

THE VOYAGE

The voyage had been long. Perhaps too long. The women on board the boat had been trying to come to terms with this as they watched the fuel gauge getting dangerously low. They wondered anxiously would they have enough to reach the shore?



That evening, sitting around the supper table, they knew they had to do something. One of them, recognized for her seafaring knowledge, spoke. “As far as I can tell if we make the boat lighter we might have enough fuel to reach land and even if this does run out we would have a better chance to use the sails if a wind came.”

They discussed what this might mean. Over the years they had amassed a lot of furniture and other objects, a few associated with the early days, others that they thought felt they really needed to function properly in the way they were used to. There were books too, some from the very beginning and even some of the most up-to-date. These they had hoped to use or give away when they began working with people.

Eventually they all agreed. All of it would probably have to go overboard if they were really to lighten up. Some were deeply saddened. Others were glad having thought for awhile that some of it had needed to go. For most it was a mixture. But go it must and soon. It was a serious moment. As they looked at each other in the soft light of the candles, one of them said softly “Remember each one of us is the most precious cargo on this boat”. They agreed knowing deeply that this was so.

They decided to start in the bowels of the boat working their way up, beginning with the furniture. Tables, desks, chairs, bookshelves went into the sea. Some of it had been on the very first boat. That day they sat on the floor eating lunch surrounded by books. It had been a heavy day in more ways than one.”What about the bell?”asked someone “we won't know when to gather or what the time is if that goes” They all remembered the various events and rituals the bell had summoned them to. But all agreed it did weigh a lot and needed to go.

The fuel gauge was showing that they were covering a greater distance marginally faster but the shoreline was still not visible.

They turned to the books. One person had the idea that one of the lifeboats might take the best of the books. That way someone might find them and use them one-day. There were a few disagreements about which books would go in the lifeboat, but eventually all were either placed in the lifeboat or surrendered to the sea. When they gathered that night they were amazed and heartened at all the words, poems, prayers and stories they had within themselves. The walls and the worn floor that had kept them secure and witnessed so much of their past, were scrubbed clean and had a beauty they had not noticed for years.

By now they had already begun to supplement their dwindling food supplies with fish from the sea and to drink water that they gathered from the dew drops each morning.

The next morning as the sun was rising, those on watch saw a thin strip of land on the horizon. They all gathered at the cry "Land ahoy." Was it too late? Despite their efforts, they knew the fuel was very low. As they got nearer and nearer it eventually ran out altogether. The current was dragging them down the coast into unknown territory. They were fearful of rocks.

So absorbed were they by this that only one noticed the clouds gathering in the blue sky. "I think we may have wind soon" she shouted. "Hoist the sails," they cried excitedly and went into action.

Gradually a gentle breeze caught the sails and they were able to move towards land. As they drew nearer they could just see hills, trees and greenery but no harbor. It wasn't quite the place they had expected. But they were alive and still together, thankful, ready and hopeful for whatever may lay ahead.

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