

Detached Clarity

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It was a bleak afternoon. The sky was slate gray and the low lying mist obstructed any sunlight. The sound of seagulls squawking filled my head as I walked up the pothole infested drive-way. After dumping my school bag at the bottom of the stairs, I walked through to the kitchen, the smell of stale cigarettes filled the air. I then grabbed a couple of choc-chip cookies out of the cupboard. They were dry and tasteless, but food nonetheless. A small note, scribbled on the back of a creased envelope lay on the messy table. "Hey, I'm out again tonight. Don't trash the house, Mum".

That night I layed in bed, staring up at the damp ceiling. A dim street light glow seeped through my tattered curtains. The house was eerily silent. Most nights I think about Dad, tonight was no different. What would life be like if he was still around? The memories of evenings spent together fishing surged through my head. The mellow sound of gentle waves splashing against our rickety dinghy and the rush of excitement when we got a bite made me feel warm inside. This seemed to be my happy place, full of fond memories and the only happy place I have left it seems.

I awoke to the bright sunlight. It was early, 6:30 in fact. After pulling on a pair of trousers and an old t-shirt that had been lying in the corner of my room for the past week, I walked downstairs. My bare feet felt numb on the wooden floor. While I was slumped on the couch in boredom, a series of thoughts flashed through my head. What state would the boat be in now? Could I still go fishing?

I grabbed a waterproof jacket and my old set of wellies. They were about 2 sizes too small but I managed to squeeze my feet into them. I walked swiftly down the drive, across the single track road before hopping over the stile. The field was overgrown and wet with morning dew. I could see the rundown boatshed on the shore, it looked far smaller now and closer to the water than I remembered but it felt comforting to be back.

I peered through a gap in the door where a panel of wood had fallen off. It was dim, cobwebs coated the cracked window and it smelt of rotting wood. Once I managed to pull the rotten door open, it was exactly how I remember it. Our fishing rods were perched on a slanted shelf, the Blue Pearl sat on its rusty trailer and it didn't appear to have aged. There was a small jerry can filled with separated two-stroke petrol so I gave it a good shake and filled the engine up before pushing it out onto the sealoch.

The water glistened with the morning sun, gentle waves rolled up the pebbled beach and it seemed like a good day to be at sea. The second I stepped in the boat it all came flooding back to me. I dropped the outboard into the water, gave 5 hard pulls on the pull cord and surprisingly the engine rattled into life. I could almost hear Dad's words from above, "Many men go fishing all their lives without knowing it's not fish they are after".

Once I was out in the middle of the loch, I began to set up my old rod. This was always a great spot as the mackerel got funneled through with the falling tide. After a short while of jigging the rod up and down, I got a bite. The excitement was no

different to years ago except this time I had no one to share it with. I felt a sudden tug on the rod, then nothing. The rotten line had snapped!

I glanced towards the back of the boat and water was pouring in. I scrambled toward the outboard and began frantically searching for something to plug the stern. An oily rag was lying in the fuel compartment so I tried to push it into the crack. It didn't seem to do much and the water continued to flood in. I could feel the numbing water soaking the sleeves of my jacket, I could see the boatshed on the horizon and I could smell danger as my heart pounded in my chest. I yanked the pull-cord, nothing happened. Time seemed to go in slow motion as water trickled over the seams of my wellies and began to soak my feet. The boat appeared to be in good condition back on the shore but in reality it clearly wasn't. I should have known. Finally the engine made a slight rumble and after pulling up the choke, it started. Cold sweat was running down my cheek as I turned for the shore.

I was beginning to feel more confident now, the progress was slow but at least I was making some ground. The water in the boat was running back out the moderately sized crack as the boat went forward. If I could keep the boat moving, I should make it back to shore. Our house stood lonely on the hill looking out over the bay as if it was calling me in, like a lighthouse as such. Just as I was starting to calm down, the engine made an alarming bang. Clouds of jet black smoke emerged and a lifeless spider rolled out the exhaust. Within seconds water began to fill the boat again. The engine wouldn't start this time, I knew with detached clarity it was over after two pulls. I decided to leave it all behind and make for the safety of the shore. In a panic I

jumped into the freezing water. Cold water shock made me gasp for air and I began to cough up a mixture of salt water and saliva. The water filled my wellies and I could feel them pulling me down. I tried to kick them off but they were too tight. The old dingy was slowly being consumed by the loch. Once I had controlled my breathing, I had one last look over my shoulder and began to swim towards the boatshed.

Finally my numb feet touched the rounded pebbles. I slumped down on the shore and my eyes closed with tiredness. My back was so cold that I could barely feel the stones I was lying on, it felt like I was floating. The reality that the Blue Pearl was lying at the bottom of the sea bed was overwhelming. Not only the boat but all my childhood memories created on it were now gone, gone forever.

Why? Why did I go out with such little equipment? Why did I think I knew what I was doing? Dad would be disappointed, he thought I was better than this, but he's gone and I have to deal with the consequences alone. My happy place had been destroyed and I was to blame. I had to move on, move on from the boat, move on from Dad.

As I stood up, shivers ran down my spine. In sheer anger and disappointment, I picked up a pebble and launched it at the boatshed. It hit the rusty corrugated iron roof and went clean through it. I trudged slowly home, freezing inside and out. I opened the front door to another note, this time it was lying on the doormat. "Just popped in quickly to grab my purse. What on earth were you doing swimming in the middle of the loch earlier? I am out again tonight. Mum.

P.S there's a pizza in the fridge."