

Ten More

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The sailboat rolled heavily in the cross chop. Waves crashed in from the open lake and reflected off the channel walls setting up crazy patterns of peaks and troughs that were deadly traps for unwary ships. Defiantly, one white cork bobbed in that watery maze. Her mast whipped from side to side, from fore to aft, and every angle in between. Foaming crests churned over the bow throwing chilling spray up on the sails. Water sloshed off the deck and poured into the cockpit.

At the tiller, Bob sat stoically, his massive frame set against the watery forces dashing against the boat. His reddish hair and long curly beard streamed first one way then another, whipped by frenzied winds. His face hardened to the task; eyes set, his mind calculated the effect of every wave, every roll. Only his herculean strength kept the boat from repeatedly smashing into the wall.

Doug stood at the mast, one hand clutching a stay, the other latched firmly to the weathered, graying, aluminum shaft that rose 35 feet above the deck. Spray beaded and glistened on his bald head. His white canvas deck shoes precariously gripped the slippery fiberglass. His tan pants were darkened to the knees

where waves had slapped his legs. His face was a mask, no confidence; the corners of his mouth twitched nervously.

Another boiling crest slammed the port beam and the boat yawed dangerously. Bob hauled on the tiller, but the chop fought back. Then, miraculously, the boat shot out of the channel's grip and into the open lake. Her frenzied dance settled into a regular fore-aft pitch as she road through the rhythmic rollers. Rhythmic for Lake Erie that is; which meant the waves all came from one direction.

The boat dropped from one crest and hit hard on the next billowing wave. A shower of spray shot skyward sending droplets halfway up the sail where they congregated into little riverlets and ran back down and out the scuppers. Doug's shirt took on a shotgun pattern where the spray landed; his pants were almost completely soaked. Bob rolled his head back and shouted at the wind, his smile stood out like a jack-o-lantern's toothy grin. Immediately Doug scrambled back into the cockpit.

"The gods don't want us out today," said Doug through a queasy smile.

"Yeah," said Bob with a grin. "But there's not much they can do about it."

"Aaa, I wouldn't be so sure about that. But then they probably don't care one way or the other really."

Doug bent away from the wind, thus ending the conversation, and tried vainly to light a spray soaked cigarette.

Bob had run into Doug's bizarre occult beliefs before and knew better than to make anything of it. He chuckled softly to

himself, then said, "Where to?"

"Well, with the wind where it is, let's head for Fairport. We're about on the right tack for a start and should make good time. If the wind holds we can try flying the spinnaker on the way back... if you're game."

"Go for it," said Bob relaxing against the gunwale.

The boat ran rail in the water, dashing up, over and through the whitecaps that rolled steadily in from the northeast; pushed by unwavering winds. Doug gave up on one cigarette and threw it overboard. He fumbled with the pack to get another when an oversize ridge of water smashed into the boat. She lurched under the strain, pitching Doug across the cockpit, cigarettes flying.

"Damn!" he cursed out loud.

Bob burst into laughter. "Why don't you give it up?" he asked between chuckles.

"There's no way I'm letting a little weather stop me," grumbled Doug as he chased the rolling cigarettes around the wet deck. After a couple minutes he flipped the rest of the soggy smokes overboard, shook his head and said, "I lose. Not a dry one left."

Bob chuckled again. "Your gods are protecting your health."

Doug shot Bob a stern look but didn't say anything. Within minutes the conversation was forgotten as they were totally absorbed by the rise and fall of the bow and the wind-whipped spray in their faces. They rode a northerly tack, then east, then north again. The power of the sailboat crashing through the

foaming mountains exhilarated them. They rode in silence, enthralled.

They hadn't gone far when, without warning, the wind fell to a whisper. The rollers came, but the boat no longer responded to the helm.

"Shit," yelled Bob and switched on the engine key. "Where's the wind? Come on blow," he snapped.

He pulled the choke and stabbed the starter button. Instantly the little motor chugged to life. A wave broadsided the boat and sent her staggering. Bob pulled the shift lever into forward and the prop bit into water, sending a bubbly wake frothing out behind them. She started to turn into the waves, sluggishly at first, but another wave caught the starboard bow and the ship twisted against the helm again. This time she righted herself and turned bow into the waves before the next one could catch her.

A frown wrinkled Bob's face. "This is bullshit. Motoring with water like this."

"I told you the gods were against us today. We should have stayed at the lounge."

"Sure." said Bob sarcastically. "I wish you'd lay off with those gods of yours. I'm sure they had a lot to do with this. Besides, the wind's got to return soon."

"Maybe so."

Bob gritted his teeth and glared at the overcast sky. They sat expectantly for several minutes. The throb of the motor tingling their feet throught the deck. The telltales hung limply

from the stays and the sails flapped loosely from the rigging. The boat slid softly up and down over the rollers. The waves were losing their foamy tops; they were flattening out. Doug reached onto the cabin and pulled out a brown package of cigars.

"Cigar?" he asked extending the pack.

"No thanks," said Bob glancing nervously around the horizon.

"I'm taking advantage. No wind seems like the only time I can light up."

Doug blew a puff of blue-gray smoke and watched it drift lazily aft. A smile broke the corners of his mouth. He wiped the water off the top of his head with his free hand.

"Success is sweet," he quipped and slipped the lighter back into his pants pocket.

Time dragged. The boat rolled slowly across the open expanse of water. Cigar smoke hung in puffs behind them like a low-level contrail. Bob rapped his fingers on his huge muscular thigh. Doug flicked ashes over the rail and watched them float down to kiss the water. Ten minutes passed. They were still motoring away from land and the wind remained ominously absent. Bob shifted from one hip to the other.

Finally Bob broke the silence. "We better turn around. We're out far enough if we have to motor all the way back."

"Yep. The day seems wasted for the most part anyway. This weather defies the imagination."

"Mind the boom I'm turning to starboard," said Bob routinely, then, "steading up on 225."

The sailboat turned smoothly, rolled twice where the waves caught her amidships, and continued around until they were coming directly from the stern. Both men looked dejectedly at the ghostly shoreline hanging at the edge of their vision. The soft swish of the waves, the rising of the stern followed by the dip then rise of the bow and the purr of the motor had a hypnotic effect. Neither spoke. Time seemed to melt into eternity.

"Damn it," roared Bob, finally tired of waiting for the wind to pick up, "Give me some wind."

Doug looked over at Bob, his eyebrows slightly raised.

"Usually it's 'ten more'. Today you'd settle for any wind."

Bob grinned, "If I get some, then I'll ask for ten more."

"Actually ten knots wouldn't help much at this point."

Bob shook his massive fist at the gray overcast. "Hey gods, give me some wind. If you can't do that, then to hell with ya."

Doug's eyes snapped open a little extra wide. "Wow, getting pretty radical. Any particular gods you wish damned?"

"All of them if they can't make wind."

"I certainly hope none of them are listening. I'm riding this boat, too."

"What?" Bob gave Doug a queer glance. "What are you talkin' about? Gods, smods. You'll believe any supernatural garbage."

Doug dropped his eyes to the deck with a look that reminded Bob of a little boy after a scolding. But only for a moment, then Doug's expression changed. His face hardened and he looked sternly at Bob.

"Some things exist in nature that are greater than the powers we know." Doug said darkly. "Indians believed in great spirits, gods if you will, who inhabited large lakes and rivers. Supernatural beings whose physical bodies were the water itself, just as our bodies house our souls. Beings whose mood was reflected in the surface energy of their water body." Doug was shaking his finger emphatically now.

"Lake Erie especially was known for the ferocity of the spirit whose life force dwelled below her waters. You may laugh but Indians were a lot closer to nature, and many of their legends have a grain of truth wrapped in them. What truth is behind the legend of Lake Erie? I don't know but I wouldn't press my luck."

"Oh great. I want wind; I get a sermon."

"Hey, fishermen, sailors, anyone who knows her knows Lake Erie's a tempermental bitch. Even to the point of being punitive. There's truth to her supernatural powers. Powers that can lead to disaster, if you anger them... "

"Drop it. I want wind. No wind; no gods. They can still go to hell." Bob's face reddened; his knuckles whitened on the tiller.

Behind them a gust of wind rippled the water's surface. The little puff rushed toward the waiting sails. Bob saw the swirl coming and chuckled hoarsely. The wind danced up to the ship and died out. The water again lay unruffled.

"A tease is it?" and Bob chuckled again. "The gods probably

are in hell already, waiting for us."

"I suppose we'll join them soon enough," said Doug and tossed his cigar in the lake.

"Ah to hell with you and your gods. It's all a bunch of rubbish anyway," snarled Bob, his temper and frustration getting the better of him.

They both sat quietly now, ashamed of their outburst. Meanwhile, the waves flattened out even more near their boat. Strangely, the water around them calmed until it was as flat as a billard table for about 10 feet in any direction. Bob shook his head, he saw it, but it had to be an optical illusion. Doug looked curiously from one side to the other. Suddenly, they realized that both of them saw it. The water was like a millpond around the sailboat! Waves still rolled serenely by, but only at a distance. None reached the hull. Then it hit them -- the boat wasn't pitching any more.

They looked at each other, and saw their own fear reflected back.

"This is crazy."

"You see it too, then. We're riding in a calm spot. Calm water in the middle of a stormy lake?"

"Ever see anything like it?"

"Not at all. In fact I'd say it's impossible."

Bob glanced back at their bubbly wake, then toward shore. Finally he turned back to Doug and said, "Look at the marker buoy."

Doug stared in at the shoreline, squinting intently for

several minutes. A strange look came over his face; he fought it off.

"We're not moving."

"So it seems."

Bob let go of the tiller as he spoke. It hung rigid at the stern.

"Something's holding us. Drop the anchor, maybe we're on a sandbar."

"There aren't any..."

"Just drop the anchor," snapped Bob.

Doug hustled to the bow. He kneeled against the rail and carefully lowered the anchor over the side. The line disappeared smoothly into the greenish water; 50 feet of rope gone and still the anchor pulled gently on the other end. He stopped.

Hesitantly he turned to Bob, gulped hard, and said, "We're not aground."

Bob stood up, carefully surveying the empty lake.

"No one around either."

Doug retrieved the anchor and meticulously stowed it. Helplessly he turned and sat down behind the cabin.

"Nothing to do but wait."

"If only we had wind. Curse your gods."

Doug looked away. "Maybe they've cursed us."

Bob started to say something, but didn't. It seemed like hours, but only minutes passed. Slow agonizing minutes. Time seemed like an enemy. They waited; they couldn't do anything

else. Bob shut off the engine. Stillness rushed over them and the quiet felt like a weight pressing on their chests. Doug fumbled for another cigar. He dropped it, picked it up, and finally succeeded in lighting it. The smoke hung in ghostly gray clouds around Doug's head, unruffled in the still air.

Bob's patience was gone. He stood up and shook his fist at the sky. "Hey gods, or what ever you are, quit playing games with us. I'm tired of your shit and I want to go home. Let us go or you can all be damned to hell."

Then it started; a rising wind. Short bursts at first, like some cosmic bellows. The sails alternately filled and went slack. Bob jumped to the tiller. Another gust filled the sails, stronger and warmer than the last. The boat heeled over hard. The wind died. Quicker now, the next gust followed; stronger, hotter. Bob looked at the sails, the telltales stood out from the stays. This time the next rush of air came before the last had faded. The wind climbed steadily to gale force and the temperature rose with the increasing speed. Soon the heat began to sting, but still it got hotter. Bare skin burned. Despite the pain Bob's eyes were riveted to the shoreline.

"We're not moving," he cried above the roar of the wind.
"The damn boat's not moving."

"You're crazy!"

Then Doug looked behind them. The friendly wake was missing. The waves slipped past without intruding on their circle of calm water. The buoy still sat three points off their port beam. They were dead in the water!

Now the wind was a blast furnace, more a raging fire than a wind, and their yells were mute cries before its fury. Blisters broke through exposed skin. Pain seared their consciousness to numbness. Paint cracked and flaked away from the hull. Their screams were lost in the boom of hellfire. Clothes charred and the soot vanished in a puff of smoke. Flesh jellied and was ripped from agonized bones. The sails, mast, hull, boat and crew were vapoized in one last burst of white-hot fire. The waves rolled happily along where the boat should have been.

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The Coast Guard stopped searching on the third day. No trace. But fishermen and sailors on the merchant ships see them sometimes on calm days with gently rolling waves; a blue and white sailboat, two men working the billowing sails, rail in the water, she dashes mysteriously here and there. Sometimes she seems almost transparent, an apparition running before a spectral wind. But the sailors and fishermen steer clear of her -- though they probably couldn't catch her if they tried.

They give ghost ships a wide berth.