

THE  
LITTLE  
BOAT  
ON  
TRUSTING  
LANE

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## THE BOAT

‘Close your eyes. Observe the breath. Do not try to control it. Let it not rush. Let it not be slow. Let your breath fall into its natural rhythm. Okay. We have found the sites of pain. Richard has discovered the energy centres presently affected. Acupuncture needles have been placed at the appropriate sites, whether actual pain-sites, or those connected to the relevant meridians. All that is left now, is to breathe, and release this deposit. Richard has asked that you reflect, to meditate on this extra-earthly substance. What does it mean to you? How is it speaking to you, in your life, in this moment?’

Finn drew a deep breath, catching sight of her pants. Were they too loud for work? She shook her head, and kicked her heels together – a trick Richard once showed her to shift unwanted thoughts.

‘Now it is my task to assist in this final stage of your session.’

Finn closed the file. Eloise – a first-time Receiver – lay on the therapy table. A blanket covered her lower legs. She had been suffering from abdominal pains. It seemed this deposit was here to teach her about letting go. Needles encircled her bellybutton. Finn leaned over and patted Eloise’s shoulder. No matter what Finn felt outside of the therapy room, when she was here with a client, she was dedicated to making them as comfortable as possible.

‘Are you warm enough there, can I get you another blanket?’

‘I’m good,’ Eloise nodded, her eyes still shut.

And there were the pants again. ‘Happy pants’ everyone called them: large, billowy trousers with a print of pink

elephants. At least they clashed with her blue T-shirt, covered in sunflowers. No-one at work could accuse her of curating the outfit. Finn clicked her heels again.

‘Okay, now I am here to help with the expulsion of your shapes.’

‘My what?’

‘Sorry,’ Finn chuckled, shaking her head, ‘I am here to help with the release of your deposits. Eloise, are you ready to let go?’

The woman nodded again, a tear streaking her left cheek.

‘Now, I want you to really visualise this deposit. What shape is it? Do you know its colour? If you were at the grocery store, what fruit would it be? A spiky rambutan? An overripe custard apple? A bright Granny Smith? Or something wild and hairy, like a stalk of fennel? Or perhaps it resembles a heart, like an artichoke?’

Eloise didn’t respond, but Finn knew not to panic.

‘Okay, let’s picture a long, winding river ...’

‘I can see something! But, I don’t know if it’s right.’

‘Eloise, it’s impossible to be wrong.’

‘How can you be sure?’

‘I can’t. But if an image is coming up for you, even if you can’t make it out clearly, then this is the image we must move towards. What is it that you see?’

Finn pulled up a stool and perched behind Eloise’s head. She watched the upside-down mouth as it opened and closed, pointed chin moving up and down. The words seemed to come out long after the mouth’s movement, as though the speeds of sound and light had grown further apart. The pink elephants were dancing in the corner of Finn’s vision. She realised she had never seen Richard clicking his heels together. Maybe his unwanted thoughts were wanted.

‘It’s red!’ Eloise announced, causing Finn to jump. ‘Waves and lines of red! But they’re moving so quickly! They’re burning up, like sparklers!’

‘Good, that’s really great,’ Finn said with a smoothness she knew didn’t belong to her. It was a smoothness that belonged to someone who didn’t have doubts about their pants, or any part of their existence. Did this make her a fake? Heels clicked. ‘Now let’s scan over your body. Where do you feel this red is burning at its hottest point? It won’t necessarily be the site of pain. Let your inner gaze move, starting at your temple, between the eyes, moving down the cavity behind the nose, now slowly traversing the depths of the throat ...’

‘It’s my lower back!’

Finn dashed to Eloise’s right side. She hovered her open palms above the exposed abdomen. She closed her eyes, focusing on the message of light. She imagined her hands were a vacuum cleaner, sucking this thing up, out, and away.

Eloise moaned, her breath short and shallow. She reached a small scream, which ended abruptly. The silence was always a surprise. People say it’s like childbirth, but with emptiness at the end.

‘Oh my ...’

Eloise’s shoulders tensed again. Her eyes flicked open, gaze fixed above her.

Finn glanced up at the white.

‘I felt this huge surge through my navel,’ Eloise gushed, ‘and then ... look, can you see?’

Finn smiled in a way she hoped was knowing rather than condescending. She shook her head. No, this was real. She was no fake.

‘It’s this mass of unspooled, winding scribbles. They’re neon pink and red strands, all rushing and intertwining. It’s like they are pulsating, like they are alive.’

Eloise turned on her side. Her eyes followed an invisible arc, across the ceiling, towards the porthole. Finn felt her own shapes, the feather-like tickle in her chest.

‘Eloise, this is so beautiful. Richard will be very impressed.’

‘Oh, they are starting to fade!’ Despite her worried tone,

Eloise's shoulders were now relaxed. The blanket had fallen to the floor. 'Now they're just really small.'

'The expulsion of a deposit is the birth of new meaning. It's the possibility for change.'

'But I didn't know it would be beautiful like that.' Her disappointment was audible.

Finn laughed, 'Yeah, I know. They're not exactly demons, flying outta hell. Welcome to your new life.' She rested a hand firmly on Eloise's shoulder. 'I will call in Richard now. He'll remove the needles. And make sure you're hydrated.'

Eloise stared through the porthole. The glowing strands of red wound over the trees, towards the sea.



Richard usually had a cup of coffee while Finn conducted the extraction. Today he considered taking his break on the roof, where driftwood wind-chimes clacked their music. That would be a place to welcome the day, with open arms, open chest, shoulders rolled back.

Richard sipped his coffee, and pushed at his sacrum. It always hurt now, the whole geography of his sit-bones. Too much sitting was to blame. But who can blame you for getting old when you didn't know you would.

Richard had found yoga helpful in the past. It was a way of relieving loneliness as well as physical discomfort. But eventually, classes became confusing.

Turn the muscles of the inner thigh outwards, rotating the right hip towards the wall, right hand extending to the ceiling, gaze reaching past fingertips to an invisible point beyond, maintaining even breath, but don't try to control the breath, moving in time with the teacher, in time with the women surrounding on their mats, all moving in unison to the chanting devotional music, and don't forget the heel of your left foot needs to line up perfectly with the arch of your right,

but forget all that now because we're moving to another pose, and Richard, it's okay that you're wobbly, it's okay that you're laughing, because if you were wobbly and serious, if you were wobbly and proud, that would be wrong, that would not be yoga.

He welcomed contradictions in life, but how could one possibly move so fast, and stay correctly aligned? Even in slow-flow vinyasa classes, apparently simple rounds of sun salutations were like a set of sophisticated dance moves. Doing it in your own time. Your own time?

'Every pose is just a way to the next pose,' the teacher would say.

This meant that yoga was a code, and every pose was a smaller code, and it was essential to master each pose to crack the next one. Like that ever happens. If there was a sequence of eight poses, Richard – on a good day – remembered the first, the last, and nothing in between.

'Whatever you do is perfect,' the teacher lied.

But Richard was well aware that his sun salutations did not resemble anything people refer to as yoga. He did seem to win points for being a yoga-class-clown though. The class broke into laughter whenever he attempted a tree pose and failed to even press his foot into his lower calf without the assistance of a wall.

'You bring so much lightness,' a lady next to him said, before flipping up to a headstand.

His humour was appreciated, and he appreciated that. But his humour became a barrier too. It was a 'glass ceiling', his teacher said, keeping him from 'further growth'.

Flocks of women in tights covered in prints of birds and the galaxy liked to laugh too, but was their laughter a mask for annoyance? Was it easier for the class to stay on track now that he was gone?

Since parting with yoga, Richard was left with an aversion to the belief that how you sit or where you sit has much bearing

on the rest of existence and how the universe may choose to treat you. And so, instead of climbing the ladder, to drink in the sunshine while he soaked up caffeine, he slumped back on the couch.

As he sipped, listening to the patter of Finn's counsel, Richard stared at the photograph. He knew there were more important things that deserved his attention. The leaky tap in the bathroom. The crack in the kitchen window. That widening hole in the floor next to the toilet. And then there were all those letters from the council that he'd 'reposted' in the gap between the fridge and the pantry.

But even thinking about these things brought a flood of dark energy to his fingertips. It wouldn't be right. He needed good energy in his fingers to finish the session.

And so, Richard sat, leaned back into the couch, and stared at Serena.



*The Pleiadian Goddess* hung outside the door to the therapy room. Her lips were large and pink. Wisps of golden hair fell about her blue eyes. The Pleiadian constellation surrounded her bodice, which erupted from green clouds. The words 'FIND YOUR HOME PLANET' shouted from the sky, which was festooned with lotus flowers.

'Pleiadians arrived in Scandinavia in ancient times and bred with the locals,' August had gushed when she arrived that first time, with the painting on her bicycle. 'That's why Nordic people look the way they do. Tall, thin, blue-eyed and angelic.' August's eyes were wide and sincere.

Finn and Richard had been sitting down, sipping coffee after a few extractions. August had arrived noisily, her bike jangling with tiny bells and rainbow spokes. Silver tinsel was wrapped around the basket, where a plush alien sat; her 'extraterrestrial navigator'.

Back then Finn was the only helper. Back then Richard was still performing extractions.

Finn wondered how August had managed to transport the painting on her bike. The canvas was almost as tall as her. Richard was loud with his gratitude, exclaiming at her sensitive rendering of the elf-like subject. He wandered off to boil the kettle. Back then, Richard boiled the kettle when guests arrived. He offered tea, coffee and shoulder rubs. Things change when you have two helpers.

Finn was puzzled by the picture. ‘So, Pleadians are superior extraterrestrials who happen to resemble what was once called the “master Aryan race”’

Finn shook her head, though August’s eyes beamed wide. Her eyes were like satellites: open to goodness, refracting it out to the ether, irony lost as space-junk.

Finn sidled past the painting and into the main cabin. There she found him, asleep on the couch.

‘Richard!’

She tapped his shoulder. Richard’s face had become red with spots, an imprint from the couch fabric. Finn noticed his glasses had fallen to the floor. She picked them up and placed them on the coffee table.

‘Come on, Richard, you need to wake up. It’s time to take out the needles.’

He let out a gasp, but remained oddly still. Then his back stiffened. Finn knew what was coming. She spun away as the sound erupted.

‘Richard!’

She crossed over to the galley, escaping the smell. The sink was full of mugs, plates and glasses. Finn switched on the kettle, then began to search for a mug that looked relatively safe.

‘What’s wrong, my Finn?’

‘You have to ask, don’t you. What’s wrong is, you reserve the best version of yourself for people who aren’t me.’

‘Consider it a compliment.’ Richard heaved a yawn. ‘To you I show my truest colours.’

Finn rolled her eyes. She was crouched on the floor, opening cupboards, in search of coffee. ‘Nothing ever has a proper home in this kitchen.’

‘That’s because we’re on a boat!’ Richard exclaimed, somehow leaping from the couch. ‘We’re travelling together, across the universe! We, and our coffee mugs, are of no fixed address!’

‘Ha.’

Richard thumped across the floor, and Finn felt the whole boat shake. Sometimes it seemed like the boat moved as part of his body. But then, it was probably just that no-one walked as heavily on their feet as he did. Richard leaned on the bench, looking down at Finn. His glasses sat crookedly on his face. There was something of an edge, a glint of nervousness in his eyes.

‘You look terrible, Richard.’

‘Thanks!’

‘Are you okay?’

‘Never been better!’ He was almost shouting.

Finn pulled out the coffee jar. It was stowed behind a seventies food processor she had never seen before. She slammed the cupboard shut, noticing a new crack in the wall, next to the fridge. She didn’t have time, though, to think about things like that. And besides, Richard was the one who should care. This boat was his house. He should be the one worried about keeping it shipshape.

‘I’ve gotta go soon.’

‘Oh?’ Richard’s eyebrows pointed upwards. ‘I was hoping you might stay here a bit.’

‘What, and wash all your dishes?’ Finn chuckled, though she knew she’d sounded serious.

Richard gave a high-pitched giggle. ‘Well, that’s not what I was thinking necessarily. But if you ever offer, I’ll always be grateful.’

‘I’m sorry and not sorry, but I have work, then I have a doctor’s appointment. I won’t be back until the circle starts.’

‘What kind of doctor?’

‘You know, a real-world doctor.’

‘What? Why are you doing that?’

‘Mum’s making me do annual check-ups. I’m just ticking the box, keeping her happy. I’ll be here afterwards. You need to get in there, Richard. Eloise can probably hear us.’

‘Yes sir.’

Richard gave a salute, then began to prise himself from the bench. Sometimes it seemed as though every vertical object was just a prop to help him stay upright.

‘Have you got any more appointments today?’ Finn asked.

‘Or you might ask, do I have any more disappointments? Why is it that disappointment is not the opposite of appointment? Or perhaps it’s not the opposite. Perhaps we are disappointed when we have missed our appointment with joy.’

Finn continued her search for a clean spoon.

‘Oh, just Joan,’ he yawned, not seeming to expect an answer. He scuffed over to the fridge. ‘Shit,’ he said, looking in.

‘You don’t have any yoghurt?’ asked Finn.

‘I could give Joan a cup of milk instead. I did that last time and it was okay.’

‘Surely milk is more comforting. Perhaps you could warm it.’

Richard smiled, placing a hand on her shoulder. ‘Warmed milk? You really go the extra mile, Finn.’

She blushed an unwelcome blush. Richard didn’t notice, thankfully. His gaze had moved on to a box of cornflakes.

‘Have you ever noticed that the breakdown of contents will say corn: fifty-seven percent, sugar: eleven percent, but the figures never add up to one hundred? Why is that? Do they think we’re stupid?’

‘Do you think she’ll ever come back to the circle?’

‘Who? What are you talking about, Finn?’

‘Joan!’

‘Oh. I’ll remind her about tonight. Let her know she is missed.’

‘Sorely so. Don’t we love her.’ Finn felt a pang, aware of her lie. Her feelings for Joan were far from love.

‘Last I heard, her arthritis was too severe for the stairs at night,’ Richard mused, stroking his beard vigorously. ‘I got the feeling she was asking for some kind of assistance, but I’m not sure anyone would be quite up to carrying her.’

‘That’s fair enough, Richard. ‘This place has accessibility issues.’

‘I know, I know. I’m thinking in the summer to hold some kind of outdoor sessions, on the carpets in the sculpture garden. We could do ecstatic dance, a juggling workshop, maybe a busy bee and some fire twirling... That’s as long as no-one from the council drives past and sees the open flame.’ Richard frowned into space.

‘The council won’t just come spying like that.’

‘I wouldn’t put it past them!’

‘Anyway, Richard, you should really get back to Eloise.’

‘Done. Easy. Piece of cake-walk in the park.’ He grinned expectantly.

‘Once again, it might have been funny the first time, whoever that first person was who was lucky enough to hear it.’ Finn stirred a salad server through her coffee, letting it clang in the sink. ‘Will you give me a leg-up?’

‘Won’t it spill?’ He nodded at her mug.

‘It’s only half full.’

‘At least it’s not half empty!’ Richard gave Finn a jovial nudge.

Richard took a deep inhale, then squatted, creating a step with his hands. Finn wasn’t convinced of the step’s structural integrity, but there was no other way.

‘We like to live dangerously, don’t we,’ she said, pushing her foot into his palms. She grabbed the ladder with her free hand. ‘And don’t forget to read my story.’

Richard groaned. ‘What story?’

‘For the circle tonight, remember? You picked the theme “solitude”. It’s my turn, Richard. I hope you enjoyed your daily workout.’

‘Yes, yes,’ he nodded. ‘Very good. You enjoy the day.’

Finn climbed up towards the utility hole, squeezing herself onto the deck. She imagined Richard watching below as her elephants disappeared into the sky.