

PICTURE OF A LOBSTER BOAT

By James Collins

I am nothing but a pleasant memory. I was born in a boatyard 70 years ago. Loving skilled hands assembled me from pine and oak. They sawed, shaved, steamed, fitted, nailed, screwed, painted and caulked me. Then they installed my engine and all the fittings. As a lobster boat on the ocean, I had many tasks and many adventures. Initially, an old lobsterman owned me. I was out all kinds of weather and did a lot of heavy work. Time went to work on my gunwales and sides, which became chipped, nicked, and worn. All the lobster pots dragged on board beat my sides and left gashes and smells. Some of these were with me to the last day. As the fishing business fell off, he sold me. A lovely family who came to Maine every summer bought me for the use of the children. Those were lovely summers. Three to five kids boarded me in the morning and we went out to fish to anchor and to swim. I was the transport and I was the portable dock. Kids would jump off my side and swim around the boat, various fish would appear, watch the activity, and nibble at the barnacles on my sides. It was heavenly. When summer ended, I was tied up to the dock and visited at irregular intervals. The seagulls would visit on a regular basis. They needed a place to sit and they did not like to be wet all the time. Unfortunately, their reputation as seagoing garbage cans is understated. They left white traces, fish bones and other assorted garbage on my decks. The only cleansing came from the regular showers that visited the area. Each year the owners would come up from the city in the fall, pulled me out of the water and lay me on a spit of land. One year, the storms were particularly bad. The waves swept in, picked me up and slammed me on the rocks. The boards of my bottom split and the caulking separated. The transom on the deck had all its windows broken and the engine had to be overhauled. These were expensive repairs and poorly done. No longer robust and full of energy, now I transitioned to an old hulk. From then on, it was like being in middle age. Every year I got a little worse. The owners no longer came up in the fall to take me out of the water. They just dragged me over to the bank and let me sit on the weeds alongside the river. It was very lonely out there. Then they sold me as scrap and someone took out my engine, the fuel tanks, the dials and finally my steering wheel. They eviscerated me. One summer an artist appeared. She was very particular and walked around me at least two dozen times. Eventually, she set up her easel and started to paint. I appeared on the canvas, not as I wished to be when I was young, but as I was then. I wish I had a say in the artwork. My green sides and my black gunwale with all the scratches, dings and dents are visible on the canvas. The broken transom with the crack glass looks seedy. My Maine license painted on the bow with the number ME6821 still identifies me from my early days. The big hole in my floorboards does not show, but the artist managed to capture the barnacles on the side, and the sagging of my deck. I looked old. The painting showed weeds around me, the river

passing 30 yards away, trees in the distance and the horizon. It all looked forlorn. When children came to visit me, they threw rocks at me and that caused more damage and breakage. It was a slow and painful death.

Twenty years have passed since the artist painted me. Ice, hurricanes, Nor Easters, and the present seagulls have caused me to further decay slowly into the weeds. I am now a faded memorial. However, the artist gave me a second life, not as I would have liked to be but as I looked before I disintegrated. Therefore, my spirit has attached itself to my painting. It did not want to die. Better to live in perpetual middle age than to die a slow death. I am forever indebted to the artist. She gave me a new life.

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