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There were ways of marking time, of trying to keep a grip on it. They had the sunrise and the sunset and the habits of their pet turtle, who would pull himself up on to the dinghy seat and watch them, wrote Maralyn, 'with a sorrowful eye'. Maralyn had her diary and began to write out a calendar on the canopy of the raft. Significant dates had a circle round them: Easter, Passover, birthdays. A cross when they caught a turtle, a plus sign for the sight of a ship.

Maurice had his watch, a Rotary Incabloc, which he hung from an electric wire on their broken emergency light. Sometimes Maralyn's hair caught on the winder, which stopped the watch. Maurice would have to wait for the sun to reach its zenith to reset the time.

At home, it would be nearly the beginning of spring, Maralyn realised. England would soon be coming into leaf. All that energy, turning into green. The country would be soaked by rain. 'Sometimes I can smell the Eng countryside, fresh mown grass etc.,' she wrote in her diary. 'I long for greenery and brown earth, plants and trees.'

When she woke early in the morning, in the gap between sleep and consciousness where fictions grow,

she imagined she was camping in the Lake District. The orange of the raft's canopy was the same colour as their tent. It wasn't hard to believe, pressed against the warmth of Maurice's body, that they were in their sleeping bags and that beyond the flaps of the tent were rising hills, sheep grazing, fields bordered by mossy stone walls. She could almost hear the birds.

Compared to land, the palate of the ocean was limited. A sunset could put on a show, striping the sky with fading colour, but mostly both water and sky shifted between greys and blues, or the black of night. The only colour they had on their vessels was a flag that Maurice had made from a pair of orange oilskin trousers, which he'd tied to an oar and attached to the seat in the dinghy: an attempt to make them visible.



On 14 March, as they were sheltering in the raft, they heard a rush of air, like something taking off. Maralyn poked her head out and there was a whale, twenty feet behind them.

Maurice felt strangely calm. There was nothing he could do, he knew. They were at its mercy. From the entrance of the raft, they watched it, though they were only able to see a portion of its body framed in the raft's doorway, ribs visible through its shining black skin. It reminded Maralyn of a cow. The blow-hole was almost close enough to touch. When it

opened, slowly, a great cloud of droplets burst into the air and rained down on them in the raft.

Maurice took Maralyn's hand. If the whale struck the raft and they capsized, he whispered, he might struggle to rescue her. Hold on to the ropes. Maralyn nodded.

They sat there, silent, the whale peaceful and still. What was it doing? Monitoring their movements, or keeping them company perhaps. It wasn't really their question to ask. They were the ones trespassing. After what felt like hours but was only minutes, they saw its bulk surge forward and down.

'Don't dive now,' whispered Maralyn, worried that a sudden movement would capsize them. The whale dived, but cleanly, the black flukes of its tail suddenly high and dark against the sky, then sliding below the surface without a splash.

They stared at the place where it had been. No trace. No blood. 'What a pity we didn't take a photograph,' said Maralyn. 'No one will believe us when we talk about it.'

Maurice was amazed. How much she seemed to assume: that they'd be rescued, that they'd live to turn an encounter with a whale into an anecdote, as if this ordeal were a minor interruption to the progress of their lives. No part of Maralyn appeared to question their survival.

