

Flotsam and Jetsam

Even in the rain I loved to walk down to the harbour. For a start it reduced the number of people who wanted to break into your quiet reminiscing. I did recognise the need for the grockles and chuckie-punters though, during the summer months. After all they did bring in passing trade to the village. But still I did like it best walking in the early morning, and in the late autumn when there were fewer folk about. Winter was too chill and played up my aches and pains, but not to worry, we all have our little crosses to bear.

Tonight the tide had filled up the dock, looking like an inky black sludge, malevolently waiting to drag you down into its murky depths. The choppy little ripples were slapping up against the fishing craft and running between them, slushing and bouncing off the harbour wall. It was a high tide tonight, and there was not much to see in the murk. But wait - what was that white blob in the water, a couple of yards from the old stone access steps? I hung out from the rail and stretched to look. As my eyes focused, I made out the form of a dead seagull with its legs twisted about a plastic fishing line, its head at an awkward angle, where it had tried to free itself. My stomach turned as I contemplated this shameful killing by detritus jettisoned by our 'enlightened' modern society. My mother would never have forgiven me if I had contributed to the slaughter of our precious wildlife, which she regarded as a heinous crime of deep neglect. As I looked to ensure the bird was lifeless, something else caught my eye, half-submerged, and difficult to spot. It was what seemed to be the shaft of some stringed instrument bobbing up and down. This might be something worth investigating when the waters had ebbed; that would be about six and a half hours until the tide was out. First light would be about 06.45, I would come back then.

When I got back in the morning, chewing on a cold sausage sandwich, I was pleased to see the rain had stopped, probably only temporarily, as the sky was still overcast and threatening. I moved tentatively down the slippery green harbour steps, glad I had the foresight to wear my wellies, for there was gloopy mud and seaweed to contend with. I started searching between the various moored vessels. And - bang, there it was!! Stuck against the bow of a small skiff, just to its starboard side, I saw the remains of a wrecked musical instrument. I was dismayed to see it was badly damaged by its ocean misadventure, the neck almost broken from its body, and the whole thing battered out of shape. As I continued to examine it, I was surprised to find in its body, the sound box, a small bottle with a string attached. One end went to the lute, (for that's what it turned out to be) and the other was securely knotted around a child's toy. They were from Persia (proven by the next surprise), for in the bottle was a note written in that same language.

The toy was an old fashioned wooden spinning top, obviously handmade with a series of ridges running down its sides, and finished off with a metal base at its pointed end.

Now, the writing on the enclosed paper, I couldn't understand it but I did have a friend, a language teacher, at a nearby college. Translated, it was given back to me with the original, this was the message :

To whoever finds this note, with Amir's ghaychak, and my little boy's top, please take care of these things for me. My name is Daria, my little boy is Farhad, and my late husband is Amir. He was arrested and died in prison, but had made provision for us by buying us passage

on a boat to England. We were taken to France, but I am not happy because things are so rushed. I write this note in the shed, before they put us in the boat. I am not happy because the boat has no cover, but the men promised safety. I am very afraid, I pray Allah will watch over us, I put this note in the bottle, in the lute and tie it to the toy. If my little Farhad makes it without me, please take care of him, he is a Sunni Muslim, the spinning top is his most precious possession, please don't take it from him.

This young mother and her child have not been identified, they are yet another pair of casualties in a war of attrition, greed and confused politics.

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