

Word Count: 538

The Yellow Boat

I have lived four years on this island. A narrow, dead-end lane, tracking briefly the angular coastline of San Juan Island. The extended commute to my job rewarded well by the departure from the disquiet of urban living. A small cottage, a lawn smaller than a putting green, several large evergreens in the yard from which eagles fall gracefully into the wind and float just over the emerald water, seeing what eagles see.

The cottage is near a ragged cliff. Not a high precipice, only about six feet above the shore. And the crescent-shaped beach is small, accessible primarily to those from the few houses in the neighborhood. For fishing, crabbing, and clam digging during frequent minus tides.

Most of the people here are retired and offer good companionship. They have lived here long and have colorful stories. Of change. Of hip replacement surgery. Of how once the salmon ran thick, like the plains buffalo in another place a hundred years ago.

One of the daily rituals here is the opus offered by Seagulls, finches, song sparrows, and other birds. However, during one of those moments of silence I took advantage of the hush. I focused my senses on the rich air. It was salty and smelled of tideland. Probably due to our nearness to the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

It was dusk. I sat at the top of the stairs that lead down to the beach. During the time I have lived here, a bright yellow boat has rested on the bank behind one of the houses. Ivy had hidden the bow of the boat. It surprised me to see it in the water, tied to a bright new line, and a small outboard engine on it. Someone had cleaned it and looked seaworthy sitting high in the water as if puffed up with pride.

I looked at the house and there was no activity. But from somewhere in the distance I heard children's voices singing *Happy Birthday*. I looked again at the bottom of the stairs and noticed perfectly formed wet footprints, one on each step. Could the children from the birthday party have been treated to a ride?

I sat on the top step until the sun buried itself in slate-colored water. I knew when darkness came the temperature dropped, so I slipped on the sweater I had with me.

The wind picked up, and I could hear the waves nosing the small pebbles on the beach. I could also hear a faint metallic sound as the waves touched the yellow boat. I thought about the shape of the boat, how stable it looked. I felt good knowing that the boat was doing what it was meant to do.

I looked back at my house, and the yellow light from the window reminded me that it was late. Pushing up from the landing I crossed the lane, but, before I entered the house, I glanced once more towards the landing and considered the yellow boat in the water. It came to me that the boat and I were companions, at home in our individual, yet convergent, existence.