

BOATS ON AN OCEAN

by

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(Based on testimony by health care workers - June 2020)

Draft 3

1 EXT. LAYBY - MORNING

1

It's morning and we're in a stationary car with its window open.

VOICE

This is a layby on a busy trunk road in the early morning. This is where I stop. In the rear view mirror I can see the hills and trees near my home. Ahead of me I can see the spires of the city, an orange glow of streetlights hovering above them. This is my coffee in a cup holder, its steam makes a tiny circle of fog on the windscreen. This is a delivery lorry rushing past, rocking my car like a boat on choppy seas, its horn blaring like an ocean liner. This is my breath, coming quickly. This is my heart, beating strongly so it makes my shirt quiver. This is the moment when everyone else will just see sunshine today, but for me, I know this is the beginning of it.

2 INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

2

We're in the corridor outside the ICU.

VOICE

And there's another moment. The one when we put on our boots; the one when we close the door to our home, or the hotel room which has become our home; the one when we get off the bus; or when we smell the burnt bacon in the hospital cafe. Or even the night before, in front of the mirror, when you decide whether you need a shave or not. It's a different moment for all of us, but mine is when I put my lanyard over my head and turn my photo towards the world. It's when I feel a change both small and huge, and one that flows from my feet to the top of my head. It's the moment when 'me' becomes 'work me'. And for some, when 'her' becomes 'hero'.

We hear a bleep as she enters.

3 INT. ICU - DAY

3

We're in a hospital room.

VOICE

The team is different again today. A paramedic has swapped a shift with someone who has a poorly dog. A receptionist has swapped a shift with someone who was coughed on in the street. A nurse has swapped a shift with a student who abandoned her lectures and her holiday to come and stand by our side. And me, I've swapped a shift with someone who hasn't seen her daughter for eight weeks. And we do it because our lives are interlaced. Our feelings are interlaced too. And I know there are lots of poems about love in the world, about roses and sunsets and mixtapes, but this is what love is here, and what it is now. We can't hug to show it, and so we show it by swapping shifts.

4 INT. BEDSIDE - DAY

4

We're at a bedside.

VOICE

There is no script for this, so this is what I will do. I will be at his bedside for you. I will whisper your words into his ear. I will whisper them softly and with love. I will whisper them as his wife. I will whisper them as his daughter. I will whisper them as his mother. I will make your words the sea breeze for him. I will make your words a sigh as you sit in the sun on a holiday from long ago. I will make your words feel like a kiss before bedtime. And when I've whispered them, I will remove the medical devices, I will wrap him in a blanket. And I will hear his last breath for you.

5 EXT. HOSPITAL - EVENING

5

We're outside in the hospital grounds. It's raining.

VOICE

None of us know what the weather does all day. Stepping outside, the sun has given way to rain and it looks like it's been coming down for hours. And because today we sometimes said words to each other that we didn't mean; and we snapped at each other when we shouldn't have snapped; and some patients died in the company of strangers, compassionate strangers, but strangers all the same; because of all that I look up and feel the rain on my face and it brings me back to myself. Clear drops down my cheeks, not tears. I think how the goslings I've seen grow up in Swanswell Park will be splashing about in puddles. How my hay fever won't be so bad. How the weather will keep people inside and safe. And also I thank this rain that's falling, because I won't need to water my plants tonight.

6

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

6

We're on a residential street.

VOICE

I drove off in the dark and I arrive home in the dark. Uniform gone. Lanyard hidden. I take my coffee cup out of the car to make room for tomorrow's. And although I haven't launched a ship today, and I haven't given a speech, and I haven't done a magic trick; I haven't scored a goal and I didn't win a gold medal, and I haven't been in a play and taken a bow; I haven't kissed the bride or graduated from college, or arrived home as a war hero; although all I've done is my job today, just that, nevertheless, I can hear clapping. And I smile a thank you. And I mean it. And I also don't mean it. And I think of the comfort it brings. And I think of the babies it wakes up.

7 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

7

It's midnight.

VOICE

To help me sleep I say the word
'compassion'. If you say it softly
it sounds like the sea breaking
over the shore. Compassion.
Compassion. Compassion. Swish swish
swish. And I'm on a boat. It's not
the same boat that everyone is in.
Other boats are in calmer waters.
Other boats are drifting. Other
boats are fishing happily. Other
boats are already lost beneath the
waves. My boat is far out, in the
swell of the storm, sails flapping,
wood creaking, looking for land.
And I will find it. Tomorrow I'll
find it. Or the day after. It's the
same ocean, though. Different
boats, yes, but all of us are in
the same ocean.

The sea fades out.

End.