

Not waving but drowning

Their last row was the best. An explosion of hatred, loathing and bitterness that was Olympic gold medal standard in its execution.

It was, as always, about The Boat. Pete's passion project and Jean's nemesis. Pete worked two jobs and squirreled away money to replace rigging, repaint the hull, enhance the motor. There was always something. Jean prefaced each daily row with the same comment: "You're throwing our money straight into a hole in the sea"

Pete had given up expounding the benefits of the fresh air and the freedom he could see ahead. He needed the boat. He felt he was drowning in his own life. His day job sucked the air from his lungs with its monotony. His night shifts at the petrol station were suffocating as he dealt with the human detritus inhabiting the pre-dawn world.

His 35-year marriage sucked the joy from anything else he did around the house. He was rewarded for his dedication to their home with meals served with a side order of sniping followed by a criticism desert. Pete suffered in silence. His boat was his salvation, his route to freedom. He tried in vain to inject Jean with the same enthusiasm. She was having none of it.

"It will end in tears as these things always do with you Pete. You promised me the moon, the big house, kids, a wonderful life. Look at us, debt and despair. That's what you should call that ruddy boat".

Pete knew he had let her down. They were both sad and the marriage was now toxic. They hadn't given each other children but that was probably his fault too.

The day after that fateful row, the boat was ready and after much persuasion that after all the time and money spent, she should at least try it, they set off together. Jean refusing to wear a life jacket and complaining constantly, but largely unheard above the sound of the purring motor, as they chugged out of the harbour. Hitting the open sea, the boat started moving more violently. Jean, who had moved to the bow started shouting.

"Surely it shouldn't bounce around like this. What have you done wrong? You've messed it up again. I knew I shouldn't have set foot on this bloody money pit."

Her tone became shrill but the more she shouted and complained, the calmer Pete became. For the first time he felt totally in control; of the boat, the sea, his future. There was clearly only room for one disappointment in his life now. It was as if he had come into his own here on the ocean. He spotted a larger wave approaching and swung the boat round throwing Jean off balance. As the wave caught the bow, he leant forward pushing her into the water. As her head hit the hull knocking her unconscious, he hoped she had at least caught sight of the name he had painted there: *The Disappointment*

500 words