

I don't know who was more surprised, the woman behind the toy counter when I told her what I'd done and then thanked me for being honest, or me, for not being reprimanded or arrested.

You became a den mother so I could wear the blue-and-yellow Cub Scout uniform. And I hope you'll forgive me for being embarrassed when you volunteered to chaperon those junior high school dances. You helped me select a birthday present for my first girlfriend, who was so important to me at the time but whose name I don't even remember right now . . .

Too many thoughts, as I look at those hands . . . unordered, rushing, pieces of memories . . . long separations buried under time gone by, events, and distance . . .

You were visiting from St. Louis. We went sailing, just the two of us. You'd never been to California or on the ocean before, and I could tell you were surprised your son knew how to handle a thirty-foot sloop. You were nervous when you stepped on the slightly swaying deck, expectant, not sure of what you were getting into, worried that you might get seasick, yet excited, trusting. You put yourself in my hands.

How I enjoyed watching you ease into the feel of sailing, shifting sides to duck under the boom when we'd come about, you enjoying the wind on your grinning face, enjoying the frequent silence interrupted by the occasional slapping of the waves against the boat, the wind straining to stay in the sails.

A wave spray hit you lightly in the face. Startled, you recovered quickly. "Ooo. Salty," you said, with a good-sport smile. I noticed gray in your hair.

You forgot about seasickness when you saw the seals piled on top of one another on the signal buoy, barking at us as we slipped by. You laughed at the lumbering, flapping pelicans in flight, yet commented on how serene it would be to ride on their backs when they eased into their long, effortless glide, skimming over the water.

The breaching whale took you off guard. Will it ram us, you worried; it's so huge, look at that, look at that, as it dove under us, then showed off by sending a fountain of watered air high above the surface. You looked at me for assurance, and I laughed.

A school of dolphins surrounded us, challenging us to go faster, faster. I had you haul in on the jib, tie it off, shift

to the starboard as we heeled low in the foamy water, the dolphins racing along side, turning their bodies, eyeing us as if to say, "Give up; you can't win."

You felt the exhilaration, dared to lean over the side, trying to touch the smooth skin of a friendly dolphin. They soon grew bored with us and went their way.

We didn't say much out there. No need. Mother and son together.

The next day, you went back to St. Louis.

That was the last time I saw you.

So now, I look and see.

You're still here, in my hands.

W. Royce Adams, a retired college English professor, has published more than a dozen college textbooks, several journal articles, and juvenile novels. His writings have appeared in *Green's Magazine*, the *Rockford Review*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, and others. He lives in Santa Barbara, California.

MADELINE VON FOERSTER

Noga, 2007

Oil and egg tempera on panel, 24 x 36 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST