

Extract from the Novel «Blue»

(«Blau», published 2001 by Reclam Leipzig. All rights by the author)

The current picked up strength and a brisk wind sprang up. All day Orla drifted southwest. How could she tack? How could she alter her course without a sail, rudder or steering device? She'd much rather be driven in the other direction, towards the Irish west coast. Or to the north or northwest, where eventually she would bump into the Hebrides. To the west there wasn't the smallest speck of land. There was nothing out there – apart from the open Atlantic.

The wind increased in force and the waves began to crest and break. Orla desperately tried not to panic. She told herself again and again that she had to stay calm and conscious of her situation. But she scarcely came up with one idea when the next moment it would be extinguished. Her mind was empty and bleak as the depths of the ocean. Each time the crest of a large wave broke over the masses of water, she sensed she was looking through a tunnel. It seemed to her as if all the dark abysses of the world, which she was about to leave, opened up in front of her eyes.

When she wasn't bailing Orla tried to sit as still as possible. With each movement she could feel damp wet clothing against her skin. Only if she sat perfectly still could she forget the cold for a moment. She clamped her teeth together because her jaw ached from chattering.

For the fraction of a second she thought she'd seen a mast. She had the sensation that her eyes were deceiving her. But then on the crest of the next wave she saw it again. As she tried to sit up straight she lost her balance. She screamed into the wind but couldn't hear her own voice, such was the thunderous roar of the sea. She unzipped her oil slicker, took off her jean jacket and waved it in the air. The mast didn't come any closer. After a while it disappeared altogether.

Orla was sure that her last chance had just eluded her. A sail boat! Within sight! And she'd had no chance of attracting attention. For hours after this encounter Orla simply stared into the waves. Surely the boat would reappear somewhere else!

The clouds broke, and the evening sun shone through. The sea calmed, but although its surface slowly flattened out there was no ship to be seen. Instead Orla discovered that the slow rolling waves now contained triangular shadows. If you were watching for dolphins you saw first of all the tailfins, poking out of the water here and there like sharp black points. At the beginning of the encounter it was never clear just how many animals surrounded you. Orla had experienced this many times. Still, she was astonished now as the dolphins began to jump. There were several hundred animals and they flew in long arcs directly over Orla's head. There was a rushing and a hissing, as if a flock of birds was flying over. Fleet as arrows the dolphins dived back under the water and vanished. They swam off towards the east and once more Orla was left drifting all alone on the Atlantic.

Her throat burned from the salty air and her thirst was becoming unbearable. She'd long finished the whisky and both bottles of water, the empty bottles stowed in the emergency pack. If it rained again she would take off her oil slicker and use it to catch the rainwater and pour it into the bottles, and afterwards would wring out her drenched clothing and collect

this water too. But first the boat had to stop swaying. Of the provisions there remained a couple of dust-dry pieces of rusk, the chewing gum and the seasick tablets. With damp fingers she scribbled a farewell message on the sodden toilet paper. Then it occurred to her that the logbook always goes down with the boat. She stuffed the toilet paper into the empty flask, put the top back on and threw it overboard. The current carried it off immediately. Orla counted the seconds and established that not even a minute passed before the little bottle containing her message was out of eyeshot. She remained bent over the edge of the lifeboat long after the flask had disappeared. Soon thereafter the sun sank behind the horizon and the colour of the sea changed from gold to orange to blood-red, and finally to black. No light is too beautiful for a burial at sea, thought Orla. Even in the light of a sunset the ocean looked as solemn and melancholy as a grave.