

**WASTE OF TIMELESSNESS**  
**AND OTHER EARLY STORIES**

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## Waste of Timelessness

IT was the usual invitation to a usual houseparty, the usual people, and with her usual husband. Why must it be friends of the "great writer" Alain Roussel rather than Alain Roussel himself who invited them out for the weekend?

Besides, it was raining.

The first thing Mrs. Farinole said was: "It has not rained here all summer. What a pity it should today, of all days! It will be impossible for you to imagine how perfectly lovely this place can be."

"Oh, but I can very easily imagine," she answered and looked around appreciatively at the hills, the pines, the sea, quite formally framed to make a cozy windless nook. And then she imagined a gigantic gust of wind sweeping the whole place clean, and Mrs. Farinole saying: "I am so sorry, our house has flown away, and so I cannot ask you to spend the night. I shall have to telephone the carpenter. He must do something about it immediately."

And then Alain Roussel would happen to pass by in quest of material, carrying a crab net. Seeing her on the road he would say: "Will you come with me? We can spend the weekend on that old fishing boat on the beach. It is a grand place." (He would use another word, a better one than "grand," but she could not think of it just at that moment.)

Her husband would say: "Wait a minute then. I must get her raincoat. She is subject to neuritis."

"There is Roussel's house," said Mrs. Farinole. "He has painted his gate in turquoise green. It will soon turn grey with the sea air."

"Have you read all his books?" she asked.

"We will, by and by," said Mr. Farinole. "Did you know that he wrote the last three right here?"

“And while they were repairing his house, too,” said Mrs. Farinole. “I don’t know how he could do it.”

“And his cook was ill—the house was terribly disorganized,” added Mr. Farinole.

“He wrote something very extraordinary in a magazine,” she said.

“He *is* a very extraordinary man,” said Mr. Farinole. “Did you ever hear how he repaired his own car when the mechanic could not make out what was the matter?”

“And here is our house,” said Mrs. Farinole. “Henry, show her the stubborn wisteria.”

They paused in front of the door.

“Do you see this wisteria? It was a stubborn plant—insisted on growing to the left for two years, and at last I got it around to the right, and over the door, where I wanted it.”

During this story little Mrs. Farinole shone with pride. “That is just like Henry, to be so *beautifully* persistent.”

“Do you think,” she asked, “that he could make me grow to the right too? I would really like to grow to the right, and over the door, but it seems impossible.”

Mr. Farinole laughed, “You have Irish in you, have you?”

“No, why?”

“Whenever Henry says something funny we said: ‘You have Irish in you, have you?’ ”

“You do!”

“And he, invariably, answers. ‘And a little Scotch besides!’ ”

“Now,” said Mrs. Farinole, “you know the family’s pet joke.”

“I think that is delicious,” she said. For a little while she did not hear the rest of the conversation. She was thinking that she would like to ask Roussel what he meant by intuitional reasoning. “By intuitional reasoning,” she thought, “I could be made to grow to the right, and over the door, but not by reasoning alone.”

They walked to the end of the garden.

“What is that? A boat? A boat in this garden?”

“I will show you,” said Mr. Farinole. “It was here when we got the house. It is an old Norman fishing boat, used as a tool house. See, it is black because they put tar on it to preserve it. What a shape it has, eh? So deep, so fat, so comfy, so safe looking.”

“May I look inside, oh, may I?”

“We put a bed there once for a little boy guest. He insisted on sleeping there. He got such a thrill out of it!”

The inside smelt of tar. There was a bed, several old trunks, garden tools, pots, seeds, and bulbs. There was a tiny square window on each side of the door. The roof sloped down squatly.

“Oh, I would like to sleep here, too.” she said.

“Have you Irish in you?” said Mrs. Farinole.

“Think of your neuritis,” said her husband.

“Henry is awfully proud of that boat,” said Mrs. Farinole.

“I hear the dinner bell,” he said evasively and modestly.

It was all so much easier since she knew about the existence of the boat—so much easier to jump gaily from topic to topic, being always careful not to exceed a certain moderate temperature.

There was the boat waiting in the dark garden, at the end of the very narrow path, the boat with its little twisted doorway, its small windows, the peaked roof, its smell of pungent tar . . . the very old boat which had travelled far, now sunk in a quiet dark garden.

The atmosphere in the Farinoles' library was dense with laughter. She must not stop laughing. Her husband had said: “The Farinoles have the most delightful sense of humor.” There was nothing to be done about it.

It was bedtime.

The Farinoles did not believe that she meant to sleep on the

boat, not until she was half way down the path, with her nightgown under her arm. Then they shouted: "Wait! Wait! We'll walk down with you."

"I know the way," she called back, running faster.

"You will need a candle."

"Never mind, there is a sickle moon, it will do."

Then they called out something else but she did not hear them.

She walked around the boat. It was tied to an old tree. She unfastened the mildewed rope. "And now I am gone," she said, stepping into the boat and banging the little door after her.

She leaned out of one of the windows.

The sickle moon was covered by a cloud.

The wind rushed once through the garden.

She sat on the bed and cried: "I would really like to go away. I would like never to see the Farinoles again. I would like to be able to think aloud, not always in hushed secrecy." She heard the sound of water. "There must be a trip one can take and come back from changed forever. There must be many ways of beginning life anew if one has made a bad beginning. No, I do not want to begin again. I want to stay away from all I have seen so far. I know that it is no good, that I am no good, that there is a gigantic error somewhere. I am tired of struggling to find a philosophy which will fit me and my world. I want to find a world which fits me and my philosophy. Certainly on this boat I could drift away from this world down some strange wise river into strange wise places . . . ."

In the morning the boat was no longer in the garden.

Her husband took the 2:25 train home to talk this problem over with his partner.

The boat was drifting down a dark river.

There was no end to the river.

Along the shores there were plenty of landing places, but they were very ordinary looking places.

Roussel had a house on the banks. When she made as if to pay him a visit he asked: "Do you admire me?"

"I love your work," she said.

"And no one else's?"

"I do care for Curran's poetry, and Josiam's criticisms."

"Don't stop here," said Roussel. And she saw that he was surrounded with ecstatic worshippers, so she pushed her boat away.

Along the shore she saw her husband one day. He signalled to her: "When are you coming home?"

"What are you doing this evening?" she asked.

"Having dinner with the Parks."

"That is not a destination," said she.

"What *are* you headed for?" he shouted.

"Something big," she answered, drifting away.

More quiet shores unfolded. There was nothing resplendent or marvellous to see. Little houses everywhere. Sometimes little boats tied to a stake. People used them for small rides.

"Where are you going?" she asked them.

"Just resting from ordinary living," they said, "off for a few hours for just a little fantasy."

"But where are you going?"

"Back home after a while."

"Is there nothing better further on?"

"You're stubborn," they said coldly. She drifted away.

The river had misty days and sunny days, like any other river. Occasionally there was magic; moments of odd stillness when she felt the same intense exaltation she had experienced the first night on the boat, as if she were at last sailing into unutterable living.

She looked out of the little window. The boat was sailing

very slowly and going nowhere. She was beginning to get impatient.

On the shores she saw all her friends. They called out to her cheerfully but formally. She could feel that they were hurt. "And no wonder," she thought, "they must have sent me many invitations and I have not answered them."

Then she passed Roussel's place again. Now she was sure she had travelled in a circle. He called out to her: "When are you coming home? The Farinoles need their garden tools, and the trunks, too."

"I would like to know," she called out, "what you mean by intuitional reasoning?"

"You can't understand," he called back. "You have run away from life."

"It was the boat which sailed away," she said.

"Don't be a sophist," he said. "It sailed away at your own bidding."

"Do you think that if I came ashore we could have a real talk? I feel then that I might not be wanting to travel."

"Oh," said Roussel, "but it might be *me* who would want to travel. I do not like perfect intimacy; you might write an article about it."

"You're missing something," she said. "It would be an interesting article." And she drifted away.

The shores still offered commonplace scenery, and there was no world beyond.

Her husband called out to her: "When are you coming home?"

"I wish I were home now," she said.

The boat was in the garden. She tied up the cord to the old tree.

"I hope that you had a good night," said Mrs. Farinole. "Come and see our wisteria. It has grown to the left after all, in spite of everything."



“During the night?” she asked.

“Have you Irish in you? Don’t you remember how the wisteria looked twenty years ago when you first came to our house?”

“I have been wasting a lot of time,” she said.