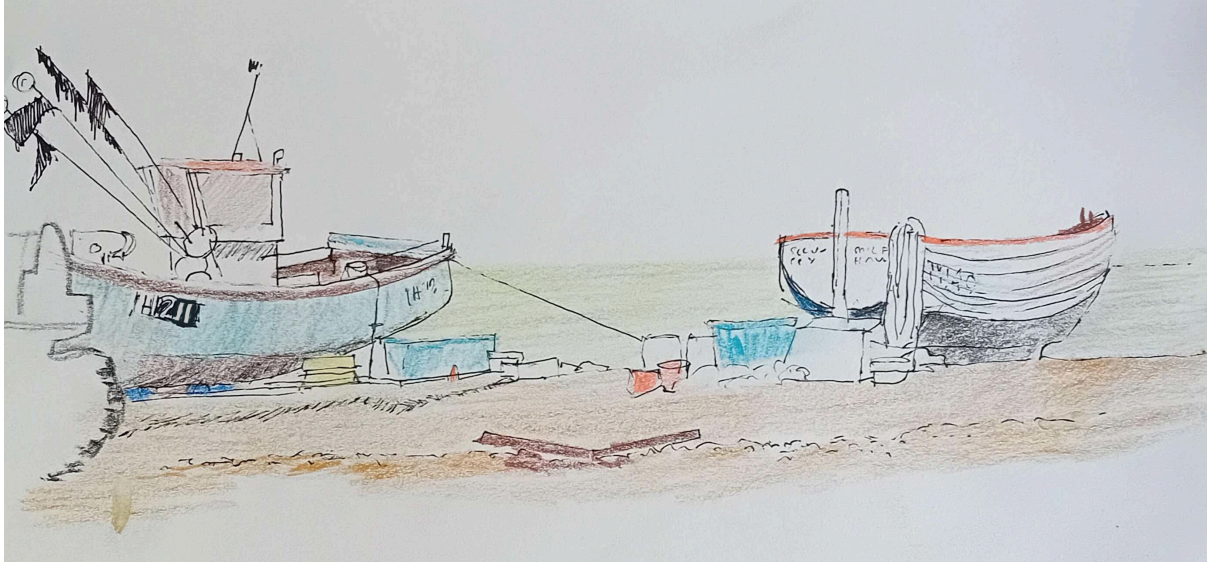


Blue moon

Elizabeth Shove and Caroline Shove

Fishing vessel for sale, IH211. Built in 1992. 10 metres. Name: Blue moon. One previous owner. Good service history. Nets, pots and line included. Price on application. Call Noel.



Pete and Amy's van scrunched on the loose gravel. Pete jumped out. 'You must be Noel'.

Noel looked at the sandy haired youth. 'Yep, that's me. You are early'.

Pete: 'It's an easy drive up from Basildon and we love coming here don't we Amy'.

Amy nodded in agreement.

Noel pointed to the top of the shingle bank: that's her, 'Blue Moon'. I've been fishing here all my life, and my father before me. She needs a bit of TLC but she's reliable. I had the engine overhauled maybe four years ago, and the winches are in good condition.

I'd keep going if I could. It breaks my heart to sell her, but no one in the family wants to take her on. It's hard work. No two ways about it. Up at 3am and out in all weathers, and there isn't much shelter, you're open to the elements in that boat. Then there is the paperwork. I've seen it all, regulations, quotas, limits on what can be landed at different times of year. If the rules say the catch has to be cut by 50% next week, that's it, big trawlers, and us longshore fishermen, everyone is treated the same. It's just not right. And the price of fuel. I don't want to put you off, but fishing is not what it was.

Pete grinned: 'don't worry, you can't put us off. We've done all the research and we're certain we can make a go of it. Amy's in marketing and this way of fishing is really sustainable. I've got a degree in engineering, so I'll be fine with the mechanics. And we both love the sea, don't we Amy'.

Amy nodded again.

After inspecting the boat in a biting cold wind, Pete and Amy made an offer: cash up front. As Pete reached forward to shake on the deal he noticed that Noel had two fingers missing on his right hand.

.....

A few months later.. Pete and Amy are settling into their new life. Thankfully, the summer weather has been kind and although the catch was not quite what they'd hoped, they've learned a lot. They know how to launch their boat and haul it back, and they know where Noel laid his crab pots. The other fishermen keep their distance, but they've had no complaints.

They've mastered the marine radio communication system, and they've become accustomed to the boat's lights dancing on the glittering sea. It is true, it is hard work, but they had no illusions about that. They are starting to understand the movements of the tides and to appreciate the underwater world on which their livelihood depends.

Pete: 'Let's go out tomorrow Amy. It's a full moon and 'fish finder' says the chances of a good catch are high'.

Amy: 'I don't believe 'fish finder' any more. Last time we followed its advice we came back with almost nothing.'

Pete: 'Ah, come on Amy, you know how the moon and the tides work together. It will be great'.

They rose before daybreak and repeated their familiar routine. They didn't see any one else getting ready, but they had their work cut out. They launched the 'Blue Moon' and the engine came to life, as it always did. A mile out, Amy checked the radio. There was nothing. No other boats at all. That was strange, what with the fish finder report and all. Where were they all? Pete shrugged and together they hauled in the first drift net of the night. It was heavy.

Fish flapped and slithered all over the floor, but there was something else. They'd caught a greenish-brownish lump about a metre long. Suddenly the lump sprang to life. Pete stepped back as the creature lunged towards him. He tried to push it away, but it went for his hand. It snapped and snapped again and then, in all the confusion, it opened what must be wings and flew off.

Pete nursed his bruised fingers. Thank goodness for those knife-proof gloves. Amy was as white as a sheet. Neither of them had ever seen such a monster before. That was it. They packed up and headed straight back to the shore. They sold their catch in less than an hour and went home in silence.

.....

The next day Pete and Amy didn't go out to sea. They went to the boat, as usual, but spent the time checking the gear and mending the holes in their net.

At around mid-day, Dobby, who owned the boat next to theirs, came into shore. They watched as 'The Valiant', was winched up to its usual place. Once Dobby had unloaded his cargo of crab and Dover sole he came over to see them. Curious.

Dobby. 'So you were out last night then?'

Pete. 'Yes, it was a full moon'

Dobby. 'I know. It was a blue moon. We get them every three years or thereabouts. None of us goes out on a blue moon, not since Noel ran into trouble. Did no one tell you that?'

Amy. 'What kind of trouble'

Dobby: 'Noel says he landed a sea dragon that bit his fingers off and flew away. He says it had cloven feet, and scales and rows of gleaming white teeth. I'm not superstitious, but Noel is a good man and

he swears this monster attacked him on a blue moon, not the last one, but the one before that. Poor Noel. He's not been the same since.



None of us wants to get bit by a dragon so we stay home and give that one night a miss. But you? You went out.. did anything happen?

Pete looked at Amy and Amy looked at Pete. Then Amy spoke. 'No. It was just fine. We landed a good few kilos of sea bass and came back early.'

.....

Fishing vessel for sale, IH211. Built in 1992. 10 metres. Name: Blue moon. Two previous owners. Good service history. Nets, pots and line included. Price on application. Call Pete.