



A CLASSIFIED LOVE STORY

By Ben Amato

We stayed in Montauk for a week on my sailboat, at this pretty little marina with clean showers. I thought that was the miracle of the summer. We arrived on a Thursday and just laid around, did the beach, the town, the bay and the pool. She had her book. I read the local paper; the classified. I was thinking of new boat. The local Sunday newspaper had this ad buried in the classifieds.

Breath Stolen

I saw you at the harbor, Friday, and the sun began to shine. Your hair, eyes and smile convinced me it was June '98. The ring you wore brought me out of that fantasy. The love we shared was real, no matter the jewelry.

– Lost Waiting for Another Dawn

I was intrigued, but then again the ad for inflatable dingy for sale caught my attention more.

Monday featured a relaxing afternoon. She shopped and went with friends who drove out for lunch. I tinkered with the rigging and installed the hardware for a new genoa. The boat needed a little more speed and a new front sail could do that. Sometimes it's fun to heel the rails into the water.

That evening we sailed in Gardiners Bay, anchored and watched the setting sun. She got lost in the pages of her new novel and I looked in that day's paper for a used headsail. I spotted this in the same spot the other personal was in.

Stolen Glance

June 99 I put his ring on my finger but our memories still make me smile. And I saw you, first.

- Red Sky in the Morning

Tuesday the weather was damp but the cabin was cozy. We watched a DVD, **Castaway**, on the laptop and later checked our stocks and e-mail. I did a quick search of the marine classifieds for catamaran sailboats, big ones, and found three for sale on Block Island.

She checked her email, downloaded some attachments and then curled into the forward bunk. She had her comforter, three pillows and her book. I took out the charts for Block Island and setup some waypoints on the GPS system. We would leave on the morning tide.



Wednesday there was a storm. We weren't going anywhere. It rained us into the cabin and a wonderful fever set in. We played in the galley naked and enjoyed an all-morning feast. But as the day wore on, we got worn down, (in a very nice way) so we went into town. There was shopping to do so we split up. I needed new lines and bungees. She bought a raincoat and a new novel. It was 600 pages. When I saw that, I picked up *The Times* and the local paper. We met up for dinner.

That night while reading the local paper I spotted this ad, further down the personals than the other two, in the R section.

Remember

Revisit. Revise. Rewrite. Recreate. Repeat. Relive or Retreat and Regret? Respond!

- No Longer Lost

Thursday morning was a gentle sail to the east, passed Montauk and then into Block Island Sound. The depth finder was reading well over a hundred feet. The winds were strong, solid and driving us out to sea. It would take three hours to reach Block Island so we settled into our sailing habits. We took turns at the wheel, each toying with the GPS and the autopilot. The cockpit, galley and table bloomed with snacks, chips, CD's, magazines, sunglasses, screwdrivers, pliers and plates. Days like this are why people go sailing. We took out the digital camera and started shooting the morning sun glaring over the rolling swells.

The Montauk Lighthouse and the surrounding fishing boats faded away to the west. There wasn't another boat in sight, so I coaxed her to lower her sails for some naughty pictures. Then we spotted the dark horizon behind us. It started as a thin blood-red line of clouds but quickly built into a solid dark wall. She packed up the cabin. I stowed away everything that could shake loose. The wind picked up and soon gusts forced me to put up a storm jib and reef the main. We were an hour out from Block Island, six miles out at sea. We were flying at seven knots and ready to be hit by a nasty thunderstorm.

Every muscle and line on board tensed and reacted when the hail first nailed us. The shock of being pelted sent shivers through the raingear and the rigging. Then it got dark, nighttime dark. The compass, gauges, GPS and the radio lit the cabin with a green LCD-type glow. The rest of our world was black wind.

She was in the cabin, spooked but solid. She had the Coast Guard on channel nine and gave them our position and heading. I had the wheel and was not going to let go.

Each swell turned into a huge dark hill, racing behind and then underneath. As the white crests got near, the bow would bow low and the stern would spring up five or six feet. Then we would slide down the wave and surf through the trough, until the next swell started the roller coaster again.



The emotional line between fear and pure excitement was very blurred. Every sense was overwhelmed. We were at peak awareness because so much was happening all at once. The sound of the wind and the waves roared over everything. The hail and rain ricocheted off the reefed sails. The lines groaned and the stays vibrated, almost howled under the strain.

She dashed from the cabin and slid into the seat next to me. Even with the layers of vinyl and a life vest, her body molded itself into mine. We leaned together into the storm. The ship slipped from wave to crest, heeled over from the torrent. The rain was so dense we could not even see the instruments but the boat was in love with the ride, hitting speeds never dreamed of before.

And then the storm ended. Mid-gust, sunshine burst through. The dark clouds flew out before us and our speed and adrenaline dropped. Stress test over. We were safe. The cabin was a mess but with no harm done.

I re-set the sails while she thanked God and the Coast Guard over the radio. The GPS said we had strayed so I righted our course. I went to log on to the Internet for a weather update and noticed we were already signed on to her account. Her mail was open and a photo was on the top left of the screen, of Montauk Point. The e-mail was titled, THE END. I closed it out and shut down the computer.

We docked at Block Island a bit later and tied up at Chapman's Marina. We were both a bit spent, so we hung out and napped. I stretched out on deck while she wrapped herself up in the forward bunk.

I went for a walk to see the other boats. Most had made it through the storm without damage. One of the catamarans for sale was tied up nearby. For a while I just sat on the dock and stared at its sleek lines and huge cabin. It was like comparing picture windows to portholes. It seemed more like a floating condominium than a sailboat. The places that boat could go and the adventures that awaited made it all the more beautiful, intriguing and alluring.

When I got back to my ship she was asleep. The laptop sat on the dinette and I started to write out an ad to sell my boat.

36ft. Catalina aged to perfection. Rigged as a live aboard, with hot water, high tech and comfort. Outfitted for speed, excitement and memories. Reliable, reasonable and very forgiving. Call for an appointment.

I logged on to the Internet and again found it on her account. A picture of my boat was in a small pop-up window of the screen. It was an attachment to an e-mail she had just sent. Under subject, it read *Already Home*, the same name as my boat.

I sat and stared at her sleeping, curled into the v-berth, wrapped into a comforter cocoon of warmth and the familiar. The cabin smelled like her hair and the only sound was contentment.

I deleted my ad, logged off the net, and curled up beside her to fall asleep. Sometimes you get to be exactly where you want to be. Realizing that was the true miracle of this vacation.

