

Matter 26

Summary

Woman Repeatedly Drowns, then is Rescued

Account by:	Alison Ellis, 50. Artist.
Source:	Near-death experience account.
Location:	Sicily Channel.
Event:	23 Sep 2022.
Report:	20 Oct 2022.
Catalogued:	4 Dec 2022.

Report

WOMAN REPEATEDLY DROWNS, THEN IS
RESCUED

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Four unfathomable weeks ago, two friends and I were cruising, carefree, the coast of Sicily in a four-berth boat helmed by a harbour-hewn Italian. We'd spent several sea-days circuiting the savage shores when one of us wondered, could we call perhaps on Pantelleria, an isolated island in the southern strait sitting in solitude close to Tunisia? Our colourful

Dheghōm

captain consented to convey us across the weary,
windless waters, so away we went.

All was wending well, when chaos struck. A trident
rent our underside, ripping and tearing, cutting
the keel and swirling amongst us streams of
surging salt-water.

For safety, we were wearing lifejackets. The canvas
canopy was down, so quickly we could clear the
confusion as the craft descended dizzily to its
doom – or so thought I.

Something snatched me as I swam – a strap, a
rope, a grappling limb – I felt my foot heaved
heavily towards the hull.

Ten, twenty, forty metres I fell, abjectly struggling
to the boundless seabed, unable to breathe, unable
to breathe, lungs empty of air, unable to breathe.

I drowned.

I was awake! Alive! I lay, liberated, in my bunk-bed
berth – but still below the bobbing waves. Up I
floated, up I swam, but breathless, airless, hopeless,
until consciousness departed.

I reawoke, respiring brine, back in my bunk,
befuddled. Was I dead? Up again I floated, up again

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I swam, until again I drowned and died and every world was shadow once more.

Repeatedly this happened, repeatedly I drowned, repeatedly my wretched life was wrested from me then reset so I could perish painfully in panic one more time.

It got dark. I kept on drowning. It got light. I kept on drowning.

Drowning isn't recommended, but a hundred rude rehearsals habituate one to its ways. I detached my lifejacket; next revival, I remained deep down to drown.

Confident of resurrection, I made plans, preparing for the point at which ascension to the surface would be possible. I figured that the fridge was sealed and filled with air, so if inverted I could clear my lungs within it; I could stay alive for long enough to break the surface and my curse.

I took my lifejacket and my chance – it worked. I coughed enough foul water up to inhale air, then gurgled gainfully towards the sunlight and salvation.

I was found, afloat, unconscious, drifting, three days after being dragged unto those dreadful depths.

Dheghōm

Doctors declared that my oxygen-starved brain had concocted the experience as it closed slowly down. Correct or not, I cannot care; the scars of the occurrences are my reality, the truth to which I must adjust.

We judge the world by what it weaves about us. Our minds mind what our senses sense; we each build bodies of belief shaped by poisoned, sugared happenstance.

Poets portray pictures with words. Artists pen prose with paint.

I am an artist; I should use decorative daubs to describe my near-death affair and its arduous aftermath. That I chose words, with their witless distance, is witness to my fear.

I do not wish enduring death again.

Notes

The International Association for Near-Death Studies anonymises all the accounts of such experiences that it publishes and takes care to protect the identities of those involved.

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Alison Ellis was aboard the vessel "Ametista", which sank over the Pantelleria Vecchia bank 23 Sep 2022. One of the other passengers, Jayne Frankish, insists that it was holed by a trident.

Alison Ellis is Love Ellis's mother.