

## TERESA AND THE LITTLE BLUE BOAT

By Herb Isaacs

Once upon a time, long after the days of witches and princes and princesses, there were two sweethearts who dwelt in a tiny fishing village gently edging the great sea. Antonio and Teresa were their names, and although they could certainly claim neither royalty nor station, they were very, very much in love. This is the story of how their love worked a little miracle.

The village of Antonio and Teresa lay on a wrinkled brow of land overlooking the blue-green ocean. Below, sprawled out along the shore were the fish houses and the marketplace and the boat docks. A few of the villagers owned and operated small fishing boats they had each built out of half a lifetime. The other men worked the fleet, three great old weather-gray trawlers that had sailed out of the harbor every Monday morning for as long as one could remember.

Antonio was an apprentice and served as a cabin boy aboard one of the trawlers. He was an honest worker and learned rapidly, and the older men praised him, for he was attentive to their every word. Every so often, they would take him aside and instruct him in the ways of the fisherman's world. He'd be allowed to help with the rigging or the nets, or work down in the hold, stowing the wriggling profits of the day's business. His enthusiasm delighted the men and they encouraged him.

"Someday, Antonio," they said, "you will have a boat of your own. Take loving care of her as you would a woman. Handle her with patience and attention, and she will take you through the hurricane--abuse her, and see how quickly she will list in rough water!"

This kind of talk always made Antonio blush a little and when he did, the men would laugh and nudge and poke each other. And then they would poke Antonio until he too would begin to laugh. He treasured those moments among the men. He was considered one of them. His mind took their words and fitted them with wonderful pictures, glorious color pictures that improved the quality of his dreams.

Antonio dreamed often. His dream was of a little blue boat with shiny mahogany trim and clean white sails. All the lines were new yellow hemp, and the deck was polished and hardwood and barefoot-smooth. In the dream he

would be standing there on the deck, in his bare feet, of course, with Teresa very close beside him, laughing together at the salt spray wind.

But dreams end, and when this one did, poor Antonio would suddenly find himself staring up at the sky or out at the terraced sea. And if there were a boat beneath him, it was only the dirty gray trawler that smelled of the freshly-caught herring, and creaked as it rocked in the swells. As it creaked, it teased Antonio. "Little blue boats are only for dreams, are only for dreams," it whispered. "A wife and family, or a boat? Which one, which one?" creaked the old trawler.

And he would shout, "Teresa! I love Teresa more than any fishing boat, and she loves me, and that is all there is to that!"

Then the old trawler would be quiet for awhile and pretty soon, Antonio would begin to dream again, only this time about Teresa and their coming wedding, and all about their life, and the children.

Teresa dreamed too, just as he did except, perhaps, that her dreams didn't begin with the boat. Teresa's dreams always began with the white lace dress and thin veil, and Antonio taking her hand in his. After that, though, they usually followed the same pattern, for the two had discussed their future so often, and in such detail, that their fondest hopes were enacted in both their dreams as the most inevitable of realities. And occasionally, when Antonio would turn pessimistic and consider the problems and hardships that might face them, Teresa would only frown and place a delicate finger against his lips. "You mustn't think like that, Antonio," she would say. "Only good things can happen to us if we believe in the good things."

For Teresa believed that the world was good and that people were good if only you would love them. The cynic might remark that poor Teresa was the most incurable of idealists. Perhaps that is true but, then, miracles so rarely happen to cynics.

One day, Teresa strolled down to the marketplace and wandered among the open shops and colorful street stands in search of a present for Antonio. It was his twenty-first birthday, and that evening a wonderful party was being held in his honor. There would be much eating and drinking, music and song and dancing, and there would be presents from everyone. Teresa wanted to find a very special gift for Antonio, a gift that could declare with proper eloquence her love for him.

She had explored the furthest corner of the mattress and recovered her treasure chest, an ancient stocking filled with many coins. It was part of a little game she played. At the beginning of each week, Teresa would put something away in the old stocking and then promptly make believe it was forgotten. Thus

it was always such a wonderful surprise to shake the stocking by the toe and see the newly found coins come tumbling into her lap.

Now, with her savings securely tied in a velvet purse, she moved through the marketplace from counter to counter, searching for a suitable gift. Each display was a fascinating montage of colors and shapes. There were belts of brown leather with enormous silver buckles, soft blue silken scarves, and rich and elegant golden rings, set with those pretty red and green stones of many faces that sparkled in the sunlight. Yet, of all these beautiful things, none seemed to strike her fancy.

The shopkeepers were very patient. They tried to help. "Is there anything else we may show you?" they asked. "Is there something special you might like?"

To them all, Teresa replied, "No, thank you, I'm just looking." While she thought to herself, "Of course I know what I'd like--a beautiful blue boat to give to my Antonio."

But, nodding politely, she would just murmur "Good day," and wander off to the next little shop.

At last there were none left. It was late now, and the deep golden tones of the sun were lazily highlighting crests of the sea. Shadows crept up on the marketplace. Teresa turned slowly away and started home. Her heart was very sad, and heaved little sighs between the regular beats. How she longed for that birthday boat. It really was the perfect gift for Antonio.

Teresa imagined herself presenting it to him. At first he'd be surprised and happy and grinning--then, of course, he would be stern with her. "You shouldn't have done it," he would say.

And she would answer gaily, "Oh, it was nothing!"

Except that it wasn't nothing--it was quite something to produce that little blue boat! Teresa considered all sorts of impossible plans. Perhaps she might find some new type of work. She tried to imagine how many little purses of coins she would need. Too many, she decided. And besides, the birthday party was tonight. There just wasn't enough time.

"Oh," she cried aloud, "I wish I knew how to make wishes come true!"

Teresa had taken the narrow path to the top of the hill. She looked back at the sea. Out in the harbor, a few sailing craft leaned away from the wind as they skimmed cross the bay. Below her, a rough wooden pier rested on great log pilings that grew down into the water. She stood there for a moment and

listened to the waves playfully slap the pilings as they rolled by, into the shore. And as each wave broke, it whispered to Teresa. "Wish," it said. "Wish, Wish!"

"All right," said Teresa, and standing up just as tall as she could, she cried, "I wish that all the boats in the world were right here in this harbor so I could pick out the best one for my Antonio!"

Sure enough, there came all the boats!! Tall-masted schooners and flat little roundboats, heavy warships with ominous cannon, and meek little fishing junks with patchwork sails. All were suddenly appearing in that tiny harbor. Teresa gave a little cry of delight and ran down the hill and out across the wooden pier till she came to the very edge.

And then her delight turned to alarm! She could see now that wherever there had been boats, there were people struggling in the water. And some couldn't swim. Poor Teresa! She had summoned all the boats and they had dutifully obeyed, leaving the passengers and crew in the middle of the ocean!

"Oh, stop, stop!" she cried.

At once, everything was stopped, even time. The tide froze on the surface of the ocean and all the world stood very still. The quiet that followed was terrible. Teresa could not even hear her own breathing or the beating of her heart.

Desperately, she considered the situation. It was clear that Teresa had somehow found a way to make her wishes come true. But it was equally clear that even if she kept only one little boat, some person was bound to be deprived of his own. No matter how she loved her Antonio and desired that boat for him, Teresa could not bear such a consequence. The decision was inevitable. All the boats had to be sent back.

"I wish all the boats to go back to their owners," she said.

Even as she spoke, the tide rushed in again, the waves splashing happily into the beach. The boats hurried back to their people and Teresa watched them sail off, as the round red sun dipped slowly into the water. Their silhouettes grew smaller and smaller until at last they could no longer be seen. Then she turned and started to leave the pier.

All at once she stopped. There, drifting slowly into the dock was a little blue sailboat. As it drew near, Teresa could see the shiny deck and pure white canvas just as she and Antonio had envisioned in their dreams. There was no one aboard.

The little boat came alongside and bumped gently into the dock. Teresa thought she heard the boat talk to her. "Surprise, surprise!" it said, scraping along the edge of the pier.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"You wished for me," scraped back the boat, "didn't you?"

"Yes, but I changed my mind," said Teresa. "You must go back to your owner."

The little blue boat rocked back and forth and laughed. "I don't have an owner," it said. "I was stranded on the beach--you got me afloat again and here I am."

She ran all the way to Antonio's with the good news.

And so, it was in this way that Antonio and Teresa found their little blue boat. And indeed, that is what they told their people--that they had found it, washed up on the beach. For after all, besides such idealists as you and I, who believes in miracles?

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