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“Reflections of an Oyster”

I used to be young once. Now, after many years of working day-in and day-out, I have finished my purpose. What have I accomplished over my life? Well, that’s quite a story. You have taken care of me by cleaning where I live, and in return, I’ve worked tirelessly to clean your waters. My work may have been quiet and unnoticed, but without it, the world around me wouldn’t be the same. When I was just a tiny speck in the water, I didn’t know what my life would look like. I floated aimlessly, drifting with the currents, waiting for the right moment to settle. It wasn’t until I found the perfect spot, a hard stonefront to latch onto, that I began my true work. From that moment on, I became an oyster, rooted into this place, surrounded by the water that would shape my life. At first, my days were simple: I fed on the nutrients that drifted by, slowly beginning to filter the water around me. As I was still young and naïve, I didn’t realize that what I was doing wasn’t just for me. It was for the environment I lived in.

Every oyster is a natural filter. I wasn’t just eating; I was purifying. I consumed plankton, algae, and other particles from the water, leaving the environment cleaner with each passing day. A single oyster might not seem like much, but over time, the cleaning adds up. If you could see the water before and after I filtered it, you’d notice the difference immediately. The murkiness would clear, the sunlight would reach deeper, and the bay would begin to breathe again. As the years went by, I began to notice changes. The water became clearer, the tides shifted, and the creatures that shared my home flourished. Seagrasses began to thrive, providing shelter for fish and crabs. The clarity of the water allowed the ecosystem to come to life in ways that had been impossible before.

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All of this was a direct result of the work I had done—quietly, consistently, and without fanfare. I remember the first time I felt a storm come. The wind howled, and the waves grew fierce, but I held fast to my spot, steady in the chaos. There were times when the currents would pull hard, and I vaguely felt my shell groan under pressure; but I was built to endure. Through the storms and the silt, I continued my work. Filtering. Cleaning. Supporting. And though no one could hear my silent efforts, I knew that, in some small way, I was making the world around me better.

I’ve worked for decades, but now, my time here is drawing to a close. My life wasn’t marked by grand achievements, but by small, steady contributions. I’ve helped clean your waters, provide habitats for marine life, and maintain the balance of this ecosystem. I’ve lived as part of a larger system, one that is constantly in motion, but always working toward harmony. Once I am gone, my shell will break down, and I will return to the bay, feeding the very waters that sustained me. In this way, I am part of something much larger than myself—an ongoing cycle of life, death, and renewal. As I look at the water one last time, I am proud of what I’ve done. I’ve done my part to make this world better and healthier. The bay is a better place because of the work I did. And now, it’s your turn. This is a responsibility that falls to you, just as it once fell to me. At this late stage in my life, I asked myself: “What have I accomplished?” My work wasn’t loud or visible, but it was essential. Now, as my story ends, I leave behind a better world; one that I hope you will continue to care for.

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