

What little wind there was, soon disappeared. The *Spray* wallowed, the engine pushing us towards the oncoming storm, halyards wearily slapping the mast. The sea, like the sky, was the color of lead in every direction. It made me uneasy until I fell asleep. When I woke up, the wind was back, blustery gusts that turned the sea even darker.

My father kept a list of things that we needed to do in case of a storm. Down below, we put things away, prepared food, and tied down anything that could come loose; while he strapped the dinghy to the deck and tied down the sails. He came down to lock the hatches and portholes. Satisfied that we'd secured everything, he took me aside.

"I'll need you on deck. Everyone else will be throwing up."

While he dragged the storm sails from the bow locker, I pulled on my plastic trousers and jacket. Bright yellow was supposedly safer in foul weather. My boots came to my knees. I tightened my life-jacket and safety harness and followed him up the stairs. The sky was dark with billowing smoky trails under the clouds.

"The wind's swinging around. It won't be long now," he said as we raised the storm sails. They were tiny but tough, built to withstand winds that could rip other sails to shreds. When he was back in the cockpit, he turned to me. "Do you remember anything from when you were three?"

"I remember you building the *Spray*."

"You were four when I laid the keel. How about before we moved to Arcadia Park?" I shrugged a response. "Do you remember hearing that music before?"

"Should I?"

"When you were three, you stayed with my parents for the summer."

"Wasn't that when they died?"

"Maybe it's better this way. Some things are best forgotten."

"Like how I got these?" I asked, looking at the burn scars on my forearms. My father looked too, only for a moment before he turned away. "What were they like?"

He cocked his head. "You don't remember them at all, do you?"

I shook my head. Suddenly, my skin crawled. It hurt to breath. My ears felt like they were going to explode. He opened his mouth to say something. No sound came out. The *Spray's* masts and rigging hummed. When, I looked up, a vast, dark funnel blocked out the clouds.

"Microburst! Hold on!" my father screamed.

It plunged down, radiating out rather than swirling up like a tornado, getting louder until my head throbbed. With a roar, the wind heaved the *Spray* onto her side. The bow dipped deeply, the deck canting at a gravity-defying angle. I plummeted down, flung from the cockpit towards the

sea. Only the lifelines saved me. My father hauled me back. I clung to him, my gut churning. The *Spray* spun around and lurched over a huge wave before slewing into the trough, the storm sails cracking like a 21 gun salute. It ended as abruptly as it began. Miraculously, nothing broke.

My heart thundered. I was certain we wouldn't survive. As far as I could see, the sea boiled, whipped white, sweeping towards us. The roar grew louder, like an out-of-control locomotive bearing down, until blinding sheets of water crashed onto the *Spray*. I thought we'd roll over for sure. My father fought back, gripping the wheel with white knuckles and staring blindly ahead. I'd never been terrified, or as uncomfortable—the front of my jacket slapped my neck red. Sheets of spray cascaded over me, finding openings in the sleeves and under my hood, brine sloshing through my clothes, chafing cold, clammy skin. For hours, I rubbed salt from my eyes, making them itch even more.

The waves were more frightening in the dark, invisible until a wall of water loomed up before us, a battering ram that shoved the *Spray* out of the way. A sideways surge preceded each wave; the stronger the rolling motion, the bigger the wave. There was no way to avoid the waves—even the smallest were bigger than any wave I'd ever seen. The *Spray* rose up to greet them, as if stubbornness could make the waves get out of her way. As the bow lifted, hundreds of gallons of seawater gushed over the gunwales with a deafening thump, swamping the deck and flooding the cockpit ankle-deep. My father clung to the wheel, his safety harness bracing him against the torrents of water, conducting Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, which played over and over again

The waves grew even larger into the night, white crests easily half the height of the mast, sometimes breaking like surf. Fearing his boat would capsize, my father hove to, his tiny storm trysail sheeted tightly and the rudder locked in the opposite position. We waited out the storm with the bow pointing towards the wind, the *Spray* rolling and bucking incessantly.

After one wave lifted the *Spray* so high it seemed we'd never get over it, he laughed maniacally. "I wish Sarah was here to see this," he shouted after the crest passed. The *Spray* charged wildly down the other side.

I cowered in the corner of the cockpit, fighting seasickness and a persistent fear that the masts would break, that the next wave would shatter a hatch and we'd sink. "This is crazy. We should head for shore," I shouted back.

"We're safer at sea than entering a strange port in a storm, especially at night."

"At least they'll find our bodies washed up on the beach."

"These waves are nothing to worry about. I built her to sail through a hurricane."

Another gigantic wave slammed into the bow, shaking the *Spray* violently. Water streamed down his front. Like Joshua Slocum, my father was unyielding.