

The Journey

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The ocean stretched out around us, dark and deep. There was no land to be seen, no sign of other life. The boat rocked in the waves—more so than before? It grew dimmer, the last vestiges of the day, and the sunlight with it, swallowed up by the clouds closing in overhead.

I heard one of the crew members gasp, and another made a sound, shushing him. *Don't scare the passengers, he said. Don't want them to know that it's bound to be the worst it's ever been.*

As if on cue, the waves began to rock the boat more sharply, jarring boxes and bags loose and knocking people to the splintered deck. The sailors regained their footings almost immediately, and scrambled about, quickly yet cautiously, tying things and people to the ship so as not to lose any of the valuable cargo to the increasing wrath of the sea.

The sky was completely covered, the clouds thick and black. The heavens opened, rain poured down; the sea roared, waves crashed over the bow. In an instant everything was soaked, and very little of what was above deck remained on the ship. People, goods, supplies—all overboard, despite the efforts of the sailors to tie everything down.

Somehow, I had remained on the ship when the water came from every direction, though surely the sea wouldn't let that be true for long. The waves crashed over the bow continuously, reaching up and over the mast, making quick work of the sturdy timber. It

had sharp eyes and carnivorous teeth, constantly trying to take a bite of what little was left above the water, seeking survivors and putting an end to them.

The sky, too, was alive with malicious intent. It glowed eerily: yellow, green, purple, the colour of a painful bruise, our presence causing it great distress. Lightning flashed, thunder began to roll; the captain fell to his knees at the base of the remains of the mast and cried out to his gods in an anguished voice that was swallowed by the wind.

The waves threw the great ship about as if it were a toy in a child's bathtub. I could see the face of Death silhouetted against the ugly sky, leering down at me. I knew then that there was no happy ending, no making it home to my loved ones. The goods and supplies would not be delivered, no payment would be rendered. Nothing would remain of us, no memory, no record, not even a wreck at the bottom of the sea for curious adventurers to explore years from now.

I threw my head back and let out a cry of lament. I wasn't done with life—I wanted to live! I wanted to travel the world, see the sights, meet new people. Yet, that was what had gotten me into this vast and terrible storm—my desire to leave all that was familiar to me. Why had I ever agreed to cross these god-forsaken waters? Why couldn't I have been content with all that had been handed to me on a silver platter?

In looking up I had met Death's eye. *Please, I cried. Please, won't you let me go, you cruel master? You already took my mother, and now you've come back for me. Please, leave me be, let us alone.*

His monstrous smile widened, his eyes flashing with a sick delight. An enormous wave rose, glistening darkly in the eerie light of the storm. I screamed, scrambling backwards, towards the hatch that led belowdecks, my hands scratching over the rough hardwood.

The wave crashed into the ship with such force that I was thrown from the deck into the raging waters of the sea.

The impact with the surface of the water was enough to knock me unconscious, and my limp body pierced the waves and sank, fast. The frigid water jolted me awake, and my arms reached out, towards anything that would help me, yet all they found was the cold water. I couldn't find my way to the surface, despite being surrounded by bubbles. The waves were crashing against one another with such force that they formed currents and whorls of air, surrounding me so completely I couldn't see. I thrashed in the water, fighting towards what I hoped was the surface, but my lungs burned, my arms grew weak, my legs became heavy. I couldn't breathe, couldn't find my way out.

A thought struck me suddenly: even if I could make it to the surface, what was I going to do then? There was no-one left to help me, and nothing remained of the ship that I could use to stay afloat. Why was I still fighting?

The water no longer felt so cold. My tired body sank, leaning into the water's embrace. There was no light, nothing to guide my way, wherever I was going. I sank deeper into the depths, my body relaxed. Why was I fighting this wonderful, comfortable being?

It grew darker, if that was even possible. The water started feeling colder, which surprised me. I thought I was beyond feeling. I sank under the weight of the water, under the weight of all that I had and hadn't done. Air no longer bubbled out of my clothes, my hair; nothing pointed me upwards.

My eyes drifted closed, my body lay gently in the water.

I felt everything. Then nothing.

Nothing at all.