

Lost at Sea

First Mate's log: Stoerm Date June 15, 2013

T*his is the last will and testament of Skyler T. Stoerm. Being of questionably sound mind and the only surviving son of Ash Stoerm, founder and CEO of Stoerm Enterprises, I hereby bequeath my beloved catamaran Stoerm Drifter to my best friend Aimee. Aimee, if you're reading this journal then I am most likely dead.*

Wow, did that sound dorky or what? But seriously how am I supposed to start a journal when most likely I'm going to die before I even finish it? It's cruel and unusual punishment. It's like forcing a third grader to write every known relative a letter about how great summer camp is when it's a total and complete drag, with crappy food and crappy counselors and even crappier camp songs.

Speaking of summer camp mistakes, Dad decided to make another huge one again this summer! He drags me away from chilling with my friends and plans of doing nothing but playing computer games and sleeping in. Instead I'm tossing my cookies on this stupid catamaran. Then Dad comes up with this brilliant (like, seriously over-the-top stupid) idea of me keeping a journal of—as he put it—our odyssey aboard Stoerm Drifter. And now I'm dying of boredom and seasickness. No friends. No fun. No computer. Just me, my journal, and my trusty bucket.

I might like sailing better if I didn't get sick as a dog whenever we sail. Maybe that wasn't the best comparison since Bear never gets sick. Bear's my dog by the way, a big grey wolf-hybrid I've had for as long as I can remember. Actually, I think Dad had him even before I was born. So, the old boy is ancient. He's got some seriously good genes or something because in dog years he should be pushing up daisies but still acts as spry as a puppy.

Journal writing is harder than I thought.

Maybe I should start at the beginning. Once upon a time in a land far, far, far, far away.

Yep, that's about how I feel right now! I live in the Tampa Bay area of Florida with my dad, or I did until recently. It's always been me and dad. My mom died in some kind of freak accident when I was a baby, and Dad doesn't talk about her much. Dad did tell me she was athletic and

loved the outdoors but that's about it.

I wonder if that's why Dad plans these crazy "summer bonding" trips every year. Survivalist camps, extreme sports, hikes in the desert or up a mountain. All this boy wants to do is just hang with his peeps! But Dad never listens. This year Dad walks up behind me while I'm role-playing online with my best friend Aimee.

"Skyler, got a minute?" Dad asked.

"Right now?" I answered, rolling my eyes and hoping he'd take the hint to leave me alone.

"What do you think about sailing to Bermuda for our summer vacation?" he asked.

"Huh?" I grunted intelligently.

It was an attempt to end the conversation quickly since I was obviously in the middle of blasting zombies into bite-sized pieces. I mean, come on! Don't parents understand they can't just interrupt a gamer between save locations? It's part of the unwritten gamer's code of survival. I thought everyone knew it. Well, everyone obviously except for my dad. So, I guess I can't be counting on him for the upcoming zombie apocalypse.

Since I'm busy blasting away and reloading, I gave him a get-lost nod and ended the conversation quickly with a typical teen reply, "Whatever."

In my youthful innocence I assumed that would be the end of it and that he understood I was far from interested in cruising with him on his dinghy—alone in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean! Last time I checked, there was very poor internet connection in the Atlantic Ocean. Dad, ever the sly dog, played his part perfectly. With a big smile, no doubt thinking "gotcha!" he turned and walked away, whistling. I should have assumed by the whistle that something was up, but I was too focused on finishing off the level ten mob boss.

Little did I know he meant we would leave that weekend! Imagine my surprise when a limo picks me up on the last day of school and brings me to the yacht club. Like that would make me happy about hanging out in the Bermuda Triangle?! I was caught off guard and didn't get time to pack anything useful (no PsP, Nintendo DS, iPhone, etc.), which was probably part of Dad's nefarious scheme.

To say I was totally bummed out is putting it mildly. I was stomping along the dock toward our yacht when I passed this really old, wooly-looking dude fishing off one of the side-docks. Talk about weird. This old guy had a beard that would put Santa to shame and was sporting the latest in fishing attire—if looking like a clichéd lighthouse caretaker was in. I'm surprised he wasn't sporting a wooden peg leg. He had an old fishing hat with hooks in it and a full-length rain slicker straight from the 1950's Sear's Catalogue.

As I passed by the old guy, he looked up and spoke to me out of the blue.

“Nice day for a sail, Skyler.” His deep voice carried easily across the distance between us.

“Excuse me,” I answered, then added under my breath, “Captain Ahab.” Not too polite but what can I say? I was cranky. The last thing I expected was to meet some old geezer on the docks who knew my name.

“Beware the ides of June,” he replied cryptically.

“Seriously?” I couldn’t resist. “Um, isn’t it the ides of March you need to be wary of?”

I walked toward the old guy to get a better look. He might be one of the yacht club’s old cronies or something. But when he looked up at me, I froze like a deer caught in the headlights. All I could see was this eye. It felt like I was getting pulled into this endless deep, piercing sea-blue eye. I got shivers down my spine, and embarrassingly enough, that freaky eye almost caused my bladder to unload.

“For Caesar it was the Ides of March.” His freaky eye pinned me to the spot. “For you it is the Ides of June that will change your life forever.”

It was like he could see right down to the depths of my soul, which isn’t an awesome feeling at all. Good thing it was only the one eye and he had the other eye covered with one of those black, pirate-type eye patches. I couldn’t have handled two freaky-deaky eyes looking at me like that.

“Dude, do I know you?” I think my voice even squeaked at the end. I was seriously weirded out by the old codger.

“Don’t you recognize me? Blood is thicker than water and your blood is thicker than most mortals.” He reached inside his rain slicker and paused, looking at me as if he could read my mind.

I wouldn’t have been surprised if he really *was* reading my mind. My face must have turned several shades of red because I could feel the heat crawling up my neck as I remembered every asinine thing I had said or done over the years—which was a lot!

Dropping the eerie eye contact, he smiled, pulled something out of his pocket and ambled closer.

“To thine own self be true,” he said. Again with the Shakespeare!

He then handed me a shiny black medallion on a leather thong and turned back to his fishing. Grabbing a small fish, he tossed it to a well-fed crow that had just landed on a nearby bench. The crow bobbed its head several times and cawed at the old geezer. He cocked his head to the side and listened for a minute before replying, “That is most disturbing indeed, Huginn. Return when you have more news.”

I should have been more surprised when the crow actually flew off, but I was more interested in the medallion this escaped geriatric psychopath had just handed me. Hanging from a leather thong, the medallion was the size of a silver dollar, well worn, and heavier than I

expected. Embossed on one side was a lightning bolt streaking from top to bottom. The other side had a blood-red stone embedded in its middle. Thin red lines that looked like veins ran through the whole medallion. It didn't look very valuable, like, maybe dollar-store worthy or some cheap Chinese knock-off. I was about to toss it when I had a change of heart—or rather a life-altering experience that scared the bejeebers out of me!

'No thanks, Gramps . . .' I started to decline the offer but didn't get a chance to finish.

"You would refuse a simple gift from an old man?" he asked mildly, reeling in his line. "Put in on NOW and DO NOT remove it until your journey comes to an end."

His voice held such power and authority that for once in my life I obeyed without protest. Yeah, that's right! I couldn't get it on fast enough and anyone else with half a brain would have done the same thing.

I fumbled with the medallion, almost dropping it in my haste to put it on. The small hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up as if the air around us was electrified. I swear to the gods that the sky clouded over and my whole world narrowed in to that one point in time. A ray of sun shone down like a spotlight surrounding the crazy old coot. Ever so slowly he turned to face me and smiled as I slid the leather cord over my head and dropped the medallion down inside my t-shirt.

"That's a good boy." He winked at me.

My heart was beating so loud I could hear it pounding in my ears. I had to get away from the old guy before he got any weirder. So I did what any kid with half a clue would do—I said goodbye and made a run for it.

After my little foray into weirdness, I ran straight to Stoerm Drifter. No detours. No more creepy old men. When I jumped on deck, Dad was already on board. I wanted to talk to him about my encounter, but he's never been a particularly patient person. As soon as he saw me, he put me to work. After that there was really no time to talk about anything not related to getting Stoerm Drifter out to sea. "Pull this, turn that, launch this, move that" didn't leave much room for a leisurely chat about the ways of weird old men.

Life aboard a sailboat is, if nothing else, an adventure. In this case, the real adventure began about eight hours out to sea when an unexpected storm interrupted any attempt at getting a few z's as a way of trying to momentarily escape the misery of sea sickness. Of course, I woke up puking, which is always a treat. I don't know what was tossing more—my stomach or the catamaran.

"Skyler, get your butt up here right now!" Dad screamed down the hatchway at me while the Drifter bucked up and down on the rough seas like a rodeo bull trying to toss a cowboy.

My wolf-hybrid Bear stood at the foot of my bed, whining, while Ali walked across my pillow, swishing her hairy tail in my face. Need I say more?

Responding to Dad's beck and yell, I rolled out of bed onto a floor that was rocking back and forth like a trampoline with a dozen people jumping on it all at once. Of course my ever helpful pet monkey Sunny had to join in the fun. He was hopping around screaming and literally bouncing off the walls.

Yeah, I know the whole Michael Jackson thing with Bubbles didn't go so well. But my monkey is older than I am and has always been reasonably well behaved. Besides, he's not a chimp but more like a gibbon. Not dangerous but often annoying. And at the moment he was doing nothing to help my headache.

Hanging from her perch Kay added her two cents' worth and laughed in that annoying bird voice she uses to mock me, which happens to sound like my own voice but with a slight nasally tone. Kay is a magpie who knows so many words and can mimic numerous sounds that it's almost scary. I swear sometimes it actually sounds like she's scolding me for something I've done that offended her. Not to mention the way she stares at me sometimes—it's just plain creepy. It's almost like she understands what people are saying—seriously freaky!

Racing up on deck I was nearly blown overboard by a wave that had to have come from Texas (because everything's bigger in Texas). Good thing Dad grabbed me by my coattails (literally) and pulled me back to safety. Well, relatively speaking. Is there really anywhere safe on a sailboat in the middle of what felt like a category 20 hurricane?

"What's going on?" I yelled at Dad.

"Hurricane," Dad yelled back helpfully.

No crap, Batman! "Can I help?"

"Yes, go below deck. Close every hatch or window and tie down anything that's rolling around." Dad's shouting could barely be heard over the howling winds. "No matter what happens, keep the animals locked inside with you."

"Aye, aye, skipper," I shouted at him, not sure if he heard me.

I crawled back inside, closing the storm doors behind me and sliding the lock bar into place.

After I tied down everything I could find, I stumbled back toward the main living area where I checked on all the animals to make sure they were okay. Then I nearly lost it. Sunny swung from the overhead grab bars, screaming bloody murder while Bear looked out the window howling his friggan' head off. Kay paced back and forth on her perch screeching in tongues or some other gibberish. And poor Ali clung to her hammock with a death grip that reminded me of King Kong

on top of the Empire State Building.

It was about that time that something large and dangerous scraped along the starboard hull. That means right side, I think. Even though I couldn't see it, I knew it was dangerous. I didn't need to see it—I could feel it. The thing rocked Drifter even more than the fifteen-foot waves.

As I tumbled across the floor like a pinball out of control, there was this awkward moment of pure terror when a huge greenish corpse-like eyeball filled the starboard portholes. For several hours—okay, maybe mere seconds—the sea monster just kept rising out of the water. Its scaly hide slithered along the bulkhead, blocking my view of the ocean. Frantically, I scrambled upstairs to look out the sunroof and froze in place.

Now I know why goons in horror flicks get rooted in place long enough for the bad guys to hack them to pieces. I was petrified in place. A reptilian head crowned with razor-sharp fins, opened its mammoth jaws filled with rows of sharp teeth the size of a Great White and literally pounced back down toward the top of the boat. I would like to say I grabbed the nearest weapon I could find and charged upstairs to fight the beast alongside my dad. Unfortunately, it was not meant to be. It seems the gods had bigger plans for me that night.

Apparently, one of our suitcases that I missed while tying stuff down fell from an open closet above and hit me upside the head, knocking me senseless. And yes, it could be argued that I was already senseless for coming on this ill-fated voyage, but that's beside the point.