It was day four at sea, and as far as eleven-year-old Carter Benson was concerned, life didn’t get any better than this.

From where he hung, suspended fifty feet over the deck of the *Lucky Star*, all he could see was a planet’s worth of blue water. The boat’s huge white mainsail ballooned in front of him, filled with a stiff southerly wind that sent them scudding through the South Pacific faster than they’d sailed all week.

This was the best part of the best thing Carter had ever done, no question. It was like sailing and flying at the same time. The harness around his
middle held him in place while his arms and legs hung free. The air itself seemed to carry him along, at speed with the boat.

“How you doin’ up there, Carter?” Uncle Dexter shouted from the cockpit.

Carter flashed a thumbs-up and pumped his fist. “Faster!” he shouted back. Even with the wind whipping in his ears, Dex’s huge belly laugh came back, loud and clear.

Meanwhile, Carter had a job to do. He wound the safety line from his harness in a figure eight around the cleat on the mast to secure himself. Then he reached over and unscrewed the navigation lamp he’d come up here to replace.

As soon as he’d pocketed the old lamp in his rain slicker, he pulled out the new one and fitted it into the fixture, making sure not to let go before he’d tightened it down. Carter had changed plenty of lightbulbs before, but never like this. If anything, it was all too easy and over too fast.

When he was done, he unwound his safety line and gave a hand signal to Dex’s first mate, Joe
Kahali, down below. Joe put both hands on the winch at the base of the mast and started cranking Carter back down to the deck.

“Good job, Carter,” Joe said, slapping him on the back as he got there. Carter swelled with pride and adrenaline. Normally, replacing the bulb would have been Joe’s job, but Dex trusted him to take care of it.

Now Joe jerked a thumb over his shoulder. “Your uncle wants to talk to you,” he said.

Carter stepped out of the harness and stowed it in its locker, just like Dex and Joe had trained him to do. Once that was done, he clipped the D-ring on his life jacket to the safety cable that ran the length of the deck and headed toward the back.

It wasn’t easy to keep his footing as the Lucky Star pitched and rolled over the waves, but even that was part of the fun. If he did fall, the safety cable—also called a jackline—would keep him from going overboard. Everyone was required to stay clipped in when they were on deck, whether they were up there to work . . . or to puke, like Buzz was doing right now.
“Gross! Watch out, Buzz!” Carter said, pushing past him.

“Uhhhhhnennnnh,” was all Buzz said in return. He was leaning against the rail and looked both green and gray at the same time.

Carter kind of felt sorry for him. They were both eleven years old, but they didn’t really have anything else in common. It was like they were having two different vacations out here.

“Gotta keep moving,” he said, and continued on toward the back, where Dex was waiting.

“Hey, buddy, it’s getting a little choppier than I’d like,” Dex said as Carter stepped down into the cockpit. “I need you guys to get below.”

“I don’t want to go below,” Carter said. “Dex, I can help. Let me steer!”

“No way,” Dex said. “Not in this wind. You’ve been great, Carter, but I promised your mom before we set sail—no kids on deck if these swells got over six feet. You see that?” He pointed to the front of the boat, where a cloud of sea spray had just broken over the bow. “That’s what a six-foot swell looks
like. We’ve got a storm on the way—maybe a big one. It’s time for you to take a break.”

“Come on, please?” Carter said. “I thought we came out here to sail!”

Dex took him by the shoulders and looked him square in the eye.

“Remember what we talked about before we set out? My boat. My rules. Got it?”

Carter got it, all right. Arguing with Dex was like wrestling a bear. You could try, but you were never going to win.

“Now, grab your brother and get down there,” Dex told him.

“Okay, fine,” Carter said. “But he’s not my brother, by the way. Just because my mom married his dad doesn’t mean—”

“Ask me tomorrow if I care,” Dexter said, and gave him a friendly but insistent shove. “Now go!”

Benjamin “Buzz” Diaz lifted his head from the rail
and looked out into the distance. All he could see from here was an endless stretch of gray clouds over an endless stretch of choppy waves.

Keeping an eye on the horizon was supposed to help with the seasickness, but so far, all it had done was remind him that he was in the middle of the biggest stretch of nowhere he’d ever seen. His stomach felt like it had been turned upside down and inside out. His legs were like rubber bands, and his head swam with a thick, fuzzy feeling, while the boat rocked and rocked and rocked.

It didn’t look like this weather was going to be changing anytime soon, either. At least, not for the better.

Buzz tried to think about something else—anything else—to take his mind off how miserable he felt. He thought about his room back home. He thought about how much he couldn’t wait to get there, where he could just close his door and hang out all day if he wanted, playing City of Doom and eating pepperoni pizz—

*Wait, Buzz thought. No. Not that.*
He tried to unthink anything to do with food, but it was too late. Already, he was leaning over the rail again and hurling the last of his breakfast into the ocean.

“Still feeding the fish, huh?” Suddenly, Carter was back. He put a hand on Buzz’s arm. “Come on,” he said. “Dex told me we have to get below.”

Buzz clutched his belly. “Are you kidding?” he said. “Can’t it wait?”

“No. Come on.”

All week long, Carter had been running around the deck of the *Lucky Star* like he owned it or something. Still, Carter was the least of Buzz’s worries right now.

It was only day four at sea, and if things kept going like this, he was going to be lucky to make it to day five.

Vanessa Diaz sat at the *Lucky Star’s* navigation station belowdecks and stared at the laptop screen
in front of her. She’d only just started to learn about this stuff a few days earlier, but as far as she could tell, all that orange and red on the weather radar was a bad sign. Not to mention the scroll across the bottom of the screen, saying something about “gale-force winds and deteriorating conditions.”

The first three days of their trip had been nothing but clear blue skies and warm breezes. Now, nine hundred miles off the coast of Hawaii, all of that had changed. Dexter kept saying they had to adjust their course to outrun the weather, but so far, it seemed like the weather was outrunning them. They’d changed direction at least three times, and things only seemed to be getting worse.

The question was—how much worse?

A chill ran down Vanessa’s spine as the hatch over the galley stairs opened, and Buzz and Carter came clattering down the steps.

“How are you feeling, Buzzy?” she asked, but he didn’t stop to talk. Instead, he went straight for the little bathroom—the “head,” Dexter called it—and slammed the door behind him.
Her little brother was getting the worst of these bad seas, by far. Carter, on the other hand, seemed unfazed.

Sometimes Vanessa called them “the twins,” as a joke, because they were both eleven but nothing alike. Carter kept his sandy hair cut short and was even kind of muscley for a kid his age. Buzz, on the other hand, had shaggy jet-black curls like their father’s and was what adults liked to call husky. The kids at school just called him fat.

Vanessa didn’t think her brother was fat—not exactly—but you could definitely tell he spent a lot of time in front of the TV.

“It’s starting to rain,” Carter said, looking up at the sky.

“Then close the hatch,” Vanessa said.

“Don’t tell me what to do.”

Vanessa rolled her eyes. “Okay, fine. Get wet. See if I care.”

He would, too, she thought. He’d just stand there and get rained on, only because she told him not to. Carter was one part bulldog and one part mule.
Jane was there now, too. She’d just come out of the tiny sleeping cabin the two girls shared.

Jane was like the opposite of Carter. She could slip in and out of a room without anyone ever noticing. With Carter, you always knew he was there.

“What are you looking at, Nessa?” Jane asked.

“Nothing.” Vanessa flipped the laptop closed. “I was just checking the weather,” she said.

There was no reason to scare Jane about all that. She was only nine, and tiny for her age. Vanessa was the oldest, at thirteen, and even though nobody told her to look out for Jane on this trip, she did anyway.

“Dex said there’s a storm coming,” Carter blurted out. “He said it’s going to be major.”

“Carter!” Vanessa looked over at him and rolled her eyes in Jane’s direction.

But he just shrugged. “What?” he said. “You think she’s not going to find out?”

“You don’t have to worry about me,” Jane said.
She crawled up onto Vanessa’s lap and opened the computer to have a look. “Show me.”

“See?” Carter said. “I know my sister.”

Vanessa took a deep breath. If the idea of this trip was to make them one big happy family, it wasn’t exactly working.

Technically, the whole sailing adventure was a wedding gift from her new uncle, Dexter. It had been two months since Vanessa and Buzz’s father had married Carter and Jane’s mother, but they’d waited until the end of the school year to take a honeymoon. Now, while their parents were hiking Volcanoes National Park and enjoying the beaches on Hawaii’s Big Island, the four kids were spending the week at sea and supposedly getting to know one another better.

So far, the sailing had been amazing, but the sister-brother bonding thing? Not so much, Vanessa thought. The weather wasn’t helping, either. It looked like they were going to be cooped up together for the rest of the day.
“Is that the storm?” Jane said. She pointed at the large red mass on the laptop screen.

“That’s it,” Vanessa answered. On the computer, it seemed as if the oncoming front had gotten even bigger in the last few minutes. She started braiding Jane’s long blond hair to distract her.

“It’s just rain, right?” Jane said. “If this was something really bad, we’d already know about it. Wouldn’t we, Nessa?”

Vanessa tried to smile. “Sure,” she said. But the truth was, she had no idea how bad it was going to get.

None of them did.
Jane sat on her bunk, with her back pressed against the wall to steady herself. The boat was rocking too hard to prop her camera on a shelf like she usually did. Instead, she held it out at arm’s length and pressed Record.

“Hi, everyone. It’s Jane B. again, reporting for Evanston Elementary.”

It took more concentration to hold the camera steady than it did to say the words. “Today is June twenty-eighth, and it’s the fourth day of our sailing trip. I don’t know if you can tell, but the weather’s not nearly as nice today. Here, I’ll show you.”
She held the camera up to the cabin’s porthole to show the tossing waves outside. On the view screen, it looked as if the whole world were tilting back and forth.

She didn’t need her whole class to know how scared she actually was. Not Vanessa and the boys, either. They all treated her like a baby to begin with. So she talked about other things instead.

“I read in one of Uncle Dexter’s books that the Pacific Ocean is ten thousand miles across and has some of the strongest wind currents in the world,” Jane narrated. “Less than one percent of the whole ocean is covered in land, so I guess there isn’t much to stop the wind from blowing out here.”

She’d done plenty of research for her report. She always did. Carter called her a brainiac for doing extra-credit work over summer vacation, but then again, Carter’s best subject was gym.

Besides, it was something to do while this storm set in around them.

“Uncle Dexter says the weather can change really fast around here,” Jane went on, as casually as she
could. “In the meantime, there’s not that much to
tell. We’re all just staying put and holding on tight.
Dex calls it hunkering down, so I guess that’s what
we’re going to do. Until later, this is Jane Benson,
reporting from somewhere in the South Pacific.”

By the time it started to get dark, Buzz was starting
to feel normal again. Maybe the seasickness was
finally behind him. Or maybe there just wasn’t
anything left to throw up, Buzz thought.

In any case, he still wasn’t hungry. Nobody was.
The weather had only gotten worse, and it seemed
to have taken away everyone’s appetite. The kids all
spent the evening sitting around the galley table,
holding on to the edges of things for balance as the
boat rolled over the waves. Each time another one
hit, it was like a jolt to the body.

While they waited for the storm to pass, Jane
watched and rewatched all of the videos she’d
made for her report so far. Vanessa sat and played
the same game on her phone, over and over. She’d given up trying to text her friends days ago, when it became clear that there was no cell reception out here on the open ocean. Carter listened to music with his headphones on and practiced nautical knots with an old piece of rope.

Buzz just sat, listening to the wind whistling through the masts and the rain pelting the boat from all sides. He’d already run down the batteries on the handheld game he’d brought, along with his spare batteries. On top of that, without any sun all day, the boat’s solar panel hadn’t been able to generate any electricity at all for the Lucky Star. The only other source of power was the boat’s engine, but Dexter wasn’t keen to use that in the storm. Dexter had told everyone to conserve electricity until further notice. That meant no laptop, no DVDs, and as few lights as possible belowdecks.

Just after eight o’clock, when the cabin windows had gone completely dark, the hatch opened and Dexter came down the stairs. All week long, he’d
been upbeat and smiley, like some kind of friendly giant who laughed at just about anything. But not now. His expression was grim as he ran a hand over his dripping-wet face.

“I hate to say it, guys, but it looks like this is going to get worse before it gets better. There’s a crazy cold front playing heck with the forecasts. It’s pushing some of this storm at us faster than we expected.”

He stopped and held tight to the upright pole in the middle of the salon as the boat dipped and rose, and dipped again. Coffee mugs clattered against one another in the cabinet. Jane’s camera slid across the table.

“This kind of thing’s always a possibility, but not to worry,” Dexter went on. “The only thing to do now is sit tight while we skirt around this squall a little farther.”

“Does that mean we’re changing course again?” Vanessa asked.

“Yep,” Dex said. He went to the nav station, unrolled a chart, and looked at it. “But just
temporarily. Today’s Boomerang Day, and I’ll have us right back on track by tomorrow.”

Boomerang Day was Dex’s name for the trip’s midpoint, when they came around and headed back toward Hawaii. Maybe that was a good thing, Buzz thought. It meant they’d gotten half of this trip over with. Then again, it also meant that they were as far from home as they’d ever been.

When Dex looked up from his chart, he seemed to sense something in their faces. He turned toward the group again with his hands clasped in front of him.

“Guys, I think your parents would be proud to see how brave you’re all being. I know it’s scary, but you’ve got me and Joe up top, handling everything. I just need you to be down here, for one another. Make sense?”

“Yeah,” Vanessa said quietly. Carter shrugged.

“Carter?” Dex said, leaning down to catch his eyes. “You got a problem with that?”

“No,” Carter said. “I just wish I could help.”

“You can help,” he said. “Down here. Right now,
your job is to hang tough, and hang together, so you’re ready to go when we need you on deck again.”

Buzz looked down at the table, trying not to show his face. He didn’t feel very tough right now.

“You know what?” Dex said. “I’m almost glad this storm came up.”

That seemed to get everyone’s attention.

“Why?” Jane asked.

“I’ve sailed with some rough-and-tumble crews before—even rougher than you four,” he said with a wink. “I remember this one time, we were out fishing, a couple hundred miles north of Oahu. We got hit with the biggest, fastest-moving squall I’ve ever seen. It was like sailing sideways, with enough wind to blow you right off the deck. That storm made this one look like a little spring shower, and I don’t think any of us thought we were going to see the morning.”

“Um . . . Dex?” Buzz said. “I thought you said you were glad this storm came up.”

“Right,” he said. “My point is, we all pulled together that night and made it through. Not
only that, but those guys are still some of my best buddies. A hard turn like this just brings you closer together. And let’s face it, isn’t that exactly what your parents wanted you kids to get out of this trip?”

Just then, the small companionway door at the back of the rear sleeping cabin opened up, and Joe shouted down from the cockpit.

“Dex? Can you get up here? Now?”

“What is it?” Vanessa asked, the worry plain in her voice. “What’s going on?”

“Probably just a loose line. I’ll go find out,” Dex said.

“You sure you don’t want some help?” Carter said. “I can hold the wheel.”

Dexter turned and put out one of his big hands to stop Carter.

“There’s nothing that needs doing right now,” he said. “But I do want you guys to strap on your PFDs.”

“What?” Buzz blurted out. PFD stood for
“personal flotation device”—also known as a life jacket. Dex already had his on, but he’d been working up top. “Why do we need those?”

“It’s just standard operating procedure for a storm like this,” Dexter said. “You never take chances on a boat.” He pulled the four vests off the hooks where they hung by the stairs and dropped them on the galley table. Then he stopped, just long enough to show his old familiar smile. “There’s nothing to worry about, guys.”

Buzz glanced around at the others, to see if anyone was buying it. From the somber expressions all around, it didn’t seem like anyone was. But Dex had already gone back up top and closed the hatch behind him.

“Watch out.” Vanessa scooted Buzz out of the way as she got up from the table.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m calling Dad.” She stepped over to the navigation station and pulled the black plastic satellite phone out of its wall-mounted charger.
They’d all been shown where it was and how to use it.

“But . . . we’re only supposed to use that for emergencies,” Jane said. Just then, another powerful gust of wind screeched from outside, tossing the boat into a hard tilt. Vanessa barely caught herself on the countertop to keep from stumbling, while the others struggled to put on their life jackets.

“Yeah, close enough,” she said, and started to dial.

Vanessa held on to the nav station desk and sat herself down as the boat continued to tilt and roll. She didn’t care if Dexter wanted them using the satellite phone or not. Maybe he’d been through worse, but she sure never had.

The phone wasn’t complicated, either. They’d been shown all of the emergency equipment on
the first day, when Dex and Joe had taken them through hours of “boat school” before they set sail. Vanessa hadn’t paid attention to all of it, but this was something she remembered. She dialed zero-zero-one and then her father’s cell number.

As soon as it started to ring on the other end, she felt tears begin to sting the corners of her eyes.

“Hello?” her father’s voice came suddenly in her ear.

“Dad?” Vanessa shouted. “Dad!”

“Vanessa, what’s going on?” Eric Diaz asked. “I can barely hear you.”

“We’re in a storm, Daddy. It’s bad. Like, really bad.”

Jane was there suddenly, reaching for the phone.

“Can I talk to Mom? Please? Pretty please?”

Then Carter was there, too. Only Buzz stayed where he was, but he watched just as intently as the other two.

“Where’s Dex?” her father asked.

“He and Joe are up top,” Vanessa told him.
“Everyone’s okay. I’m just . . . I just wanted to hear your voice.”

“Listen, sweetie, you’re going to be fine. Dex and Joe know what they’re doing. Just try to hold on and be brave, okay?”

Vanessa took a deep breath. “Okay,” she said, mostly because there wasn’t any choice. “Is Beth there, Dad? Jane wants to talk to her.”

“All right. Hang on a second. I’ll get her.”

But before Vanessa could even hand over the phone, an enormous scraping sound screeched up from under the boat. Everything seemed to stop short with a sudden, violent jerk, as if someone had jammed on the brakes. Vanessa felt herself thrown toward the back of the boat. The others tumbled around, too, and the phone flew out of her hand. A cascade of books, dishes, storage baskets, and swiftly unrolling charts came down on top of her where she landed hard against the aft cabin door.

“What just happened?” Carter shouted.

“Did we hit some rocks?” Buzz asked.

me?” She started scrambling through the pile of debris on the floor, but she couldn’t find the phone anywhere.

Instead, her hand landed in cold water. It was soaking the carpet, Vanessa realized. When she looked to her right, she saw it was also pouring in from under the small engine-compartment door.

At the same moment, Joe came barreling down the galley steps.

“Joe? What’s going on?” Vanessa said.

He clambered over the mess as if none of them were even there, and fell onto the wooden stool bolted in front of the nav station.

“What are you doing?” Vanessa asked. “Joe, where’s Dex? There’s water coming in!”

But Joe wasn’t listening. He was holding the sideband radio transmitter with one hand and adjusting a dial on the console with the other.

“SOS, SOS, this is the *Lucky Star*,” Joe said into the handset. “SOS, SOS, this is the *Lucky Star*, do you copy?”

Whatever was said next, Vanessa didn’t hear. It
was swallowed up by a brilliant flash of lightning and a crash of thunder too overwhelming to be anywhere but right on top of them.

In the next moment, the entire cabin was thrown into darkness.