



IT'S THE WIND

STORY STARTER BY CARLY ANNE WEST

It's the wind that hits me first—the sheer violence of it all. You might think you know hopelessness (I mean, if you're also a fifteen-year-old nihilist with a pessimistic bent). But believe me, friend, you don't know the depth of suffering more than when you're looking down the dark maw of a frozen ocean.

That's exactly where I woke up at the crack of midnight—on the bow of some moldy, ancient ship getting tossed around like a wet raccoon in a literal hurricane surrounded by the rankest sailors I've ever had the misfortune of smelling (which until now has been a very grateful zero times). And yeah, I smell it through the hurricane. It's that bad.

It's not what I smell that's scaring me, though; it's what I hear. Over the howling wind and roaring thunder, it sounds like the ship is wailing, like some prehistoric mammoth sea dragon is waking up. And it's bit mad.

These are the moments I picture mom shaking her head slowly, taking a deep breath in and out, one after another, her nervous foot tapping the floor, giving her away.

That's why you don't slipstream, she'd say. It's what she called dropping into other people's dreams. Like riding the jet stream of some rogue pilot. You better know that person so well, kiddo, you can find your way through their head, she'd say. Worst thing in the world would be to get trapped in someone else's mind, Leonard.

That's what Mom would say,

“Let go of that rope and I'll gut you like a fish.”

That was definitely not Mom. Whoever it was, his hot breath in my ear makes me jump just as the ship lurches over another rollicking wave. I just want to make it through this kid's dream without suffering serious bodily injury.

I stumble backward, catching myself on a cluster of barrels strung together with the same heavy rope some sour-smelling sailor just threatened me not to let go of. It's the same rope that's twisting the skin on my palms as I curl my fingers around the thick braids. The fibers burn straight through my skin, but I grip tighter because I really, really don't want to be gutted like a fish.

Still, as much as I want to, I can't wake up yet. Not until I get what I came here for.

AN OCEAN OF STORIES

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