

The Boat

The summer before I turned nine my dad bought a boat. It wasn't a huge yacht type of thing or a speed boat, just a simple fishing boat. Dad took me out of daycare early that day. We got ice cream and went out on the gulf. I had never been on a boat before. Dad took command of the machine, leading us on the open water. We zoomed up and down the west coast of Florida for hours, salt water spraying in my face. Dad said he was the best damn boat driver around and he challenged the speed boats that whizzed past us to races. I'll leave your ass in my wake, he said. When he pushed the boat to what seemed like a hundred miles per hour, I grabbed on to the seat, afraid I would fly out. The wind whipped around me; I struggled to hang on. Dad was focused on going as fast as possible. I was focused on not falling out and getting eaten by sharks.

After we got out of the water, Dad took me to the mall and bought me a new Gameboy Color and a Pokémon game. I had wanted one for a few years. Everybody else in my class had one. Mom would always say no and would get angry if I kept on asking.

Dad was very happy that summer. Well, not *that* happy, but very happy for him.

But most of that year he was just sad, which made Mom sad and angry, which then made me confused. Why is Dad so sad? I would ask. I don't know, Mom would say. Why isn't he happy? I would ask. I don't know, she would say. Are you sad? I would ask. No, I'm fine, she would say. You look sad, I would say. I'm fine, she would repeat. Then she would tell me to go play in another room while Dad lay in their bed and Mom sat at the dining room table sipping tea, the newspaper in front of her.

After Dad and I got home late from being on the boat, Mom said, You did not seriously buy a fucking boat? Dad said, Hey, it's okay, it's just a boat, only cost a grand. Then they yelled for a while about it.

I hid on the boat. I lifted up the seat and took the lifejackets out of the compartment and crawled inside. It was tight, and my head hurt pressed up against inside walls, but I didn't want to hear Mom and Dad fight anymore. I took my Gameboy out of the box and put in the game cartridge. I chose Cyndaquil as my starter.

As I was about to enter Violet City's Gym and earn my first badge, Dad opened up the seat compartment. Hey kid, he said. C'mon, you got to get out. No more boat for us.

I hesitated. The sudden surge of natural light hurt my eyes, made me see spots. I squinted.

Come on! And turn that damn music off. Dad grabbed my arm and picked me up out of the compartment. Shit, Dad said, he already started playing the game. Can't return it. God damn, I heard my mom say.

I ran into the house to find new batteries; the Gameboy was about to die.

A couple days after buying it, Dad got rid of the boat. He and Mom argued about the boat. Dad really wanted to keep it, but we didn't have the money for it. Mom made him sell the boat. Mom suggested that Dad get back on medication so this kind of thing wouldn't happen again—her words. He didn't want to. He said it made his skin feel like it was crawling off of him.

Dad was normal for a few weeks after losing the boat. He was like a normal dad that summer. We played basketball in the park, went to the movies. He bought me a lot of stuff, which didn't make Mom too happy. Most of it had to be returned, but I was happy I was able to keep some games.

Towards the end of that summer, Dad left without saying where he was going. When he got back, Mom and I walked out of the house and onto the driveway. Behind Dad's pickup was a large boat; it could have fit two or three of those fishing boats inside it. It was bright red, with yellow stripes along its sides that looked like lightning. I pictured all of us happy on the boat, zipping around the ocean.

Her name's "Seas the Day," Dad said. Get it? *Seas* the Day.

I looked to Mom. Her arms were crossed, eyes narrowed. She was biting down on her bottom lip. Now are you happy? she said to Dad.

I hoped he was. I didn't want him to be sad anymore. I'm always fucking happy, he said. I'm the fucking King of the Gulf.