

After Kate and Tom got married in the backyard of her parents' Connecticut home, they drove through the night to Port St. Lucie. The next day they used their wedding gifts to buy a run-down sailboat for their home. Claire de Lune needed work, but was a strong and stable Morgan, perfect for long, off-shore cruises. It was Tom's dream to live aboard, and Kate, intent on her dream of marital bliss, shared his romantic vision of working to sail and sailing to work. She found a job teaching at a maritime school where the children built sand sculptures of mermaids, and dug for crabs on the beach. Tom found work captaining a schooner that took corporate types on cruises to improve productivity in the workplace.

During their first year of marriage, Kate, who had never traveled beyond the hills of New England, enjoyed the novelty of living at sea, tied to a buoy in the bay, and rowing a dinghy twenty minutes to shore each morning before driving to work. Only once did she fall into the sea. It was the time they rowed back from drinking until two am and Kate missed her step jumping from the dinghy onto Claire. She knocked her chin on the starboard side as she slid into the murky cold water. When she surfaced, Tom threw a line she managed to grab while he pulled her aboard like a soggy ragdoll, eyes wide with surprise. Apart from that one mishap, Kate thought nights were magical under the starlit skies and even better when she and Tom lay side by side in the teak paneled V-berth, calves overlapping and feet intertwined.

Months later, when they bored of their jobs, they made the decision to cruise to the Bahamas. While sailing the Gulf Stream, Kate stayed below deck, vomiting. The continual rocking, waves splashing over the deck and the endless horizon intensified her anxiety when she realized they were but tiny specks that could be lost forever. Tom felt glorious, hoisting and lowering sails, reading charts and downing beers when the sea calmed. Within a day they

anchored near Eleuthera, and Kate called her mother. In the weeks and months to follow, their savings dwindled and they struggled to live off Tom's meager earnings from boat repairs.

Despite living in paradise, Kate felt darkness descend. While Tom was busy sanding Claire's woodwork or caulking vessels, Kate wondered when they would return to the U. S., when she would see her friends again and if it had been a mistake to marry Tom. When he returned from afternoons drinking at The Cove, he could hear Kate's muffled cries from the cabin below. At night, when he pressed his body against hers, she pulled away and walked on deck, peering into the darkness, listening to unexplainable sounds. She was convinced the call of seabirds were cries of someone being tormented. Tom assured her there was nothing to fear: no monsters, no danger, only the vast peace of the ocean. "You are a solid foundation Kate. Your thoughts are just your thoughts, nothing more, nothing less. Come back to bed and I will hold you until you fall asleep." Despite Tom's efforts, Kate confessed to a panic words could not soothe. She needed the routine of work, steady income and family nearby. "Tom, I'm so sorry. I can't do this. I am no more made for a life at sea than a fish is meant to live in the desert. I love you, and I know I promised, but I am dying out here." She bargained with her marriage -- either they sail back to the States or she would fly home to her mother until he decided what mattered most.

"Kate," Tom implored. "We are living the dream. Don't you get that? We made a plan to sail the world and this is just the start."

"Tom, it's your dream. Not mine. I'm not sure I ever wanted to sail the world. I've thought a lot about this. I'm thirty and can't live moving from port to port, not knowing what's next." Tom was baffled. He had no intention of leaving Kate. Sailing was *their* plan, one *they* had invented together and one, he believed, would free them from the drudgery of paying monthly bills or mowing the lawn. Disappointed, Tom pointed Claire de Lune into the wind on

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an early September morning, pulled her halyards to raise the sails and crossed the Stream. When they arrived like early explorers on the Virginia coast, they docked at a modest marina in Norfolk where live aboards were permitted. Kate feel steadied with electricity and Internet. She found a job teaching and Tom divided his days between beers and video games. It was within this motif of apparent contented domesticity that the young couple agreed to embark on yet another journey, one fraught with as much uncertainty and potential calamity as crossing the billowing Atlantic in a thirty-five foot, dilapidated sailboat during hurricane season. They decided to have a baby.

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Two months after Melanie was born, Kate sat across from Tom at the navigation table. Gentle waves lapped against Claire's hull. "Tom, would you mind doing the dishes? Melanie looks like she's out for a bit and I need some air." Kate felt overwhelmed by motherhood and grateful Melanie was dozing peacefully across Tom's arm.

"Have a nice walk, sweetheart." Tom leaned across the table to kiss Kate's forehead.

"Thanks. I'll take my cell. Text me when she makes noise. I don't think she ate enough last time."

"I will. She's fine. Enjoy your walk."

Melanie was frail, born a few weeks early, weighing barely five pounds. Her delicate hands and feet were mottled with a bluish hue, suggestive of her infant heart's struggle to keep blood flowing to distant appendages. Soft down covered her body like a barely ripe peach. Tom and Kate gazed admiringly at their unfinished masterpiece; a beautiful concept on its way to completion with details and shading the years ahead were certain to supply. Just last week, Kate told Tom she saw Melanie smile, a lopsided baby smile. When Melanie lay against her breasts, Kate felt safe and complete, knowing she had everything she always dreamed of possessing.

Kate opened the hatch and stepped from the boat onto the dock. It felt good to have a little time alone. As she walked along the pier, she tried to empty her mind of nagging thoughts about raising a child on a sailboat or whether Tom would ever tire of the sailing life. She liked thinking about when she and Tom decided to marry and sail away on Claire. She was attracted to Tom's rugged independence and quiet solidarity, but motherhood shifted her vision and now her focus was on creating a nourishing home for Melanie.

She recalled Tom's excitement when the pregnancy test was positive. Minutes after showing him the dark pink line, he left to pick up a six-pack and bottle of champagne which Kate wouldn't drink, but he insisted was requisite for celebration. He was excited to call his childhood buddy, Bryan, and share the great news but Kate begged him to hold off until things were further along. When she looked back on those past months with frequent doctor visits, temperature charts, and timed sex, it seemed worth the inconvenience. They were finally a family.

She thought about Tom handling the baby; the way he methodically wrapped her in the gauzy, cotton swaddle cloth as if folding a sail at the end of the season. He tenderly positioned her tiny body with the same care he used to secure a dock line to a mooring. Parenting books emphasized the importance of the father's involvement to form a proper bond and develop confidence, so Kate tried not to make suggestions. It was interesting to Kate because as patient as Tom was with Melanie, there were times when he snapped at her, like the manic dog, Comet, her parents owned when she was a child. Kate remembered they finally put him down after he bit several people. Tom was sometimes like that. If she got in his way, if she seemed too critical, he would snarl and with Melanie, she couldn't risk unleashing his anger. Kate turned along the shoreline, heading back to the boat.

Tom reached for another beer. He slumped against the cushion and considered how the whole motherhood thing was getting on his nerves. His wife was gone. She had vanished into baby books and websites, alternating with crying and sleep. He looked at his watch. It was time. He opened his computer, logged onto *World of Warcraft*, positioned his headphones and started to chat with Bryan.

“Man Tom, I can’t believe the shit you’re into these days.”

“You don’t know the half of it. You don’t have to listen to Kate’s incessant dialogue with her mother about feeding and sleeping and obsessing over whether the baby gained enough weight or slept enough or too much, or whether we should buy a fucking stroller. It’s pathetic. Honest to God, Bryan, I never wanted this shit.”

“Hey dude, I hear you.”

“I told her from the start, I want to sail the world and she was cool with that. We agreed. We would get married, and take the wedding cash to buy a boat and take off across the Atlantic.”

“And you did, you got that boat.”

“Yeah, her father was happy to give us the money he would have spent on some fucking expensive wedding. He loved having it in his hoity-toity backyard.”

“I got hammered. Who was that bridesmaid with red hair?”

“And when we bought Claire de Lune, I thought we were out of here.”

“Gone, but not forgotten”

“Wait. Hold on a minute, Bry. She’s squirming.” Tom stood and started swaying, holding Melanie close against his chest until her body relaxed with his motion.

Bryan knew Tom’s dreams like his own. Their brotherhood was confirmed when they were ten and rode the school bus together, sharing stories about crazy-drunk parents. Now, miles from one another, they stayed in touch playing video games. Bryan and Rebecca would never

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have kids – too dangerous. They feared their battered childhoods wreaking havoc on another generation. Tom also never planned to have kids, but Kate changed that. A few months at sea and Tom told Bryan she fell apart. When they got to port in Eleuthera, she called her mother and called the next day and the day after that. Kate was nothing like that the summer Bryan met her. He was roommates with Tom in Beaufort when she lived in town doing marine research as part of an internship. She was a party girl from a college up north, downing shots and dancing until dawn. Bryan remembered her easy laughter and sweet, compact ass. She kept Tom pretty busy that summer.

Tom picked up his headset and heard Bryan say, “she tripped out and you manned up. You brought her home, and now you’re somebody’s daddy.”

“Yep, that’s me. Somebody’s Daddy, Papa to Melanie.” Tom glanced at Melanie quietly asleep in his arm. He picked up another can and chugged it down, quenching a desperate thirst that fatherhood had brought him. “It was bad stuff. Kate crying and repeatedly telling me how sorry she was. That’s what put me over the edge. She made me feel like I was fucking Blackbeard, pirating her life. But now man, I don’t know. I just don’t know...”

Tom heard the distant music from the bar overlooking the marina, and felt mocked by the absurdity of a life at sea reduced to living on a toy boat tied to a bath faucet. He would serve his time, and prepare for an Atlantic crossing. He imagined himself, tanned and relaxed with beautiful tow-head Melanie by his side, playing captain’s first mate and loving every second of sailing with Daddy. He could see Kate returned to the carefree girl with whom he had fallen in love.

“Hey Bry, time to go. The baby’s crying again and I’m taking her on deck to look at the stars.”

“Sure, buddy. Hang in there. This will get better. You’ve got a daughter. Maybe if you do it again, you’ll get a son out of the deal.”

“Yeah, maybe. Thanks bro. We’ll talk later.”

Tom shut the computer and downed the rest of the beer. Melanie was making baby sounds he knew would soon erupt into full blown, red-faced screams. He stood, and holding her in his arm, gently placed her pacifier between her lips. He briskly waved his arm up and down to soothe her cries. It worked. Melanie stopped crying, and sucked furiously while she tried to focus on Tom’s face.

“Hey, sweet pea. How’s my girl? You wanna catch some of the night sky? Let’s see what’s up there.”

He took a few steps and reached up with his free hand to slide the hatch open, stumbling into the August night. Melanie had quieted, fixated on her pacifier and snuggled close to Tom’s body. He looked out across the bay and inhaled the salty, green air and then peered down at Melanie, feeling a tenderness that surprised him. She was angelic with translucent skin, soft and delicate as the wisps of clouds passing overhead and her fingers with creases and miniature fingernails were startling in their perfection and detail. He had never held a baby before Melanie, at least, never one this young. The nurses at the hospital remarked how much Melanie looked like him. Maybe, he thought, maybe she does, though mostly she just looked like a tiny doll.

He moved towards the bow where the deck narrowed and the northern view was uninterrupted by the riggings of other boats docked in the marina.

“Melanie, let me introduce you to the night sky.” Tom held his precious infant towards the sky. “See the stars over there. That’s Orion’s Belt. It’s part of Orion, the hunter.”

Melanie gurgled as the pacifier slipped from her mouth. Tom brought her close and rocked her in rhythm with Claire’s movement. “And that one over there,” Tom gestured towards

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the North Star. “That’s the North Star, the most constant star in the sky. And, just above that,” Tom raised his right hand further over his head, balancing Melanie in the crook of his left arm, “is the constellation Cassiopeia. The story goes that Cassiopeia was very beautiful, but not as beautiful as you, sweet love.” Tom sighed. He had so much to explain to Melanie. “Those stars are our guides. If you can see them, you can find your way home. When you’re a little older, I’ll take you night sailing and teach you all about the stars.”

Tom wanted to show Melanie the night sky from another vista. He pivoted and held his left arm out before him, away from his body so she could have a clear view of the constellations. Tom took another broad step toward the bow. This time, his right foot caught in rope piled on the deck. Tom’s body stuttered. He tried to wrestle his foot free and hold Melanie steady, but his body lurched while his foot remained trapped within the tangle. His grasp loosened and he felt Melanie lift from his arm, sailing on her own, like a graceful white gull. Her gauze wings rippled in the light breeze. Tom twisted and lunged forward. He stretched his arms, his fingers clawed into darkness for the small corner of her wing, screaming her name into the night sky, Tom watched Melanie unravel and flutter into the sea.