

ONE

(fury of the elements)

The wind howled like a wounded animal, violently shaking the boat. Waves crashed against the hull, and violent jets of foam pelted the sails and deck, splashing salt water on the worried faces of the boys. The vessel, an elegant fifty-four-footer made of carbon fibre that, moments before, had been ploughing the calm waters of the Adriatic, was now a fragile cradle suspended between the sky and the stormy sea.

All morning, the sun had caressed their skin, leaving golden traces on their youth. The Adriatic was a crystalline mirror, guarding the luxurious vessel that carried them toward the horizon. Laughter and music lightened the air, while their worries dissolved like sugar in the salt water.

But the idyll, as often happens, was destined to shatter.

Suddenly, a dark shadow spread across the clear sky, swallowing the sunlight in a flash. The wind, once a caress, transformed into a ferocious roar, raising waves that crashed over the vessel like liquid mountains. The storm had arrived unannounced, unexpected, furious, and unexpected, like a monster awakened from the depths.

The physical and mental endurance of everyone on board was severely tested by the fury of the elements. Every command shouted by the helmsman reached no one, lost in the vortex of wind and waves. Seven young men and women, all passionate sailors, once strong and carefree, now appeared helpless in the face of unleashed nature. Although they were secured to the rail with sturdy safety lines, at any moment they could be carried away like leaves torn from the trees by an autumn storm. In the ensuing night, only their faces, illuminated by the flashes of lightning that split the sky, repeatedly shone.

As suddenly and unannounced as it had arrived, the storm ceased, suddenly and unannounced.

In a few minutes, the waves, which had reached terrifying heights, subsided to make way for a milky, foamy liquid, while the atmosphere, once again filtering the sunlight, began to fill with a blanket of fog. Before the fog thickened, in the distance, in the direction of the bow of the boat, the outline of a rocky coast materialized, from which a cone of fire emerged.

The sophisticated onboard instruments placed the vessel at 44° north latitude and 14° east longitude, over sixty nautical miles from where it had been before the fury of the elements unleashed.

The crew looked at each other in dismay and questioning.

There in front of us, a rocky agglomeration that shouldn't have been there emerged from the water.