

Sailing Into Trouble

What a perfect day, thought Sophie. The sky was blue without a cloud in sight. The sun beat down on her dad's new sailboat, *Monsoon*.

"Dad," she said with a grin, "thanks for taking me out for a sail."

Her dad smiled as he steered the large boat through the clear blue-green water of the lake. "It's great to have you on board, Sophie. It won't be long before you can take a turn as the skipper," her dad added, as he wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

Sophie stretched out on the open deck, thinking that life was wonderful. She loved listening to the boat swishing through the water. The sun shone through the brown sails, turning them red and yellow like a glorious sunset. The air smelled fresh. Not like the constant burning smell there seemed to be in town.

White and grey gulls soared overhead. "SQUEEEeee WAWK WAWK WAWK, SQUEEEeee WAWK WAWK WAWK," they cried as they swooped and circled.

"I need this," Sophie thought, not realizing that she'd spoken out loud.

"Had a bad week?" her dad asked.

"Yeah. It's not fair. Mr. Moore sprung a math test on us – without telling us. So mom got me a math tutor. Now I have to go every Saturday morning."

"It's good to keep your math up," her dad said.

Yeah, well not only that, thought Sophie. Charlotte's been at her mom's all week. Julie has to go to day care now every day after school. My two best friends. There's no one to hang out with.

But this is great, she thought.

How many times had her dad promised to take her out for a sail – just the two of them? But, until today, it was always, “Sorry Sophie, I'm afraid I have to work.” Work, work, work. That's all he seemed to do these days. But maybe if he enjoyed this sail, he'd take her out alone more often.

Suddenly Sophie sensed that something was wrong. The boat seemed to be out of control. She could hear the sails fluttering as if they were loose. They should have been tight.

She raised her head from the deck and saw that they were heading for the rocky shore. “Dad,” she called out. “Where are we going?”

She looked over at her dad. “Dad,” she screamed. Terrified, Sophie saw her dad was slumped over the steering wheel. “Dad,” she screamed again. But he didn't reply.

“I have to get help,” Sophie said to herself. She looked around. There were lots of other boats in the distance. But none of them was close enough to hear her shout.

Somehow she had to stop this boat before it crashed onto the rocks. She'd taken sailing lessons at the Junior Sailing School. But that was different. That was in a tiny boat with one small sail. Not a big keelboat like this.

Then she remembered the day her dad had taken her out with his grown-up crew. A fierce storm had come up without warning. She'd been sent below deck to get out of the rain. But she'd heard her dad shout to one of the men, "Let the jib go."

That's it. She had to let the sails go loose to stop the boat. Careful not to get her fingers caught, she let the line for the small jib sail go free. The sail flapped the way grandma's wash danced up and down on the clothesline.

Then the big main sail. She let that go loose, too. It didn't look like a proper sailboat anymore, but the boat had stopped racing towards the shore.

Sophie looked at her dad. He was still slumped over, but she thought she saw his chest going up and down. "Please let him be okay," she murmured.

"How do I get help for my dad?" she wondered out loud.

The radio. I can call someone. Dad had said he always kept the radio on in case he needed to call for help quickly, or if someone else on the lake needed to get in touch.

She clambered down the steps to the radio. Dad had let her use the radio once to call a friend in another boat. And she'd seen a movie recently where they'd used the radio in a storm, and were rescued. They'd called, "May Day."

Sophie picked up the microphone and pressed the button. "May Day, May Day," she shouted. "I need help." She let the button go. Would anyone hear her?

"May Day, this is the Harbour Police," she heard a voice come over the radio. "Who are you and where are you? Over."

A chill ran down her spine. They'd heard. Quickly she pressed the button again. "We're a sailboat and we're on the lake the other side of the big island. We're

near the small lighthouse. There's something wrong with my dad. Over."

Sophie was afraid she was going to cry.

"We're on our way," the voice in the radio said. "What colour is your boat? And what's its name? Over."

"It's ... it's green," Sophie managed to choke out. "It has brown sails, but they're loose. We ... we call it *Monsoon*."

Sophie was now sobbing uncontrollably. She dropped the microphone, but she thought she could hear a siren in the distance.

"*Monsoon*," the voice said, "we can see you. Hold on. We're coming. Over."

Sophie went to her dad. She put her arms around him.

"Dad," she said. "We're getting help."

The siren was getting louder. She could see the red and blue flashing lights through her tears.

All at once the police boat was beside her. Police leaped on board. They took her dad's pulse and listened to his chest. A policewoman had her arm around Sophie. "What a brave person you are," she said. "We'll have your dad better soon. You come with us in the police boat. We'll get your dad's boat back to his dock."

The police boat screamed across the harbour to a waiting ambulance.

Later at the hospital, a smiling doctor approached Sophie in the emergency room. "Is this the clever sailor I've heard about?" the doctor asked. "Your dad passed out from too much stress. And he's borderline diabetic. He'll have to watch what he eats. But he's going to be fine, thanks to your quick thinking. I've told him to stop working so much, and spend more time in his boat with his capable young crew."

Sophie laughed with relief. It wasn't the kind of sail she'd imagined with her dad, but everything had turned out all right in the end. And maybe, just maybe, he'd take her out sailing again soon – just the two of them.

Just then, her dad came into the room, walking quickly towards Sophie.

“Thanks,” he said. And he wrapped her in a great big bear hug. Sophie had never been so happy.