

PROLOGUE

'Do you think we're all right?' Julie shouted, emerging from the little cabin of *The Aegre* for her watch and feeling the growing strength of the wind. A nearby breaking wave top roared behind us in the pitch darkness, surrounding the stern in white phosphorescence, then slowly fading in our wake. The wind and sea had been rising since we'd left Tahiti, and no light was needed to show how rough it was.

I shouted back that I thought we should be OK. We'd had weather as bad as this before with no real problem. The boat would swoop and dive, in and out, up and over every wave, but unlike bigger boats, we rarely got any solid water on deck. Our little boat seemed as safe as could be. I gave her a smile and ducked down into the cabin, sliding the hatch shut behind me.

Out of the wind and into the haven of our cosy cabin, its small oil light giving a sense of security and calm. I crawled forward and sprawled onto our damp but comfortable bunk. Sliding out of my thermal underwear, I pulled the duvet up, checked the time, about 00:30, and quickly fell asleep...

I could hear roaring, then I was turning head over heels. My eyes were clenched shut. I managed to open them, but it made no difference to the blackness. Where was I? I'd been asleep in the oil-lamp-lit cabin. Now I was lying in water, but breathing air. What the hell was going on? Were we sinking? Where was Julie?

'Julie! Julie!' I shouted.

There was no reply.