

Čestne prehlasujem, že táto poviedka je výhradne mojím vlastným autorským textom.

II.AJ ŤUK +BIL Lukáš Szabados The waves of a starless sea

The waves of a starless sea

It's a rainy day. Droplets endlessly pour from the thick, dark clouds, suspended in the sky. The sun is barely visible and thick fog shrouds the sea. A boat comes out of the fog, seemingly out of nowhere. It's a small boat, with a lantern being its only light source. The tide is relentless, and the ever-growing wind blows at the ship's sides. Inside the wheelhouse, a sailor struggles to keep the boat from turning over.

"Help! Help!" A man's voice cries out from the deadly sea. The sailor frantically looks around the sea. The thick fog makes it hard to see. He spots the man and tosses a rope. "Catch!" he yells. The man grabs the rope and he's pulled onto the boat. The sailor looks at him and yells, "Hang on! I'll find us a safer place!" He starts the boat, its engine crackles and starts to whirr. The boat picks up speed and moves.

After a while, the boat stops. The mist fades away and the sea is visible. The sailor approaches the man. He is trembling, his clothes are soaked and wet. "Here," the sailor hands him a towel. "T-thanks," the man responds. "Now, tell me, "The sailor sits down, "how does a young man like you end up in the middle of a freezing sea?" The man looks at him, "I was on a kayak. Once the wind picked up, I tried to go back to the shore, but my kayak fell over. Thank you for saving me." says the young man. "No problem. What's your name?" "Nick." "Nice to meet you, Nick. I'm Michael."

The sun is setting down. Nick is looking at the dark sea. He turns around and sees Michael looking at a map with a frown expression on his face. He approaches him, "So Michael, how long is it going to take for us to get back to shore?" "Well, I've got no clue where we are and without any light, I can't see a thing." Michael grabs the map and a lantern and comes to Nick, "Go get some sleep. We'll know more tomorrow." Nick follows Michael as he goes downstairs. They enter the cabin. It's small, with the only furniture being a bed, a desk, a chair and a small wardrobe. Nick looks at the desk and notices a picture of a woman with green eyes and hazelnut hair. Michael grabs a sleeping bag from the wardrobe and hands it over to him, "I apologize, that's the only thing I got." Nick takes the sleeping bag. "Thanks, this'll do." Michael leaves a

lantern on his desk and goes back upstairs. Nick gets inside the sleeping bag. As his eyes close, he wonders who the woman in the picture is.

Nick wakes up. The sky is still gray, and the rain hasn't stopped. He walks upstairs. "Morning." Michael approaches him from the bow with a map in his hand. "Morning Michael," Nick responds. "Well, I've got good news and bad news. The good news is that the weather is calmer than yesterday, so our chances of getting out of here are higher." announces Michael. "And the bad news?" Nick asks. Michael hands him the map. "We are about... 1000 miles away from shore. Maybe more. I tried to use the GPS system, but it's busted." He points at the map. "We are somewhere in this area. But still, it's far." Nick stands up, "I have an idea. You said the GPS system is down, right?" Michael nods his head. "What about this?" says Nick as he walks to the bow of the ship and points at a cliff. Michael turns his head and notices the cliff. He grabs the map and after a few seconds he proclaims, "I know where we are. At least I know where this cliff is." He points at a spot on the map. It's an outline of a peninsula. A small building is pictured on the map, with the word 'Frelse' written on top of it. "Frelse? What's that?" "It's an old dock, located behind that cliff. Getting to it will be the toughest part, mainly because of the sharp rocks found around the cliff's walls," says Michael. "Give me the map." Nick hands him the map and the two of them go downstairs. Michael sits behind the desk and grabs a pencil. As bends closer to the table, his back obstructs Nick's view. After a few minutes, Michael walks from the table and says, "I've got it. Now I just need to check if the bearing is correct. You know what a bearing is?" Nick responds, "Yes." "Who taught you that?" "My grandfather was a fisherman" A smile appears on Michael's face. "Well, that's... interesting." The two men walk upstairs to the bow of the ship. Nick grabs the compass and points it in the direction of the cliff. "It's... seventy-five degrees East." Michael walks inside the wheelhouse and starts the engine. "Okay," he shouts, "we're good to go!" The boat starts to move.

Nick looks behind the boat. The boat sails smoothly and the cliff seems closer with each passing second. Suddenly he hears a loud noise and looks up. His face grows pale as he notices a large, dark cloud above their heads. Droplets start to fall on his head and the wind picks up. "Michael? How far are we from the cliff?" Nick asks. His voice gets lost in the growing wind. He enters the

wheelhouse and shouts at Michael, “Michael!” “I don’t know! Just hold onto somethi- “as Michael shouts back, the boat crashes into something and stops. Sharp rocks suddenly appear in front of them. Michael is thrown from the wheelhouse and falls into the sea. “MICHAEL!” Nick yells and, without hesitation, jumps into the sea.

The sea is freezing, and the waves make it hard to see. Nick frantically looks around, all the while trying not to drown. He notices Michael’s unconscious body, grabs it and starts swimming to the boat. Nick throws Michael’s body on board and climbs on. The cold wind pierces his lungs as he starts the boat and grabs the steering wheel. He turns it and begins to ride the boat. The waves hit the boat left and right, water splashes on the deck. Nick holds onto the steering wheel, the metal almost piercing his palms and fingers. He avoids the sharp rocks ahead of him and continues to drive the boat. Waves continue to hit the hull of the boat and the rain makes it hard to see anything. With much effort, Nick manages to drive the boat to safety. He turns off the engine and walks towards Michael, who is now awake. “Thank you, Nick.” “No need to thank me.” says Nick and sits on the wet floor. Michael sits next to him and looks at the sky. The clouds have disappeared and the sun shines on Michael’s face. They sit in silence for a few minutes, before Nick asks: “Do you like being a sailor, Michael?”

“Well, yeah, but I wasn’t really into it at first. My father was a fisherman, so he always persuaded me to be like him. I liked the sea, sure, but not enough for it to be my passion. When I was a kid, I loved to go swimming. Father always warned me not to go past the red buoy. One day, I was swimming in the sea when the wind picked up. I was swept by the waves, far past the buoy. I thought I was dead, but a sailor saw me in the sea and brought me on his boat. I was fascinated by this man. He looked so brave and courageous. He brought me back to my parents. I decided to become like him. Over time, I realized that not all sailors were like this man. But that didn’t discourage me. I had found my passion, something to live for.”

They sit in silence for a few more minutes before Nick finally asks. “I saw a picture of a woman downstairs. Is that your mother?”

“No. That’s Catherine. My wife. We met at Frelse. At the time, Frelse was one of the most frequently visited docks in this entire area. She was the nicest person I’ve ever met. She loved this boat. So much that I named it after her.” “What happened to her?” asks Nick.

“We used to go riding on this boat, usually around the island. During one of our rides, a heavy storm hit us. The boat fell over, and I fell into the sea. She saved my life, just like you did. But she didn’t make it.”

“It’s been a couple of years now,” Michael continues. “My son, Jacob, thinks I could’ve saved her. I know it wasn’t my fault, but I can’t help but feel like I could’ve done something to protect her. This boat... It’s the only reminder that she ever existed. And it’s the only thing I have. Jacob... I feel like I’ve lost him. I’ve always tried to be a good father, but I think he hates me. I’ve tried so hard to tell him how sorry I am. That I couldn’t be a good father. That I couldn’t save Catherine.” Nick looks at Michael, “It’s still not too late. You can still tell Jacob how much you love him. Tell him everything and you’ll see that he still loves you”

Nick continues. “At least you have a passion, Michael.” Michael looks at him. “I’m an accountant. Sitting behind a desk, counting numbers, I never liked that. Being stuck in the constant cycle of doing the same thing repeatedly each day... it’s what makes life unfulfilling. I love being alive and I want to enjoy this beautiful gift! I was always told that I’m weird just because I’m different. But what’s wrong with being different? Nothing! You’ve found your passion Michael. You’ve made life fulfilling and I think that’s what everyone should strive for.” Nick looks at the sky. “We are so small, so insignificant, compared to the grand scheme of things. That’s why we should live our lives to the fullest. Sure, life can be painful. It can take things away from you but also give you the things that make life worth living. All the good and even bad things are a part of life. The unpredictability of life, the randomness of it all is what makes it ever so interesting! But a life without self-love is a sad one. So, please Michael, forgive yourself!” Michael looks at Nick and smiles. “Thank you, Nick. You have a good heart. Follow your passion, kid. Don’t let others tell you how you should live your life.” The sun slowly starts to set. Michael looks at his watch, “If we start moving now, we should make it to Frelse soon.” Nick goes to the wheelhouse and starts the engine.

After some time, the boat passes the cliff Nick noticed earlier. Shortly after, a building appears in front of them. A man walks out of the building “Hey! What are you folks doing here? I thought all boats returned to shore because of the storm!” “Can you help us dock?” says Nick. “No problem lads.” The man docks the boat. Nick and Michael get off. Hey kid,” the man from the

dock approaches Nick, “you need a ride?” “Uhm... yeah.” Nick answers. The man leaves and returns in a truck. Michael and Nick get into the truck and leave to town.

“Thanks for the ride!” says Nick as the man drops them off. “So, what are your plans, Michael?” “Well, I’ll go see my son. And you?” “Well, I... don’t know. I’ll look around town while I’m still here.” The two men are silent for a while. Nick suddenly says, “You know what? Meet me at Frelse in two weeks.” “Why?” asks Michael. “You’ll see.” says Nick.

Two weeks later.

A car arrives at Frelse. It’s a warm day. Michael steps out of the vehicle and walks towards the dock. He enters the dock and approaches Nick. “It’s good to see you again.” says Nick. “So, how did things go with Jacob?” he asks. “Well... it went better than I expected. I told him that I won’t be angry if he decides not to forgive me, but he did. And you?” “Well, I really like this country. I’ve decided that I’ll stay here. By the way, I got you something.” Nick points at a white shiny boat. “Wow.” says Michael. “This is for you.” says Nick. Michael gets on board and looks around. “Nick, this is... you didn’t have to.” “Oh, come on, you saved my life. It’s the least I can do.”

A tear rolls down Michael’s cheek. He approaches Nick and hugs him. Michael lets go and looks at him. Smiling, Nick says: “Well, captain. Don’t you want to try out your new boat?”

Michael gets on board and starts the engine. The boat begins to move. As the dock fades behind him, he looks around his shoulder and sees Nick waving at him. He continues to look until he can’t see Nick. He turns his head forward and looks at the sea. “I’m sorry Catherine. I’ve forgiven myself, and I hope that, one day, you’ll forgive me as well.” he whispers as he looks at the sea and smiles. His soul is now free and happy, filled with passion. His regrets, mistakes, all drowned in the sea that once took everything from him but gave him a second chance.

