

TWO

Peter dipped his paddle into the sea and swept air. The angry waves had lifted the fishing boat unusually high only to send it crashing into their watery fury. He gave thanks when he spotted the other boats sailing to Gerasa. His friends had not succumbed to the storm. In all his years as a fisherman, he had never encountered a squall that made him crave land. Why couldn't Jesus have stayed in Capernaum another day? The crowds were plentiful enough for two days' worth of teaching. Evenings were for gutting fish. Not sailing to Roman strongholds.

"Shall we wake him?" Peter's brother Andrew shouted. He sounded as if he waited on shore and wasn't an elbow jab away.

Peter turned his head so Andrew could hear his reply. "Not yet." A spray from the last wave doused Peter's face. He clenched his teeth and blinked moisture from his eyelashes. Tomorrow they would depart in daylight. The crowd would be turned away earlier. Traveling in the dark placed them all in peril.

A gray haze shrouded the shoreline. Were they still on course to Gerasa? He should know, and it bothered him that he didn't. Across the boat, James and John, fellow fishermen, struggled to sit upright against the fury of the storm. Sea water submerged their ankles. One more heavy wave and the boat would sink.

He glanced at their teacher asleep in the stern. Wasn't his cushion soaked? Hadn't the moisture from the rain penetrated Jesus's robe?

A muffled scream from the other side of the boat frayed Peter's threadbare nerves.

Andrew grasped the side. His paddle had vanished.

"Now can we wake him?" Andrew's drenched hair hid his eyes.

The boat pitched sideways. Peter dropped his oar and grabbed for anything sturdy enough to break his fall.

"Teacher," James yelled. "Help us." He clutched his chin as Andrew crawled to aid him.

Andrew cleared the hair from his face and glared in Peter's direction.

"Wake him or I will," Andrew shouted. His ire was but a whisper on the howl of the wind.

Peter stifled a grumble. It was true Jesus lived in his home, but that didn't bestow him the right to order the Teacher around. Though they couldn't all slip to the back of the boat without capsizing the vessel. He crouched and maneuvered to where Jesus slept. Water lapped at his legs as he balanced against the boat's pitch. Not a thread on his garment remained dry.

He knelt in front of Jesus and gently shook his arm. "Teacher, wake up. The men are afraid of drowning." Himself included.

Jesus opened his eyes, but he didn't rise. Was he groggy from a dream?

Peter removed his hand from Jesus's robe. "The storm is swamping the boat."

"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" someone yelled.

Which disciple had panicked? The howling wind masked the identity of the fearful voice.

Jesus gazed skyward as if noticing the squall for the first time. Rain pelted his face, but no displeasure registered. He rolled into a sitting position and then stood.

Peter grabbed hold of the Teacher's waist to steady him.

Raising his hand toward the unrelenting cascade of water, Jesus scolded the wind. He beheld the waves and said, "Quiet! Be still!"

The Teacher's voice rang in Peter's ear, loud and assured, like when he taught in a synagogue. Jesus's command didn't hold one droplet of concern.

In an instant, wind and water evaporated from the sky. The sea calmed with barely a ripple. Water receded from their boat as if fleeing the Teacher's words.

Peter's legs almost faltered beneath him. He regarded Jesus and then cast a glance toward his friends. Their mouths gaped as they scrambled to behold the berated sea. Were they all in a dream? Not with drenched tunics clinging to their bodies and soaked wood beneath their sandals. What, or who, did the wind and the waves obey? Men, women, and children listened to their Teacher every day on the streets of Galilee, but who banished squalls? The storm fled at the utterance of a few words from Jesus. How was this possible?

Many times, he had heard a man shout for quiet. Some conversations stopped, and some continued on, unaware of the plea. Nothing Peter had witnessed compared to this power. A power over nature where squalls ceased at a man's scold.

He withdrew his steadying arm from Jesus. The brush of woven threads against his hand gave him the assurance he wasn't living in a vision.

Jesus returned to rest on the cushion.

Andrew came alongside Peter. His body shook visibly. "I can see the shores of Gerasa. We weren't knocked off course." He cleared his throat as if more words were trapped inside.

"We won't get there by staring at the land. Grab another paddle and get to work." Peter urged the other men to resume rowing. His bones became light as crushed wheat, but he barked orders and picked up an oar while he began to paddle and ponder.

His brain ached from contemplating Jesus's miracle. He had seen men and women healed from sores and disease. He had seen demons flee from the sick. He had seen those who claimed to be sorcerers humiliated, but he had never seen anyone, not even the Teacher, calm a storm.

Muttering filled the boat. His friends reveled in awe of this

moment. They had shared in another miracle of Jesus. But this time, they certainly shared the same question. *Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.*

As they reached the shore of Gerasa, Peter hopped out of the boat with James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They secured the vessel. No one, not a single person, spoke of the calming sea. Everyone seemed jittery, as if their minds hovered over the stilled waters. His friends faltered in the simple task of securing a bow.

When all the boats had landed, the men made their way to the path that led to the Gentile city of Gerasa. Why Jesus desired to teach in the Roman stronghold had Peter questioning the fruits of their labor. As if to mock his decision, a herd of pigs covered the hillside. The unclean animals were eaten by those who sneered at the laws of Moses.

His brother bartered a torch from one of the herdsman. Supplies from the boat remained damp.

Peter trudged behind Jesus and scanned every rock that might offer a warm place to curl into a ball and sleep.

Shouts disturbed the night. Who would be out at this late hour? Word of their travel plans would not have reached this side of the lake. Not with the storm causing chaos.

A young man raced toward Jesus, arms flailing. The boy screamed for help. His high-pitched wail tortured Peter's ears. The young man halted and crouched behind Jesus's robe.

"Save me," the boy pleaded as he wrapped his arms around Jesus's leg.

Jesus did not move. He glanced at the boy and then into the darkness.

A man lumbered toward the shore, howling and twirling something that resembled a whip.

Andrew leaped closer to the Teacher with the torch held high. Flames illuminated the path.

The approaching stranger did not change course, but his pace

slowed as he stared at the fire. His intense howling became a simpering whine.

Jesus didn't flinch. He raised his hands as if he was going to bless the man or calm another sea. "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" The Teacher's voice roared louder than the earlier squall.

Peter shivered and studied James. For a brief second, he wished they were all back in the boat.