

GREGOR CRAIGIE

SAVING WOLFGANG



CHAPTER SAMPLER



—CHAPTER SAMPLER—

SAVING WOLFGANG

GREGOR CRAIGIE

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

Text copyright © Gregor Craigie 2025

Published in Canada and the United States in 2025 by Orca Book Publishers.
orcabook.com

All rights are reserved, including those for text and data mining, AI training and similar technologies. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher.

The publisher expressly prohibits the use of this work in connection with the development of any software program, including, without limitation, training a machine-learning or generative artificial intelligence (AI) system.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Saving Wolfgang / Gregor Craigie.

Names: Craigie, Gregor, author.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20240373960 | Canadiana (ebook) 20240374061 |

ISBN 9781459838161 (softcover) | ISBN 9781459838178 (PDF) |

ISBN 9781459838185 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS8605.R34695 S28 2025 | DDC jC813/.6—dc23

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024938841

Summary: In this middle-grade novel, Wolfgang and his mother move in with his grandfather in the wake of his father's death, and Wolfie's new friend Jimmy helps him find solace through hockey. But Wolfgang can't stop wondering why his father's cause of death is such a secret.

Orca Book Publishers is committed to reducing the consumption of nonrenewable resources in the production of our books. We make every effort to use materials that support a sustainable future.

Orca Book Publishers gratefully acknowledges the support for its publishing programs provided by the following agencies: the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Cover artwork by Alex Siklos.

Design by Rachel Page.

Edited by Sarah Howden.

Author photo by Rebecca Craigie.

Printed and bound in Canada.

To my mum, Betty, for guiding me through it all

ONE

August 4, 1985

Dear Papa,

Is it true? And if it is true, why am I even writing you this letter?

Grandpa told me yesterday. But I still can't believe it. I don't want to believe it! Please, Papa, tell me this isn't real.

When I woke up yesterday morning, I actually felt hopeful. It was exactly two weeks since you went missing, and one week since we flew to Calgary to stay with Grandpa. But I woke up feeling like they would find you, somewhere

safe up in the mountains, and then they would phone us to let us hear your voice. It made me feel so good to imagine that. I felt even better when Grandpa surprised me with a present. He had bought me a brand-new bike to give me something to do around here. After all, I don't have any friends in Calgary, and I've been getting pretty bored. The bike is a shiny yellow Apollo three-speed, and I jumped onto the long banana seat as soon as I saw it to take it out for a ride. I sped down the big hill near Grandpa's house and rode all around the neighborhood for a couple of hours. I was so happy! But I didn't know yet.

It took a lot of huffing and puffing for me to pedal back up the steep hill, and as soon as I hopped off my bike in front of the house, I could tell everything had changed. Grandpa was standing on the front porch, looking like he might throw up. I knew something was wrong. *Really* wrong. But I didn't know what, and even though I immediately thought of you, I forced myself to stop trying to guess as I leaned the new bike against the side of the house. I climbed to the top of the stairs and stopped in front of him. He just stood there, looking down

and rubbing his palm with the thumb on his other hand. Finally he took a deep breath and opened the door.

He walked straight into the living room without taking his shoes off. But I stayed in the doorway and didn't move. At that moment I knew. I know it doesn't really make any sense, but I just knew.

"Son..." he called in a shaky voice. "There's... there's something I need to tell you."

But I still couldn't move. I was absolutely frozen, and nothing was about to change that. So Grandpa stood up and walked back to me. He grabbed my shoulders with his big Grandpa hands. It startled me and made me look up into his face. I could see he wasn't angry. He looked desperate and sad, like he was struggling to say what he didn't want to say. What I didn't want to hear.

"Your dad..." He took another shaky breath as his hands started to tremble. "Your papa... well...he's gone, son. Your papa is gone."

TWO

August 11, 1985

Dear Papa,

I guess there's no point writing you any more letters. After all, you can't hear me, can you? I talk to you every night, but you don't actually hear me. Or do you?

I know you never believed in God, Papa. But Grandpa does. At least, he told me he thinks there's a heaven, and he hopes you're up there looking down at us. I don't really know what I believe, but I'd like to think that some part of you is still out there somewhere.

I miss you, Papa. More than I ever thought I could miss anyone. If I focus on the fact that you're never coming back, I feel like I can't breathe.

I'm also worried about Mama. She doesn't talk. Not at all. I haven't heard her say a single word since we found out about you. She doesn't leave her room either. She just lies on her side in bed, staring at the wall. She looks so sad, Papa. I wish you were here to make her feel better. She's usually so calm and even-tempered. I mean, I remember she used to get sad when you were away on your mining trips. And sometimes she'd get frustrated or angry, like when my friend Robbie and I ran into the kitchen with our muddy shoes still on. But then she was always happy when you got home. Like a little girl. And of course she was so upset when you went missing. She couldn't sleep. But now it's like she's broken. I don't know what to do.

I stood outside her bedroom last night when Grandpa went in to take her dinner. I snuck up close to the door so I could listen. I knew I shouldn't, but I couldn't help myself. I was desperate to hear something—anything—

that would make me think Mama might be okay.

“Come on, Christie,” he said in a shaky voice. “You have to eat something.”

Mama said nothing, but I heard Grandpa put the plate and glass of water on the tray, so I took a few steps away, ready to disappear from sight. I waited a little longer but he didn’t come out, so I tiptoed closer again and listened.

It was a long time before Grandpa spoke.

“I know you’re hurting, sweetheart. And I don’t know that the hurt is ever going to go away. But you’ve got a boy out there who needs you now more than ever.”

I held my breath, waiting to hear if that would snap her out of her silent state. I waited and waited and waited some more. So did Grandpa. But he finally stopped waiting and walked out. I was still waiting—hoping—that Mama would say something, so I was too slow and didn’t get away in time. Grandpa saw me before I could hide.

We stood there staring at each other for a few seconds, neither one of us moving. Then he forced himself to smile and said, “There’s

still some ice cream in the freezer. Neapolitan, I think. Do you want some dessert?”

“No, thanks,” I said. “I’m not hungry.”

THREE

August 18, 1985

Your funeral was today, Papa. Apart from me and Grandpa, there was only the minister and a handful of other people I didn't know. That giant church felt so empty. I don't know if it would have made a difference to have a big funeral back home in Victoria. But having a small service here in Calgary with barely anyone there felt strange. It was almost as if we were trying to keep what happened a secret.

No one talked about how you died, either, and I couldn't ask. Does it really matter anyway?

Grandpa said you didn't want to be buried in a coffin. So now there's an urn holding your ashes up on the mantel above the fireplace. I hope Grandpa was right.

FOUR

September 3, 1985

Dear Papa,

Everything is changing! You're gone, and it feels like Mama is disappearing too. But that's not all. Now it looks like I have a new home. Grandpa says Mama is in no state to go back to Victoria right now so we should just stay here with him. I couldn't really argue because Mama is still lying in bed, not saying anything, and I can't look after her by myself. So Grandpa signed me up for school here. It's called Elbow Park School, and it's just a few blocks from his house.

This morning I even changed my name! I didn't mean to do it, but I was so nervous in the new school, with all the new kids looking at me. Actually, I guess they were the old kids and I was the new kid. Anyway, when the teacher—Mrs. Starling is her name—asked me to stand up in front of the class to introduce myself, well, I just panicked.

“All righty, then...” Her mouth smiled, but her eyes didn't. I remember what you told me, Papa, that the eyes never lie. “This is a special day because we get to welcome a new student to our class today.”

She turned to look at me with her fake smile and just stared. All of a sudden I could feel everyone else staring, and I didn't know what to do. Mrs. Starling still didn't say anything. So after a few seconds of not knowing what to do, I stood up and mumbled, “Hello.”

“Now speak up, young man,” she said in a voice that sounded just as fake as her smile. “And introduce yourself, please.”

I don't know why, Papa, but I couldn't speak. I was just so nervous.

Finally Mrs. Starling spoke for me. “Why don't you start with your name?”

“My name?” I asked, as some of the kids behind me started to snicker.

“Yes, please.” She paused again, but I still didn’t say anything. So she said, “Well... Wolfgang...it’s perfectly understandable to be a little nervous...”

There was some more laughing in the back of the class, followed by a wolf howl from the tall girl sitting right in front of me. Then the whole class burst out laughing while I turned even redder. I wanted to run out of the classroom and keep running all the way to the Calgary airport, where I would get on the first plane back to Victoria. But I just stood there.

“Now don’t be silly, Clara,” Mrs. Starling scolded the girl who’d howled, though she didn’t sound like she really meant it. “Wolfgang is a perfectly normal...well, now, is it a German name, Wolfgang?”

“Actually...” I tried to speak but had to gasp for air before I could say another word. “It’s Winston...I mean...my name is Winston... I mean, my middle name is Winston, and that’s what people call me.” I took another deep breath, wondering if anyone had ever called me by my middle name, then thinking back to what

Mrs. Starling had just said. “And yes, Wolfgang is German. But I’m Canadian.”

I felt so light-headed I thought I might fall over, so I sat down first.

Mrs. Starling frowned at me just a little, then squinted at the paper attendance sheet she was holding. “All right then...Winston...Wagner.”

She pronounced it the English way. Not the proper German way that you taught me. I’m sorry for that too, Papa. I know I should have told them it sounds like *VOG-nur*—not *WAG-ner*. You know I was never shy about that before now. I never (ever, ever!) felt even a little embarrassed to tell people our family name is pronounced like the famous German opera composer. I’m proud of my name. I’m proud of you, Papa. But standing in that new classroom in a new school in a new city, I was just too nervous to be myself. And now I have a whole new name.

How did this all happen so fast? A new name. A new school. A new city. But no Papa.

I wish you were here, Papa. I miss you so much.

Alles liebe,
Wolfie