An aerial photograph of a sailboat with white sails and a red deck, sailing on a dark blue ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and red glow that reflects on the water's surface. The sky is filled with dark, textured clouds.

# CINNAMON GIRL

“A superb, fast paced and  
exciting story.”

--- Skip Novak

a novel by

**BRIAN HANCOCK**



CINNAMON  
**GIRL**

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For Sally - the love of my life

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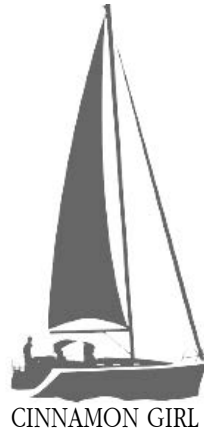
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## INTRODUCING A TIME TO WEEP



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**Cinnamon Girl is the first book in a three part series; A Time to Weep.** The book starts off in the peaceful seaside town of Marblehead, Massachusetts. An idyllic start quickly turns to disaster and from there the plot twists and turns and goes to the dark side. Four main characters emerge. Jay, a dreamer with the idea to sail around the world with his family. Zach, the captain of a cargo ship whose unfortunate crossing of paths with Jay leads to tragedy and an unlikely friendship. Lillian, the housekeeper from Jamaica who ends up in an affair with Jay, and Brooks, a wheeler-dealer and a scoundrel all mixed into one complicated package. The story is set in London, Jamaica, Botswana, the Bahamas, and the rolling hills of New England.

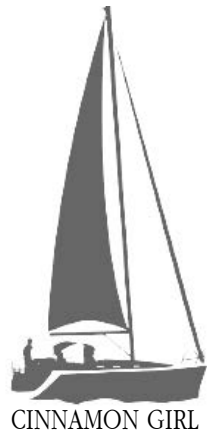
**The second book in the series is Brooks,** the aforementioned scoundrel who gave up his business in the child prostitution business in London to take on a more 'normal' lifestyle; elephant poaching in Southern Africa. After an encounter with a tiger in Asia, Brooks switches from ivory to diamonds and this is where Lee Lee comes in. Raised on the Mekong Delta in Vietnam by a mother who ran a noodle stand, Lee Lee rises to become one of Vietnam's most successful businesswomen, all on the back of illegal trading. She also discovers her sexuality after meeting Tam and a torrid romance follows.

**The third book in the series, Lee Lee,** is a work in progress but will focus on Lee Lee and her rise to political power in Vietnam, despite being gay in a country where homosexuality is most definitely frowned upon.



## CHAPTER ONE

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**Note:** If you would like a customized BOOKPLATE for your copy of Cinnamon Girl please contact [brian@greatcirclepress.com](mailto:brian@greatcirclepress.com)

**A** LEAFY LINED LANE led up to the main house and Jack, the family pet pig was sauntering slowly on his stick thin legs. He had been out for his morning walk and was returning to the main house hoping for some scraps from the kitchen. On the way into the house he stopped to scratch an itch, rubbing against the doorframe, tilting his head slightly. Aaah that felt good. His tiny tail wagged with pleasure.

“Get out,” Ms. Lillian yelled, shooing him. “You already ate this morning. Twice. Don’t you remember? Plus you are dripping mud.” Ms. Lillian was acting mad, but inside, well, seeing Jack was like a tiny balm to her. He reminded her of her home in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica where her childhood was spent living close to the earth. Her Mom kept chickens. Her Dad raised the livestock, a couple of pigs and always a goat. The pigs were sent to market but the goat was slaughtered at the end of summer. It was a big deal. All the neighbors came, their colorful clothing adding a festive touch. The goat was usually dispatched early in the day and would be simmering in a large pot filled with spices. The fragrant aroma wafted on the warm late summer breeze and the guests crowded around drinking beer. Strangely enough they were drinking Guinness, the thick syrupy beer from Ireland. It was a status symbol, a small point of pride that they could afford more

than Red Stripe, the locally brewed beer that was much better suited for drinking in a sultry hot climate, but status is status and so Guinness it was. Ms. Lillian's father was not only a good cook, but he also knew; The Secret. Keep your guests around the fire where the heady aroma would have them craving something to eat. Keep them there for hours and feed them drinks in the hot Jamaican sun and by the time the goat was ready they would eat anything as if it was the best meal that they had ever had.

Ms. Lillian smiled at the memory. Those small moments kept her grounded. She had left Jamaica looking for a better life for herself and found it in the farming countryside of Hamilton, Massachusetts. She turned back to the sink to deal with the dishes and heard a low snort behind her. Jack was in the garbage. While her head had been in Jamaica, Jack had used his snout to open the door to the recycling area and was retreating guiltily out the door with the crusts of last night's pizza. Heaven in a box to a hungry pig. "Shoo," Ms. Lillian said scooting Jack out the kitchen door. "You are a bad pig. You eat too much," but Jack was gone, his curly tail wagging in delight. He knew that Ms. Lillian loved him, she had in fact told him so.

Ms. Lillian turned back to the sink while Jack ambled off to lie in the shade of the old oak. He flopped down on his side and was instantly asleep. Ms. Lillian could see him out the kitchen window. She smiled to herself. "That pig," she thought. "What are they going to do with him when they take off on the boat?"

JAY HAD LONG DREAMED of doing another circumnavigation. When he was younger he made a living as a professional sailor. Well professional sailor might be a little highfalutin for what he did. He was a sailor for hire and went from regatta to regatta, his duffle bag always at the ready. Back then it was a letter, or if there was a budget, a phone call asking if he was interested in a

boat delivery or some yacht race somewhere. Letters were always a bit of a worry. It meant that there was little money. Perhaps his expenses would be covered, food included, but nothing extra for rent and even less for beer. A call, on the other hand, meant that there might be some money involved. Either way it didn't matter. Jay was young, looking for adventure, and ready to go at the drop of a dime. Or a stamp.

He looked around at his home. The kids were asleep. Jess too. She had headed up early which was unusual for her. It was normally Jay who turned in early. But tonight he was restless, his brain working overtime. They, well he to be more specific, had just bought a boat. A solid Bristol 40. He fell in love at first sight. The brilliant blue of the polished hull, the soft glow and sweet smell of teak warmed by the afternoon sun was almost more than he could bear. He had to have her. Her name was Cinnamon Girl. She won his heart and earlier in the week Jay had met with his old friend Bump, the yacht broker, and they made a deal. Jay might have paid more than he needed to but love is love and he was in love. With a boat, and Jess, his kids, and Jack if he was to be honest. "What the hell am I going to do with the pig," he thought?

He was also secretly in love with Lillian.

SUNDAY MORNING and the family were walking down the dock at the Eastern Yacht Club in Marblehead. It was a sunny Sunday morning but the world seemed surreal. Everyone was wearing a mask. A Covid-19 Sunday. The kids were excited and ran ahead. "Hey Jackson," Pattie said to the launch driver. "Did you see our new boat?"

"I did indeed. It's beautiful. Really, really beautiful."

"My Dad says that we are going to sail 'round the world."

“Oh, that sounds like fun.”

Pattie smiled. “Jackson you should come with us.”

“Just get in the launch. You know I can’t do that. I just got accepted to BU and my classes start this Fall.

“Oh, OK I will send you some Insta pics.”

Jay climbed on board, helping Jess with the bags. Jackson cast off and gunned the engine.

“It’s a real beauty Mister J,” he said. “I love the color.” Jay felt a surge of happiness. Despite Covid they were going to have life carry on just as it should. They were going to socially distance out on the open ocean far from any virus. As the launch pulled closer to the boat Jay felt a shiver. He was not sure if it was a shiver of pleasure; or fear. He would soon find out.

“WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO with Jack?” Jess asked. Jay knew that she would ask and he had no good answer. He had had this idea of a boat trip long before the kids fell in love with a tiny pink pig they found at the Topsfield Fair. Jay went along with it at the time because they were so excited, but now two hundred pounds of bacon stood in the way of his dream. “What are we going to do with Jack?” she asked.

“What was he going to do with Ms. Lillian?” he mused.

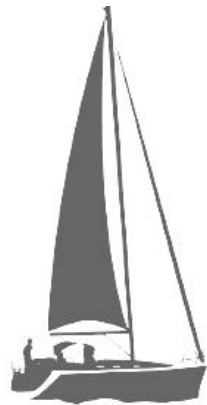
Later that night when Jess and Jay were in bed she asked him again. “Jay,” she said. “I love the boat and the kids loved the day out on the water. I love the idea of an adventure and I know that it’s been your dream, but we have a life here. A home, our children have friends. We have Ms. Lillian and, well, we have a pig. What are we going to do with Jack?”

Jay rolled over feeling uneasy. Why did she mention Ms. Lillian? His nose was sunburnt and itchy so he distracted from her

question by rubbing it vigorously. “I’m not sure Honey but I will figure it out.” Figure it out. It was always his fallback position. Yup, the great Mr. J could always figure it out. Jay was sure that he could find a nice home for Jack but he was not so sure about Lillian.

She was Lillian to him, not Ms. Lillian.

## CHAPTER TWO



CINNAMON GIRL

CAPTAIN ZACH MCKLOWSKI had always dreamed of a life at sea. His Dad had been a sea captain, as had his grandpa before him. Grandpa seemed to be some kind of sailing legend by the stories told, especially those told late at night after the bars had closed to the public and the regulars pulled their chairs closer. They closed the shades at The Crows Nest and regaled each other about the half century that they were away from home plying the high seas, either trading or fishing. Gloucester is a seafaring town, its history dating back to 1623. The town and The Crows Nest are best remembered as the place where the movie *The Perfect Storm* was filmed. Salt water runs thick in the veins of most locals. Some late summer evenings, when the fog rolls in heavy and damp, locals swear that they can hear the voices of sailors who lost their lives fishing for cod out on the Grand Banks.

Zach had always known that he would spend a life at sea and after graduating from Gloucester High School he enrolled at Maine Maritime, one of the country's best colleges for those seeking to ply the ocean as a trade. Maine Maritime is noted for taking misfits and some of societies outcasts and turning them into soldiers of the sea. Zach was neither a misfit nor an outcast and graduated at the top of his class. He knew what he was about and had his eyes



set squarely on the prize. He wanted to captain a ship.

World Navigator, a Monrovia based ship was advertising for a captain and Zach jumped at the opportunity. His credentials were impeccable and he had the necessary experience having worked numerous jobs on many different ships and had risen up through the ranks. When he interviewed for the job he knew that he had it when the retired Navy Captain skipped protocol and winked at him as he ushered him to the door. At 42 his dream was coming true.

A month later Zach assumed command of the 100,000 ton cargo container ship and started to trade between the Mediterranean seaport of Marseille and New York with a side stop in Boston. His crew were loyal and trusted him as their commander and they did a number of 'rounds of the Atlantic,' as they liked to call it. The crew were Zach's family. He had never taken a bride, preferring to be married to the sea and perfectly happy about his decision.

His crew were a mixed bag. Some were from Puerto Rico, some French but his favorites were the Mexicans. Their laid back look at life was in stark contrast to his own laser focused ambition and it seemed to balance him. Most evenings he could hear music wafting up on the night breeze from the galley to his station on the bridge and it always seemed more comfortable because of it. His favorite was Arturo. He had once Googled the name and found out that it meant Bear King. It seemed appropriate. They never spoke of it but there were some nights when Arturo slipped into his cabin like a shadow. He always seemed to know just when Zach needed him.

ZACH HAD BEEN PACING the same strip of deck for weeks, or so it felt. He could almost see where the paint had been worn down

but there was nothing he could do. They were at anchor off New York in Covid quarantine. For the past month or so shipping in and out of New York harbor had been forbidden. A week earlier he had seen the USNA Comfort Hospital Ship pass close by, a stark reminder that people on land were dying daily and the curve was nowhere close to being flattened. So far on World Navigator there had been no incidences of Covid; just boredom. The days slipped into nights and the nights slipped back into days.

Cesar knocked on the bridge door. "How many more days do you think captain?"

"I dunno Cesar. We just have to wait. It could be another few days, a week maybe. No one knows. This virus is making a mess of everything."

Cesar nodded. "Thank you Captain, I will let the others know." He turned to go, but then turned back.

"My wife is going to give birth any day now. Is there any way I can go ashore?"

Zach knew that his wife lived in Brooklyn, just a stones throw from where they were laying at anchor. He leaned back in his Recaro seat and sighed. "I dunno Cesar. Maybe."

Zach had never broken a rule in his life. There was too much at stake but there was something in the sound of Cesar's voice that caught him. He picked up his phone and texted Arturo. "Can you come up to the bridge please." A moment later there was a knock on the door.

"Arturo I need your help. You know that Cesar's wife is about to give birth right?" Arturo nodded. "I know that you can keep a secret. I might need you to do something for me. I am still not sure what but if I come up with a plan, will you help?"

"Yes Captain."

“Thank you.” Zach turned to his tumbler of brandy and took a long hard swallow. These days since Covid he seemed to be drinking a lot more than usual.

## CHAPTER THREE

**T**HE PIG WAS THE PROBLEM. Jay had spoken to Lillian and she was OK with things. She would return to Jamaica to spend some time with her sister who still had a home in the Blue Mountains. Jay would make sure that she was comfortable. Lillian was prepared to wait. In Jamaica life moves slowly. To a tourist it may seem lackadaisical, a slow drift through the day without seemingly any purpose or plan, but to the native born it was simply how the blood flowed. There were no seasons to speak of. Almost every day was picture perfect, the trades blowing through the palms and with so much abundance on the island there was very little stress.

“We believe that the Lord will provide all we need,” Lillian had told him, but Jay was not so sure. He had once attended a Sunday tent revival and there seemed to be more urgency in the preacher’s words. He made it sound as if things were coming to an end but maybe that was just his way of loosening the purse strings.

The pig was the problem. Pattie and Ollie were excited about the trip but they were also very attached to Jack. Over the last couple of years he had grown from a tiny piglet into a big lumbering oaf and they adored his antics. He would follow them on walks, always on the lookout for some mud to roll in or something to snack on. Sometimes he would be up to his ears in

mud only to realize that he had been left behind and would chase after them, his mud covered body wobbling on his spindly legs, mud dripping, tail wagging.

“Jack you are piece of work.” Ollie rubbed his snout pushing him away so that he didn’t get covered in mud but Jack’s love knew no bounds. He wanted a full body hug. “Jack, come on,” but it was too late. Jack was rubbing against him and his jeans were a mess. “It’s ok,” said Pattie, “Mom will wash your pants. Come on Jack, let’s go back home.”

JAY WAS SITTING in his study when the idea came to him. What if Lillian would take the pig with her when she went back to Jamaica? What if Jack could stay with her until they were back from their around-the-world trip. It would only be a few years and besides Jamaica would be a perfect place for a pig. Even Ms. Lillian has said so. He vowed to talk to her that evening.

IT HAD BEEN A LONG DAY. Ollie and Pattie had been in school Zooming with their classmates. Governor Baker had left it up to the various districts in the Commonwealth to come up with their own ‘back to school’ plans and Hamilton had decided on a hybrid model. They would Zoom Monday through Wednesday and in-person learn for the rest of the week. It was Tuesday night and the Zoom chat had been going on all day. Jay was lucky that his work as an electrician got him out of the house - he was considered an essential worker - but Jess was stuck at home with the kids and even though there were teenagers, they still needed supervision.

“I am going to bed early,” she said. “I’m beat. “It’s not that the work is hard, it’s just the gnawing unease about this virus. It really wipes me out.”

“Ok love, I will be up soon,” Jay lied. He knew that as soon as she had gone through her nightly ritual of applying night cream and flossing that she would be down as soon as her head hit the pillow. Jay waited for twenty minutes flipping channels, and then slowly tiptoed to the back door. He knew every floorboard and knew the sound that the door would make when it opened. Tonight he was being extra cautious. He needed to talk to Lillian; and if she was in the mood, something else.

IT WAS AUGUST, Jay’s favorite month. The real heat and humidity of summer was starting to wane and the smell in the air was of some leaves starting to turn, the early leaves that was. Jay could see that the lights of Lillian’s cottage were still on and using the flashlight app on his phone to guide him he made his way down the stone path to her door. He knocked gently. Nothing. From under the door he could hear water running. He knew that he shouldn’t do it but he quietly let himself in. There were tea lights set up on the kitchen counter and a very soft reggae beat coming from the bathroom.

“Lillian,” he said. “It’s me,” but no reply. Then the water was turned off and Jay could hear her humming to herself.

“Lillian,” it’s me. Nothing. He thought of leaving, but the faint scent of lavender stopped him. He knocked gently on the bathroom door. “Lillian,” it’s me.

“I knew that you would come,” she said.

In the main house Pattie was coughing. There was so much on the news about Covid that she wondered if the cough might be related. “Shut up,” said Ollie. “I am trying to watch TV.” The kids had their own space where they hung out. “I’m going to go and see Ma and see if she has anything for me to take.”

Pattie slipped into her slippers and made her way down the

stairs to her parents room.

“Mom,” she said, but was met by soft snoring. No answer. “Mom.” Just more snoring. Pattie went downstairs looking for her Dad but he was not on the couch where he usually sat to watch TV. She looked out the kitchen window and could see that the lights were on in Ms. Lillian’s cottage. She was going to head back upstairs when she thought that she saw a silhouette that looked a lot like her Dad pass in front of the cottage window. The silhouette was moving slowly, almost cautiously. Pattie turned to go back to her room but hesitated for a moment. Her coughing had stopped and she needed to get to bed. The show that they had been watching had been Ollie’s choice and she was not really that interested. Her first Zoom call was at eight.

JAY SLIPPED OUT of his clothes and joined Lillian in the bath. “How does the cottage have a bigger bath than the main house,” he wondered, but never said out loud. Lillian already had the tub full and when he slipped into the water some of the water overflowed. “You crazy man,” Lillian said. “You need to drop those Covid 19.”

“What?”

“Ever since the shutdown you have been putting on weight.”

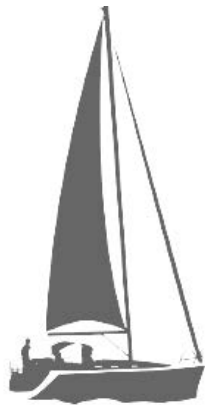
Jay looked down at his gut and knew what she meant.

“There is just more of me to love,” he said and Lillian laughed. Her laugh even had that beautiful Jamaican lilt to it. It seemed to come from deep inside and her eyes sparkled. “Let’s make love tonight,” she said.

“Ok.”

PATTIE’S COUGHING CONTINUED. Her Mom would not wake up and her Dad was not on the couch. She was sure that it was him that she had seen in Ms. Lillian’s cottage. She turned the phone over so that she could see the flashlight app and followed the path. The night air was still except for the light sound of laughter coming from under the cottage door. It was definitely Ms. Lillian but why would she be laughing to herself. Pattie thought better than to knock on the door and instead decided to move to the window to see what she could see. What she saw was not what she expected. Ms. Lillian had her back to the window and she was naked, her black skin looking blacker than ever. Then she saw her Dad, also naked. His white skin looking whiter than ever. They seemed to be kissing but she could not be sure. Pattie stood by the window unable to move. Then her Dad looked up and looked straight at the window. Pattie froze; then ran. She ran back to the main house, up the stairs and climbed into bed. It was going to be a long night. Some things you can’t unsee.

## CHAPTER FOUR



CINNAMON GIRL

**T**HE FOLLOWING MORNING Governor Cuomo announced that the lockdown would continue for at least another two weeks. Zach sat at the Captains chair with his feet up. He was bored, and a little anxious. He was not sure why he was anxious but these days there always seemed to be some kind of gnawing feeling in his gut. It was still early but he felt that he needed a drink. He walked over to the small fridge in the corner of the bridge and reached for the bottle of brandy. Zach held it up to the light so that he could see how much was in the bottle and there was less than a finger. "Shit," he muttered. "I must have had more to drink last night than I thought." He spilled the remainder of the brandy into a coffee cup and drank it straight

"There was a knock on the door. It was Cesar. "Captain, my wife had the baby. I have a son." His face was radiant. "Congratulations," Zach said. "I am very proud and happy for you. What will you name him?"

"My wife likes Jose but I think it's too ordinary. I am thinking of Francisco. I once went to San Francisco and loved it there. What do you think?"

"I think that if you are smart you will go with what your wife wants. It's always better that way."

Zach felt the brandy hit his gut and it warmed him. He was happy for Căsar but at the same time a little sad for himself. He had chosen a life at sea and was content, but he knew that he would never know what it would be like to be a parent.

“Captain,” said Cesar. “No matter what we name him my wife and I both agree that you must be his godfather. Please say you will accept.”

Zach was taken aback, but the brandy in his gut felt great. He wished that there was a little more. “I would love to,” he said. “It’s such an honor. Thank you Căsar and you give my love to your wife.”

Cesar left and Zach went in search of another bottle of Brandy. The crew usually left him alone on the bridge and for the last few days he had been getting a bit hammered before lunch. He was well into his fourth tumbler when he decided to text Arturo. Moments later Arturo was at his door.

“Arturo,” I have been thinking,” he said. “Cesar must visit his wife. He has a son and it’s important for a father to meet his boy. I have a plan.” Zach knew that he didn’t have a plan but the combination of brandy and the heady news that he was to be named godfather had him thinking. “Arturo, we have a small Zodiac dinghy on board somewhere, I can’t remember where. It needs to be inflated. When it’s dark tonight can you and Cesar take the boat ashore? You will have to go slow and hide behind the other ships so that they don’t pick you up on radar, but I think that you can make it. I will get you an UBER when you get to land and you can take him to visit his wife and son.”

Arturo looked at him squinting down his nose. “Are you sure?”

“Of course I am sure. A man needs to be with his wife and baby on an occasion like this. You leave when it gets dark and you come back before the sun comes up.”

“I’m not to sure about this but you are the Captain.”

“Don’t worry Arturo, everything will be just fine.”

ZACH WAS WELL INTO his second bottle of brandy when Arturo and Cesar launched the dinghy. He watched them motor slowly toward land staying in the shadows. He was sure that they would be fine and smiled to himself. “A man needs to be with his wife and son on an occasion like this.” He took a long pull from the bottle and slumped into the captains seat.

The two Mexicans used the other waiting ships as cover and soon found themselves motoring under the Verrazzano Narrows Bridge. “We can tie the boat up at Sunset Park,” Cesar said. “It’s close to where my home is.” There was no one about and they quickly found a dock where they could tie up. “OK I am going to text the Captain. He will order the UBER.”

Cesar and Arturo surprised the family when they arrived at the home just after ten. Căsar’s wife was shocked to see them. Căsar, while thrilled at the idea of seeing his new son, was also scared. What if the authorities found out? He knew that this was very illegal and in Trumps America this kind of thing could get them deported. Căsar had a green card; his wife was illegal. She had come over the border with the help of a smuggler. At first she had stayed in California but her sister lived in New York so she took the train. That’s where she and Cesar met. At the train station five years earlier.

Zach had fallen asleep in his captains chair. He had ordered the UBER and then passed out. Suddenly he was wide awake. “What the fuck did I just do?” Zach had never broken a law in his life. Now he had let two of his crew sneak ashore in the middle of the night. No customs, no immigration. What if they got caught? Zach walked out onto the deck. Manhattan loomed before him.

The lights of the city lit up the sky and the water. “Fuck.” He went back to the cabin and found his phone to text Arturo. “Is everything OK?” he asked but there was no reply. “Fuck.” His head was sore so he shoved two Tylenols down and stared at his phone. No reply. He could not believe how stupid he had been. If anything went wrong he could lose his captains license.

“Fuck.”

Zach sat gloomily in his captains chair. He had tried calling but Arturo did not pick up. Neither did Cesar. They were both reveling in the love in the home, a home that had just welcomed a newborn baby. Cesar’s wife was scared, and exhausted. The baby was fussing, he was hungry and Cesar’s wife had never breast fed before. She was happy to see her husband but also scared. Her mother said, “Cesar I think that you should go back to the ship. Let Poco,” her name for her daughter, “get some rest and the baby get some rest.” Arturo said, “Yes a think it’s a good idea.” He looked at his phone. There was eight missed calls and four text messages, all from Zach. “I am sure that we will be able to come into port soon and we will visit and we will celebrate baby Francisco. Poco shot him a glance. “His name is Jose.”

IT WAS AFTER TWO in the morning when they got back to the ship. Zach was there to meet them but he had been back on the brandy. “How was your baby?” He asked. Cesar said simply, “Just beautiful, gracias.”

“Ok,” Zach said. “I’m happy but here is one thing I have to tell you. Neither of you will ever, ever speak a word about this to anyone ever. Do you understand?”

“Si captain. No problem.” Those four words would later haunt him.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**A**RTURO CHAVES was born on the island of Santa Margarita on Mexico’s west coast. The island was off the Baja peninsula and relied mostly on fishing to keep the economy going. Fishing had once been good but for years the locals had been locked in a battle with a huge population of sea lions who also found fish to make a first class meal. When he was a boy they were winning the battle, but once he became a teenager it started to become obvious that the sea lions had the upper hand. The fishing industry was starting to wane.

His parents were devout Catholics and Arturo grew up attending mass every Sunday. In fact it was more than that. Sunday was a whole day devoted to God. They would leave for church right after breakfast and sit through two hours of service. It was a comfort to him and he loved the time with his family. His Mom had already prepared lunch and by the time they got back to the house they were starved. His Mom was an excellent cook and she had a way with tacos. She would make the dough before they left and then toss it when they got home. Her secret was adding a little liquid smoke. On a trip to Disneyland a couple of years after she had met Arturo’s Dad she fell for an American and he had introduced her to liquid smoke; and a few other things. Just a couple of drops in the batter went a long

way. She never revealed her secret. She never told Arturo's Dad about the American and he never asked why a strange package with a no-return address would every now and then land on their doorstep.

Lunch would be a long affair. Arturo's Mom didn't drink but his Dad liked a drop, especially on Sundays. The hot Mexican sun would get his blood going especially when mixed with the local red wine. It would all start off just fine. Everyone was so hungry that there was no time for conversation but once the food was gone and Arturo's Mom and Aunt had left for the kitchen to clean up, his Dad started.

"What did you learn from the sermon today?" He would ask no one in particular. Arturo, his brother and his sister knew what was coming. They said nothing.

"Come on mi hijo," he said gesturing to Arturo. "Estabas escuchando. Were you listening?"

"Yes Papa."

"The padre was on fire today, don't you think?"

"Yes Papa."

His Dad pulled the carafe of wine closer but didn't pour himself any. He was just getting started. "The man is a genius. He knows everything. He must have a direct line to God."

"Yes Papa."

Arturo's Dad poured his glass to the brim and took a sip. "Did you hear what he said about family and marriage? The man knows everything."

"Yes Papa." Arturo knew what was coming next. The wine was settling in. As the wine went down, the flush in his Dad's cheeks rose. At first there was just a red hue around his mouth but by four glasses in the hue was more blood red than just a light hue.

Some Sunday's he would quit when the line got just above his eyeballs. Some Sunday's he didn't.

"Mis hijos tengo que tomar una siesta," he would say. "I need a nap."

This particular Sunday he was on fire. The blood red was well above his eyes and he was on a roll. "We need to get rid of these fags," he said. Actually as the wine hit his gut with each pull on the glass he more than just 'said'; he started to shout, his voice rising. "God has a plan for all of us and it doesn't include fags. Padre said so himself didn't he?"

"Yes Papa."

Arturo would start to squirm. He knew better than to say anything. Once, a year earlier, he had tried to defend gay people and his father had almost exploded.

"They need to be dead," he shouted.

"Yes Papa." His sister left the table to go and help her Mom and Aunt in the kitchen. "Papa is getting drunk again," she said but her Mom and aunt weren't listening.

"What do you think Arturo? What do you think Pepe?" His Dad reached for the carafe of wine and poured himself another glass. The hot Mexican sun beat down.

"I think that it's time that God came down and took out all of these fags. Send them on a one-way ticket to hell where they belong. It's just not right. It's against God's way. These people are lower than dogs."

"YesPapa."

"Lower than dogs."

"Yes Papa."

As a child Arturo knew that he was different. He was not



interested in sports. He was not interested in Jaripeo; bull riding. He liked music, and the arts. He knew that his Mom loved him because he was a sensitive boy. Mothers are protective that way. He loved the church but he was starting to hate Sundays. This was the day that the Padre got up there and started to preach.

“Mi familia,” he would start. “Mi familia. I am a man of God. God loves families. God loves children. God loves animals. God loves everyone except those that lie with their own sex. God hates those who would defy the natural order. God hates those who would go away from the teachings of the church.” The Padre would go on for a half hour. Arturo would squirm, not sure why. He understood that God loved everyone but he had feelings that were not, as he thought anyway, what God would approve of.

HIS FIRST SEXUAL EXPERIENCE was more of a fumble than sex. He and his friend Jesus had found some candies in his Dad’s desk. He knew that they had alcohol in the center but at this point he didn’t care. He had just turned sixteen and bits and pieces were starting to sprout. Jesus had come by and they had spent the afternoon listening to music, Bruce Springsteen mostly.

Arturo had eaten five of his Dad’s candies and was starting to find his tongue too thick for his mouth. He wasn’t sure what was going on but was enjoying the afternoon. He looked over at Jesus who had fallen asleep. He reached over and touched his shoulder and rubbed it. Jesus didn’t stir. Arturo rubbed it a little. Nothing. He felt guilty but couldn’t help himself. His hand moved lower, across his belly. Jesus was asleep. His mouth hung open. His breathing was heavy. Arturo just gently let his hand slip lightly across his crotch. Nothing. He so wanted to touch him. Nothing. Arturo took another of his Dad’s candies. He looked at the wrappers on the bed. They had eaten a dozen between them. He tried the hand brushing again and this time he felt Jesus

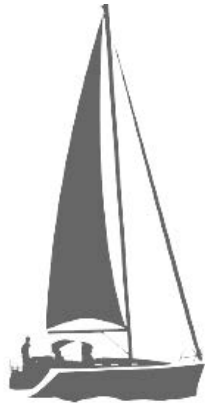
getting hard. Arturo knew the feeling. Ever since he was a child he had woken up hard but after taking a pee it was all just fine. He knew that Jesus didn’t need to pee.

“PUTO AND PUTA,” his Dad raged. They are everywhere. They are here among us. “Faggots and whores. We need to find them and get rid of them. The Padre told us so.” Arturo squirmed. Pepe was not that interested. His Dad was getting drunk and he agreed with him anyway. “We need to get rid of the fags.”

JESUS SHOT STRAIT UP. “I think that I fell asleep. Is the music over?”

“Yes,” said Arturo. “The music is over but the dancing is just about to begin.”

## CHAPTER SIX



CINNAMON GIRL

THEY HAD THE HOUSE pretty well packed up and the boat provisioned. The tenants were moving in the first of the month which was the following Monday. They were planning to set sail on Sunday. The first leg was going to be only as far as Charleston, South Carolina. Jay had a brother who lived there and he was going to join them for the leg to the Caribbean. Earlier in the week Ms. Lillian had returned to Jamaica and Jack had been boxed up ready for shipment. He was in the capable hands of a freight forwarder. Jay had been horrified at the cost to send Jack to his new home. “I could have bought a new Genoa for what that cost,” he said to Jess.

“We don’t need a new Genoa and just think how the kids would have felt if Jack didn’t go to a safe home.” Jess, as always, was right.

Sunday dawned bright and clear. The forecast was for light south easterlies with sunny skies. It would be a pleasant reach to the Cape Cod Canal. Jay wanted to ease the family into the trip as comfortably as possible and the forecast bode well. If they could average six knots they would catch the fair tide in Sandwich at the entrance to the Canal which would shoot them through to Buzzards Bay.

“Don’t forget the spare VHF,” Jess said. “And the back-up hard drive.”

“They are already on the boat Hon. I think that all we need are our toiletries, and a couple of kids.”

“I’m ready Dad,” Pattie said, but I don’t know where Ollie is.”

“He went to say goodbye to his friend,” Jess added. “He said that he would be back before nine.”

The kids were excited. Their good friends the Coopers had thrown them a send-off party the night before. They had a fire pit in the back yard, socially distant of course. Jay had drunk more than he usually did but surprisingly felt fine. He was nervous. This was a big deal and he wondered, not for the first time, if he was being reckless. The thought kept popping into his mind. On paper it seemed like a great idea but now that the day had arrived he was not so sure. “It’s probably just nerves,” he thought. “Once we get going things will be OK.” He remembered a talk that he had attended at the Yacht Club. The speaker was a well seasoned sailor.

“People ask me all the time what’s the hardest part about sailing around the world,” the speaker had said. “The hardest part is leaving the dock. Many people dream about it but when it comes time to throw the dock lines ashore they can’t do it.” Jay was determined to leave the dock.

A SMALL CROWD had come down to the club to see them off. It was a bit challenging with all the Covid rules in place but their friends clapped and waved as Jackson gunned the launch. “You all set Mr. J?” he said.

“Yes Jackson. Thank you for asking. We are all ready to go.”

“That’s exciting Mr. J. One day I hope to sail around the world myself. But first I have to get through college.”

“Make sure that you follow us on Insta,” Pattie said.

The launch pulled alongside the boat and the family scrambled aboard. They stowed their bags and Jay fired up the engine. It had recently been serviced and all the levels looked good. “Ollie,” he said. “Don’t forget that you are my official in charge of all things anchoring or mooring. Let’s plan to drop the mooring in five.”

“Ok Dad.”

Jay motored forward slowly to ease the pressure on the mooring cables and Ollie was able to slip them off the cleat. First he threw off the pick-up stick and then after a thumbs up from his Dad, he dropped the mooring lines. They were officially on their way.

Marblehead harbor was still packed even though summer was starting to wane. Everyone was trying to squeeze the most out of what had been a pretty crappy year. Pattie’s teacher had contracted Covid over the summer. She had recovered but along the way passed it along to her husband who was not doing very well. They had admitted him to Mass General in Boston and he was on a ventilator. Jay was happy to leave land and get out to sea where the air was Covid clean. He weaved his way through the moorings until they were off Fort Sewell at the entrance to the harbor.

A FEW YEARS EARLIER Jay had delivered a friend’s boat from Newport, Rhode Island. His friend was OK with him doing the trip single-handed. Jay wanted the adventure; his friend wanted his boat moved. He set off at sunset planning to catch a fair tide at the Cape Cod Canal and had in fact enjoyed a good extra three knots all the way up Buzzards Bay and was through the Canal before midnight. The wind in Cape Cod Bay was also favorable and he found himself entering Marblehead harbor just before

dawn. The trip had been much quicker than expected and he took a mooring at the entrance to the harbor off Fort Sewell. He was anxious to go ashore but the launch service didn't start until eight. Then he had an idea. It was summer and the water would not be too cold. He could swim ashore and walk home. He would surprise Jess. Back then they were renting a small apartment in Marblehead.

Jay stripped to his underwear. He took his shoes, shorts and shirt and stuffed them into a Zip-Lock bag and taped them to his head. He lowered himself into the water and started swimming toward Fort Sewell. The water was freezing but he soon got to the shore and started to clamber up the steep rocks to a path that ran around the perimeter of the fort.

Marblehead is a town steeped in history and they have a very active group of re-enactors who dress in Revolutionary War gear and act out battles. Once a year they camp out at Fort Sewell. They pitch their tents, dress up in civil war garb, and have a totally great time.

Jay was unaware that this was the weekend they were camping out and came up over the hill drenched, in his undies, with a bag of clothes taped to his head. The re-enactors looked at him as if he was some kind of apparition that had come from the sea. Jay felt like a complete idiot until he noticed that the re-enactors might be in civil war clothing, they might be in front of their tents with open fires burning, but most of them were drinking Box O'Joe coffee from Dunkin' Donuts and eating breakfast from a platter of donuts and pastries.

Jay smiled at the memory. Ollie had removed the mainsail cover and hooked on the halyard. The halyard was led aft to an electric winch in the cockpit.

"You can remove the sail ties," Jay said and Ollie and Pattie

released the tie-downs on the mainsail. Jay swung the boat around until it was a heading directly into the wind and slowly hoisted the main. The jib was next but that was easy. It was on a roller furling unit led back to the electric winch. Within minutes they were sailing. Jay cut the motor and Cinnamon Girl heeled gently as the first fingers of a new breeze caught. Now they were definitely on their way. Jay had pre-programmed the autopilot to talk to the Garmin Chart Plotter and using a remote, he set a course for the entrance of the Cape Cod Canal.

"Pretty slick Dude," Jess said. Jay smiled. She only called him Dude when she was in a good mood. So far, so good. Jess looked radiant. Her golden blond hair caught the sunlight. Her long tan legs were sticking out from tiny white shorts making them look longer than they already were. The kids came back to the cockpit and flopped down. "I'm hungry," Ollie announced.

"Go down to the galley and make yourself a sandwich," Jess said, "and while you are about it can you make one for your sister?"

The day passed easily enough. There were other boats out on the water and they all waved gaily at each other. Jay felt smug. The other boats would soon be pulling in for the night. Cinnamon Girl would not find a safe harbor for at least a week. The sun had started to set when they entered the Cape Cod Canal. Timing was perfect and the tide was in their favor. Jay rolled the jib away and they motor-sailed with just the main up. With four knots of current in their favor they were almost through the canal when it suddenly got very dark. The sun was down, no moon yet but the entrance into Buzzards Bay was well lit and they followed the flashing lights keeping the green lights to starboard. Jay planned to take things real easy for the first night so they motor-sailed until they could change course slightly to leave Martha's Vineyard safely to port.

“Look Dad, the moon is coming up,” said Pattie. In the east a crest of moon was breaking the horizon. “How about a glass of wine?” he asked and Jess dipped below. She came up with a bottle of South African red and two glasses. So far so good, but little did any of them know what trouble lay ahead. They clinked glasses. “So this is how it’s going to be then?” Jess said.

“Hopefully,” Jay replied.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

JESS FELL IN LOVE with Jay in Antigua. Jay was captaining the classic yacht Spindrift and he had invited Jess to join him on the boat for a week. The owners were away and the boat was at the dock in English Harbor. Jay gave the crew the week off and looked forward to some time with the pretty lady that he had met only briefly at a bar in Southie. Jay had been back home to visit his parents to carry out their traditional 5K run in South Boston. It was always on St. Patrick’s Day and it was more about the costume you wore than about how fast you ran. One of the best parts was that your race entry fee included a pint of Guinness at the finish, if you were older than 21. Jay ran a good race and downed his pint. His parents came in a while later. They were getting up there in age but Jay was proud that they were still running.

“We are going to head back home,” his Dad said. “Your Mom and I are beat. Do you want to come with us, or stay?”

“I think that I will stay.” Jay felt the heavy beer hit the bottom of his gut and the flush came on right away. “I will take the T later.” He walked away from the race finish and found a place that was already rocking even though it was only nine in the morning. Shenanigans Bar. The Irish music was at full volume and the place was in full swing. Jay stepped inside and ordered a

Green Lager, the house specialty for St. Patrick's Day. He was on number three when he noticed a girl giving him the look. She still had her race bib on her chest and he, beer emboldened because this was not his usual style, walked over to her.

"How was your race?" he asked. The girl blushed.

"I sucked. I went out too fast and the first half, as you know, was downhill so when we turned around to come back I was fucked. Out of breath." Jay liked the way she said 'fucked.' He had always loved it when women talked dirty, not that she was talking dirty but, well, she did say fuck.

"I'm Jess," she said. "Jess Slattery." She grabbed his hand and shook it. "I'm also buying, what will you have?"

"I think that I have had enough Green Beer for now. Maybe a glass of wine?"

"Are you kidding me? Wine? Get real my friend this is the one day that us Irish get to celebrate our Irishness, if that's even a word, and we don't celebrate it with wine. Hey barkeep, two pints of the red stuff; Killian's." They had few more drinks but Jess had to leave. She gave Jay her number and asked him to call her. Jay said that he would but he had not told her that he was leaving town the next day. He had to deliver Spindrift from Granada to Antigua. What a bummer.

He called Jess from Grenada gushing about how beautiful the place was. "I'm really sorry that I had to leave town and didn't tell you," he said. "Hey, but here's a thing. We will be in Antigua in a week's time. Can you come down for a visit?" There was slight pause.

"Yes."

A week later Joe met her at Antigua's V.C. Bird International Airport on the north side of the island. She was more beautiful

than he remembered but then he remembered that he had been completely hammered at the bar in Southie. He was feeling hopeful. "You never know," he thought to himself. "Maybe she is just coming for the sunshine."

Jess was not just coming for the sunshine. Later that night, after a few rum punches, Jess turned to him and said, "I'm feeling kind of hopeful in a horny sort of way."

JAY HAD A FRIEND with a Sabre 36 and he loaned it to them for a few days. Spindrift was good at the dock so he and Jess took off for a bit of R&R. They sailed out of English Harbor and took a right. Jay thought it best to start things off with a following breeze. They anchored for the first night off Turners Beach and went ashore the next day in Jolly Harbor for lunch. Jay was smitten. Jess was smitten and four days later when they were back on board Spindrift in English Harbor Jess said, "I think that I am in love with you."

"I love you too."

JESS HAD NO IDEA how hard it was going to be to love an itinerant sailor. He was always leaving, some boat to deliver somewhere, but she was willing to go along. Money was not an issue. Her father was loaded and he had set up an automatic transfer that allowed Jess to do whatever she wanted. She was at Logan Airport on her way to Lisbon to visit Jay when the idea came to her. Her Dad was in Portugal, on business. Maybe they could get together and he could meet Jay. She landed in Lisbon and Jay was there to pick her up. His friend Ricardo gave them a ride. Jess was radiant. She had never been in Europe before and was thrilled by the commentary that Ricardo offered on their way to the Old Port. He knew his history and he brought the city alive, cobblestones and all. They stopped at a small cafe close to the harbor. Ricardo

ordered. "You have to have a small coffee and Pasteis de Nata if you want to really know my city." Pastéis de Nata is a Portuguese egg tart that has a crisp, flaky crust. It also has a creamy custard center. "You will love it." It was quite possibly the very best thing that Jess had ever tasted. Ricardo dropped them at the boat and took off, cell phone glued to his ear. Ricardo was a wheeler and dealer, Portuguese style.

Jess mentioned that her father was also in Lisbon and asked, cautiously, if she could invite him to the boat. Her father was always overbearing when it came to who she was dating and he would always find fault. He knew about Jay and had already made some crass comments about him. "He sounds like he's a bit of a bum," he said when Jess returned from her trip to Antigua.

"Of course," Jay said. "I would love to meet your Dad." He came to dinner that night and took an instant dislike to Jay. Sarah, the boats cook, had gone all out and they were able to enjoy the meal in the cockpit but there was no pleasing Harry Slattery. He found fault with the meal, he found fault with the wine, and even though he didn't come out and say it out loud, Jess knew that he found more than one fault with Jay.

HARRY SLATTERY HAD the opposite of an Electra complex. It was not that his daughter was attracted to him, it was more that he was obsessed with his daughter. In fact he was beyond obsessed. Jess had first noticed it when she was a young girl. She loved her Dad and she loved how much he loved her, but once she became a teenager it started to become a bit embarrassing. Her Dad was always there fawning over her. When she played volleyball he was there fawning over her. When she was in the school play he was there fawning over her. When she introduced him to a boy from school that she liked he was horrible and made her feel uncomfortable. She was hardly ready for sex but her Dad had

implied, to the boy, that they must have been having sex. The boy was mortified. Jess was mortified. She tried to talk to her Mom about it but her Mom just brushed it off. "It's just your Dad being your Dad. He loves you." Jess had learned to live with it but she really liked Jay and she didn't want her Dad to screw things up.

"I'm sorry about tonight," she said once her Dad had left and they had cleaned up. "He means well. He just doesn't have a filter."

"Hmmm,"

"He just wants what's best for me. He has worked hard for his money. I am his only child."

"Hmmm."

"Jay, I'm sorry, say something."

"I'm not sure who ever thought that George W. was a funny guy. Actually not just funny, but hilariously funny. Your Dad could barely stop laughing. Bush said 'they underestimated me.' It's really not that funny no matter your politics."

"I know. I'm sorry."

Her Dad came for dinner two nights later. He was worse than the previous evening. No filter? The guy hardly had a brain and there was some weird stuff going on with how he viewed Jess. At first Jay found it kind of sweet how much he loved his daughter but as the night wore on, and as Harry Slattery made himself more and more available to the cognac bottle, the worse it got. He was starting to slur his words. He was also starting to leer at his daughter and began to talk about how much fun he thought she might be in bed. Jay white knuckled it for a bit but then he had had enough. He had also been taking the odd pull on the cognac bottle. At first it was just a nice buzz, but then he suddenly exploded.

“You need to leave Mr. Slattery, you have had enough and Jess and I need to go to bed.”

“I suppose that you want to get rid of me so that you can go and fuck my daughter. That’s why you want me to leave.”

“It’s OK Dad. We are tired. That’s all.”

“I have always wanted to fuck my daughter,” Slattery slurred. Jay grabbed him by the arm. “It’s time to leave,” he said.

“Fuck off.” Slattery took a swipe at him. “No one gets to fuck my daughter unless they ask permission from me and you didn’t ask me.” Jess stepped in. “Jay leave this to me. This is not the first time that he has been this bad.” She took her father by the arm and walked him down the gangplank. Jess had already called an UBER and the car was waiting.

Jay and Jess never spoke about that night and Jay never mentioned the email that he had received from Harry Slattery a few days later. “I know that you are fucking my daughter,” it read. “No one gets to do that unless they first get my permission. I don’t give you my permission. I am a rich and powerful man. I will get you one day you motherfucker.”

Harry Slattery did not attend their wedding.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**T**HREE DAYS LATER they were closing in on Cape Hatteras. The wind had swung to the south and they were on a close reach but the sea state was fine and the family was settling into their voyage. Jay and Jess shared the watches with the kids helping where they could which up until this point had been limited to making lunch. They slept through the night. Once they cleared Martha’s Vineyard there were very few vessels out, mostly fishing boats which were easily picked up on the radar. Jay was still nervous though. He knew that he had bought the best electronics but in his gut he didn’t quite trust them. But then again his gut had been in a knot since they left Marblehead.

As they got closer to land the shipping increased with the northbound traffic staying offshore and the southbound traffic sailing closer to the cape. Jay knew enough to respect the shipping lanes but was nervous because it would be dark by the time they would pass abeam of Hatteras. The family had dinner alfresco in the cockpit. They had been dragging a lure and purely by luck had snagged a small Bonita. Jay fried it up while Jess kept watch and he served it with some store bought French fries. “Fish and chips,” he said and the kids were happy. So happy in fact that Jay went back down the galley and pulled a cold bottle of white wine out of the fridge. He poured a splash into a red solo cup for Jess



and one for himself. They watched the sun set spluttering and sizzling as it dipped into the ocean.

CAPTAIN ZACH McKLOWSKI was at the helm of World Navigator. The ship was on course for Cape Hatteras after which they would turn north to enter the Chesapeake Bay. His 'Atlantic Triangle' had recently been extended to include a stop in Wilmington, North Carolina and one in Newport News near the entrance of the Chesapeake. He was alone on the bridge. His second officer Hank Redmond was doing the rounds on deck before it got dark. Zach texted Arturo. "Do you have a moment?" he asked and moments later Arturo was at the door knocking gently.

"Come in," Zach said. Arturo could tell that Zach had been drinking but it was not his place to say anything. "Yes Captain?"

"I might need you tonight." Arturo nodded and was about the leave when Zach motioned to him to sit down. "Just a quick one?"

"Sure Captain." Zach stood and found his briefcase. He pulled a fifth of brandy from it. Arturo could see that most of the brandy was gone and suspected that Zach had been taking more than an occasional sip. "Quick before Hank comes back." He handed Arturo the bottle and he took a sip before handing it back to Zach. "Good huh?"

"Yes Captain." Arturo watched while Zach drained the remaining brandy. "OK later," he said.

JESS WOULD TAKE the first night watch from eight to eleven. The kids usually hung around to chat and help where they could but this night the weather was clear and there was not much to do. Back aft Jess could hear the comforting sounds of the autopilot creaking keeping Cinnamon Girl on a straight and steady course. Jay went down below to nap. He knew that it might be a long

night with all the shipping but he trusted Jess and as soon as his head hit the pillow he was asleep.

Jess woke him at eleven. "You are up Dude," she said, gently shaking him. "It's all pretty quiet out there. Some ships but not many. We passed Cape Hatteras. I could just make out the loom of the lighthouse but that's behind us now." Jay had a habit of rubbing the back of his neck to wake up. "OK I got it," he said. "You get some rest." Jess climbed into the warm bed and pulled the sheets closer.

It was a beautiful night, but dark. The moon was up but it was waning and did not shed much light. Jay had read once that a waning moon meant that the moon's energy was slowing down which led to 'feelings of satiation and gratitude'. Right about now that was just how Jay felt. He grabbed a deck cushion and parked off under the dodger. The night air was cooler than it had been earlier but from where he sat he had a pretty good view of his surroundings. To the west there was a northbound ship. He could see the green starboard light flickering. They were out of the traffic separation zone but the ship that he could see was clearly getting set up to enter the separation zone. Jay watched it for a while until the lights faded into the black night.

CAPTAIN ZACH McKLOWSKI handed over the watch to his second in command. The forecast was good and he was looking for some quality time with Arturo. It was not really quality time but it was what Zach needed. He sat at the desk in his cabin and reached for the drawer his fingers searching for the familiar feel of the bottle. Just as he grabbed it he saw a shadow pass and heard a low knock on the door. "It's me Captain." Zach flicked the night-light off and poured two stiff glasses. Arturo sat on the bed.

Zach was a practical man. He knew what he needed and was not much for small talk. He downed the brandy and Arturo did the

same. "This time it's on me," Zach said, and Arturo nodded. He leant back on the bunk and removed his pants. World Navigator rolled gently as the ship caught the wake of some other vessel but quickly settled down. Zach took another quick pull on the brandy bottle and joined Arturo on the bunk.

Suddenly his cell phone rang. It was Hank. "You need to come to the bridge," he said.

"Fuck."

Zach grabbed his Captains hat and left the cabin. "Stay here Arturo, I will be right back."

JAY FELT UNEASY. He was not sure why. Everything had been going really great. He thought that he might make himself a cup of coffee and slipped down below as quietly as he could. He opened the fridge door to get the coffee beans but the half empty bottle of cold white wine caught his eye. He reached for the wine instead. He got a solo cup and filled it. He knew in his gut that it was a bad idea but he also knew that he needed to settle his mind which had been racing overtime since he had received an email from Lillian earlier in the day. Lillian had been fine with the move back to Jamaica but was now missing him and not afraid to tell him so in the email.

"I think that I am in love with you," she wrote. Jay had quickly copied and pasted the email and filed it in a secret folder; password protected. He knew that he was in love with Lillian as well, but he also knew that the money for their lovely lifestyle came from Jess's family. Her Dad had started a successful law firm and he had made sure that his only daughter was well taken care of.

## CHAPTER NINE

JAY HAD FINISHED the bottle of wine but he was still restless. He did not trust his electronics, not yet anyway. He saw a ship on the horizon ahead and thought that he might call to see if they had him on radar. He ducked down below and flicked the VHF to Channel 16. "Northbound ship, northbound ship, northbound ship in the vicinity south of Cape Hatteras, this is the sailing vessel *Cinnamon Girl*, do you copy me?" He repeated the message a couple of times when a voice came on. "Yes, switch Channel 72." Jay flicked the dial on his VHF and repeated his message.

"Yes Captain we can see you just fine." Jay was relieved. He was about to hang up when he had another question. My GPS has not been working that great. Can you give me your position so that I can check my GPS.

"Stand by," came the reply.

ZACH MADE HIS WAY to the bridge. "Captain," Hank said. There is some sailboat calling on the VHF looking to see if we can see him on radar. "I think that I can see them heading southbound but I'm not sure." Just then the VHF sparked to life. "Yes *Cinnamon Girl* we can see you clearly," The voice came with a Chinese accent.

We are at 34 degrees 20 north and 77 degrees 50 west. "Thank you," Jay said. "That's funny it doesn't make any sense," Jay thought. The ship was more than 20 miles to the west of his position and could not possibly see him on radar. "Our GPS must be off," he thought. He powered it down and let it sit for a couple of minutes before powering it up again. The GPS showed the same coordinates as before. "Strange," Jay thought. Then he heard a low thudding sound. Dum dum dum. Jay pulled a paper chart from his navigation station and started to plot their position. Dum dum dum. He laid the chart out and plotted their current position on the paper chart. Dum dum dum. "That looks about right," Jay thought. Maybe the ship had their position wrong. He kind of wished that he had not drunk the wine. Dum dum dum. He wondered what the noise was and thought that he might just take a quick look around. He scrambled up the companionway and saw that the night was pitch black. Then he looked up and saw lights directly above.

That was when the ship hit.

CAPTAIN ZACH wanted to get back to Arturo and had quickly left the bridge. Hank picked up his iPad and clicked to the movie that he had previously been watching. His wife had given him some noise canceling headphones for his birthday and he loved the way they brought the movie to life. The sound was crystal clear. The movie was one of his favorites: *The Man Without a Face*. He loved Mel Gibson and had already watched the movie a dozen times. He never got tired of it.

Hank never heard a thing. It was Zach, who was just starting to pleasure Arturo when he heard a strange noise. He shrugged it off and returned to the business at hand but the sound had bothered him. "One Moment Arturo," he said. "I will be right back. The captain's cabin had a small balcony and Zach opened the

steel door and looked out at the night sky. Then he looked down. There was what looked like a small sailboat dragging alongside. It appeared to be hung up on one of the lifeboats.

"Fuck."

"Arturo you have to come with me," he said and the two dashed up to the bridge. Hank was enjoying the movie and was surprised to see both men. It didn't go unnoticed to him that Arturo was looking a bit disheveled. "Did you see a sailboat?" Zach asked.

"No."

"Quick come and look." The three men ran to the small balcony that was off the bridge and looked down. There was nothing there. Zach was sure that he had seen a sailboat hung up on the lifeboat but now there was nothing there.

"Fuck."

He knew that he was really drunk but he also knew what he had seen. There had definitely been a boat hung up on his ship.

JUST BEFORE THE SHIP HIT, the boat lurched from the surge caused by the displaced water. Then there was a loud bang and Cinnamon Girl was violently ripped around. Jay heard Pattie scream but he was scrambling to the foredeck to try and see what had happened. It looked like the mast was caught up on something and the boat was being dragged backwards. It was fast filling with water. Jess had been knocked unconscious by the ship. Their cabin was on the side where the ship had hit and there was a gaping hole in the boat. They were being dragged and the boat was rapidly filling with water. Jay panicked. He had no idea what to do. "Jess," he screamed. It had all happened so fast. Suddenly the mast came crashing down. The boom hit him squarely on his back and in a split second he was in the water gulping for air. The steep sides of the ship were right there, black

and menacing. The boat was still hung up on the lifeboat and was being dragged sideways.

“Jess,” he screamed but in moments the ship and the boat were gone. Jay was left all alone, treading water. He stared at the hulking hull as it sailed off with his boat and his family. He knew that he was going to die. He also knew that he had been talking to the wrong ship. The Chinese vessel was 20 miles away and had picked up a different yacht on radar. The ship that hit *Cinnamon Girl* was *World Navigator*, Captain Zach McKlowski in command.

## CHAPTER TEN

LILLIAN WAS HAPPY to be back on the island. She had forgotten how much she missed the slow pace. She had forgotten how much she missed the food. For now she was babysitting her sisters two kids, but this morning she had over slept and so had the kids. The clock on the wall of her tiny room showed that it was after eight. The bus came at 7:45. They had missed it. Her sister had left right before dawn. She had a job at the hospital in Kingston. Lillian got the kids ready, not sure what to do. Their school was five miles away. They could walk if necessary. She packed lunch and the two girls hitched their satchels over their shoulders and they started walking.

Gerry was up early. He hated resorts but his wife, a travel agent, had won an all expenses paid vacation to one of the fancier places on the island. Gerry was in search of Blue Mountain coffee and figured that the best place to find Blue Mountain coffee would be in the Blue Mountains and had left his wife asleep. He took the small rental car on a road trip. He was enjoying a slow ride down a red dirt road when he saw a lady with two kids flagging him down.

“Hey Mister,” Lillian said. “Can you give these kids a ride to school. It’s only a few miles down the road.” Gerry was American and was a little taken aback. This lady was going to hand over

two children to a complete stranger. That would never fly back home. “Sure,” he said. “I’d be happy to.” The girls clambered into the car. “Thank you Mister.”

Gerry wound down the window. “Thanks for the kids Mam, they look like they will taste delicious.” Lillian laughed. “You crazy man,” she said as they sped off down the road toward Kingston. Island life, she loved it, but she was wondering how Jay was going to respond to her email. She had probably been a little too forward. Love is a strong word. Jay was off with his family now. His wife was beautiful; and rich. Why would Jay ever leave them for her? At the same time she knew that they had something special. Jay had wired \$10K into her account earlier that week. He had also sent an email. “That money is just the start. There will be more. Oh and please make sure that you contact the Freight Forwarder to see when they expect Jack to arrive. I won’t be able to track anything from offshore.” He had signed off with three xxx’s.

LILLIAN WAS SURPRISED that Jay never responded. “Give it time,” she thought. “I’m sure that he is busy with the boat and getting things in order. Still, she was a little sad that he had not responded. “How long does it take to send an email?” She so badly wanted to tell her sister about the affair but she knew that her sister would most definitely not approve. She was a devout Protestant and would not be ok with the situation. The first Sunday that she was back on the island her sister had taken her to a tent revival. Sure there had been music and singing and hand holding and clapping, but there had also been fire and brimstone and abortion and adultery were high on the list of things that could get you sent straight to hell.

Later that night she retired early to her room. The night sounds wafted in through her window. She could feel the beat of the

land. Lillian had picked up a book at the airport but never read it on the plane. The plane ride was strange. Everyone wearing masks. There was no cabin service. The middle seat on each row was empty. Covid was on everyone’s mind but she felt safe. The Jet Blue airline was spotlessly clean, they loaded the plane row by row to keep social distance, and they offered gloves to anyone who wanted them.

The book was good but Lillian dosed off. She tried to read it again but when she realized that she had read the same page five times over she gave it up and turned the light off. She slipped into the bliss of sleep with the sound of crickets serenading her. A cool breeze blew through the window. Lillian was grateful that her sister lived at a higher elevation. She knew that it would be stifling hot near the coast.

At three in the morning she sat bolt upright in bed. Her heart was racing. She had no idea what had woken her up. All she could feel was her heart pumping in her chest. Something was wrong. She could feel it in her bones but she had no idea what it was. Lillian lay there trying to go back to sleep but there was no way. There was something wrong. Her heart was still racing when she opened the kitchen door and stepped out into the night air. The cicadas were cranking. The Blue Mountain air felt good against her skin. Her sister had a small area set up with some chairs and a fire pit and Lillian plonked herself down on one of them. She was not sure what had happened but she was sure that the earth had shifted on its axis.

She was dozing off when the roosters started to crow. The first one was across the valley but the sound carried on the still night air. That started the rest of them off. “How many bloody roosters are there?” she wondered. Within minutes the whole valley was a cacophony of rooster calls, each trying to outdo the other. Lillian tried to go back to sleep but the sound was getting louder and

louder. It filled her spirit. She had grown up with those sounds. It warmed her heart. She also had a nasty premonition that something bad had happened. She was not sure what it was but she had a sense of foreboding.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHEN THE SHIP HIT, Jess was knocked unconscious and drowned a few minutes later. The owners cabin rapidly filled with water and her lifeless body floated to the overhead. The same fate had struck Ollie. He had banged his head trying to escape from his cabin and fell face first into the swirling water. Pattie had managed to get out of her cabin and made it onto the deck. What she saw was a nightmare. The boat was being dragged backwards by a ship and was rapidly filling with water. The mast was down and banging against the coachroof. "Dad," she screamed. "Dad where are you?" Suddenly there was a violent crack as the boat came free from the ship. It lurched upright as the ship sailed off into the night. Pattie screamed again. "Dad where are you," but her words were lost in the wind. She was terrified. The boat was sinking fast and she soon felt warm Gulf Stream water around her ankles. "Mom," she screamed. "Mom where are you?" No reply. The night air was damp. The sky was pitch black as Cinnamon Girl slipped silently beneath the waves. The family dream went to the bottom of the ocean taking Jess, Pattie and Ollie with her.

ON BOARD WORLD NAVIGATOR Captain Zach McKlowski was in a panic. He was sure that he has seen a sailboat hung up on his ship. "Arturo," he barked. "Go and see if there is any damage to

the aft starboard lifeboat.” Arturo left immediately. “Hank what the fuck?” he said. “Were you not keeping a lookout?”

“I was,” Hank lied, “But I didn’t see anything. “I think that boat that was calling on the VHF was a different boat.” Arturo came back to the bridge. “Captain there is damage to the lifeboat. Something happened.” Zach turned to Hank. “Slow the ship down,” he said. “I am not sure what to do but for now slow down. I am going to take a look at the damage.”

The lifeboat had been ripped from its davits and was hanging by the pulleys used to lower the boat in an emergency. It was swinging and banging into the side of the ship. Clearly they had hit something and it was probably the boat that he thought he saw. “Arturo, you can’t say anything to any of the crew about this. Do you understand?”

“Yes Captain.”

Hank was adjusting course slightly to get them into the traffic separation zone. The ship had slowed. Zach could hear the engines deep in the bowel of the ship. Dum dum dum.

“Fuck I don’t know what to do,” he said. They could keep going and no one would ever know. No one except Hank; and Arturo of course. He knew that if he said something that there would be an inquiry. Arturo knew about the drinking. He was not sure about Hank but wasn’t ready to take any chances. He and his first in command didn’t quite see eye to eye on many things and he knew that Hank was looking to get a promotion.

“Fuck.” Zach needed a drink. Badly. “Hank you keep the same course for now. I will come and relieve you at five. Arturo you need to go back to your cabin.”

“Yes Captain.” They both left the bridge at the same time. Arturo turned to Zach. “Your cabin right?” Zach nodded.

The two men were almost through the second bottle of brandy when Arturo spoke up. “You know that we have to go back, right?” Zach rubbed his eyes. “We can’t. What if there is an inquiry? I could lose my Captains license.”

“What if there are survivors on the boat.” Arturo looked directly at him. “Captain, we have to go back.”

JAY HAD BEEN TREADING water for three hours when he saw some debris not far from where he was. It was just starting to get light and in the east low clouds scudded across a faintly pink horizon. He was completely alone. The ship was gone, his boat was gone and he expected that quite likely his family was gone. He swam over to the debris and saw that it was some kind of bale of hay. It was floating north in the Gulf Stream and Jay set off on a course to intersect with it. The bale was soggy, but still buoyant, and it was not hay. Marijuana. Jay could smell the pot before he got to it.

“Jesus Christ.”

Jay was getting tired. He was still full of adrenalin but the enormity of what had just happened was slowly sinking in. He was going to die. He was not sure about his family but he knew on some level that they were not OK. Jess was a decent sailor but the boat was damaged, he was sure of that. The good thing was that they were not that far from land and there was quite a bit of shipping converging at the traffic separation zone at Cape Hatteras. The bale of pot was helping provide some buoyancy but it would only be a matter of hours before he lost his strength.

“Damn how stupid I was to think that this would work out?”

Zach instructed Hank to turn the ship around. “Captain I have the coordinates of where we were when you thought that we might have hit something. I hit ‘save’ on the GPS.”

“Good man,” Zach said. “Let’s motor back to that spot and decide from there.” His head was still fuzzy from the booze. He was trying to make a plan but his thoughts were not coming in clear. “Hank,” he said. “Can you figure out how much the Gulf Stream might play into where the boat might have been and where it might be now.”

“Yes Captain.”

Zach slumped onto the couch on the bridge and held his head in his hands. “What if they had hit a boat? What if they found survivors? They were not far from the nearest port and there would definitely be an inquiry and that would definitely include a test for alcohol in his system. Zach knew that going back was the right thing to do but he was also worried. He had built up a career and reputation as a straight shooter. He did not want this one incident to ruin it all.

THE SUN HAD RISEN and was starting to beat down. Jay clung onto the bale of pot but he was getting uncomfortable. His arms were chafing and his legs were going numb. He had seen three ships since daylight but none of them had seen him. “Maybe it’s better if I die,” he thought. Then he thought of Jess and his children. He had to stay alive for them. That was if they were still alive themselves. Then it started to get really hot. Jay was thirsty. The wine had dehydrated him but that was nothing compared to what the sun was going to do. He hung onto the bale of pot and started to cry. Twelve hours earlier he had been living a dream; now he was in the middle of a nightmare.

“WE ARE GETTING CLOSE CAPTAIN,” Hank said. Zach picked up his binoculars and scanned the ocean around him. Nothing. Just a lazy undulating ocean. The sun was up and the visibility good, but nothing. Zach was dying for a drink. He needed something to

take the edge off, something to ease his uneasiness but he didn’t dare. His crew was awake and wondering why they had turned around, but no one said a word. World Navigator kept motoring south. It was going to be a hot day.

JAY STARTED TO FEEL HIMSELF slipping. He was dehydrated and exhausted. Something bumped against his leg and he was suddenly very much awake. It bumped again. He wondered if he had been hallucinating. Two more ships had passed him by. He waved but neither saw him. The heat and dehydration were playing tricks on his brain. He thought that he saw another ship coming directly toward him but it had to be his mind tricking him. Jay closed his eyes. He felt himself slipping again. He was so thirsty. He knew that it was a bad idea but he cupped his hand and scooped some seawater, pressing it to his lips. The water was cool. His throat constricted, his body telling him no, but the urge to get something down prevailed and he swallowed. He knew immediately that he had made a mistake. “You stupid fuck,” he muttered. “That was dumb,” but he immediately scooped another handful and drank it down. The water cooled him. He thought that there was ship coming his way but he could not be certain. Dum dum dum. Jay put his head in his hands and started to cry again. Dum dum dum.

“CAPTAIN I THINK that I see something to port,” Hank said. “Take a look over there.” Zach trained his binoculars on some debris in the water. It was not unusual for there to be some kelp or plastic floating north in the Gulf Stream. “It’s just junk,” he said but just in case let’s go over and check it out.

“Yes sir.”

As they got closer Zach thought that they could make out a bale of something with something clinging to it. A hundred yards



out and he was sure of it. It looked like a body. A person.

“Arturo please come up to the bridge.”

“Yes Captain.”

“Arturo please inflate that Zodiac right away. I want you and Căsar to take a look and see what’s floating over there.” He pointed in the direction of the bale.

“Yes Captain.”

They launched the Zodiac and motored over to the pile of debris. As they got closer they could see what looked to be a body. It was clinging to the bale, but seemed lifeless. Arturo gunned the engine. There was no time to waste. They pulled alongside the limp body of Jay Hendricks and hauled it into the dingy. They sped back to the ship. Zach was there to meet them and the three of them dragged Jay’s seemingly lifeless body on board. One of the crew brought a stretcher and they rolled Jay onto it. The ship did not have an official medic but Cesar had taken some courses back in Mexico. They got Jay up to the bridge and Cesar took over hooking up a drip and a blood pressure monitor. “I think he’s going to be fine amigo’s,” he said. Jay opened his right eye and looked at the five faces looking back at him. “Where am I?” he said.

“You are safe,” Zach said. “You are safe.” And that’s how they met. Jay and Zach. They didn’t know it then but they would become firm friends, a friendship that would almost break both men.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

**W**ORLD NAVIGATOR’ motored slowly up the Chesapeake. They had grid searched the area south of Hatteras looking to see if there were any signs of a boat but after a few hours they gave up. Secretly Zach was happy. Finding a damaged boat would only have made things more difficult for him. Questions would be asked. Why were they sailing south when their destination was north of Hatteras? What if they found the boat and one of the survivors had seen the name of his ship. It was in huge letters on the stern; ‘World Navigator.’ He was sure that the man that they had picked up was in some way related to the accident but he never mentioned it. “Arturo,” Jay said. “This is between you and me and God.” Arturo nodded. He was not worried about Hank. Hank was on watch at the time so he would have to take some of the blame, so long as the no one mentioned the drinking.

The ship pulled into Newport News. There was an ambulance waiting to take Jay to the hospital. Căsar had done a good job but Jay was still in bad condition. He had been well sedated during the search for Cinnamon Girl. The ambulance took off, lights flashing and Zach made plans to get his cargo offloaded.

The police showed up just after lunch. Zach had expected it and had stayed off the bottle. “We just have a few questions,” the

constable said. He looked like he was not a day older than 16 but he had the badge and uniform.

“No problem,” Zach said. “Let’s go on up to the bridge.” He asked Arturo and Cisar to join them.

“I understand that you found this man floating in the Gulf Stream,” the officer said.

“Yes.”

“How did you find him? Was he just in front of you and you saw something?”

“Yes.” Arturo shifted nervously. The officer glanced at him but went back to his questioning.

“Isn’t it hard to see a person in the water? It’s a long way down from the bridge. You must have been keeping a good lookout.”

“We always keep a good lookout,” Zach said. “And besides the weather was perfect.”

The officer went to the bridge balcony and looked down. I dunno,” he said. “I am still not sure how you could have seen a man floating on a bale of pot unless you were looking for him.” Zach shifted his weight to his other foot. Did this police officer know something? Had he spoken to the crew?

“I talked briefly to your crew,” the police officer said. “They said that you were sailing a southerly course. Wasn’t your destination the Chesapeake?”

Zach shifted his weight back to the other foot. “Yes,” he said. “We were sailing north when I thought that I had seen something in the water so we turned around to go back and take a look.”

The officer shot him a glance. “I see.”

“Ok, well good job. It looks like you may well have saved a life. When are you leaving port? I may have some further questions.”

“Not for a day officer.” The policeman said that he would show himself out. Zach slid quietly to the bridge balcony and looked down. He didn’t want it to seem too obvious but he could see the policeman stopping to chat with some of the crew. There was no way that he could hear what they were saying but their body language wasn’t good.

JAY RECOVERED QUICKLY in the hospital. The IV drip had rehydrated him and once the sedatives wore off he was awake and alert. “Does anyone know what happened to my family?” he asked the nurse. She looked surprised. “No sir.”

Jay needed answers. He suddenly felt much better. He needed to get out of the hospital and start to look for his family. They wanted to discharge him but he had no money, no identification, nothing.

“Sir is there anyone we can call?”

“Yes my brother. He lives in Charleston but I don’t know his number. It’s on my phone but under speed-dial. I have no clue what the actual number is.” The nurse took the details and left the room. Jay was starting to panic. There was no way that Jess could manage the boat especially after it had been hit by a ship. “I have to get out of here.”

The nurse came back into his room. We have your brother on the line.

“Jay what the fuck happened?”

“I have no idea. I think that a ship hit us. I was washed overboard. Jess and the kids are still out there. I am sure that the boat is damaged. I was rescued by a passing ship.”

“OK just stay there. I am going to get in touch with the Coast Guard right now and then I am coming to get you. You just need

to take care of yourself. I am sure that we can find the boat and Jess..." His voice trailed off.

Jay slumped back on his hospital bed. "What a stupid mess," he thought. "What a stupid, stupid mess. How could I have been so stupid?"

ZACH ASKED ARTURO to join him on the bridge. "Yes Captain," and moments later there was a knock on the door.

"Do you know what that cop was asking the crew?" Arturo shrugged. "I think he was asking why we were sailing south when we should have been sailing north. They said that they didn't know. They said that it wasn't their job to question the Captain."

"OK."

"Please let me know if you find out more Arturo. You know not to say anything right?"

"Yes Captain." Arturo left the bridge and Zach slumped onto the couch. "They should all be congratulating me for saving a mans life," he thought. "But instead they are treating me like a criminal. Maybe the Cop was inexperienced but he sure seemed to know more than he was letting on."

THE NURSE CAME BACK into his room with the phone. "It's your brother," she said.

"Jay?"

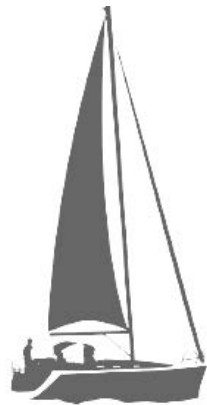
"Yes."

"OK. I called the Coast Guard. They are sending out a helicopter from their station at Morehead City. They said that they would get a second chopper if they couldn't find anything. Also Millie has booked me on a plane for this afternoon. I will come and get you. We can figure out what's next but I first need to see that

you are OK. Don't worry Jay, I am sure that the Coast Guard will find them."

Jay was not so sure. He had a sick feeling in his gut. The ship had hit them pretty hard. He was lucky to be alive. He feared for the safety of his family. He didn't know then that later in the day the Coast Guard would find some debris. A horseshoe life-ring with the name Cinnamon Girl painted on it. And some blue fiberglass that looked like it was a piece of a yacht. That was all that they found.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN



CINNAMON GIRL

**T**HE COP AGAIN EARLY the next morning. Zach was in the shower when he got a call that the detective was already onboard.

“Fuck.”

He quickly dried off and went downstairs. “Can I have a few minutes?” the cop asked.

“Sure. Come on up to the bridge.”

“Fuck.”

“I am not saying that there is anything to this you understand, but your crew told me that you were sailing southbound for at least an hour before you found Mr. Hendricks. I think that it’s a little strange that you would see what you thought was a body in the water and take more than an hour to turn around to go and investigate. How so?”

Zach was not sure how to answer and he hoped that his body language would not give him away. “Captains intuition,” he said. “I have seen a lot of stuff out on the ocean and when I first saw what I thought was a body in the water I didn’t think much of it. It was only later when I thought about it that I got concerned that I might have seen an actual body that I ordered the ship to be turned around.”

“Good intuition.”

“Yes, after 20 years at sea you start to get a sense of things. A kind of sixth sense.”

“One of your crew told me that before dawn that morning that he heard a loud bang on the hull. Do you have any idea what that might have been? Do you remember seeing or hearing anything?”

“No I was off watch in my cabin asleep. I was due to relieve my second in command Hank Redmond around six. He didn’t mention anything.”

“Can I talk with Mr. Redmond?”

“Sure.”

Zach made a call and moments later Hank arrived in the bridge. The detective introduced himself.

“Some of the crew have told me that early yesterday morning when you were getting close to the traffic separation zone for Cape Hatteras that they heard a loud bang. Like the ship had hit something. Do you have any idea what they are talking about?”

Hank seemed to go a little pale but he composed himself. “I’m not sure what they are talking about. It’s noisy up here on the bridge. The radios and stuff, you know. I didn’t hear anything out of the ordinary.”

“Hmmm, OK. That’s all I have for now.” The cop started to leave but then said. “Do you mind if I have a little look around?”

“No problem.”

“Double Fuck.”

Zach was glad that he had Arturo put the lifeboat back on its davits, but still. A guilty conscience can eat you alive if you let it.

Officer Chris Plummer had recently been promoted to Detective.

He was new to the job but not new to policing. His father had been a beat cop in Virginia Beach for three decades but wanted a desk job to ease him through toward retirement. He moved the family to Newport News and was thrilled when his youngest son joined the force.

Officer Plummer strolled around the deck not sure what he was looking for but there was something in his gut that told him that there was more to the story than he had been told. The second in command guy Hank looked nervous for someone with nothing to hide. He took some photos with his iPhone but didn’t notice anything amiss. He was about to leave when he noticed that one of the lifeboats was slightly askew. He walked over. He was not really sure how lifeboats should look but this one looked off. He noticed a small flag hung up under the seat and reached in to grab it. It was some kind of burgee. He took the flag and stuffed it into his pocket. It was probably nothing, but you never know.

ZACH WANTED TO VISIT Jay in the hospital before World Navigator set sail the next day. He called the hospital and was told that Mr. Hendricks was going to be discharged later that day but could receive visitors for the next few hours. Zach took an UBER and showed up at the hospital shortly after lunch.

“Jay,” he said. “It is beyond great to see you looking so well. I heard that you were going to be discharged.”

Jay looked at him and his eyes welled. “You saved my life Captain and I have no idea how to repay you. I was going to come by the ship later when my brother picked me up but here you are. Looking in on me, checking in on me. I am beyond grateful for your kindness.” He wanted to hug Zach but Covid protocol made it impossible.

The two men sat for an hour talking about their lives. Jay was

anxious to hear from the Coast Guard and was a little on edge knowing that his family was still out there. Zach assured him that the Coast Guard would probably find the boat and they would all be fine. When they parted Jay said, “Screw Covid, I am going to give you a hug. You saved my life man. If you hadn’t seen me in the water I would be dead by now.” The two men embraced, somewhat awkwardly.

“Hey by the way,” Jay said. “I almost forgot. There was a Police officer here this morning asking questions.”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

**T**HE LIEUTENANT COMMANDER of Coast Guard Station Morehead City called Jay’s brother Matt. Matt had just picked up Jay after getting him discharged and they were driving down Warwick Boulevard. His cell rang Unknown Number but he picked it up anyway.

“Is this Matt?”

“Yes.”

“Oh hello Matt this is Lieutenant Commander Jones from the Coast Guard. Is this a good moment to talk?” Matt saw a Walmart up ahead and pulled into the parking lot. “Yes I am pulling over.”

“Matt are you anywhere near your brother?”

“Yes he’s right next to me.”

“Please hand him the phone.”

“OK.”

Jay took the phone. “Is this Jay Hendricks?”

“Yes.”

“Mr. Hendricks this is Lieutenant Commander Jones from the Coast Guard out of Morehead City. My crew have conducted a

thorough search for your boat. They did a grid search of the area where you were washed overboard and they also checked all the marinas in the area to see if somehow your family had made it safely to land. I'm afraid to say that we didn't find anything except a horseshoe lifebuoy with the name of your boat on it. There was also some other debris in the water but nothing that could be traced directly to your boat. Except the life ring of course. I am really sorry but I think whatever hit your boat damaged it enough and it has likely sunk. We have searched for survivors but nothing. I am really sorry Mr. Hendricks, but it seems to me, and I have been doing this for over 30 years, that it's likely your family went down with the boat."

Jay felt his whole body go numb. Matt had been watching him and saw him go pale. "Give me the phone," he said and took the phone from Jay.

"This is Matt. Can you tell me what happened?" Alongside him he saw Jay slump and then start convulsing, his whole body shaking. Lieutenant Commander Jones told Matt just what he had told Jay. "Nothing? Just the horseshoe ring?"

"Yes I am afraid that's all they found. The helicopters saw some debris from the air and we sent out a crew to investigate. There was also a large piece of fiberglass that looked like it was a piece of the hull of a yacht. It was dark blue." Matt knew. Jay had probably already known. Your gut never lies. Jess, Ollie and Pattie had likely gone down with the yacht.

"Thank you sir. I need to talk to my brother. Thank you."

"I am really sorry to bring you this news. We have the life ring and the piece of the hull at our station in Morehead City. I am sure that there will be an investigation. You take care of your brother." Lieutenant Commander Jones hung up.

Jay was sobbing, his whole body wracked with anguish. He had known in his gut but clung to the hope that somehow miraculously Jess and the kids had survived. He also knew the violence that occurred when the ship hit them. He also knew that he had been drinking and knew that the white wine had dulled his senses. This was all on him. The stupid idea to take the kids out of school to sail around the world. The stupid idea to not take along another experienced person to help him out. All of it. What a fucking mess he had created. He started to sob again. Matt put his hand on his shoulder but his body was numb and he could not feel anything. Jay put his head in his hands and cried. He cried for himself, he cried for Jess and he cried for his two beautiful children. What terror had they experienced? What has happened to their bodies? "Oh my God," he said to Matt. "I have no idea how I am going to live with this."

LILLIAN HAD BEEN CHECKING her computer every couple of hours hoping for an email, but nothing. She knew that she should not have used the world love, but she was in love. She was in love with Jay's free spirit. His love of adventure. The way he loved his children. She was going to pick up Jack later that day in Kingston and wanted to let Jay know about it but he was not answering any emails.

"Lillian, are you OK?" Her sister was home from work. There had been another outbreak of Covid at the hospital and they asked some of the nurses to leave early while they figured out what to do. Jamaica had some test kits and they were relying on more to come from the United States, but they had not sent many. She had heard Trump on the news a week earlier. "We are not sending tests to shithole countries. They won't know what to do with them."

“Yes I’m fine.” Lillian drew a deep breath. “I’m OK. Just a little sad.” Her sister didn’t ask why. “I know that you need to pick up the pig later. I talked to Winston. He said that you can use his truck. I know that I told you that you could use my car but I think that Winston’s truck might be better.”

“Thank you. You are probably right. The truck may be a better option.”

JAY AND MATT found a hotel room in Norfolk. Jay was a mess. He was inconsolable. “I need to call Jess’s parents,” he said. “Her Dad is going to kill me. He told me not to take Jess and kids on this trip and I did and now they are gone. Do you think that there is any chance that they are alive somehow?”

“I dunno Jay. The Coast Guard knows what they are doing. Jones would not have called if he knew that there was still hope. They don’t want someone with false hope asking that they send out another helicopter. We can’t give up hope but I think that we are hanging onto strands.”

Jay sobbed. He knew that his life was forever changed and he had no clue how he was going to get through the next few hours let alone the next few years. Family was everything to him. This was all his fault.

LILLIAN JUMPED INTO the drivers seat of Winston’s pick-up. “You know where to go right?”

“Thanks Winston,” I have the directions on my phone and the Freight Forwarder told me that Customs had already been involved and that I could just pick him up.”

She took off slowly. The clutch on Winston’s pick-up was a bit suspect but once she was moving it all seemed ok. She tested the brakes. They seemed fine. The road to Kingston is

beautiful. A light mist had settled in but she was soon out of it and the winding road down out of the Blue Mountains offered some wonderful views. She passed through Trelawny Parish where the road started to open up and ahead she could see the shimmering Caribbean Sea. Once Lillian got closer to Kingston the traffic started to pick up until it became a congested mess. Kingston was not like it used to be when she was a young girl. It used to be laid back and easy going, but now it was Americanized with fast food restaurants and car dealerships on each corner. She took a left onto Hope Road and passed by the Bob Marley Museum. She was hoping to skirt most of the traffic and her plan seemed to be working. Old Hope road was clear and pretty soon she found herself on Norman Manley Highway, the road that led to the airport.

Lillian found the Freight Forwarder company and after carefully putting her mask on she entered the door and found a lady behind a Perspex shield.

“I have a shipment here,” she said. “It’s a pig.”

The lady laughed. “You are here for the pig? The forklift drivers out in the warehouse have been making bacon jokes all day. I told them to knock it off because I knew that the pig was a pet. The paperwork is all set. You just need to sign here.” She pushed some paperwork under the Perspex shield. Lillian signed and dated the form.

“If you can pull your vehicle around to Bay #3, the men will meet you there. Back up to the ramp. That will be the easiest.”

Lillian jumped back into the truck, found Bay #3, and backed the truck up the ramp. The door suddenly opened and there was Jack, in his crate, on the forks of a bright yellow forklift. He looked out through the mesh and recognized Lillian. His tiny tail started to wag. “You must have been so scared my poor



boy,” Lillian said reaching her fingers through the mesh and rubbing his snout. Jack grunted and Lillian could swear that she saw him smile.

“Hey Lady you want your pig in the back of the truck right?” The forklift operator was keen to keep things moving.

“Yes please.”

AS LILLIAN GOT TO the higher elevation the mist started to roll in again. It swirled through the trees like a friendly ghost. It was this mist that made the Blue Mountains perfect for growing coffee and Lillian, not being at all biased, was sure that Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee was the best in the world.

On the way home Lillian had been thinking about how she was going to get Jack out of the crate. He weighed over two hundred pounds but she needn't have worried. Winston was still at the house visiting with her sister. Between the three of them they managed to get the crate to the ground and using a crow bar pried it open. Jack scooted forward and was suddenly out of the crate. He stood on his skinny legs surveying his new surroundings. He snorted and then took off running, returning in 30 seconds. This time Lillian was one hundred percent positive that she could see a broad smile on his face.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE CALL TO Jess's Dad had not gone well. He had not expected that it would. Harry Slattery was a self-made man and a staunch Republican. He and Joe disagreed on just about everything except that they both loved Jess. “I told you that this was a damn stupid idea,” he yelled down the phone line. “I told you that you were not experienced enough and now you have killed my daughter.” Jay thought it ironic that he had not mentioned his grandchildren but thought better than to bring it up. I am going to conduct an investigation into this and if you were any way at fault there will be some serious trouble.”

With that he hung up the phone, well to be more specific, he slammed the phone down.

A couple of days later, when Jay looked at his joint checking account with Jess, he saw that the weekly payment from her Dad had been stopped.

JAY DROVE SOUTH ON I-95 until he saw a sign for a Motel 6 and took the exit. He knew that where there was a Motel 6 that there would be a liquor store, and sure enough there was. He bought a six pack of Yuengling and a large bottle of Stoli. He checked into the Motel and flicked on the TV. The news was all Covid.

The numbers were on the rise all over the country. They showed the freezer vans in Central Park that were being used to keep the corpses cold until their next of kin could be notified. It looked like a scene out of some horror movie. Jay took a long hit on his Yuengling. He flicked the channel but NBC was also talking about Covid.

“There has been a dramatic rise in the number of Covid 19 cases,” the pretty newscaster announced. “New Orleans is now considered a ‘hot spot’ and authorities there are enforcing the lockdown.” Jay took another long hit on his Yuengling and tossed the empty bottle into the trash. He wasn’t feeling any effect and grabbed a second bottle. The beer tasted flat. Jay drank it down and threw the empty bottle into the trash. He didn’t really want to start on the Vodka so early in the day but thought, “what the fuck.” The ice machine was down the hall and he filled the bucket.

He flicked the channel and CNN was also talking about Covid. Earlier in the day the President had once again tweeted that the virus was a hoax and would soon be gone. “It will be gone as soon as the election is over.”

“Ugh what a twat,” he thought. Out of pure self flagellation he turned to Fox. The late afternoon anchor was drop dead gorgeous. Where the hell does Fox find these women?” he thought. He watched for 30 seconds and then the anchor lady didn’t seem so pretty after all. She was spewing propaganda.

“The President is rising in the polls,” she said. “His numbers are looking good for November. Joe Biden might have received a bump in the polls after receiving the nomination but now the latest poll shows that President Trump is back. Some polls show him even leading Biden in most battleground states.”

“Jeezus fuck, what a bunch of bullshit this is.” Joe flicked

the TV off and reached for the Stoli. He added ice to the plastic tumbler and filled the glass with vodka. He took a long draw and felt the alcohol hit the bottom of his gut. He knew what he was going to do. He was going to numb the pain. He wanted to put the image of his wife and children that had been playing on a loop in his head, out of his head. He could hear their screams. He could hear them calling for him. He knew how violent the impact with the ship had been. He could not get the horror of them drowning out of his head. He took another long draw on his glass of Stoli and the pain started to ease.

LILLIAN WAS GETTING more and more concerned. Jay was not responding to any of her emails. It was not that she thought that Jay was moving on past their relationship. He would at least be decent enough to email her and let her know. He was a good man, or so she thought. Her gut told her that something had happened. Maybe they had just lost power on the boat but she knew in her heart of hearts that it was something more than that.

She wandered out to the garden. Jack was snuffling around. He had already ruined her sister’s garden patch but she was Ok with it. “He’s a fine specimen of a pig,” she had said. It was almost as if Jack could understand what she was saying and he wagged his tail vigorously.

It had been years since Lillian had smoked any pot but she was anxious and knew that a joint would help, at least temporarily. She pulled out a small tin box and took a joint out of it. It was late in the afternoon and for a change there was no mist. The sky was a radiant blue. The light Trade Winds blew gently through the ferns at the edge of her sister’s property. She took a long hit on the joint holding the smoke in her lungs for a bit before exhaling slowly through her nose. She took a second

hit and felt the effect of the pot. The sky looked bluer than she had ever seen it. She was glad to be home. She was still worried about Jay.

JAY WAS WELL INTO the bottle of Stoli when he passed out. The talking heads on TV were talking crap, he was sure of it. He eased down on his bed and pulled the pillow under his head. The sweet feeling of alcoholic bliss settled in and he fell into a fitful sleep.

ZACH WAS RESTLESS. They were halfway across the Atlantic and his mind was racing. The cop had asked too many questions. For now at least he was outside of US jurisdiction but he was still bothered by what happened. 'World Navigator' was his ship. He was in command and people had died on his watch. Well not technically on his watch but if he had not been so keen to get back to Arturo things might have turned out different. Plus there was the matter of the booze. Plus there was the matter of the fact that it was his ship that had killed Jay's wife and his two kids. He was not sure why he had made such an effort to become friends with Jay. Guilt perhaps. Or was it a subconscious way to cover up what had happened?

There was a gentle knock on his door. It was Arturo. "Captain can I come in?"

"Yes." Zach wanted to say no but didn't and Arturo came into his cabin.

"Captain," he said. "Are you OK?"

"Yes why?" Zach looked at his lover and for the first time since he and Arturo started having sex he was slightly repulsed. "I'm OK. I just have a lot on my mind these days."

"It has been two weeks," Arturo said, his voice trailing off.

"I know. I am sorry Arturo."

Just then there was a call from the bridge. "Captain you need to come up here."

"I'm sorry Arturo, I have to go." Zach was relieved that he had an excuse.

He joined Hank on the bridge. There is something strange in the water. Hank had his binoculars trained on what he had first thought was just flotsam but as they got closer he saw that it was some kind of makeshift raft. There appeared to be a person on it.

"Jeeze how does this happen to me twice in the same month?" he thought. They slowed the ship and Cysar and Arturo took off in the Zodiac. Zach watched them approach the raft. Arturo looked back at the ship and gave the thumbs down. Whoever or whatever was on the raft had not fared very well.

They gathered the body into the Zodiac and gunned it back to the ship. Zach was there to help them bring the body on board. The remains were of a white male. That much they could see. He had been dead for a while, his body bloated. His blood had leaked into his body giving his skin a purple hue.

"Jeezus fuck."

"OK I don't want any part of this," Zach said. "Dump him."

"You sure?" Arturo asked.

"Yes."

Jay opened one eye. He saw the Stoli bottle and saw that most of it was gone. "Oh crap," he thought. His mouth was dry. He leaned over and grabbed a bottle of Poland Spring and took a sip. "What a mess. What the fuck." He took another sip. His head was sore but suddenly his mind was wide awake. "I need to call Lillian."

LILLIAN WAS SITTING OUTSIDE watching the pig play in the mud. She had her phone next to her when she saw a number come up on WhatsApp. She didn't recognize the number and was going to ignore it, but decided instead to answer.

"Lillian, this is Jay. I have to see you. They are all dead."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

OFFICER CHRIS PLUMMER was staring at his computer screen. He had been there for the best part of the morning. Something nagged at him. He had Googled "World Navigator" and came up with the ships registry; Monrovia. He dug a bit deeper and found that the ship had sustained some damage in 2016 after hitting something while at sea. He could not find any record of it having been repaired. This was not his usual beat but something bothered him about what Captain Zach McKlowski had said and why did it take him an hour to turn the ship around?

He called his superior, a man who went by the name of Spanky. His name was Jared Jackspanky. Officer Plummer and his fellow police officers had made fun of the name until one of them screwed up and said it out too loud in the lunch room and was put on administrative leave.

"Spanky," he said. "Can I come and see you?"

"Yes. But give me ten minutes. I need to finish filling out some forms."

Officer Plummer knocked on the door. "Come in."

He sat across the desk from his boss. "I know that this is not my beat but there is something wrong with that case of the man who was picked up out of the sea. I talked to the man who was

rescued as well as the captain of the ship. Their stories matched but I can't help feeling that there is a lot more to this. Can I spend some time on it?"

Detective Inspector Jackspanky looked at him. "Why the heck would you waste your time on this? There are druggies trashing downtown and you are want to investigate some rich white people?"

Officer Plummer looked dejected.

"OK, do what you need to do but don't waste too much time on this. Plummer's Dad had given him his first break in the force and he had a soft spot for the Officer.

JAY AND LILLIAN were watching a rerun of Breaking Bad on Netflix when the phone rang. It was another Unknown Number. "Those telemarketers," Jay said. But this time he answered.

"Hello.

"Hello is this Jay?" The line was not that good. There was an echo.

"Yes."

"This is Zach. Zach McKlowski. I am calling to see how you are doing."

"Wow Zach this is great. I am doing great. Well sort of. I am so happy to hear from you. Where are you?"

"We are currently a hundred or so miles north of Faial in the Azores. We are heading back to the Med. I was thinking of you today and hoping that you were doing ok."

"I'm ok," Jay said. "When do you get back to land and even more important, when do you get some leave? I have also been thinking of you and was hoping that you might come and visit. I have a place in Jamaica. Well it's not my place but it's a beautiful place. You saved my life and I would love to get to know you more."

He glanced over at Lillian. She was looking at him with a strange look on her face.

"Who is that?" She mouthed.

"I will call you once we get to Marseille," Zach said. "Let's make a plan."

OFFICER PLUMMER had done some digging and found that the World Navigator had been repaired but not by a licensed company. For some reason they had done the repair on the quick and cheap. It had been under the command of Zach McKlowski which he thought was an interesting bit of news. He stowed that bit of information away. You never know.

JAY AND LILLIAN were at the gate at the airport in Kingston. Everyone was masked up, socially distant of course. Jay was surprised that they were allowed to go into the airport but Jamaica was in Phase 3 of opening up. So long as everyone kept their masks on and played by all the other Covid rules things should be ok.

They were waiting for Zack who had called a couple of days earlier and told him that he had some time off and wanted to see him. He told him that had been all through the Caribbean but never to Jamaica. He said that he couldn't wait.

The door opened and Captain Zach McKlowski strode out carrying a small duffel bag. The two men bumped elbows, Covid style.

"This is my friend Lillian," Jay said. "We are staying with her sister. There is a spare room for you." Zach bumped elbows with Lillian. "I am so glad that you came," Jay said.

They drove up into the mist not saying much to each other. They were new friends who shared a special bond. At first Zach was gushing about everything but after a while he settled down

and was taking in the scenery. “They sure do have a lot of chickens in Jamaica,” he said to no-one in particular.

“Yes,” Jay replied. “Do you like spicy food?”

“Yes.”

“OK there is a little place right on the water near Port Antonio. In fact it’s in the water. Not on the water but in the water. Your feet are actually in the water. Their jerk chicken is so hot that that you need to have your feet in the water because you might explode otherwise.” Zach laughed. “Sounds like my kind of place.”

OFFICER CHRIS PLUMMER had dug up some more information about the ship. The Monrovia company where the ship was registered was just a shell company. He wasn’t sure what that all meant but stored the knowledge away. You never know.

THE DAY DAWNED MISTY and cool but soon Jay, Zach and Lillian were out of the mist heading for Port Antonio. “That coffee was amazing,” Zach said for the fifth time. Lillian was just thrilled that her friend’s rescuer was visiting. Without him the love of her life might not be alive. She had gone to bed early once they got home from the airport leaving the two men to spend some time together. She knew that it was a special friendship born out of tragedy. Early in the morning she could still hear them laughing and when she got up to make breakfast she noticed that the flagon of rum was empty.

As they descended out of the Blue Mountains Jay noticed a car behind them. He seemed awfully anxious trying to pass on blind corners and at the last minute pulling in as a car coming the other way flashed its lights. Finally he found a strait where he could pass and ripped right by them. “Stupid fuck,” Jay said. A half hour later as they drove into Port Antonio they saw the car. It

was parked near a tidy strip of sandy beach. There, under a palm tree, was the driver; fast asleep.”

“Jamaica. I love this place,” Jay thought.

Port Antonio was bustling. They drove through town to a small parking lot on the water. Lillian was in charge. This was her town. She had grown up there and knew everyone.

Jay and Zach were dozing off but she nudged them awake. “Lunch is going to be amazing. Just you wait and see.”

She had a friend ferry them across to Navy Island. It wasn’t far but there was no public transportation to get there. Navy Island was just a stones throw from the docks at Port Antonio but most of the towns’ residents had never been there. It was exclusive. It was where the islands most famous former resident Errol Flynn had lived and had hosted many wild parties.

“Today we are going to eat jerk chicken,” Lillian announced. “The salt and spice will be good for your hangovers.”

OFFICER CHRIS PLUMMER was still digging when his boss, Detective Inspector Jackspanky came into the room. “Why are you still here,” he asked.

“My wife is pissed at me,” he replied. “She says that I spend too much time working. I don’t really want to go home right now.”

“You and me both brother.”

THE RESTAURANT was built on an outcropping that allowed it to be mostly over the water. The favored guests had their seats at the end where they could dangle their feet in the water. Lillian was a favored guest. They got the end seats.

“Red Stripe or anything stronger?” the barman asked.

“These guys don’t need anything strong,” Lillian said. “They

are still marinating in last night's leftovers." Jay laughed. He had wanted to tell Zach more about Lillian and their relationship but thought it better to leave it for another time.

The waiter brought them a dish of ackee, a local fruit, and salted cod. It was delicious. The ackee had a buttery, creamy texture and a mild taste that reminded Zach of hearts of palm. It was complimented perfectly with the cod. "This is quite good," Zach said, his hangover starting to fade. It was the salt that made everything better.

Next came the jerk chicken. Lillian was secretly enjoying herself. These boys were going to suffer. This was her turf.

Zach said, "I have never had so much fun. Thank you Lillian." He took a bite of his chicken and his face almost exploded.

"Just dip your feet into water," Lillian said.

"You have to be kidding me."

"Just dip your feet into the water."

Zach was a little bit drunk but he did what he was told. Amazingly the water helped. He was enjoying himself, "But what the fuck was going on with Jay and Lillian?" He thought. "The man had just lost his wife and family and here they all were yakking it up on an island off Port Antonio in the middle of the Caribbean Sea. Jay didn't even seem to care."

Lillian took her glasses off and looked straight at Zach. "Jamaica is about love. Don't you ever forget that." She had read his mind. "Waiter please bring these boys each a Sea Cat. Sea Cat is Jamaican slang for octopus. The waiter returned with a very suspect looking drink. It was a punch made from the milky white liquid that was produced by boiling an octopus. To it was added white rum, rum cream, peanuts, molasses, Supligen, a protein supplement, and malt powder. The waiter had blended it with ice.

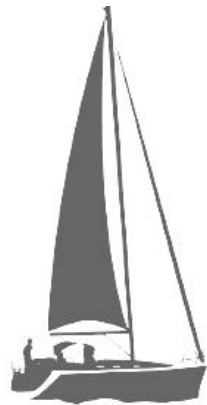
"Hmmm," Jay said. "What the heck is this?"

"Don't worry, just drink it. Here in Jamaica all the men swear it enhances their virility and cures a hangover."

Jay was suspect but decided that he was going to chug it. "Jeezus fuck that's disgusting," he said. He had managed to get it down but thought that he was going to throw up. "Your turn Zach."

Zach took a sip. It was disgusting. "OK," he said. "I can do this but I need a rum chaser." That was pretty much how the rest of the day went. When Lillian poured them back into the car they had sworn a lifelong allegiance to each other. Little did they know what the future held.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



CINNAMON GIRL

**H**ARRY SLATTERY. hired a private investigator, a shrew of a man who went by the name of Agent Axelrod. He had a small office on the corner of Boylston and Mass Ave in Boston, across from the Boston Burger Company, his favorite haunt.

“Mr. Slattery this is Agent Axelrod,” he said. I have a bit of information for you.” Jess’s Dad was in bed with an aide to Senator Becker. “Just one moment,” he said. “Give me 20 minutes and I will call you back.”

The aide left. She seemed a little miffed.

“OK what’s going on?”

“I have done some digging around and found a few things. For starters Captain McKlowski has a long history of drinking. I found records that he has been in Spaulding Rehab Hospital in Boston. It was five years ago, but...,” his voice trailed off.

“Ok what else?”

“I am not too sure about the ship owners. It seems like it’s some kind of shell company with some investors who seem to want to remain anonymous.”

“OK what do you have on my son-in-law?”

“Well not much to be perfectly honest. He seemed to have



spent much of his early adulthood as a bit of a bum. Sailing a lot. Screwing a lot. There is one instance of some Haitian lady living in Dorchester that was seeking child support for a child that she claimed was his but she was reluctant to take a paternity test and so the case was dropped.”

“Yes I know about that,” Slattery said angrily. “I had to settle. I didn’t want Jess to know. What else”

“That’s it for now sir.”

“Thank you Axelrod.”

CAPTAIN ZACH McKLOWSKI landed at Marseille Provence Airport. He had really enjoyed his trip to Jamaica and solidified his friendship with Jay but was not ready to get back on the ship just yet. For starters, and he was not sure why, but he was starting to find Arturo a little repulsive. He loved the sex but it was the quirky things that Arturo always wanted to do that turned him off. He was not sure how to deal with it.

The UBER dropped him a block from the port. There was a dive bar that he liked to go to when he was in town. A sailors bar with cheap drinks and even cheaper sex. “Un petit pastis s’il vous plait,” he said to the bar lady who had her back to him. Monique turned around. “My Captain,” she said. “My Captain, you are back in town.”

“Yes, just for a few days.”

She filled a glass with ice, another with pastis and placed them both on the bar. Then she filled a carafe with water. “Enjoy.”

Zach took a couple of cubes of ice and tossed them in the tumbler. The tumbler was one of the reasons he loved this place. No fancy engraved glasses. Just a heavy glass tumbler with some chips that spoke of many good times. He poured in some pastis and a little water. Not too much. He wanted the first sip to be

strong. There had not been any bar service on the plane. Covid restrictions. He was thirsty.

“I knew that your ship was in town.” Monique said. “Some of your boys were in here the other night. I asked them where you were and they told me that you had some leave.”

Monique placed a small bowl with olives in front of him. They were Nicoise, Zach’s favorite. They grew abundantly in the south of France.

“Yes I went to see an old friend. His wife and children recently passed away. I went to offer him some comfort.”

“Vous ktes un homme bon. You are a good man Captain.” Zach was not so sure about that. Monique left to tend to the other end of the bar and Zack proceeded to get drunk. The pastis hit his gut and he could feel the burn. It felt good. He poured another and downed it. Soon the room had a rosy hue. Life was good. Well except for the accident; and Arturo. How was he going to tell Arturo without him exploding? Zach had seen that side of him. “You have a Mexican temper,” he had told him but Arturo had replied that there was nothing Mexican about his temper. “I am just pissed off.”

They closed the doors to the regular public around midnight so that the locals, Zach included as one of them, could get really drunk. Drinks were half price. Zach’s eyelids were drooping. He had started the day in Miami where he had a layover. Plus a layover in Paris. His flight had been delayed three hours out of Paris. The airlines were all screwed up due to Covid.

“Un de plus?” It was Monique. “Yea sure why not? I am pretty fucked up already. How much difference could one more make?”

The soft early light was starting to filter on the cobblestones as Zach made his way back to the ship. The city was coming alive, slowly, French style. The seagulls were the first to herald

the dawn. Their sharp calls hurt his head. He leaned against the Customs building to steady himself.

“Fuck.”

Zach knew that he was going to have to tell Arturo. He felt sick. He had witnessed some kind of love between Jay and Lillian and he was starting to crave a partner and a life that was more normal than months on a ship with a bunch of sailors from some shithole countries. “Well France is not a shithole country,” he thought. “At least they have good food.”

AGENT AXELROD called Harry Slattery. “I have some more information about the ship that hit the boat.”

“Yes.”

“It was involved in an accident a few years ago and was repaired by a shipyard in the Bahamas. The repair was done on the quiet. No invoice, no Certificate of Seaworthiness.

“So what the fuck does that have to do with anything?” Slattery was a man who wanted answers and he wanted them right away.

“I am not sure Sir. It’s all pieces of a big puzzle. I will call you when I have more information.”

“OK.”

THE CARGO WAS LOADED and World Navigator was scheduled to leave port early the next morning. Arturo had sensed the hangover and not said much to his Captain all day. Zach was in a black mood. He had received an email from Officer Plummer stating that the investigation into the accident was continuing and requesting his full cooperation.

Later that night there was a knock on his door. “Captain it’s me, Arturo.” Zach pretended to not hear and pulled the sheets

over his head. “Captain I need to see you. Can I come in?”

“Yes.”

Arturo sat on the bed. “The boys, you know, they are talking.”

“What do you mean Arturo?”

“They are talking about that night.”

“What night? What do you mean?”

“They all heard the bang.”

“There was no bang. Nothing happened, you know that.”

“Si Captain, but you know and I know that there was a boat involved. We ran over a boat. Some of the crew got an email from a police person telling them that they were going to be involved in some kind of investigation and could face trouble when they came back to America.”

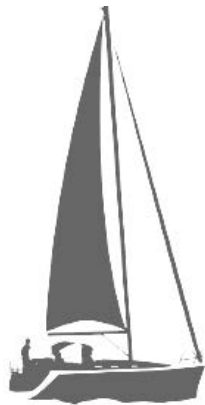
“That’s just bullshit Arturo. You know it. There was nothing. Get out of here. I need to sleep.”

“But Captain I have not seen you for a week. Can I stay for a little while?”

“Arturo fuck off. I am not interested. Get out of my cabin now and tell the crew not to answer any of those emails.”

“Si Captain, but they already have.”

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



CINNAMON GIRL

**T**HREE MONTHS AFTER Zach had assumed command of World Navigator they were steaming toward New York. Zach had finished first in his class at Maine Maritime but he was finding his duty as Captain a little overwhelming. He was a good book person. He was actually a good people person too but he was struggling with the responsibility. Most days were good but some days he felt a little overwhelmed. And that was when the drinking started. Not a lot. Just a hit from the brandy bottle every now and then. He knew that he had a problem when he had to hide it. There were bottles under his bunk. Bottles behind the books on the bridge. Anywhere he could think of where the crew would not see them. Plus he stocked up on mints.

They were getting close to Bermuda when they hit the reef. Zach was on watch. Hank below asleep. It was just a glancing blow. The crew felt it too but no one said a word. Not even Hank. There was no water coming in, thankfully. Zach panicked not sure what to do. He took another hit on the bottle to calm his nerves.

“Arturo can you come to the bridge please.” Arturo had just joined the ship and was young and loving his new life. He was away from his crazy family in Mexico. “Yes Captain.”

“I am a little worried about what happened last night off Bermuda. Are the crew talking?”

“Not so much.”

“OK.”

They were still on a course for New York. Arturo turned to leave but Zach said, “Stay Arturo, I need some company.”

“Yes Captain.”

“I think that the stress of this job is getting to me. I should never have come that close to Bermuda. The routing software had me two miles offshore. Ugh I don’t know, I am not sure what the bosses are going to say.”

Arturo came closer. He was torn between his duty serving under his Captain but his Captain smelled great.

“Captain, maybe I can help.”

Zach looked at him. He was small, brown and in that moment; beautiful. “Come here Arturo,” he said, his voice slightly husky. “Arturo I need you tonight.” That was all he said and later that night Arturo came to his cabin.

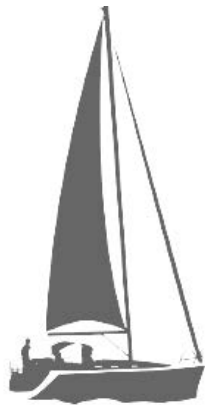
THE BOSSES HAD SUGGESTED a shipyard in Grand Bahama. They didn’t want insurance to look too closely at things. “Just have them look at the damage and let us know.” Zach was relieved. He was sure that he would lose his job because of his carelessness. He was a little unsure why the bosses were being so secretive about it all but it was none of his business. ‘If you don’t ask any questions you can’t get told any lies’ was how he liked to see things.

Grand Bahama Shipyard did a thorough survey. The ship was damaged but not too bad. Their welding team was in there the next morning and a few braces were added. There was an area where the hull was dented and they dealt with that. Not too bad.

Zach was relieved and a little surprised when he was told “everything had been taken care of.” His Maine Maritime training had not prepared him for this kind of thing. He went along with it all. This was his first job as Captain after all.

ARTURO FELL IN LOVE with Zach. It was the first time since leaving Mexico that he found a place he could call home. The ship, his friends and, secretly, his private access to the Captain. He loved life on the ship and he especially loved it when the Captain called on him. The ship was a no judgment zone. No scorn for his feelings. All the crew had issues. Françoise, the French cook, had once told him that she had loved a much older man. “He was so passionate. Such a man,” she said. “Yes his nose was big and his dick was small but he had, well. ‘E’nergie.’”

## CHAPTER NINETEEN



CINNAMON GIRL

**B**ROOKS DINTWA was a petty thief. He grew up barefoot in the Okavango Delta in Botswana and made his living, if you can call it that, from robbing his neighbors and ripping off tourists. He was quick, smart, and felt no remorse. His favorite was currency exchange on the streets of Maun. Tourists, American's especially, were so gullible. Plus they were cheap despite the strength of the almighty US dollar. He knew that when people went on vacation they often let their guard down. They were tense all year round but when away from the traffic and jams of life they liked to relax a little.

Brooks had been working the area around the supermarket. A couple of pretty longhaired blonds came by the market everyday to shop. They were young and loving life. Brooks made eye contact but acted as if he had not noticed them. The girls were from Alabama and were trying to make as if they loved every black person on earth; over compensating. The following day they smiled at Brooks. He moved in.

"Hi ladies," he said flashing a smile. "How are things? Are you enjoying Maun?"

"We absolutely love it."

"Really?"

“Yes we love the people. We love the food, everything.”

“That’s great. Have you tried out the Akacia Cafñ? My sister works there. Thalitha, my younger sister. Why don’t you try the place out sometime?”

“I am hungry now,” the taller of the two said. “Let’s go there now.”

“That’s great,” Brooks said. “Come with me.” The two girls followed him. The road was dusty and busy but it was Africa. They had come looking for adventure and they had found it.

Akacia Cafñ served local favorites. Sticky pork ribs, black rice and because it was Thirsty Thursday, the drinks were half priced. The girls ordered the ribs with a side of vetkoek, an African fried dough stuffed with curry.

Brooks and the two girls were at a table under an acacia tree. Thalitha served them giving Brooks a quick glance. He nodded. She poured the drinks extra strong and soon they were loving the African bush more than ever.

“What are your plans from here?” Brooks asked.

“We are going back to Johannesburg tomorrow.”

“Ugh that’s a shame. There is so much to see here. Plus the airlines rip you off these days. Do you already have your tickets?”

“No we were just going to the Travel Agent to buy them. Some other girls told us that it was cheaper to buy the tickets locally than online.”

Yes that’s correct. You have Pula?” Brooks was moving in.

“No we have American dollars.”

“Ah, OK. I can help. You know that you can get a better exchange rate on the streets than at the banks?”

“Really?”

“Yes for sure. Let me see.” He pulled out his iPhone and flipped the screen. The current rate is one US\$ to 11.45 Botswana Pula. What a rip-off.”

“You can do better than that on the street?”

“Let me see. I have a rich friend who always needs dollars. I will call him.”

Brooks left the table and pretended to make a call. Thalitha came over.

“Another drink, it’s on the house?”

“Thank you.”

Brooks came back. “OK this is your lucky day. My friend will give you 14 Pula. How much do you want to exchange?”

“We have five hundred dollars.”

“OK just wait here. I will go and get the money.” Brooks left. Thalitha came back with the drinks. “Here you go. Amarula. It’s a local drink made from the Amarula berry.” It was a creamy drink served over ice.

“It’s delicious.”

Brooks came back a half hour later. The girls were drunk. “OK,” he said. “Actually my friend said that he could do 14.5 Pula. How about that?” He took out his iPhone and hit the calculator app. “\$500 times 14.5 is 7,250 Pula.” He showed the girls his phone. Thalitha came with another round. The girls handed over their money and Brooks handed them a thick wad of Botswana Pula. “Just stick the money in your bag for now,” he said. “The restaurant is OK with this but just in case some of the other guests see this. They may complain.”

“OK.”

The hot African sun beat down. The girls were more than a

little pleasantly drunk. “Hey do you want meet up later and I can show you where a herd of elephants come each evening. Only the locals know where it is.”

“Yes. That would be awesome. We need to go to the Travel Agent first. Can we meet back here at four?”

“Yes.” Brooks said, “I will take care of the tab don’t you worry.”

The girls left. They were loving Africa. They found the Travel Agent and organized their flights. The Travel Agent smiled at them. That will be 6,220 Pula please. The taller girl took the wad of cash out of her bag. The outside note was a blue one for five hundred Pula. She slipped the rubber band off and stared with disbelief. The rest of the notes were for five Pula each.”

The girls ran back to the Akacia Caf . They were out of breath when they got there. They saw Thalitha. “Where’s Brooks? We need to see Brooks.”

“I dunno who you are talking about,” Thalitha said. “I don’t know Brooks and I have never seen you before.”

A COUPLE OF MONTHS later Brooks tried the same on a well dressed English Man. The man was looking to exchange close to four thousand pounds. Brooks almost had the deal down when the man grabbed him by the wrist. “You are fucking with me,” he said. Brooks tried to act startled.

“What do you mean?”

“I know you,” the man said, smiling slightly. “I know your kind. You are trying to rip me off, right?”

“No sir, not at all.”

“Ok,” the man sneered. “Here is the deal. I have an offer for you.” He released his grip on Brooks’ wrist. “I am a businessman.

I have made a good living seeking out other businessmen. I sense you are a businessman. I want you to come and work for me.”

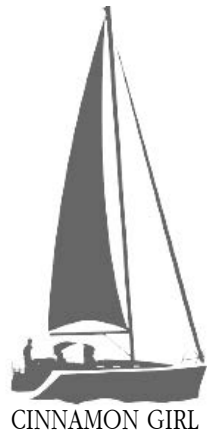
TWO MONTHS LATER Brooks was in London. A nice lady had paid his airfare and he had checked into a swank hotel, already paid upfront for a week. He was due to meet the businessman in a pub across from Harrods. Brooks had borrowed some clothes from his best friend Thuto. He looked fairly decent.

The businessman was already at his table and the waiter showed him over. “Mr. Brooks it’s nice to see you.” The businessman rose to shake his hand. “Sit and let’s talk.”

At the end of the four course meal Brooks was fully onboard. This was a business that he knew he could grow into. Child sex trafficking. “Thank you Sir.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY

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**W**ORLD NAVIGATOR was due to dock in Newport News in the next 12 hours. Captain Zach McKlowski was feeling uneasy. There had been some back and forth emails with Officer Plummer. He had requested a meeting as soon as was convenient.

They were barely tied up when Zach's phone rang. It was Plummer. "Can you come down to the station at eight tomorrow morning?"

"Sure."

Zach showed up at the Police Precinct on schedule and was led into a conference room. Plummer rose to shake his hand. "Mr. McKlowski this the Lieutenant Colonel Jackspanky. He's my boss." Zach shook his hand.

"Thank you for coming. This is just routine you know. We just have a few questions."

Zach leaned forward as if eager to get the bottom of things. "There was an accident at sea the night before you found Mr. Hendriks floating and rescued him. Some of your crew told me that they had heard a loud bang and they thought that your ship might have hit something. To be clear none of them were sure. Is there something that you are not telling us? There are three people that lost their lives that night."

Zach tried to appear calm. "No Sir, I have no idea what you



are talking about. As I told you, I saw what I thought was a body floating in the water and when we returned a couple of hours later we found Mr. Hendriks.”

“OK. I have no proof - yet - but Mr. Hendriks’ yacht was hit by a ship. He told me so. I have no proof, as I said, but I am starting to suspect that it might have been your ship.”

“That can’t possibly be so,” Zach said.

“Maybe. I have a few more questions for you. Do you know who the owners of your ship are?”

“No, not really. My interview was with a retired Navy Captain. I can’t remember his name. He was the only one that I dealt with face to face. The rest is through the company. I get my paycheck and a little budget through World Navigator Holdings and run the ship on that money plus some additional money for expenses. It has been the same for a number of years. The company handles the rest. The crews’ pay, the maintenance, etc, as well as the schedule. I just take the ship where I am told to take it and I collect a paycheck each month. A working stiff if you like.” Zach smiled. He noticed that neither Plummer or his boss Jackspanky smiled back. ‘What the fuck kind of name is Jackspanky anyway?’ He thought.

“OK.”

Zach leaned back in his seat. They didn’t have anything on him. “Do you have a drinking problem Mr. McKlowski?”

“No. Why do you ask?” He knew it before the words came out of his mouth. He should have just stopped at no. The ‘why do you ask’ put him on the defensive.

“Just asking. Some of your crew seem to think that you might drink a little more than might be expected of a ship’s Captain.”

Zach tried to look indignant. “What crew told you that?”

“I am not at the liberty to say, but I do have one more question. It

seems that your ship suffered some damage a few years ago but there is no record of any repair and no Certificate of Seaworthiness issued.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“OK Mr. McKlowski. Thank you. You are free to leave.”

ZACH WENT BACK to the ship and sat on the bridge. He watched the cranes offload the containers. He was a little unnerved by the meeting. That bloody cop knew more than he was letting on. Things had not been going very good for him recently. Arturo was not only pissed that he had broken up with him but had hinted that he might make some trouble for him. “Fucking Mexican fuck,” he thought. He had wanted to fire him but he knew that he needed a good reason to do so and he also knew that Arturo knew some things that Zach wished he didn’t know. Like the body that they had dumped, for example. And the night that he had let two of his crew go ashore illegally.

He decided to give Jay a call. His friend picked up right away. He sounded happy. “Me and Lillian are shopping in Port Antonio,” he said. “She says that she can’t have enough dresses so we are buying more for her.” They talked for a few minutes and then hung up.

“What the fuck?” Zach leaned back in his Recaro seat. “The man just lost his family and he is still in Jamaica shopping. With Lillian.”

WORLD NAVIGATOR set sail the following day. They would dock at The Port of New York where they were scheduled to pick up a load of containers before leaving to sail back to France. Zach was anxious to get out of the States. There was a gnawing feeling in his gut and there was no longer Arturo to help him with the stress. “Fucking Mexican,” he thought. He wondered if Arturo was

the one who had told the police about the yacht they had hit. He didn't have to think about it for very long. No sooner than the ship was alongside the police came on board.

"Captain McKlowski," the Italian cop said coming straight to the point. "We have some information that your ship might have hit a yacht just south of Cape Hatteras. Do you know anything about this?"

"No."

"Hmmm, OK," the cop said. "How about this. Earlier this year some of your crew members might have gone ashore illegally here in New York." Zach shifted to the other foot. "I have no idea what you are talking about."

"One of your crew told the police in Newport News that you had let them go ashore before the ship had actually cleared Customs and Immigration."

"I have no idea what you are talking about." Zach tried to act indignant. "No fucking clue."

The officer left. Zach reached for his briefcase. He had been trying to white-knuckle it on the booze but this bit of news had him rattled. He found the fifth of brandy and knocked back most of it in the first gulp.

World Navigator set sail the following day.

## CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

**B**ROOKS DINTWA seemed to have a knack for the business. He quickly found out where 'the lost' in London hung out. He had a magnetic charisma about him and being black made it easier for him to befriend the kids. He lured them with the prospect of food and shelter. He also promised some money. Many of the kids were Syrian refugees. They had traveled in groups crossing from Syria to Turkey by boat and then overland. Many had lost their parents along the way but with the help of locals some of them made it to the port city of Calais on France's north coast. They were allowed to cross to Dover where they were held. Britain was in the middle of Brexit negotiations and some kids slipped through the cracks. They made their way to London where the lure of some kind of freedom was strong. Plus they were starving; and undocumented.

Brooks would get them to join him with a promise of a good job and some food. It was easy. The kids were desperate. The Bosses owned a number of tenement buildings in Hackney, a run down area north of the City of London. They would be housed there but it came at a price. The kids were turned over to the sex industry. They had no choice. They were undocumented and had nowhere else to go. As the war in Syria raged the Boss' business boomed. It was all cash and

they were nervous about where to stash the money. Monrovia seemed like a good option and that was how they got into the shipping business.

JAY FELT ENORMOUS GUILT about losing his family. He had found some solace in the arms of Lillian but even her lovely bosom and sweet smelling skin was not enough. He kept getting calls from an obnoxious investigator that his father-in-law had hired. Fortunately he had kept his US cell number and he didn't think that the investigator could know that he was in Jamaica. He was evasive playing the mourning husband card, perhaps a little too often.

"SIR," AGENT AXELROD SAID, "Your son-in-law has been living in Jamaica since the accident.

"Who the fuck with?" Harry Slattery was more than a little annoyed. He thought that he might have to make a call to the State Department and have his friend Mike Pompeo get involved.

"I am not sure Sir. I put a tracer on his phone and he has been in Jamaica somewhere between Port Antonio, which is a small town on the south east corner of Jamaica, and Kingston which is on the south side."

"Yes I fucking know where Kingston is."

"The cell service is not very good in the Blue Mountains so we are not 100% sure exactly where he has been living."

"OK Axelrod let me know if you find out more." Slattery hung up. "The fucker." He turned his attention back to Senator Becker's aide. "Come here Baby," he said.

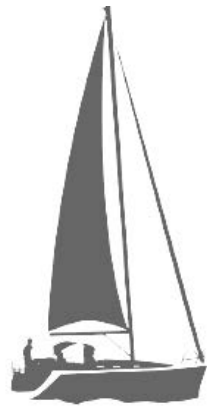
Arturo was furious. He not only didn't have access to the Captain

anymore but he no longer had access to his lover. Arturo knew rage. He had managed to keep his rage in check all those Sundays when his Papa would get drunk and the Padre would rail against fags. Zach had cut him out without offering any explanation. "Put a," he thought. "Fucking whore." He had asked for some shore leave in Newport News and Zach had been more than happy to grant it. The less he saw of Arturo the better.

Arturo had stopped by the police station and had a chat with Officer Plummer. "Well that's interesting," the officer said. "Can any of the crew back up your story?"

"Si, my friend Cesar. And there is one thing more that you need to know."

## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO



CINNAMON GIRL

“WHAT?” HARRY SLATTERY yelled into the phone. “You are telling me that he is living with some Jamaican lady? In Jamaica?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Jeezus Fucking H Christ on a Crutch. I am going to kill the bastard. He killed my daughter and I am going to kill him.”

“Yes Sir, but that might get you into some trouble. I have a better idea.”

“It had better be a good idea because I am beyond pissed.” There had not even been any kind of memorial service for his daughter. It was unthinkable. He seemed to have never once given thought to the fact that he had also lost two grandchildren.

“What’s your idea?”

“Your daughter’s family apparently has a pet pig. The pig is also living in Jamaica with them. I had one of my friends from Ocho Rios find out where they were living and staked out the place. The pig is definitely there with them.

“That fucking smelly pile of dirt?” Harry Slattery hated the pig. He hated all animals. He could not understand why his

daughter loved animals. He could definitely not understand how his daughter could love a pig. "So what about the pig?"

"I dunno," Axelrod offered. "If we kill the pig it may be a way of sending your son-in-law some kind of message. "Did you ever see the movie Fatal Attraction?"

JACK WAS ENJOYING his new home in Jamaica. There were no fences to keep him from strolling off but he often got lost and neighbors would have to guide him back home. He also had a friend. The neighbors down the street also had a pet pig and Jack would visit occasionally. There were some herbs in the garden that he particularly loved. They were plentiful and he loved to lay in them, roll around in them and get their oil all over his body. He would lick the oil off and his mind would start to wander; to a happy pig place.

"Jack get out of the crop," Lillian yelled at him. "She was mad but Jack could tell that she was not that mad. "Go. Shoo." Jack sauntered off, his stick thin legs barely capable of holding up two hundred pounds of stoned bacon.

ZACH FIRED ARTURO AND CEZAR the moment they docked in Marseille. Both men left the boat without incident. Căsar flew to London. Arturo flew to the US, Newport News to be exact. He made an appointment with Officer Chris Plummer.

ZACH WANTED AN EARLY DINNER and found his way to the dive bar. Monique was not in yet but that was OK. He ordered a carafe of the house vin rouge. Surprisingly, for an American he had a good palate. "Escargots s'il vous plaot." The young waiter bought him a plate of snails steaming with garlic. Zach didn't recognize him. He must be new. He gulped down the escargot, mopping

up the garlic butter with the hard crust bread that he had been offered. Next was a dish of steak tartare with a raw egg yolk balancing perfectly on top. Zach ordered another carafe of red. He made sure to brush his hand up against the waiters hand to see if there was a reaction. Nothing.

The sun was starting to set and the low glow reflected perfectly off the old fort. Marseille was such a beautiful city. Zach felt the glow of the red wine rise. He poured himself another glass.

"Bonsoir." It was Monique. She sat for a few moments making idle chatter before heading to her station behind the bar. Zach was feeling content. He had dealt with Arturo and got a two-for-one. Căsar was gone too. Replacement crew were easy to find.

"Monsieur," he gestured to the waiter. "Une assiette de cuisses de grenouilles s'il vous plaot."

"Oui Monsieur." The waiter came back with a plate piled high with frogs legs. The side was simple. Just some melted butter with garlic and parsley. This time the waiter brushed his hand; ever so slightly.

Zach was stuffed but wanted dessert. Creme brulle. The waiter, whose name by now he knew was Christophe, made an elaborate display of serving him. Christophe said, "I get off at ten. My apartment is close by."

ARTURO GOT HIMSELF a Day's Inn near the airport. He was still upset at being rejected and also for being fired. He had a meeting with Office Chris Plummer first thing in the morning. He went to bed early feeling the jet lag. The jet lag also had him up early. He showered and was at the Police Precinct before eight. A pretty police officer showed him in.

"So are you sure that the person was dead?" Officer Plummer asked. "I mean could the man have just been unconscious?"

“Si, I think so. I think that he was dead.”

“Are you 100% sure?”

“No.”

Arturo was at the station for an hour and left after making sure that they also had Cesar’s contact information. “Ese hijo de puta pagaró,” he said to himself as the UBER rolled up. “That fucker is going to pay.”

THE BOSSES WERE HAPPY with Zach. The ship was making money and the Captain was not making any waves. Just the way they liked it. They gave him a pay raise but Zach was uneasy about it. The raise came with a years contract and he wanted to explore some other options. He was looking for something that would mean more time on land where perhaps he could find a meaningful relationship.

ARTURO LOOKED at the number that Officer Plummer had given him. His cell phone was on a Mexican cell plan but decided to try and call via WhatsApp.

“Hello, hello is this Agent Axelrod?”

“Yes.”

“Ok good I was given your number by Officer Plummer in Virginia Beach. I think that we might have something in common. Can we talk?”

Arturo laid out what he thought had happened that night. The crew had heard a loud bang. The Captain thought that he had seen some kind of boat being dragged by the ship. The Captain was drunk. He was always drunk. Arturo was not sure what kind of boat it was because he had not actually seen it himself.

“That’s very interesting. Thank you.” He hung up after taking Arturo’s contact information. “I will be in touch.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

ARTURO WAS JUST ABOUT to leave the Days Inn when the phone rang. It was Agent Axelrod. “So I presume that right now you don’t have any work. Do you want a small job?”

“Si.”

“OK, and what about your friend Cesar. Does he need some money?”

“Si.”

“OK, listen I have a job for you both.” Agent Axelrod outlined a plan. There would be pre-paid tickets waiting for them at the airport. Arturo in Newport News and Cesar in Long Beach where he had stopped off to see an old friend on his way back to Mexico. The plan was for them both to meet in Montego Bay. He would outline the job in an email.

MR. SLATTERY had agreed to the plan. He wanted to send his sticking rotten son-in-law a message. He was not to be fucked with. He wired money right away. “Make sure that it’s not pretty.”

Arturo was sitting outside a cafe in Montego Bay. Jamaica was still in Phase 3 and there was no inside dining but it suited him. He liked the cool breeze outside. Preferred it to air conditioning. He was waiting for Cesar whose flight would land later in the day.

He was not too sure whose pig it was but it didn't matter. His rage was still up and if the pig had to pay, the pig would pay. Cesar joined him just as the sun was setting. They would drive the coast road to Port Antonio in the morning and then make a plan.

The road from Montego Bay to Port Antonio is beautiful. Most if it runs parallel to the ocean and every now and then they saw strips of perfectly perfect beaches with kids surfing and adults laughing. Jamaica, what a place?

They checked into an AirBnB in the center of town. The place was bustling. The air was heavy with the smell of jerk and pot. "So what do you think?" Arturo asked. "How are we going to do it?"

"Not sure Mi Amigo."

"The Boss says that there will be a bonus if it's a really bad way to go. Poor pig."

"Don't you start getting all sorry for the pig now. This is a job."

"I know."

AGENT AXELROD called Jay the following morning. He came right to the point. "I represent Mr. Harry Slattery." There was a long pause. "OK."

"Mr. Slattery is very unhappy with you."

"OK." Lillian shot him a sideways glance.

"He wants you to know that he is very unhappy that you killed his daughter."

"OK so who the fuck are you?" Jay heard the phone click. It was a blocked number.

He told Lillian what had happened on the call. They decided to take a walk. The mist was hanging low and dripped on them as they walked down the main street in Newcastle. It was a town

over a couple of miles from where they were living and they were there on an outing when the call came in.

"You know Lillian you never met Jess's Dad but he is real piece of work. I would not be surprised if he is planning something."

"What could he possibly be planning? Do you think he even knows where you are?"

"It's impossible. Can you imagine? We are at almost at nine thousand feet in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica. How could he possibly know where we are?"

"Not sure my friend, but you told me that he was well connected."

CESAR AND ARTURO left Port Antonio early in the morning. They drove through banana plantations that seemed to go on and on. The United Fruit Company had done a real number on Jamaica, all in the quest for cheap bananas. They were soon into the foothills of the Blue Mountains, the road winding up and up. Arturo had bought a road map, smart enough to know that his Waze App would not work at the higher elevations. After a couple of hours they arrived in Newcastle. They checked into the Mount Edge Guest House. "Just one night thank you," Arturo said to the sweet lady with a lovely Jamaican lilt.

They dumped their bags on the bed and drove three miles over to the address that Agent Axelrod had given them. The road was dirt with an occasional chicken getting in their way. As they neared the property they slowed down. There were no street numbers and the Waze app wasn't working. "I think that this is it," Arturo said. They were looking at a smallholding. Some corn was growing and a small vegetable garden looked about to burst with goodness. No sign of a pig. Arturo drove the car a couple of hundred yards up the street and pulled over. They walked back to the property. Arturo had a bag with a knife and a hammer

strapped to his waist. He also had some beets and a grapefruit stuffed in the bag. He also had a rope. No sign of any pig. They were snooping around when they heard a car coming up the road. They ducked behind a thicket and the car drove right on by without seeing them. The mist dropped lower and swirled around their ankles. Good cover. Cesar and Arturo made their way up toward the house. The chickens were indignant and clucked and grumbled. No sign of the pig.

“Mi Amigo,” Cesar said. “Do you think that we have the right place?”

“Si, Shaddup.”

They were almost at the house when they heard a scuffle. And a snort. It was the pig. “OK quick.” Arturo reached into his bag and grabbed a handful of beets. Pigs have a good sense of smell but poor eyesight and in moments the pig was there looking for a meal. Arturo fed him out of his hand for a bit. The pig was hungry. For a fleeting moment Arturo was unhappy about what he was going to do but then he started to feel the rage. His Papa getting drunk. The Padre ranting on about fags. And Zach telling him that he smelled like chilies. His hand slipped into his bag. He felt the wooden handle. He had purposely chosen a knife with a long blade. The pig was scoffing the beets. He pulled out a grapefruit and handed it to the pig but the pig wasn't interested. He smelled more than dinner. The pig smelled a trap. He turned to go when Arturo lunged for him. The knife came down right on his buttocks. The pig screamed; and then ran. The knife was well embedded and Arturo was not about to let go. The pig screamed and ran trying to brush Arturo off against a tree but he held on. “Fuck Cesar I need your help,” Arturo screamed.

Cesar had a hammer in his bag. The pig was moving slowly dragging Arturo. Cesar caught up to them. He didn't want to do it but he hit the pig in the eye. He had meant to hit it in the face

but at the last minute the pig had turned away and his eye splat onto Cesar's shirt. The pig screamed. Cesar hit him again this time right between the eyes. His front legs crumbled. Cesar hit him again, and again, until Arturo was able to remove the knife. “Ok good job,” he said. “The pig is dead.”

“We need to send a message,” Arturo said. Cesar was weeping. “I have never done something like that,” he said. “I can't do any more. Mama please forgive me.”

“Shut the fuck up. You are getting paid for this. Arturo felt his rage rising. “I am going to cut this pig into pieces.” The poor pig lay in a pool of its own blood. Arturo hacked off his neck. His blade cut easily through the sinews. The bone was a bit of a challenge but his rage was close to being out of control. He hacked at it for a few minutes and the head came loose. “This will teach those fuckers,” he said. He stuck the head onto a barbed wire fence, the thick skin catching. The head hung up on the barbs, the fence sagged. Arturo hacked at the carcass. Cesar wept. “Mi Amigo what the fuck are we doing?” In the end the poor pig was cut into pieces, the blood flowed on the damp dirt. “Fucking Captain, I will teach him a lesson.” He took out his phone and took a photo. “The bloody scene was worthy of a bonus,” he thought

JAY AND LILLIAN returned from their walk. They so loved how the mist would swirl in and wrap around their ankles. It was magical. They got to the house. There were a couple of chickens kerfuffling around. “Chook chook,” Jay said handing them some meal worms. Spoiled chickens. “Do you want a rum Lillian?” Jay asked.

“Yes please.”

Jay went into the house. He was secretly glad that Lillian's sister was working late. He enjoyed the time alone with Lillian.



He poured two stiff glasses of Appletons. He added a couple of ice cubes and a splash of tonic. Not too much. He didn't want to dilute the effect.

"Here you go." He handed Lillian the glass.

"Why are you not in bed," she said. Jack came scuffling up to the deck. He rubbed his nose against Lillian looking for some food. "You silly pig, I already fed you. You need to go to bed."

## CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

"THE STUPID FUCKS, they killed the wrong pig." Harry Slattery was beside himself. Agent Axelrod had sent him some photos earlier in the day. Arturo had emailed the bloody scene in Jamaica to Axelrod hankering for a bonus, and Axelrod had forwarded them to Slattery who was immediately on the phone. "That's not the pig," he exploded. Their pet fucking pig is brown. There is a lot of blood but I clearly see that the pig that they killed is white. White as the fucking driven snow."

"Hang on Sir, let me get Arturo on the phone." He placed Slattery on hold and dialed Arturo's cell. Arturo, eager to hear if they were getting a bonus, picked up right away. "One moment Arturo I have Mr. Slattery on the other line. He wants to talk to you.

"Si this is Arturo."

"Are you fucking crazy. You killed the wrong pig. Their pig is brown and big. That little fuck you killed is white and half the size. What were you thinking?"

Arturo stumbled. He was taken aback. And slipped into Spanish. "Que? Nadie nos dijo de que color se suponía que era el cerdo."

"Speak fucking English. How am I supposed to know what you just said.

"I'm sorry," Arturo said. "No one told us what color the pig was. He was at the address that the Agent gave us and we killed it."

"Well there is no money until the right pig is dead." Slattery slammed down the phone. His wife looked at him. "The man has clearly lost the plot," she thought.

JAY AND LILLIAN were woken by a loud knocking on their door. Lillian's sister had long since left for Kingston. Jay pulled on his pants and stumbled down the stairs. It was their neighbor; frantic. "Someone killed my pig," she wailed. "Bertie, my best friend. Someone killed him and left his head on the fence."

"Jay what's going on?"

"Come downstairs Lillian. You need to hear this." He ushered his neighbor into the house and she sat at the kitchen table. Lillian wrapped a nightgown around her and joined them.

"Someone killed Bertie."

"How do you know he didn't just die?"

"They cut his head off and hung it on the fence. They also cut his body into pieces. There is blood everywhere." Lillian turned pale. "What if it was Jack?" Her words hung in the air. "Who would do this? We have to call the police."

The police came but there wasn't much that they could do. No one had seen anything. There were no fingerprints and after all it was just a pig. Winston came with his truck and helped haul Bertie away.

"NO AMIGO, I am not going to kill another pig," Cesar said. "No way Jose, not a chance."

"I can't do it all by myself," Arturo pleaded.

"No I don't care. I am going back to Mexico."

"Please you have to help me. We won't get paid until we kill the pig."

"I told you no Arturo. My Mama would no forgive me."

"OK I will kill the pig myself but you need to help me get to the house and get everything set up. Besides I have the rental. You don't have any way to get back to Montego Bay." Cesar was cornered. "OK, si but I am not killing any more pigs."

JAY AND LILLIAN sat for hours taking about what had happened. Neither of them said it out loud but they both knew that Jack was quite likely the target. "What are we going to do with Jack?" Lillian said.

"We will bring him inside after dark. I am sure that Bertie was killed after dark. Who would be so brazen to kill him in broad daylight?"

"OK."

THE FOG HAD LIFTED and the Jamaican sky was bluer than ever. Arturo had booked a second night at the Mount Edge Guest House. They were planning on going back to find the other pig once it got dark out. "I will kill the pig," Arturo said. "You just need to be close by in case something goes wrong."

"Si."

Jay was not saying anything to Lillian but he was coming up with a plan. He was sure that for some reason, and he could not think of one, that Jack had been the target. Someone was out to kill Jack. He knew Jack's routine. Jack would usually go for his meditation walk late in the afternoon. Sometimes he would visit with Bertie, sometimes not. He would usually stop by the marijuana patch for a quick roll and then return to the house

looking for food. Jay would tell Lillian that he was going for a walk, that he had something on his mind that he needed to think through. She would know that he needed to be alone.

“You go for a walk,” Lillian said. “I am going to start cooking dinner. We can eat when you get back.”

“Thanks Love.”

Jay took off down the path toward the gate. When he was out of sight of the house he doubled back and let himself into the shed. Earlier he had placed his pistol on a high shelf. He reached for it and it was still there. Now he would sit and wait. He knew in his gut that whomever killed Bertie would come back for Jack. Sure enough he saw a Hertz rental car go back and forth in front of the gate a few times. “No one ever does that,” he thought.

ARTURO AND CESAR were sure that they had the correct address this time but there was no sign of any pig. “Arturo, let’s get the fuck out of here.” Cesar’s nerves were frayed.

“No.”

They parked the car on the side of the road and walked back toward the gate. They didn’t want to seem too obvious but they had to try and see if they could see a pig anywhere. There were some chickens scratching around but no sign of a pig. It was starting to get dark and Jay wondered if Lillian had kept Jack inside and not let him go on his walk. Then he saw him, happily walking on his spindly legs, his snout sniffing the breeze, his tail wagging.

“There is the pig,” Cesar said. Jack was walking right toward them. “He’s big.”

“Si.”

Jay could see some movement in the bushes near the gate

but he was not sure if it was wind or a person. Jack walked right by the shed, toward the gate. There was no fence, just a gate. The fence had long since been hauled away. As Jack got closer to the fence he saw movement in the bushes. A man came out. He was carrying a bag slung over his shoulder. He approached Jack with something in his hand. Food. Jack was thrilled. Food. He trotted over to the man and started to eat out of his hand. Jay waited as long as he could. The man was feeding Jack. Then he saw a second man behind him. He caught a glint of something that caught the very end of the evening’s light. It was hard to see but it looked like some kind of knife. The man came closer to Jack and Jay could see that it was definitely a knife.

“Freeze.” Jay exploded out of the shed. He had the gun drawn. “Freeze,” he yelled again. The two men looked up at him, shocked. Cesar dropped the food and put his hands up. Jack kept eating. Arturo started to run. “Freeze you fucker.” Jay shot a few rounds into the air and Arturo stopped. “Freeze you fucker.” Arturo put his hands up and turned to face Jay. “We were just feeding the pig.”

“Right the fuck you were,” Jay said. “You need a knife to feed a pig? Get over here.” He pointed the gun at them moving from one to the other. “Give me the bag and throw that knife down on the ground. Now get on your hands and knees.”

Cesar and Arturo knelt. Jay grabbed the bag. There was more food in the bag, a second knife and some rope. “What do you need a rope for if you are going to feed a pig? You fuckers are so fucked. Did you kill my neighbors pig yesterday?” Cesar lied, “Arturo did, not me.”

“Callate.” Arturo scowled. “It was not us. I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“Sure you don’t.” Jay had them stand and walk toward the

house. “Don’t you fucking try and run,” he threatened. Lillian could see them walking up the path to the house. Jack, a few steps behind, his tail wagging. “These are the men who killed Bertie.” Lillian was shocked to see the men but even more shocked to see a gun in Jay’s hand. She hadn’t known about the gun.

“Call the police.” Jay used zip ties to tie the two men to the dining room chair. “Don’t you dare fucking move. Capishe?”

“Si.”

Jay didn’t want the police to know about the gun. It wasn’t registered.

The police came. They had very few questions. The Sergeant had gone to school with Lillian and that was all he needed. He loaded Cesar and Arturo in the back of his van and took off along the dirt road heading for Port Antonio with a quick stop in Newcastle to get their clothes and passports.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

**T**HE PRISON in Port Antonio was squalid. Actually it was beyond squalid. It was just a small holding cell in the corner of the police station. It was jammed full of people yelling that they were hungry and that the cell was overcrowded. Most of them were high, both male and female jammed in shoulder to shoulder. There was a small metal toilet in the corner. Arturo and Cesar were led to the cell and shoved into the mass of humanity. The cop had taken the cuffs off and he had also taken Arturo’s cell phone. The Rasta guy right next to them was high. He spat on the floor. “Where you from?” Arturo was tight lipped but Cesar couldn’t help himself.

“Mexico.” The Rasta guy spat on the floor, his wad just missing Arturo’s foot. “Mexico my ass. Where are you really from?”

“France,” Arturo chimed in. “Yes I knew it. I can tell a French person when I see one. Or two.” He laughed at his own joke. “Why are you two gentlemen in here?” Cesar shifted his feet nervously. “It’s a case of mistaken identity. They have the wrong people.” The Rasta man burst out laughing. “Ya Mon,” and all of us in here are innocent as well.” He laughed again at his own joke.

The on-duty cop had allowed Arturo a single phone call. He cuffed him and walked him over to the payphone. Luckily Arturo

knew Agent Axelrod's phone number and dialed it. The phone rang through and went to voicemail.

"Agent this is Arturo. You need to help us Man. Me and Cesar are in jail in Port Antonio. You need to get hold of the Boss man and have him pull some strings to get us out of here. You have to do it right away. We can't stay here one night. It's a terrible place." He hung up. The cop walked him back to the cell, opened the door and shoved him in. "What did he say?" Cesar asked. "Voicemail."

"Mierda."

AGENT AXELROD had seen the call come in but it was an Unknown Number and he had ignored it. He listened to the voicemail. "What the hell have those two idiots done now?" he wondered. He was not going to tell Mr. Slattery. Not yet anyway. He did a quick Google search and came up with the number of the police station in Port Antonio. He could not find any prison listed. He placed a call but the call rang out. Nothing. He waited a few minutes and then called again. This time someone picked up. "Yea Mon this is the Port Antonio Police. Who am I talking to?"

Axelrod cleared his throat. "Yes this is Agent Axelrod from the US State Department. I understand that two of my men have been arrested on the island and may be in one of your prisons. I need you to find them and I need you to release them. Their names are Arturo Hernandez and Cesar Rodriguez. They look Mexican but they are American. They work for the US State Department."

"Yea Mon we have them here. They were picked up this evening trying to kill a pig. They will see a magistrate in the morning and the magistrate will decide if they can be released. Probably have to pay some bail money. Depends on the mood of the magistrate. He has a steel plate in his head. Some days when it gets really hot the steel plate expands and the magistrate is

in a bad mood. But the forecast for tomorrow is for rain so it won't be too hot. They will probably get out." He hung up the phone. Agent Axelrod stared at the phone. "What the heck had just happened?"

CESAR AND ARTURO were arraigned in the court in Montego Bay. They had been transported there early in the morning. The beautiful coast road that they had enjoyed so much a couple of days earlier did not look that great from the back of a police wagon. Luckily they were first on the docket.

"Mr. Hernandez and Mr. Rodriguez will you please stand." The men stood. The council for the state says that you are here because you tried to kill a pig. Is that correct?"

"No your Honor that is not correct. My friend and I were there to feed the pig."

"Isn't it true that you also had a knife and some rope in your bag."

"Yes. But I can explain."

"Did you have any food in your bag?"

"Well... No."

"Save it for your trial. Your bail has been posted. You are free to leave but you may not leave the island." The judge banged his gavel. Arturo and Cesar were escorted out. "The court has your passports." They took an UBER to the hotel where they had spent their first night in Jamaica and proceeded to flatten more rum punches than was humanly possible.

JAY AND LILLIAN were still disturbed by what had happened. Something did not add up. Lillian wanted to let it go. The monsters were in prison and that was that. Jay was not so sure. His gut told

him that there was more to the story. He called the police station in Port Antonio and was told that the two men were out on bail. The police had no idea where they were but the courts had their passports and they would still be on the island. Jay was worried. They might come back for Jack. He was right. Two nights later he saw a car drive slowly past the gate. It turned around and drove back the other way. "I am just going outside to pee," he told Lillian. The gun was back on the shelf in the shed. Jay crept quietly to the shed and grabbed the gun. It felt good in his hand. He waited for a while, listening. Nothing. The car seemed to have left. His nerves were on edge. What if the men had come back for him and Lillian.

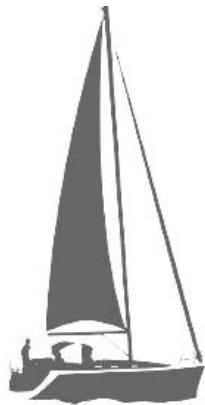
It was another clear night. Just some low scudding clouds. Jay stood in the shadow of the shed. He thought that he heard something but it was hard to hear anything. The tree frogs had started up, their melodic sound carrying on the still night air. Then he saw them. Two shadows walking slowly toward the house. There was clearly some monkey business going on. He let the shadows pass him by then started to follow. He released the safety catch on the gun. The sharp click reassured him. Fuckers. They were walking slowly, stopping every now and then. Listening. Nothing. Jay followed them. As they got closer to the house he could see Lillian silhouetted in the window. She was looking out as if to see where Jay was. The two men stopped. They had heard a crack behind them. They slunk back into the shadows standing perfectly still. It was time for Jay to make his move.

"Freeze you fuckers," he yelled. The men froze. They had already been on edge knowing that they were making a mistake and now they had been caught a second time. Jay approached with his gun drawn. "So if it isn't you two fuckers again," he said. "Get on your knees." Cesar and Arturo did as they were told. "Te dije mi amigo," Cesar muttered. "Now lie flat on the ground," Jay

ordered. "Lillian bring me some rope," he shouted. He saw her frightened face in the window. "I need some rope now. Hurry. Quick." Lillian could only find some butchers twine. "That will do. I am going to tie these pricks up and find out what's going on. This whole thing is wrong and I know that there is more to this."

Jay lashed their hands and then tied their hands to the feet which he had already lashed. Who are you motherfuckers? Who do you work for? The men said nothing. "OK maybe you will start to talk when you get hungry. Jay found some stronger rope and lashed them to the wrought iron banister that led to the front door of the house. If he had learned one thing as a sailor. If you can't tie a good knot, tie a lot of knots. Cesar and Arturo were well and truly tied up.

## CHAPTER TWENTY SIX



CINNAMON GIRL

**B**ROOKS DINTWA had quickly risen through the ranks. He was very good at his job. He soon had a very nice apartment, some jewelry and a car. A Mazda Miata that was in reasonable shape. The sex industry was booming. The Syrians were bombing their own people and the people were fleeing. The odds of making it to London were small but some were making it and Brooks was there to offer them hope. The Bosses were buying more tenements and filling them with prostitutes. What a life. A life so far from the Okavango bush. He was able to send some money home to his Mom. None for his Dad. He was lower than hippo dung as far as Brooks was concerned.

WORLD NAVIGATOR was steaming back to the United States. Zach was not happy. The trips that he had done with Arturo had been fun. Now he had no one. He was lonely. And frustrated. The brandy no longer helped. He could numb himself for a few hours but the effect eventually wore off and when he woke up he felt worse. He was not sure what to do about the contract. He had been a man of the sea since his early 20's. What the hell would he do on land?

Jay lay awake. He could hear Lillian's soft breathing beside him. Every now and then she would fart. Just a little. He could also

hear the two Mexicans wrestling with their knots. They weren't going anywhere. He was trying to piece together why anyone would want to kill Jack? Jay had no enemies, as far as he knew. Who could possibly want to kill Jack. He knew that the two Mexicans were not after Jack. They were on a job. They needed money and had jumped at the opportunity. He didn't trust them though. They had killed Bertie, he was sure of that. Sometime after midnight he fell into a fitful sleep.

HARRY SLATTERY was pissed. He had Venmo'd an additional two thousand which had been used to pay bail for the two incompetents. "How hard is it to kill a fucking pig?" His wife was on his ass and Senator Becker's aide was starting to make excuses. Tonight it had been a Zoom call that she just absolutely had to be on. "I probably won't be done until very late," she said.

IN HIS SMALL OFFICE in Newport News Officer Chris Plummer was Googling. There was a little something that niggled at him. "Who owned the ship and why was it all so secretive?" Surely the shipping business was not that complicated. But it was. He spent most nights researching the industry and when he came to work each morning he was tired. "Are you feeling OK?" Jackspanky would ask. "Do you need some time off?"

"No I'm fine."

Jack was asleep in the side bedroom. Lillian had insisted that he stay in the house for the night. She had dragged in some hay and made a bed. Jack was full from his supper of mangos and bananas and was happily asleep. His gas was worse than Lillian's.

AGENT AXELROD was pulling his hair out. His client was pissed at him. Jeeze, how could two people fuck up a job so badly? It

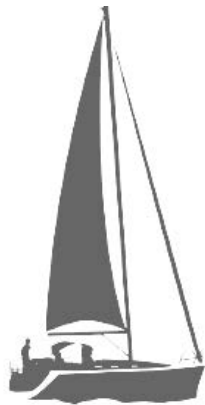
was late but he decided that he could use a stiff drink. He went across the street to the Boston Burger Company. There was only outside seating but they had heaters rigged. There was the first nip of Fall in the air. "Just a Mount Gay and tonic," he said. The waiter, wearing a mask, was happy to oblige. "Here you go sir." She giggled a little when she set the glass down.

ARTURO AND CESAR were miserable. They had not eaten in more than a day. A cold Blue Mountain mist was settling in and they were freezing. The mist clung to their ankles. Arturo started to shiver. "Mierda." He wished that he was back on the ship.

AGENT AXELROD got lucky that night. The pretty waiter kept her mask on the whole time. She was a giggler but that was ok. It had been months since Axelrod had been laid.



## CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN



CINNAMON GIRL

**T**HE TWO MEN were cold and hungry. What did it matter to them if they gave away some names? Jay untied them from the banister and they hobbled inside to the kitchen table. Lillian brewed a pot of coffee and placed two mugs in front of the men. “OK.” Jay started. “I need the truth from you both. Did you kill my neighbor’s pig?”

“No,” Arturo said. “Si,” Cesar said.

“Jeezus fuck which is it?” Jay asked. “We killed the pig,” Cesar said.

“Ok.” He turned to Arturo. “Stop this shit and you can go home. Capishe?”

“Si.” Arturo was starting to feel his rage building but knew that he would have to keep it under control. Jay said, “I know that this was just a job for you. We all need to make money. Who told you to kill the pig?” Arturo was going to object but decided to tell the truth. “A man in Boston contacted me. He said that he had a client who needed a pig killed. I asked Cesar to help.”

“Who is the man?”

“The man is Agent Axelrod. He lives in Boston. I don’t know who his client is but I got a feeling that it was someone quite important.”

“So you have no idea who the client is?”

“No.”

“So you have not had any contact with the person?”

“No.” Arturo cupped his hands on the mug of coffee trying to warm up. What a bullshit situation this was. Cesar looked at him. “Arturo is wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“The man sent us some money for expenses. It came direct from the man and not through the Agent. The upfront payment came from the Agent but the expenses came direct from the man. It was only \$200. He Venmo’d it.”

“So you have a record of the money transaction taking place?”

“Yea I guess.” Arturo wasn’t happy but he was not really in a place to argue. “Give me your phone and log into Venmo.” Arturo did as he was told. He handed his phone to Jay. Lillian poured more coffee for both men. “Do you want something to eat?” she asked.

“Si.”

Jay flipped through the Venmo app. He could see the money transfer but there was no name. Just some kind of IP address. He took a screenshot and texted it to his phone. He had a friend back in Hamilton who knew about this stuff. “Do you have any idea why you were supposed to kill the pig?”

“No we just got off the ship and I got a call from the Agent in Boston. He wanted more information about an accident that had happened a couple of months earlier. The Agent had been in touch with a police officer in Newport News asking about the accident.

“We,” he looked over at Cesar, “we had some information and I wanted to tell the police. The police must have told the Agent

because he called me and asked me to repeat what had happened. I told him about the accident. An hour or so later the Agent called me and asked if I needed a job, a quick way to make some money. I told him Si. I always need to make money. He told me that his client needed a pig killed and that the pig was in Jamaica. I didn’t ask any questions. I called Cesar and asked if he would help. But we killed the wrong pig. The pig that we were supposed to kill was your pig. I don’t know why. I didn’t ask any questions.”

“What happened at the court?”

“We were just arraigned and then they let us go. Someone had already posted bail for us. They took our passports.” Lillian brought over a plate of eggs, toast and more coffee. The men had their hands free. They were still tied to the chair but didn’t show any sign that they might try and escape. Jay left to make a call. His friend in Hamilton told him that it would be easy to trace the source of the money. Joe texted him a screenshot.

He returned to the kitchen. “So what kind of business are you in that involves killing pigs?”

“You don’t understand. Cesar and me. We are sailors. We have been working on a ship for the last few years but the Captain, for some reason, got pissed at us and we were fired. The Captain was a great guy but then he turned into a bit of a shithead. It happened almost overnight.” Jay’s cell rang. He saw on the caller ID that it was his friend Tom calling him about the Venmo.

“Hi it’s Jay.”

“Hi Jay, this is Tom. I did a quick search. It was quite easy to find out who had sent the money. It was a man by the name of Harry Slattery. He’s based in Washington. That’s about all I can get for now.... Jay, Jay are you there?”

“Yes, I am here. Sorry.” He could not believe what he had just heard. His father-in-law had put a hit out on his pig. “Thanks

Tom, I will be in touch.” He returned to the kitchen. The two men were mopping up the last of the eggs. “You know what, you can go. But I need to have your contact information. There is some strange shit going on here and I might need to talk to you again.” He untied Cesar and Arturo and they left after giving Jay the name of the guest house in Hamilton and Arturo’s cell phone number. The two Mexican’s left. Jay slumped down on a seat in the small living room. “Lillian please come in here.” She had been tidying up the kitchen. She knew immediately that there was something going on with Jay.

“Jay, what is it?”

“You are not going to believe this Lillian. I still don’t believe it myself. The man behind killing Jack is Jess’s father, my father-in-law.”

“What, that’s crazy. Why would he do such a thing?”

“I really don’t know. He never liked me and he never liked the pig but this is crazy even by his standards.

“Crazy, that’s beyond crazy. There is something wrong with that man in the head. Who hires two Mexican’s to fly to Jamaica to kill a pig? I’m sorry Jay, Jess was a nice person but this is beyond crazy.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

**W**ORLD NAVIGATOR was back in Marseille. Zach was restless. He still had not decided what to do and the ship owners were pressing him to sign the new contract. He didn’t really have anyone to talk to about his situation. He decided to pay Monique a visit.

“I don’t know what to tell you Captain,” she said. Monique had listened attentively. “It’s OK, I just needed someone to talk to. It helps me to think better when I can get it out. Thanks for listening.” Monique brought over another pastis and a second bowl of olives. “Selfishly I hope that you stay with the ship,” she said. “We love it when you are in town.”

“Merci Monique.”

Zach returned to his ship. There was an email from Officer Plummer. He asked if Zach had ever heard of Grand Bahamian Shipyard. “Fuck. How the hell did Plummer know about the Grand Bahamian Shipyard. What was he looking into? More importantly what might he find? Fuck.” He decided to go back to the bar.

“De retour si tot?” Monique said. “Back so soon?”

“Oui.” I need a bottle of red wine and some food. Steak frites. Tell the chef that...”

“Yes I know. You want your steak barely cooked and your

frites over cooked. Pas de problem.” She returned a few minutes later with a carafe of house red and a chipped glass. She was not sure why the American liked the chipped glasses but he seemed to. He always commented on them. She poured his glass half full. Take it easy Captain I can tell that there is something on your mind.”

“Oui Monique, you know me too well.”

“I do. I meant to tell you before. That boy that you slept with last time that you were in port. He left the restaurant and has gone to work in a bistro in Paris. But he called the other day. Paris is going into lockdown again and the mayor is closing all restaurants. He wants his old job back. He may be coming back next week.”

“How did you know that we slept together?” Monique put her hand on his. “It’s my job to know everything.”

“Hmmm.”

“I will be right back with your dinner.” Monique left and Zach filled his glass to the brim and then downed it. He could feel himself sliding toward the dark side. “What the fuck was that asshole Plummer after?”

They closed the bar to the public at midnight. Zach was well lit but opted to stay. Monique, s’il vous plaot. Calvados.” Monique came to his table with a full bottle of Calvados. “You are on the honor system,” she said. “Keep track of how many.”

“Merci.”

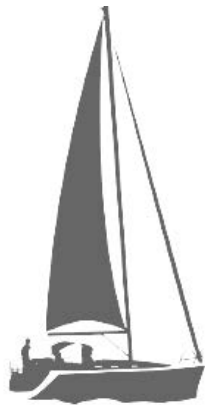
Zach poured himself a heavy hand. His mood was getting darker. He sat alone. His French was not good enough to have a conversation and the locals who stayed after midnight were mostly working class with very little or no English. Monique stopped by every now and then but she was busy. Around three in the

morning Zach decided that he had had enough, well more than enough if he was to be honest. He settled his bill with Monique. He told her that he had had five Calvados but he wasn’t sure. It might have been six, it might have been four. It didn’t matter.

Zach left the bar and stumbled back toward the dock area. It wasn’t very well lit. He steadied himself leaning against the old Customs building. He was well and truly fucked up. He picked a target to aim for and tried to get there without falling over. Suddenly he was jumped. Three young men came at him. One had a knife. He stuck the knife in his side. “Donnez nous votre argent. Give us your money.” Zach took a swipe at the man with the knife but he was too drunk to connect. Someone hit him from behind and he fell to the ground. Someone kicked him in the ribs. Someone stuck their hand in his pocket and found his wallet. The three men then, just for the fun of it, beat the shit out of Zach. At some point he puked and that made the men crazier. They kept kicking him until he was a bloody mess. Then they took off; with his money.

The dockworkers found him just as the first fingers of light filtered through a gray dawn. They called an ambulance and Zach was transported to Edward Hospital Toulouse, the closest medical center. The emergency room was packed but because he arrived by ambulance he was treated first. His shoulder blade was broken along with four ribs, one of which had punctured his lung. There were lacerations all over his body. He had lost a lot of blood and a lot of fluid, mostly from throwing up six pastis, three carafes of house wine and, well, this was an approximation, five heavy hands of Calvados.

## CHAPTER TWENTY NINE



CINNAMON GIRL

**B**ROOKS DINTWA had a unique entrepreneurial spirit. Had he been born into a different society he could have done really well, in real estate, for example. He might have even made it up to the top job in the country, but instead he was born dirt poor in the bush in Botswana. He had done the best he could given his circumstances despite the fact that his father was an abusive drunk and drug addict. His Dad was also a part time poacher working with a gang of thugs who hacked the horns off rhino's. They would enter the park after dark knowing where the rhinos were and shoot as many as they could as quickly as they could. They would then take a hacksaw and cut the horns off. Rhino horn is just hair and keratin, a protein that is also found in human hair and fingernails. It was easy to cut through and before long they slipped back out of the park with their haul.

Once a week his Dad would drive their old truck to Maun and drop the horns off at a secret location. There clearly wasn't much money in it for the poachers because Brooks and Thalitha, along with their parents, lived in a mud hut, his mother growing what food she could from their small plot. She also raised chickens. It wasn't much but they survived. Had it not been for his fathers drinking and drug habit it might have actually been a decent childhood.

The skills that Brooks learned as a kid were serving him well as an adult. After two years in London the Bosses had put him in charge of the overall operation. Brooks had proposed expanding their business beyond sex trafficking into drugs, which was an easy move, and also into human smuggling which was not quite so easy. The need for sex workers was growing fast but there were not enough children so the natural move was to set up an operation to bring more kids into the country. The Bosses loved the idea. They already had a broad reach across the country and into Europe and knew that they could pull off human trafficking without too much trouble. They had always used one of their aces with great success. All of their clients had been filmed having sex with some of the children. Microscopic cameras had been set up all over the place and on a server in the Arizona desert there were thousands of hours of incriminating video. It was an important insurance policy for the business. Some of the clients were people in high places. Politicians, police, you name it. It seemed that it made no difference what your station in life was. If you had a proclivity toward wanting to have sex with children you would find a way and the business was in the business of offering a service that many wanted. Brooks never mentioned this to his Bosses but he had duplicated some of the videos and had a healthy side income selling them to porn sites.

Over the course of the next six months the human trafficking business was in place and starting to generate some serious money; all cash. The Bosses were buying more apartments in Hackney and more ships to launder the cash. Brooks was a good manager and once the human trafficking operation was working smoothly, he was able to integrate it with the sex trade. He was 25 and driving a brand new Tesla. Life in London was good; there was no lack of available woman and the Tesla

was a total chick magnet. He was still sending money back to his Mom and Thalitha and urging them to join him in London. His mom, Daisy, was not interested. She loved her plot of land and was happy growing corn and raising her flock of chickens. She had used some of the money that Brooks had sent her to expand her vegetable garden and was able to sell her veggies from a small farm stand at the end of their driveway. It was on an honor system. Thalitha, on the other hand, was interested in moving to London. "Let me think about it," she told Brooks. The problem was her boyfriend. They had been going steady for over a year and the boyfriend was not interested in moving to a country where the temperature dropped below 20 degrees centigrade.

LILLIAN DROVE JAY to Montego Bay. Some of his friends back in Hamilton had planned a memorial for Jess and the children. They were upset that Jay had not done anything, but Jay had been too distraught. There were no bodies to bury and the thought of what might have happened to them was more than he could bear. He shoved it all to the back of his mind and found some comfort in Lillian. Some days he could push it all the way out of his mind; other days he was overcome with guilt. Not only the guilt from taking his family on a reckless misadventure but also because of his affair with Lillian. Jay had seen Pattie at the window that evening and knew that she had known about the relationship he was having with Lillian. She had died knowing that her father had cheated on her mother. When Jay added it all up he was unable to face his friends and hold a memorial, but they had collectively insisted in a series of group WhatsApp chats and so here he was heading back to the States.

Jay had wanted to fly out of Montego Bay because he also wanted to meet with Căsar and Arturo who had taken up residence

in a cheap motel in Mo Bay. They were waiting for their court date, burning time. Jay was still pissed that they had killed his neighbor's pig but there was something that they had told him at his kitchen table that kept floating around in his brain. They had mentioned an accident at sea.

"Hey," Jay said when the two men joined him and Lillian at a coffee shop. They were sitting outside, masks on, socially distant. "Si. Encantado de verte, Nice to see you."

"Coffee?"

"Si, gracias."

"How are things?"

"Not so bad. We need to get back to Mexico and find work. Our lawyer says that the case will be dismissed but we still have to stay until the court date which is early next week." The men talked for a while then Jay got to the point.

"You told me that you were in touch with the Police in Newport News about some kind of accident that took place at sea.

"Si."

"When was that?" Arturo knew exactly what day the accident had happened. "It was September 12. In the early morning."

"Where did this happen?"

"We were heading for the Chesapeake and we hit something. The Captain thought that it might have been a sailboat. I didn't see anything and neither did Cesar but the Captain told us that he had seen a sailboat caught up on one of the lifeboats and was being dragged by the ship, but when I looked there was nothing there."

"Hmmm." Jay looked at Lillian. She said, "we had better get going. We should get to the airport early. You never know with Covid. The airport may be full or it may be empty. The men

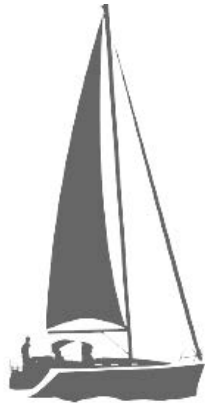
exchanged greetings and Jay and Lillian left. They drove through the cobblestone streets past Sam Sharpe Square. "This place used to be called Charles Square," Lillian offered, "but was renamed in honor of Sam Sharpe. He was an anti-slavery campaigner. Jay?"

Jay had been preoccupied and lost in his thoughts. "Sorry Lillian, please say that again." Lillian repeated what she had said. They bounced along the cobblestones.

"Interesting."

"Jay is everything OK."

"Yes, everything is fine Lillian, I just have a lot on my mind." They pulled into the parking area at Sangster International airport. Jay had told Lillian that it would be fine to drop him off but she had insisted that she come in. The airport was empty and Jay was able to check-in and clear Customs without any problem. He had said goodbye to Lillian and was happy to be on his own. He had a lot to process. Not only what he had heard from Cesar and Arturo but also it had been three months since he had lost his wife and his beautiful children. He had taken up with Lillian as a way to try and forget the nightmare of that night at sea but he was starting to realize that he needed time to grieve. He also needed to make an important phone call but that could wait until he was in Miami.



CINNAMON GIRL

## THIRTY

**D**ETEKTIVE CHRIS PLUMMER had been digging. He was becoming obsessed with the case. He had a pretty good idea of things, but there was some underlying story that had him puzzled. It was as if one hand didn't know what the other was doing. It might not be anything sinister, but it sure was puzzling. He was pretty sure that Zach McKlowski knew that he had hit a yacht and that Jay Hendriks, the man that he rescued, was the owner of the yacht. He was not sure that Jay knew that the man who had rescued him was also the man in command of the ship that had plowed over his yacht and killed his wife and children. In his communication with both men it seemed that Zach was aware of his mistake and of what had happened, but he was not coming close to admitting it. Plus there was something suspicious about the ship. It had been repaired in the Bahamas after some kind of accident at sea but there was no record of the repair having been done and no Certificate of Seaworthiness having been provided.

Plummer was in regular touch with Agent Axelrod, or to be more specific Agent Axelrod was in touch with him almost on a daily basis. He had a client who was trying to get to the bottom of what had happened that night at sea when his daughter died. There was some monkey business going on, the client was sure



of it. On the happy side of things Agent Axelrod and the giggler were starting to become an item. She had her own place but Axelrod was starting to imagine a time when she might move in with him. Sure the romance was new but Axelrod had made a successful career as an investigator by trusting his gut and he trusted his gut on this one.

JAY LANDED IN MIAMI. He was happy that JetBlue had a bar service and he had made himself available. It was only a short flight but he had managed to pound down three beers. He knew that he was going to need to be well fortified if he was going to make the phone call. He put a number blocker on his phone and dialed. "Law Offices of Slattery and Simon," the pleasant voice on the other end of the said, "may I ask who's calling?"

"Yes, may I speak to Mr. Slattery?"

"Uh yes, I think so, I need to check and see if he is available. Who is calling please."

"It doesn't matter."

"One moment." Jay was put on hold and some awful elevator music came on. Moments later the pleasant voice was back. "Mr. Slattery needs to know who is calling before he will take the call."

"Tell him two words. Cinnamon Girl." There was a moment of silence before the elevator music came back on again. Jay heard the phone click. "Yes Slattery here who am I talking to." Jay felt his gut constrict. It had been like that since the first day that he had met Jess's Dad. The man commanded a presence and not just a little bit of fear, but a picture of Lillian's neighbor's pig was in his mind and he steeled himself.

"You lousy fucking fuck," he said. "You tried to have my pig killed."

"Who is this?"

"You know exactly who this is. I don't know how someone like you could have produced such a beautiful daughter. You are a pile of shit. My pig is still alive but you are dead to me." Jay hung up the phone. His heart was racing, his palms dripping sweat. He needed a drink. Something stronger than beer. He walked to the Islander Bar and Grill. They had outside seating. "Can you bring me a rum punch?" he asked the waiter. "I need it in a big glass, triple on the rum, no cherry."

ZACH WAS IN A LOT of pain. Monique had stopped by to visit but she had not stayed long. "Jeeze Captain you are a mess." Zach tried to smile but it was too painful. They had repaired his collapsed lung and stitched everything together. He was on a morphine drip with a little dial that he could operate to increase the flow if he needed more pain medicine. He had it pretty well dialed up but the morphine made him loopy. He tried to smile at Monique but he didn't think that he pulled it off too well. The nurses had not let him see himself in a mirror and now he didn't need to. The look on Monique's face told him everything.

JAY WAS HIGH ABOVE Baltimore when he figured it out. He had already met Cesar and Arturo long before they came to Jamaica. The two rum punches at the airport in Miami plus two little bottles of red on the flight had knocked him out. There was some turbulence and the seatbelt light flicked on. "The Captain has asked that we all put our seatbelts on. There might be some bumps for a while." Jay hated turbulence. He could deal with stuff at sea and he didn't mind the take off and landing but the fact that a huge airplane was getting tossed around in the sky with him in it was horrifying. He fastened his seatbelt. His mouth was dry. He would have to wait until they resumed bar service.

The girl in the seat next to him was drooling. She had kept her seatbelt on and was sleeping through the turbulence. Jay was envious.

His subconscious had been working overtime and after a fitful nap it had provided him with the information that he needed. When he was rescued he was so out of it that he had no clue who had pulled him from the water. He did remember being in a dinghy and he remembered being on the ship but he had been well sedated. He would never have recognized Cesar and Arturo. Everything was a blur until he got hydrated on a drip in the hospital. But he did remember that the day his boat with his beautiful family was hit by a ship was September 12, early in the morning. He knew instinctively that Cesar and Arturo were somehow involved in the accident, as well as his rescue. He was sure of it now.

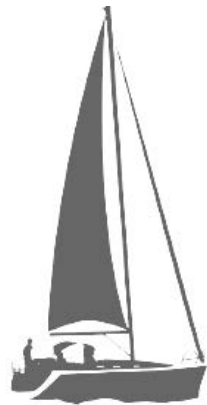
LILLIAN DROVE THE COAST road back to Port Antonio. It was dark by the time she passed through Ochos Rios. She thought that she might grab a place for the night but decided to press on. She still had the money that Jay had sent her in her savings account, but decided that until she could find some regular work that she would try and save money where she could. She took a right turn at Annotto Bay and was soon climbing up into the mists of the Blue Mountains. She was already starting to miss Jay. He had seemed distant at the airport but she had dismissed it. Maybe he was just concerned about the memorial. She pulled into her sister's house and was surprised to see that the lights were on. Her sister was at the kitchen table drinking a cup of coffee. Lillian could see that she had been crying.

"What's going on?" She had hardly ever seen her sister cry. "Come sit." Her sister patted the chair and Lillian sat down. "Do you remember Ms. Hazel who ran the bakery in Newcastle?"

"Yes."

"She died today, of Covid. I didn't know that she was even sick but I saw her at the hospital the other day. She was on a ventilator. She didn't recognize me. This morning they told me that she had passed. Lillian this disease is causing so much pain and anguish. We have lost a lot of people at the hospital but no one that I knew personally. Until now. Ms. Hazel was such a lovely lady."

Lillian sat with her sister. The world was a mess. The US elections were in full swing and she didn't trust Trump or Biden to do the right thing. At least Biden hadn't referred to Jamaica as a shithole country.



CINNAMON GIRL

## THIRTY ONE

**H**ARRY SLATTERY was fuming. How dare his son-in-law threaten him that way. How did he even know that he was behind the hit on the pig? He called Agent Axelrod. It was lunchtime and Axelrod had the giggler on his desk. He glanced over at his phone to see who was calling. “I think that I had better take this,” he said.

“No, don’t stop now,” but his hard-on was fading fast. He answered the phone. “Axelrod here.”

“This is Harry Slattery.” Axelrod already knew that from the caller ID. Didn’t the old coot know that everyone had caller ID these days?

“Yes Mr. Slattery.”

“How the fuck did the pig people know that I was behind the hit. I thought that you were a professional.

“I have no idea Sir.”

“Where is that pig now? I want it dead. Really, really dead. Get rid of those two buffoons who killed the wrong pig and get me someone who can make that brown, yes brown, pig squeal. I want the pig to squeal for its life preferably in front of my son-in-law.”

“Yes Sir.” Slattery slammed down the phone. “How dare his son-in-law talk to him that way. Useless no-good sailing bum.”

WITH CESAR AND ARTURO in Montego Bay Lillian had decided that it was safe to let Jack stay out at night to go exploring as much as he wanted. He usually took his meditation walk in the evening with a stop by the pot plot. Jack would come back, his tail wagging, but not as much as before. He must have sensed something bad had happened to Bertie. His friend was no longer there at the fence to greet him.

“Come here Jack,” she said and the pig waddled over. He wagged his tail but not with the same enthusiasm as before. Lillian fed him some mango’s and a slice of pie and that seemed to cheer Jack up a little. He flopped down at her feet and was instantly asleep.

The hit came a couple of nights later. Lillian had spoken to Jay earlier in the day. He sounded tired. Jack was out on his meditation walk. Lillian watched him waddle down the path. She remembered back in Massachusetts how Jack used to trot on his spindly legs. He seemed to be getting bigger, and more lethargic since he had moved to Jamaica. “I feed him good stuff,” she thought. Lillian poured herself and her sister a Red Stripe and they sat out by the fire-pit. In the distance they could hear the roar of an engine.

“What the heck is that?” Lillian asked. The car noise got louder and then suddenly stopped.

“Dunno,” her sister said. She took a long pull on her Red Stripe. Then the firing started. It was a machine gun no doubt about that. Lillian heard a loud squeal and jumped out of her chair running toward the gate. There was another round of gunfire. Someone was emptying the whole magazine. There was

a screech of wheels and then the engine went over the hill and faded into the early evening.

Lillian ran to the gate. Jack was there, well what was left of Jack was there. He was riddled with bullets. His face was blown off, his white skull standing starkly against his brown skin which was covered with blood. Lillian screamed. Her sister came running.

THE GATHERING was much bigger than Jay had anticipated. It was being hosted by the Coopers and they had gone all out. Just about everyone within driving distance who knew Jay and his family had come. Jay had stayed at an Air BnB not wanting to get into any discussion of why he had retreated to Jamaica after the accident. He was also dreading seeing Jess’s father and step mother. He knew that the encounter would not be pleasant.

Jay took an UBER and arrived at the Coopers just before noon. He felt sick to his stomach. For the first time he was really on his own. No Lillian to set a warm hand on his arm to steady him. He was going to have to face the harsh reality that his family was gone, his friends were grieving, and he was a lying, cheating sack of shit. He steadied himself in the UBER and was doing OK until he saw the children. Both Ollie and Pattie’s classmates had come to the memorial.

“Please can we go around the block,” he asked the UBER driver. “I will pay you extra in cash.”

“Sure.”

Hamilton was at its most spectacular best. The Fall foliage was on full display and the Indian Summer sun shone through the leaves. The beauty overwhelmed Jay and he started to sob; uncontrollably. “I’m sorry,” he said to the UBER driver. “Please keep driving. I will pay you.”

“OK.”

The drove past the Bradley Palmer State Park. Jay noticed that he had a text from Mimi Cooper. She had seen him arrive and saw the UBER leave again. The text read, “Jay we are waiting for you. This is a place of love and comfort and no judgment. Please come back.”

Jay sobbed until he had nothing more to give and then he asked the UBER driver to take him back to the house. This time Mimi was waiting for him and helped him out of the car. “It’s OK Jay,” she said. “I know how hard this must be for you.” Jay slumped against her. She had no idea.

Jess’s father and step-mother did not show up.

LILLIAN WAS FRANTIC. She had tried calling Jay but he was not picking up. The police came to investigate but again there was not much that they could do. There were no witnesses and the two culprits in Bertie’s murder were far away in Montego Bay. “What the heck was there some kind of pig genocide?” the officer wondered. “Another pig blown to bits.”

Jack was not just another pig. He was a member of the family and a well regarded one at that. Lillian knew that Jay would be devastated by the news and wanted to shield him from any more pain, but she knew that he needed to know what had happened.

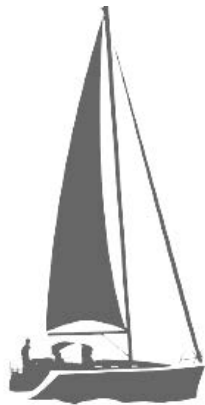
Jay had let the phone ring through to voicemail. He saw that Lillian was calling but he couldn’t take it. His gut was in a knot, his head was a mess. He just wanted to put his head under a pillow and hope that the world would fade away.

Mimi Cooper had been a comfort. She and Jess had been best friends and was devastated by what had happened. She was without judgment and Jay appreciated that. She didn’t know about Lillian. That was going to have to remain a secret; for now.

Mimi pulled Jay aside. “You know that I invited Jess’s father and step-mother but they declined. At first he said that he would attend but a few hours ago he called and said that he had some pressing business to attend to and neither of them would be coming.” Jay smiled to himself, but said nothing.

The phone rang again. The called ID was L. Just L. Joe excused himself. “Hi, sorry that I did not pick up earlier.” He heard sobbing on the other end. “Jay I am really sorry to tell you this news but they killed Jack.”

## THIRTY TWO



CINNAMON GIRL

JAY HENDRIKS grew up middle class in Winthrop, Massachusetts. His family was from Boston, his Dad an electrician who rose to become the top dog at the IBEW Local 103 Union. It was a big day in the family when he got elected. His Dad took them out to Cafe Rosettis, a small Italian BYOB joint on the beach in Winthrop. Jay had graduated from Boston Latin and was looking to make his way in the world. Boston Latin was well above his family's station in life but his Dad had put some pressure on Mayor Tom Menino's office and a door had been opened. Jay found himself a small one bedroom place in Winthrop, the memory of his Dad's election night still sweet in his mind, and found himself a job working for a small outfit that wired new homes. Life was good, well good enough.

Salem, Massachusetts was starting to become a global destination for Halloween. Mayor Kim Driscoll had done a superb job marketing her city and what had once been a run down place had become a much spruced up city that people from all over the world came to enjoy. Traffic in October in Salem was brutal. Jay had never been north of Winthrop, in fact he had hardly been south of Quincy or west of Natick but he always had a little wanderlust in his heart. He took the commuter rail to Salem and found himself walking along Salem Waterfront marveling at the

boats. His Dad had taken him sailing a couple of times but he hardly knew what to do on a boat other than make coffee.

A pretty girl caught his eye. She was topping off the water tanks and smiled back at him. Jay stopped to chat. It turned out that the girl and her family were leaving in a couple of weeks to sail to the Bahamas. They knew that they had left it late in the year to leave New England, but the boat was ready and there were just a few things to tie up before they could sail south.

It happened so quick. Jay met the girl's parents and they told him that they needed someone strong to help them with the trip. Jay could hardly believe what he was saying, but before he knew it he had signed up for a delivery to Nassau. He never admitted it to himself but it was all about the girl. As luck would have it she was not all about him and he spent a frustrated month hoping for some leg over but got nothing. When they tied up in Nassau Jay bolted as quick as he could. He found a small motel and checked in. Later that evening he went out for dinner at a local crab shack. His waiter had the most beautiful skin. Of course Jay had seen black and brown people before but never one with such beautiful skin. He was still frustrated from the delivery and slowly starting to feel the warm buzz of a stronger than legal rum punch when he decided to say what he knew he shouldn't say, but said it anyway. "You have beautiful wrists," he told the waitress. She looked at him and smiled. "I know, I'm on the restaurant darts team. I hear that all the time." Jay had been around the block a few times but he had never been around the block with a black woman. Jay was smitten.

HE FOUND A JOB on a ketch that did day charters around Nassau. The clients loved him. He was funny and outgoing and, well, more than a bit good looking. He lost the job when the First Mate found him 'in flagrante' with the Captain's wife in the

forepeak. He thought better than to ask for a reference but he already had built up a circle of friends and a week later was heading for Bora Bora. He called home every so often from a payphone, if he could find one, and he could tell that his Dad was more than a little disappointed to hear from him.

"I got you the best education," his Dad said.

"I know but I am having fun. I will be back in Boston soon," but Jay never went back. He had tasted the open road and was soon a 'sailor for hire.' His charm and good looks had made him popular and he had become a better than average sailor. He knew that someday he would have to join real life again and he also knew that he had an electrician's license, something to fall back on. For now, though, he was working his way through as many women as possible, none of them white.

IT WAS THE MORNING of his thirtieth birthday when he decided that he had had enough. These days it took a lot of rum to get a buzz. The job opportunities were there but none of them really interested him. He was shagging anything with a pulse and hating himself for it. He had woken up that morning on a boat in Mallorca not knowing where he had left his pants, or his underpants for that matter. He looked through the saloon and could see some people sitting at the cockpit table eating. It was hard to make out but it looked like a mother and father with two children and it looked like they were eating breakfast. He did not recognize the boat that he was on and there was still this pesky problem of not being able to find his pants, or underpants. He thought that he remembered a girl but he might have had the nights confused. Jay eased himself to the edge of the bunk and stood. Not only did he not have his pants he could not find his shirt either. He was still a little dizzy but decided to go for it. He walked through the main saloon and up the companionway

stairs. The husband and wife and two children looked up from their breakfast of melon wrapped in prosciutto.

“Buenos dias.”

“Buenos dias.”

Jay found the boat that he had delivered to Mallorca five berths down. He slept it off and later that day booked his ticket home.

THERE WAS PLENTY of work for him when he got back home to Winthrop. Revere Beach, just a couple of miles to the north, had once been the most famous beach in the country but had slowly fallen on hard times and had become a bit dilapidated. Now developers had obtained the needed permits and were building big and beautiful apartment buildings as fast as they could and the place was booming. Jay had made it a bit of a tradition to go to the annual sand castle competition on Revere Beach. The event, once just for locals, had started to attract the very best talent from around the world. He would always try and be the first one there in the morning. By eight the boardwalk would be jammed but on this summer morning, long before the sun had come close to kissing the horizon, he was admiring the immense talent of the sand sculptors. His new iPhone 8 took some incredible photos and as it started to get light he decided to grab some breakfast at Kelly’s Roast Beef. They had the most delicious breakfast sandwiches. It wasn’t sailing the high seas but it was a pretty nice life and Jay was happy; but lonely.

## THIRTY THREE

HARRY SLATTERY had always been a bit of a fuck-head. He was a major donor to the Republican party and always measured his donation by what he received in return. He was having a field day with Trump. Trump was sucking his money but he was also delivering.

When he first met Jay he was less than overwhelmed. His daughter was beautiful. Smart. But much to his annoyance she had donated to both Obama and Bernie Sanders’ campaign. “The man is a Liberal Nut Job,” he said. “A Bloody Socialist. It’s like he drinks a Red Bull for breakfast.” Jess smiled, knowingly. She too loved the odd Red Bull for breakfast.

Harry Slattery was also mean. He was a huge advocate of the death penalty. “I told Trump that he was right. The Central Park Five should have been taken out behind the barn and shot in the head.” Jess was not listening. She was living a balancing act. They needed the money and she didn’t want to upset her Dad. Jay had come along and he was ‘a total dead beat,’ according to her father. He had spent the last ten years flopping around on boats. “What kind of person does that?”

It was not long after Jay and Jess got married that Jay told her about his plan to sail around the world. The idea had sounded



so great. None of her friends had a husband that wanted to sail anywhere, let alone around the world. Most of them were just looking to make Partner. Her friend's husband's friend who she knew through Facebook had been tapped for a job in the State Department. "Now there you go," she thought.

Jay worked hard. He was kind. He showed up. He even showed up on Thanksgiving one year when the next door neighbor set their oven on fire. In a masterful piece of genius Jay invited the whole family to their house for Thanksgiving dinner. Jess was at first less than impressed but later told him that he was a kind person. "Kindness counts," she said. The next day he rewired their oven; for free.

LILLIAN WAS NOT FEELING that great. Jay was away. Jack was dead. Her sister had found a new man but he seemed like a bit of a loser. But who the heck was she to judge? She was living in her house.

HARRY SLATTERYy was happy to hear that the pig was dead. The Insta pics were perfect. The little fucker never saw it coming. He knew that his son-in-law would be finding the whole thing rather traumatic; just the way he wanted it. Harry Slattery was a man on the way up. His friend Mike Pompeo was hinting at a job in the next Trump Administration. Slattery was sure that Trump would win. He had donated enough money to his campaign to warrant a Cabinet Position.

His wife was less than pleased.

"What are you on about? You are like some kind of maniac. Yelling into the phone. Threatening people. And what's going on with that pig?" Mrs. Slattery was clearly upset. "Yes and by the way I know about Senator Becker's aide. Why the fuck do you

think I have been fucking my hairdresser? Reuben. Yes that's his name. Reuben. Quid pro quo."

JAY WAS MARINATING in his misery. He had stayed on for a couple of weeks tying up some loose ends. The tenants were taking good care of the house and he had offered to extend their lease for an additional year if they wanted to. They were delighted. It was time to go back to Jamaica. He felt some kind of connection there. It was more than Lillian. He flipped open his laptop and opened Kayak. He typed in Kingston. The flights were cheap; relatively. A day later he touched down in Montego Bay. Cheaper. Lillian was there to pick him up. They grabbed a room close to the airport. She was glad that he was back on the island.

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

"Starving."

"I have a friend who has a place near here. She can cook."

"Ok."

They walked over. It was a hole-in-the-wall restaurant but it was one of the best meals Jay had ever eaten? Jamaican Kingfish. Lillian's friend had a source that went out every morning and came back with the Days Catch. An hour earlier the Kingfish has been swimming peacefully through the reef off Doctor's Cave Beach. Moments after landing back on land the fish was in the fryer and then on the plate with just a simple salad on the side.

"I am so happy to see you Lillian," he said. "I love you so much." When he said it he knew that it was the bottle of white talking but Jay had had such an awful week he wanted to start feeling some kind of normalcy again. "I really do love you."

"I love you too."

THERE WAS A MESSAGE pinned to the door when they got home. It was a Post-it note but one that wouldn't stick so someone had pegged it with a push-pin. "You Fuckers Are Next," it read. It had Harry Slattery all over it.

"What do we do with this? Lillian asked.

"The man is just a bully. He has always been a bully. He's angry that his daughter is dead. He had never once mentioned his grandchildren. I say we ignore it. It's one thing killing a pig..." his voice trailed off.

"Let's at least let the police know in case something happens."

"OK," Jay said. "Call your school friend." Lillian went in search of her cell phone. She could never find it when she needed it.

OFFICER CHRIS PLUMMER touched down on the island of Grand Bahama. He had asked his superior Jackspanky for a couple of personal days but had not told him why he wanted the time off. He took a taxi to the Flamingo Bay Hotel in Freeport and checked in. The place was a bit of a dive but that didn't worry Plummer. He was there on a fact-finding mission. "Can you get me a taxi for six this evening?" he asked the checking-in desk lady. She was wearing a mask behind a Perspex screen that looked substantial enough to be able to withstand stray gunfire.

"Yes sir, my pleasure."

The taxi was early but so was Officer Plummer. He prided himself on being early. "Grand Bahamian Shipyard please."

"No problem Cap." They drove down West Sunrise and in ten minutes pulled up in front of the Grand Bahamian Shipyard. It looked a bit run down. He could see through the fence that there were some dilapidated ships tied up alongside. There was not much going on but it was a Sunday evening after all. He

had asked the taxi to wait and was about to let him go when he saw some men walking from one of the ships. They were young, looked like they were from South America, and it looked like they were going out for a night on the town. Plummer climbed back into the taxi. "Just wait one moment please."

"No problem Cap, you are paying while the meter is running."

Soon another taxi pulled up and the men got in. "Please follow that taxi," he said.

"No problem Cap."

The taxi took off along Queens Highway toward Freetown. Plummer and his driver followed at a discreet distance. They took a right on Coral Road and headed south. When they hit the beach they turned left and a couple of minutes later pulled up in front of Tony Macaronis Conch Experience. The men climbed out of their taxi and adjusted their masks. Plummer paid his driver and did the same. He watched the men grab a table on the patio before he entered the restaurant.

"A Captains and Coke please." The waitress left and came back a short while later with his drink. "Here you go Sir."

"Thank you." Plummer was keeping an eye on the men. They were speaking Spanish but every now and then would lapse into English. "That's good," he thought. "At least they speak English." He waited until they had finished their dinner and were a few drinks in before approaching their table.

"Mis amigos," he said before the full extent of his Spanish ran out. "May I ask you some questions?" A man waved him to an empty seat. "I think that you are from one of the ships in the shipyard, right?"

"Si."

"Ah good. I have a friend who took his ship to the same

Shipyard last year but they did not do a very good job on repairing the hull where it was damaged. Have you had work done at that shipyard before?”

“Si.”

“Ah OK, and it’s none of my business but is that a good shipyard? My friend asked me to come and talk with them about the work that they did but now that I am here I am a little nervous. It’s a big place.

“Si.”

“Are you having work done there?”

“Si. Listen my friend,” the man with a mustache said. “People don’t go to that shipyard because they do good work. They go there because there is never any record of them having been there. That way the insurance never knows. That way there is never any record or accounting. That’s why we come to this shipyard. That’s probably why your friend took his ship there to be repaired. It’s a cash-only business.”

“Gracias.” Plummer went back to his drink. The waitress came over. “Are you ready to order sir?”

“Yes please another Captain and Coke and the conch burger.”

## THIRTY FOUR

**Z**ACH WAS DISCHARGED from the hospital on his birthday. The Bosses had found a temporary Captain to take World Navigator back to the US. Zach had earned some convalescence time and would rejoin the ship in New York. He took an UBER to a small AirBnB in Villefranche, a picturesque village just east of Nice. The cottage was made from stone and had bougainvillea growing up one side. Even though it was late in the year for bougainvillea to be blooming it was still going strong and the purple flowers smelled like honeysuckle reminding Zach of his family home in Gloucester. He tossed his bags onto the bed and went for a walk on the cobblestone beach. Warm turquoise water lapped onto the shore. Zach felt good, happy to be out of the hospital, but not sure what to do about his future.

The Bosses had given him an ultimatum. They needed him to sign the new contract but Zach was not sure. Being a ships Captain had been a lifelong dream but something was lost that night when his ship ran over Cinnamon Girl and destroyed Jay’s family. There had been a summons for an appearance in court in Newport News for an initial hearing on the accident. Zach had emailed the court attaching a photo of him hooked up to various machines and received a reply that the court date had been postponed indefinitely. He was riddled with guilt about the accident. He knew

that if had not been so keen to get back to Arturo that the accident might never have happened. He felt terrible that he had deceived Jay. How could he ever explain to him that it was his ship, under his command, that had killed his family?

It was starting to get dark when Zach made his way along the stone path that ran on the ocean side of the Citadelle. He walked slowly toward the main dock area and then up some stairs to where he had a good view over the harbor. He found a creperie, The Good Mood Cafe, and ordered a crab crepe and an espresso. No booze anymore. The drink had fried his brain and the kind nurses at the hospital had helped him detox without any judgment. He was grateful for that and vowed to remain sober. He saw that he had a text. "We are giving you until the end of this week to sign the contract." That was it. The text unnerved him a little. He had been a good employee. There was no need for a stark, almost threatening text.

OFFICER CHRIS PLUMMER was back behind his desk. He wanted to bounce what he had discovered off Jackspanky but at the same time he also wanted the case for himself. There was something really fishy about the Grand Bahamian Shipyard and he was sure that there was something really fishy about the reason that World Navigator had gone there for repair. Plummer was still eating his conch burger when the men left the restaurant. They came over to his table. The man with the mustache spoke. "Mi amigo," he said. "The shipyard is run with drug money. I should not be telling you this but the drug money is also mixed up with some other businesses that are probably also illegal. Be careful, that's all I am saying."

Plummer had been careful the following morning when he called the Shipyard. He told the receptionist that he was a reporter with Hellenic Shipping News Worldwide and was doing a piece on how Covid was effecting shipping in the Bahamas.

The receptionist patched him through to the yard manager who agreed to a short interview later that afternoon.

When Plummer got to the reception area he was escorted to an office in the back. The air conditioning was cranking and the yard manager was scowling at his computer screen. "I'm calling bullshit on this one," he said by way of a greeting. Plummer was startled. "No, not you. My customer is complaining. Please sit down." The manager extended his hand. "Scott Ellis, pleased to meet you."

They talked for an hour before Ellis had some pressing business to attend to. He had been very vague on the operations of the shipyard and even more vague on what effect Covid had had on their business. Plummer left thanking him for his time. He went back to his room at the Flamingo Bay Hotel and flew back to Newport News the following morning.

BROOKS HAD BEEN THE ONE to suggest buying the shipyard. The Bosses had been taking their ships there for years and Brooks figured out quite quickly that the shipyard owners were halfwits. He figured that if they could run a profitable business with not much acumen for money and very little knowledge of ships, that he could turn the place into a cash cow. Plus he needed another place to launder money. There were only so many apartment buildings to buy in Hackney and the ships, while a good place to launder money, came with some pain-in-the-ass Captains. That prick that ran World Navigator for example. Brooks had fired off the ultimatum text but had not received a reply. The prick was playing hard to get.

THE US ELECTION was really heating up. Somehow Biden had opened up a sizable lead. Harry Slattery could not believe what he was reading. Even Fox News was reporting a double digit lead for Biden. If Fox was reporting a ten point lead it was probably

closer to fifteen. Fucking Trump. The guy was a bit of a dick but he was Slattery's dick and would always do as he was told. The cash flow required him to do so.

Slattery was pacing his office. "Get me Jules on the phone," he yelled at his receptionist. "No, better yet, tell him to come to my office."

"Yes Sir."

Jules showed up an hour later. He was an immigrant from Haiti, a man looking to better his life. "Jules I have a job for you," Slattery said. He gave him the address of his wife's hair salon. "There is some fucker that works there named Reuben. I want you to give him a bit of a scare. You don't need to know any details. Just tell him that the husband has a video of him; and her."

"Yes Sir."

REUBEN WAS THE LAST to leave. He had to do Mrs. McIntyre's hair and she could only come in after she had made dinner for her husband. Her hair was a huge process. Mrs. McIntyre was not taking growing old gracefully. She wanted the full monte but she always tipped well and the salon made good money off her visit. Reuben locked the front door and was almost to his car when he felt a knife in his side. "You fucking queer fuck. Don't say a word."

Reuben was terrified. The knife had pierced his jacket and he could feel the cold steel against his skin. "I am going to make myself absolutely clear. The husband has video of you fucking his wife." Jules was not sure about the last bit. Slattery had not been clear but he suspected that this might be the case. Reuben felt the brick hit him above his right ear and that was all he knew until the pizza delivery guy found him laying beside his car.

## THIRTY FIVE

ZACH TEXTED. "I don't think that I want to renew my contract." He felt ill seconds after he had hit the send button. There was no reply.

BROOKS DINTWA got the text. "Hmmm." Once you were in, you were in. No one gets out easily. He saw that his WhatsApp was ringing. It was his sister Thalitha. "Brooks," she said. "I want to come and live with you in England. Khan has moved back in with his old girlfriend in Johannesburg. I found out that he had been screwing her all this time. All those so called 'business trips.'

"I will arrange a ticket for you. I have to take a call," he lied. Brooks had not been happy with the shipyard in the Bahamas. He knew that Covid had been a factor but the place had not been making enough money since they bought it. He didn't want to fly there. He had just met a cute English Rose and was perfectly happy helping her tend to her more than ample garden.

He texted Zach. "I understand. I have a job for you in the Bahamas. I think that you will be perfect for it."

Zach was still at the AirBnB in Villefranche. He was sitting outside under a lemon tree when he saw the reply from Brooks.

“Fuck.”

“OK,” he texted back. “What’s the deal?”

“Grand Bahamian Shipyard. Bunch of crooks there. I want you to manage the place.”

Zach let his phone sit for a moment. He was tempted to send a quick reply but thought better of it. Monique had come for a visit. “Tell him to fuck off,” she said, her French accent accentuating the ‘fuck’ part.

“No, I think that this might be a good idea. I need a job and I know this shipyard.”

BROOKS picked up his phone. “Give me Scott please.”

“Yes Sir.”

“Scott you are fired. Sorry but you suck as a shipyard manager. And I am warning you. Don’t try and fuck with the Bosses. They will hang you out to dry.” He hung up the phone. If Zach wouldn’t take the job he had some other ideas.

He heard his phone buzz. He had a text. “When do I start?”

JAY WAS SURPRISED that his friend had quit the ship. They had been texting back and forth about it but since Zach landed in Grand Bahama there had not been much communication. It all happened pretty quickly. Plus Lillian had taken a job at the Love Bites Cafe. She was waiting tables but at least it was an income. Jay was not hurting for money but he was starting to hurt; in his heart. The insurance had refused to pay out on Cinnamon Girl. Jay had not been able to show that there had been a regular log kept and that a clear watch system had been established. He was also in a struggle to get Jess’s life insurance. Seems like her father knew someone at Old Mutual and had blocked things.

THALITHA LANDED AT HEATHROW. Brooks was there to pick her up in his Tesla. “Looking good bro,” she said. They stopped at a pub in Twickenham for lunch. Brooks was looking at the menu but could not find anything that appealed to him. “I will take a pie and chips,” Thalitha said.

“This food looks like shit,” Brooks said.

“Come on Brooks, I am sure that the food here is excellent. This place is nice. I missed you.” Brooks had become a snob. A Botswana bush baby snob. There was a time when a cup of beans had been enough. His mother’s beans. Now he was bitching about the menu. “Why don’t you just share my lunch?” Thalitha offered.

“Ok.”

ZACH WAS TRYING to figure out the computer. It was a mess. The office was a mess. His predecessor Scott had left a pile of files under the desk and they were not in any kind of alphabetical order. The air conditioner was struggling against the heat. Outside a squall was rolling in. Dark and wet.

The front desk lady came in. Zach could not remember her name. “Is it OK if I leave a little early Mr. McKlowski? It looks like there is some weather coming in.”

“Yes that’s fine. You are leaving 20 minutes early. I expect you in 20 minutes early tomorrow to make up the time.” Zach glanced out the window. Rain was not far off. He didn’t care, he was in for a long night. He pulled the files from under his desk and started to sort them alphabetically. He could not deal with their contents until he had them in order, that was just the way that his brain worked.

The first fingers of a tropical rainsquall hit and the building shuddered. The wind had picked up. Zach had the files sorted

and started with the first file. It was for a ship out of Amsterdam that had needed some work done on its steering system. There was not much in the file so he tried to find more information on the HP computer that they had given him. He hit Search but came up empty. He opened QuickBooks and there was no record of the ship. Zach was puzzled. Maybe it was listed under the Captain's name but another Search also came up empty. There was a loud crack of thunder. Zach left his desk and walked to the front of the building. The outside lights had come on automatically even though it was not yet six in the evening. The sky hung heavy and ominous. Zach had seen plenty of these tropical squalls when he was at sea and they were always a cause for concern but on land he didn't care. He had planned to sleep in his office for the first week anyway. Another loud crack of thunder rocked the building. Rain came in horizontal. Zach went back to the files.

By midnight he had a good sense of what was going on with Grand Bahamian Shipyard. It was a front operation, nothing more. The files were slim, the books almost non-existent, the place was a mess. He thought of texting Brooks about the situation but decided to sit on what he had found out. He was the new Boss. It was not that he wanted to start off on the wrong foot, he wanted to get as much information as he could before saying anything to anyone, Brooks especially.

## THIRTY SIX

THE JUDGE let Arturo and Cesar go with just a small fine. They were in the next taxi to the airport. Cesar headed straight for Mexico with a stop in Miami, Arturo for Newport News. He had had an ongoing correspondence with Office Chris Plummer, and Plummer wanted him in for a deposition. He was more than ready to get it on paper that the Captain of World Navigator was a drunk and because of his reckless behavior that night, there were three dead people. Arturo was careful to skirt around the edges of Hank Redmond's role in all of it. As far as the record would show the blame landed squarely at the feet of the Captain.

"Thank you," Plummer said, "I really appreciate your input. I will be in touch and please email me back if you hear from me."

"Si."

Plummer had decided to involve Jackspanky and told him about his trip to the Bahamas. He was quite sure that the Shipyard was some kind of front for something. Jackspanky was a good detective and he would know what the next steps should be.

"Get it in writing," he had said. "We can't depose the manager of the Shipyard because we don't have any jurisdiction in the Bahamas but if the Mexicans will talk let's get them on tape. Let's also ask McKlowski about his version of things. People lie

without any reason. You have done a great job gathering the details of this case, now it's time to take a few steps forward." There were a few details that Officer Plummer had not disclosed to his boss. He had done a Google search on the small burgee that he had found hung up under the seat of the liferaft on Word Navigator. It was the official flag of the Eastern Yacht Club in Marblehead, Massachusetts.

"HI CAPTAIN, this is Officer Plummer." The front desk lady had already informed him. Zach was not sure if he wanted to take the call, and in the days when he was drinking he would have avoided it, but instead, he said, "put him through."

"It's nice to speak with you again and congratulations on the new position."

"Thank you."

"I am still worried about what happened that night at sea and wanted to ask you if you would be willing to put your version of events on tape. In a deposition."

"You know that I am living in the Bahamas now, right?"

"Yes, I can arrange for the Embassy there to carry out a deposition. You will have to go to Nassau but it's really important. We could subpoena you to come to the States but I think that a short, if somewhat inconvenient trip to Nassau would be an easier option, especially because of Covid."

"OK."

A couple of days later Zach was in Nassau. He arrived at the Embassy and was let in through security. With the Presidential race tightening people were on edge. Trump had still not assured the American people that he would leave office if he lost the election. Zach was led to a small room. Thankfully the

air-conditioning was working.

"Coffee, water, anything?"

"Just some water please."

The lady sat opposite him. "Thank you so much for doing this," she said. "I am sure that you are a busy man and this is probably the last thing that you want to be doing but I need to ask you some questions about that night. You know the night I am talking about right."

"Yes."

"For the record let me state that I am talking with Captain Zach McKlowski about the night of September 12. Mr. McKlowski was the Captain of the cargo ship World Navigator." Zach took a long pull on the glass of water. It was the first time since he had stopped drinking that he regretted it. He would love a hit of brandy but no such luck.

The lady led him through the events of the evening leading up to the accident. She had received a fairly extensive outline from Officer Plummer. Zach went along with most of it. He denied having any kind of relationship with any of his crew members but admitted that he used to drink, but never on the job. He was emphatic about that. The drinking part.

"Are you still drinking?" the lady asked.

"No."

"Did you quit?"

"Yes."

"How come?"

"I don't really know. I just decided." The lady looked at him squarely in the eye. "You know that most people who stop drinking stop drinking because they know that they have a



problem with alcohol. That's why they stop."

"I barely drank anything," Zach lied. "I stopped drinking because I want to run a marathon."

"Oh that's interesting. Have you ever run a marathon?"

"No."

"Have you ever run a half marathon?"

"No." Zach was starting to feel a little uneasy. "Well good for you," the lady said. "That's a great goal."

Zach left the deposition feeling that he had done ok. He had exuded charm. He was a gay man; he knew how to exude charm. He walked out of the building and took a right on East Bay Street. He could see the Atlantis Resort up ahead of him and thought that he might just stop in to check it out. He crossed the bridge that led onto Paradise Island but before he got to Atlantis he saw a sign for Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville. He sidled up to the bar. Every nerve ending was craving a drink. The waitress dropped off a coaster and asked him what he would like to drink. She also dropped off a menu. Zach could feel his hands tighten on the brass railing that ran around the bar counter.

"Just a coke please," he said. "And I would really like the coconut shrimp. Mr. Buffett is one heck of a good cook and I have had his coconut shrimp before. The waitress smiled. "Coming up."

## THIRTY SEVEN

JAY WAS SITTING. with Lillian by the firepit. It was a rare clear night and the Milky Way dominated the night sky. Jay had been feeling uneasy for a while. The note on the door had unsettled him. His Father-in-Law was a nut, but he must be seriously losing his mind to have someone come by their house and leave such a note.

"Lillian I think that we should find an apartment for ourselves. Just a small place."

"Funny you should say that," Lillian replied. "Winston told me of a place that's available in Port Antonio. It belongs to his cousin or someone like that. I can't remember exactly." Lillian's sister's new boyfriend had not officially moved in but he might well have done so. He was always there and he was a slob. "Let's drive to Port Antonio this weekend and take a look. Please text Winston and tell him that we are interested."

"Ok."

Jay had heartburn and went inside looking for some Tums. His phone rang. It was a blocked number so he didn't answer. He stared at the screen for a bit but there was no voicemail. He tossed back the Tums and was heading back outside to sit with Lillian when the voicemail dropped in. "This is Arturo. Please

call me.” He left a number. Jay decided that he would wait until the morning to call. He wanted to spend a quiet evening with Lillian. He had some steaks to throw on the fire and Lillian had made a salad. He turned back to the house and grabbed a bottle of red and two glasses. The call was a bit unsettling; in fact everything these days was unsettling. His family was dead.

ZACH SPENT THE WEEKEND digging through the files. It was all complete bullshit. Made up numbers. Fabricated projects. Some ships he was quite sure never existed. Grand Bahamian Shipyard was a front for something big and possibly quite lucrative. He wanted to ask Brooks about it but his instinct told him to keep the information to himself, for now. They had two Iranian cargo ships in the dry dock at the moment and the yard crew were working hard to get them ready to go back out to sea. It was a similar situation as when he had brought World Navigator there to get repaired. When the work was done the ships just left. The invoices were sent to the owners and were presumably paid. Zach never questioned it. He went back to his job as Captain plying the Atlantic triangle.

He was still at his desk one Sunday evening when his cell phone lit up. It was a blocked WhatsApp call. He decided to ignore it. A minute later his screen lit up again. He had a voicemail. He swiped left. Arturo was trying to disguise his voice but Zach saw right through it. “They are coming for you. They know everything.” The message was short. Cell reception in the Bahamas had never been good but Zach didn’t think that the call had been cut short. He listened again. “They are coming for you. They know everything.”

Jared Jackspanky was getting worked up. “Ok so it’s clear that there was negligence on the part of Captain McKlowski,

but it was not willful manslaughter. I can’t figure out how Mr. Hendriks has not figured out that it was McKlowski’s ship that ran over his yacht and killed his family. I think that the bigger story is the ship. There is some serious bullshit business going on there.” He looked at Officer Plummer. “This is your case but would you mind if I have a friend of mine in the UK take a closer look at things? I haven’t talked to him in a few years but I think he still works for Scotland Yard. I want him to do some digging on that side.”

JACKSPANKY CALLED THE MAIN LINE for Scotland Yard in London. It took a while but he finally tracked down his friend Yves-Marie Moloney. “Holy Moly is that really you Jackspanky, me old mate?” Jared smiled to himself. The guy was French, he had lived in the US for a decade, and was trying to pull off some kind of Cockney accent. They talked for a bit with Jared explaining his hunch. He was sure that there was something more to the ship situation and their owners and Yves-Marie promised to do some investigating.

THE OLD HP COMPUTER that was on his desk in his office had no firewalls installed. It was originally in the main office in London but shortly after the Bosses bought the business they sent a whole bunch of equipment to the Shipyard office. The computer was slow and cranky but Zach had been digging deeper into some files that were buried on the hard drive. He was not liking what he was finding. There was some porn but that was not an issue. He figured that most computers had some porn buried somewhere on the hard drive. It was kiddie porn and it didn’t look like it had been poached from the Internet. It looked like the video had been shot with a stationary camera. Some with fisheye lenses. There was a lot of it. Some of the girls

looked to be as young as eight or nine. Maybe even younger. There was also a lot of other information. Contact information for thousands of individuals. There was also a very early version of QuickBooks but for some reason he was not able to open it.

The following morning Zach went to Computer Kingdom in Freetown and purchased a new laptop and two remote hard drives. He talked to the sales person, a geeky kid who seemed to know more about computers than Bill Gates. The kid told him that he could revive any old file even if the software no longer existed. Zach took his card.

He spent the day at the shipyard making sure that the two Iranian ships were ready to leave and getting his new computer up and running. It was starting to get dark when he Googled, "Gay bars in Freetown." TripAdvisor came up with a place called 'Over the Hill.' He scrolled through some of the comments. The Bahamas were very homophobic so it was a bit of a challenge to read between the lines. There was clearly a gay community but they were well hidden. Someone talked about a small place out near the airport. It didn't have a name and only really got going around midnight. Zach decided that he would give it a try but he needed a nap first. He was still living in his office and pulled out the futon and took a three hour power nap.

It was after 11 when he found the place. There was only a neon "open" sign in the window, no other indication that it might be a bar. He had his mask on and wasn't sure if the place would be open because of Covid. It had been months for Zach but despite his nervousness he opened the door and looked in. He needed to find someone badly. He was quite shocked at what he saw. The place was packed, no one wearing a mask, clearly all gay. Zach wished that he still drank. It would have been easier. He found the bar. "A coke please."

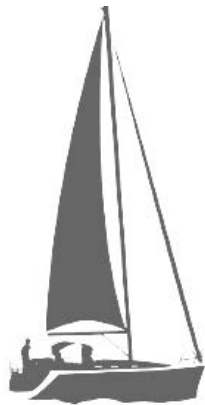
"Sure. Coke in a bottle or Coke for the nose?"

"Bottle please."

"Have it your way."

Being sober in a gay bar was a new experience for him and Zach felt uncomfortable. He was thinking of leaving when a small black man approached him. He reminded Zach a little of Arturo. At first that put him off but after chatting for a bit it turned him on. They left. He followed the man in his car and he pulled into a nice one level suburban home. Zach was not sure what he had expected but the sun was almost up when he drove back to the shipyard.

## THIRTY EIGHT



CINNAMON GIRL

**Z**ACH KNEW that he had to tell Jay what had happened that night. He also knew that he had to tell him in person. He knew that if he didn't Jay would find out in a court of law and he didn't want that. He invited Jay to visit him in the Bahamas and Jay said that he would love to. He would look into flights. Zach started to look into apartments. There was no spare bedroom in the office.

OFFICER PLUMMER also wanted to talk with Jay. He asked Jackspanky if he could go to Jamaica but got the big thumbs down. "Sorry my friend but you are going to have to Zoom."

"Really?"

"Yes, don't you know that there is a global pandemic going on. Plus the City Council has slashed our budget. I can be there on the call with you if you like.

Plummer emailed Jay and they set up a time to Zoom. Jay asked if Lillian could be on the call and Plummer said "no problem." The call was scheduled for the following Tuesday. Jay had set up his computer in the corner of the kitchen where the Internet seemed to be the best. Lillian was beside him when the chime went off. They were invited into the Zoom meeting. Officer Chris

Plummer was there on the screen. Jay thought that he could see someone hovering in the background, but was not sure.

“Thank you Jay. I appreciate you agreeing to this call. It’s an important one.” Plummer had learned from Jackspanky that on important calls there was no time for small talk. He came to the point. “We are planning to press charges against Mr. McKlowski. Manslaughter charges.” There was silence. He could see Jay on his screen but Jay was not saying anything.

“Hello Jay did you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“We have irrefutable evidence that he was in command of the ship that killed your family. World Navigator.”

Jay sat in silence. He knew, but he had not told Lillian. She looked at him. Jay excused himself. His heartburn was kicking in. Plummer stared at the screen where Jay had just been. “Where did he go?”

“Heartburn,” Lillian said.

Jackspanky hovered in the background.

Jay came back to the screen. “I know,” was all he said. “I think that I always knew.” He then hit the “Leave the Meeting” button.

LILLIAN LOOKED AT HIM for a long while. “Why did you not tell me?”

“I dunno.”

Agent Axelrod was still on the case but not liking his assignment. He had gone along with the note on the door and the pig killing spree but this one was a bridge too far. He and the giggler had become more than an item and she was most definitely talking about moving in with him. You see, his intuition had been right. He knew that it was right the night when she ripped off her mask

and kissed him full-on on the lips. The kiss was good. Axelrod made a mental note that she didn’t put the mask back on. To him that was more sexy than leaving her panties off.

Slattery had called him earlier in the day. “I don’t want them killed,” he said. “I want them to think that they are going to be killed. The note was clever. Now you have to deliver.”

ZACH FOUND A SMALL PLACE at Sandy Point. It was on the edge of Abaco National Park and the birdlife was awesome. He had tried to reach Jay but no luck. He figured that his friend would be in touch when he had a flight booked. Brooks had been on his ass. He needed the report on the two Iranian ships and he was also looking for some accounting from the German ship that had been in the yard for a couple of months. Scott Ellis was the yard manager back then and Zach could not find any record of the ship having been there.

BROOKS TASKED THALITHA with keeping track of the shipping as well as the shipyard. He needed to turn his attention back to the real moneymaker; the child sex trade. The Bosses were happy with the way he had structured the company but also a bit worried that he had lost his focus. Brooks had the human trafficking part figured out and that fed the sex business. The hard part was laundering the money and that was where the ships and the shipyard came in. “This is not really much different than running the Akacia Cafe in Maun,” Thalitha said. “Just keep everyone happy and make sure that the suppliers don’t try and rip you off.” Brooks thought to himself, “well maybe, but maybe not.”

Brooks had a hunch that the UN Refugee Agency may have been tipped off. He had received some strange calls, all rather vague but his guard was up. He had received a really strange

call from someone who identified himself as Moloney but Brooks could not figure out where he was from or who he represented. His problem was that the business was growing fast and many fast growing businesses are apt to spring leaks. His team was tight lipped, well paid and he trusted them. He had not told Thalitha about the sex trafficking part. He knew that she would not approve. She was a devout Christian. Still the call from Moloney was a bother.

“SO YOU KNEW ALL ALONG?” Lillian had her back up. She didn’t like being taken by surprise.

“I didn’t know Lillian, I only suspected it after we had that talk with Arturo and Cesar.”

“What, are they involved in all of this?”

“Yes. I only figured it out on the plane to Boston. They had talked about an asshole Captain and an accident that had happened at sea. It was just too much of a coincidence. We were in the same place at the same time and now Officer Plummer has confirmed it all. I wasn’t keeping anything from you. None of this has been easy and I really don’t know what to do.”

“Well what the frig is with Zach? He came and stayed at this house. We went out for lunch. He told you that he was your friend. He knew all along that he had run over your family with his ship. Who acts like that?”

“I dunno.” Jay walked outside and looked up at the night sky. “Who the fuck knows about any of this,” he said to himself.

## THIRTY NINE

**Y**VES-MARIE MOLONEY knew that he was on to something but wasn’t sure what it was exactly. The Brooks guy had been more than a little cagey on the phone. He had run some leads but they all seemed to fade out. There was a problem with the ships but there was not much that he could do about that. He had called the shipping company in Monrovia and they had been less than helpful. He knew that many companies in Monrovia were fronts for money laundering so he was not surprised when he didn’t get any information.

It was not easy to get a wiretap on a phone in the UK. He needed a judge to sign off on it and he also knew that he didn’t have enough for a judge to agree to the wiretap. He called Jackspanky. “Making slow progress chum,” he said. “There is something there but I can’t get there without more goods to work with.” Jackspanky looked at his phone. “What the frig was he talking about? Something there?”

“I will call you again tomorrow.”

ZACH TRIED JAY AGAIN but no reply. He had texted a number of times but had not received an answer. He was starting to suspect that Jay might know something about the night. He walked out

onto the small deck that overlooked the swamp. Pelicans were hustling for a place to sleep. The island in the swamp was not very big and the pelicans, along with many other bird species that Zach couldn't identify, were trying to find the best place to spend the night. It was the first time in years that his mind was clear. It had been so clouded by booze for so long that he had forgotten what it was like to have a clear thought. He went back inside and closed the French doors. The pelicans were making a racket. He wandered out front to the mailbox and opened the door. The previous tenant had made a cute mailbox and painted it with hearts. He reached in and grabbed the mail.

There was the usual junk but there was also a little green postcard type thing telling him that he had some certified mail that he needed to pick up and sign for at the Post Office in Freetown. He looked at the return address on it; Newport News, Virginia.

AXELROD HAD A PLAN. It was getting close to Halloween. There was not much Halloween in Jamaica but he knew that Jay knew about Halloween. He called his friend in Ochos Rios. "I have a plan," he said.

The next day, after spending some time on Amazon, he had a package sent to Ochos Rios. Shipping was free but it would take too long so he paid extra to get it there in two days.

There was a company in Minnesota that would make lifelike masks. All they needed was a photo. Axelrod went on Facebook and downloaded both Jay and Lillian's profile pictures. The package was on its way to Ochos Rios the following day.

The package arrived in Ochos Rios. Just in time. The next day was Halloween. The friend, his name was Huey but he always hated the name. So he went by Dexter. He called Axelrod but

there was no answer. Axelrod had the giggler on the couch and had turned his ringer off. Dexter made a plan. He would spend the night in Newcastle, all expenses paid of course, and would take it from there.

THE CERTIFIED MAIL were the court documents. They outlined a manslaughter case against Zach McKlowski. "Willful negligence," was the central gist of it.

HARRY SLATTERY was at a fundraiser in Washington. Senator Becker's aide was giving him the cold shoulder. His wife was hinting at divorce. She knew that her husband had been behind the attack on Reuben. Well at least she suspected as much.

The senator from South Dakota sidled up to him. "I have already talked to Trump. He wants you to be the next Ambassador to England. Does that work for you?"

"Hmmm. Does that mean that I will be hanging with the Queen?" Slattery laughed at his own joke. "I know, I'm sorry. Gallows humor."

The senator continued. "You know your way around London better than anyone. That prick Boris has no clue. Country Club wanker. We need you there to guide him."

"Tell Trump that I will consider it."

It was just getting dark when Dexter made his way toward the house. He had purchased some rope at the local Ace Hardware and learned from YouTube how to tie a noose. There was just one light on in the house. Dexter hid in the shadows. The masks were perfect, very lifelike. He tossed the rope over a tree outside what he thought might be the bedroom window. He looped the noose over the head of Lillian and hoisted it. Excellent. He tossed

a second rope over the same branch and then looped it over Jay. Excellent. He hoisted it alongside Lillian. Dexter pulled his iPhone out of his pocket and took some photos.

SLATTERY WAS TRYING to chat up the new Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett. “She’s a real piece of ass,” he thought. His phone lit up. There were some ghoulish photos of Lillian and Jay hanging from a tree.

He texted back. “Good work.”

ZACH WAS CRAVING A DRINK. More than ever. He poured himself a coke but it tasted flat. “Fuck.” Brooks was being an ass and who the fuck was Thalitha? She seemed to have a bit of an attitude. The court documents had him worried. He knew that there was no way out of what had happened. Somewhere between Maine Maritime and Grand Bahama his life had gone off the rails. He was going to need a good lawyer.

JAY AND LILLIAN had settled into watch *The Crown* on Netflix; for the third time. Neither could understand why they loved the show so much. Jamaica had been an English colony and most Jamaicans resented the British. Jay had no real opinion but he loved the pageantry. Plus Claire Foy was stunningly beautiful and that was from Jay who preferred black women. They had opened a bottle of red and were enjoying a couple of glasses. Jay said, “I need to pee. I will be right back.”

Lillian paused the show.

Jay went to the front door heading outside to take a piss. He was halfway through relieving himself when he looked up. Lillian heard him scream.

## FORTY

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OFFICER PLUMMER had built a strong case against Zach McKlowski. The Mexican Arturo had told him about the drinking as well as about the night that he and Cysar had gone ashore in New York illegally. He had also told him about the body that was dumped. It was his first big case; manslaughter. Three, possibly four dead.

He was also compiling a case against the shipping company. Moloney had emailed him more information. The shipping company and the shipyard in the Bahamas were definitely a front for some kind of business. He was not sure what but Scotland Yard was moving in slowly and cautiously; British style.

Jackspanky was coaching Plummer. Newport News had its fair share of crime but this was a juicy one.

ZACH PULLED THE KIDDIE porn off the old computer and was running it through some brand new facial recognition software. So far there were no hits. Just a lot of old white men getting it off in the worst possible way. Surprisingly, there were some old ladies getting in on things as well.

Lillian called her school friend. There was not much the police could do about it. It was just some Halloween costumes but they



were starting to sense a pattern. First the pigs, now this. Lillian was shaken. "I want to get away from here for a few days," she said. She had noticed that Jay was self-medicating. They usually shared a bottle wine each night but Jay kept getting up to pee. She found the half empty bottle of Appletons hidden on the shelf in the shed. She also found a stash of empties behind a flower pot in the corner. She was not sure how to bring it up with him. "Poor guy," she thought. "This was not the plan that he had in mind when he bought the boat."

ZACH HAD GONE BACK to the gay bar a few times but only got lucky one other time. The problem was that the bar only started to get rolling after midnight and Zach needed to be at the Shipyard by eight in the morning. He decided to stay in and screw off on YouTube. He was lonely. YouTube was a blessing. He flicked between cooking shows and porn. The pelicans were making a racket. He so badly wanted a drink but sipped on a coke instead. Suddenly there was a notification on his screen. He had the face recognition software going in the background and it had found a match.

He grabbed his laptop and stared at the screen.

"Match."

Zach clicked on the match notification. The software gave it 72 percent "Likely" rating. The software had paused the video momentarily. There was an old white man having his way with a young girl. He had stopped for a moment and looked over his shoulder. The camera caught him looking directly into the lens. The software identified the man. He Googled the name and got more than ten thousand hits. He scrolled through but none of the hits resembled the man on his screen. He clicked the software again and it kept searching.

Zach was dozing off when the computer found another match. Zach had no clue who it was and Google didn't help. He woke up on the couch around two in the morning. There had been seven more matches. There was a name that he did recognize. 'Steven Cruse.' Zach Googled him to be sure. Cruse was a Congressman from the 4th district of Texas. He looked at the screen shot and looked back at the Google page. It was Cruse for sure. The software had given it an 85 percent "Likely" rating. Zach knew him, not personally but by reputation. He had been a leading advocate against gay marriage. He had used the word 'fag' on the floor of the house and the Speaker had admonished him for it. There he was, his skinny ass on full display. The girl did not look to be older than ten. Zach looked at the time stamp on the video and Googled 'Congressional Travel Records.' It showed that the Congressman had been part of a delegation visiting London at that time. "Well I'll be damned," he muttered out loud.

The program had run almost 30 hours of footage when it hit. It was only a 40 percent "Likely" rating; Harry Slattery. The name was familiar. Zach knew that he should go to bed. Mornings came around all too quickly and the shipyard had its routine. He Googled the name. His screen filled with thousands of links. The one nearest the top of his screen was for Slattery and Simon, Lawyers out of Washington DC.

YVES-MARIE MOLONEY had convinced the judge that a wiretap was necessary and the judge ordered BT, British Telecom, to place the tap on his line. Brooks noticed it right away. As soon as he picked up a call or placed a call there was a click. Brooks had been on edge since he had received those calls from Moloney so he was hyper vigilant. He visited his local Clicks and bought a half dozen burner phones. He gave two of them to Thalitha. "Use these phones for now," he told her. She gave him a weird look but

didn't say anything. He was scheduled to meet with the Bosses at a country estate on the weekend and didn't want anything to go wrong. They had been hinting at some kind of partnership.

Moloney knew that Dintwa was onto him when he suddenly stopped using his cell phone. He asked one of his juniors to stake out the house. "Don't fuck this up and report back to me chop chop as soon as you have some information."

"Yes sir."

Brooks left mid-morning for the meeting. They were scheduled to meet at two in the afternoon. The estate was at Southend-on-Sea overlooking the ocean, but there was a pub that Brooks liked and figured that he would grab a light lunch before the meeting. The Bosses had been a bit vague about things. As soon as Brooks drove away from his house, Junior notified Moloney. "Do you want me to try and plant the devices?"

"Yes if you can get in the house without damaging anything."

Junior jiffied the bathroom window and was in the house in minutes. He had three bugs. He placed one under the coffee table in the living room, one in the bedroom and the third one under the sink in the kitchen. He let himself out through the front door. "It's good to be a pro," he thought.

Brooks had been expecting a warm reception but instead he was getting a hammering. Someone had infiltrated the business and now the police were asking questions. They did not know what was going on but their questions were too close to the bone. The Bosses were on edge.

## FORTY ONE

ZACH KNEW that there was something wrong the moment he woke up. His mouth was dry, which happened most mornings, but this time it was really dry and he could not get his saliva to flow. He took a shower feeling a bit wobbly and short of breath, but he shook it off. He made himself some toast with sardines, his favorite. He looked at the can of sardines. They were Portuguese, the best, but they tasted of nothing. He added salt and some red pepper flakes and still could not taste anything. He was tired but it was probably because he had stayed up way too late Googleing hits on his face recognition software. He had been astonished. Most of the men that the software had managed to identify were prominent people, some whose names he recognized, most he didn't.

He was starting to feel dizzy when the diarrhea hit. His shipyard job came with healthcare but he was a bit suspect of the healthcare on the island. Unfortunately he had no choice. He pulled up the UBER app on his phone and ten minutes later a small sedan arrive at his door.

"Hey Mister are you ok?" the driver asked.

"I don't feel so good. Can you get me to Rand Memorial?"

By the time they arrived at the emergency room Zach was in bad shape. He went through the hand sanitizing protocol and

wore the new mask that they offered but while waiting to see someone he started to vomit, violently. That got their attention and he was soon on a stretcher heading upstairs. “That fucking gay bar, I knew it,” he thought. They had been jammed in there shoulder to shoulder, no masks.

MOLONEY GOT THE NOD from his higher ups at Scotland Yard. Plus a budget. He had talked with Chris Plummer. There was a lot more to it than some ships and a shipyard. The house wiretaps had revealed something sinister going on but for now they had only an idea without any hard evidence. Moloney had been doing this long enough to know that he was onto something.

JAY AND LILLIAN checked into a small AirBnB in Port Antonia. Lillian thought that some time by the ocean would be good for Jay. His mood had darkened since the hanging effigy’s. She was also unsettled. The likeness of herself and Jay was uncanny. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble to scare them; and they had succeeded.

“I dunno Lillian. I think that I have fucked up big time. I’m really not sure what to do. I suspect that Jess’s Dad was behind the Halloween stunt but obviously can’t prove anything.”

“It’s OK love.”

“It’s not OK, my children are dead and my wife too. And her father is trying to kill us. He is a powerful man in Washington.” Jay held his head in his hands and started to cry. His life was beyond a total mess. Cinnamon Girl was his dream boat. His life had become a nightmare.

THEY INTUBATED ZACH. He was in the ICU. Covid came on quick and direct and he was in bad shape.

JAY SAID, “I THINK that I need to go and talk directly with Zach about all of this. At least get that part out in the open. I had already told him that I would visit but that was before the call from Plummer.

“You need to do what you need to do.”

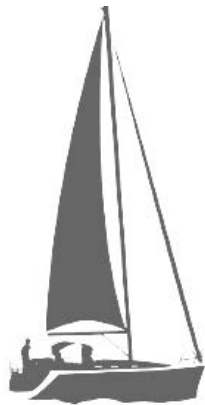
Jay swiped his phone on the Kayak app. He booked a ticket.

OFFICER CHRIS PLUMMER was knee deep in files. He and Moloney were well beyond a ship and a sailboat. There was some serious shit going down and he was digging deeper. Plummer had been molested as a child. His uncle. He had a hunch that this whole thing had to do with sex.

JAY LANDED AT GRAND BAHAMA Airport. He was a bit concerned that Zach had not answered any of his calls or texts but he had his address and took an UBER. He knocked on the door but no answer. Zach was still not answering his phone either. He was sure that he was at the right address. The front door was unlocked. Jay opened it and called out. No reply. The place was a bit spartan. There was a laptop on the table, some hard drives connected. No sign of Zach. Maybe he was at the wrong place. Jay went outside to call Lillian but she didn’t pick up either. He went back inside and saw a plaque. “World Navigator.” He knew that was in the right place, but no sign of Zach.

Jay felt very awkward. He had no idea why Zach was not picking up and felt uncomfortable to be in his home but he was not sure what to do. He sat down at the table and accidentally bumped the mouse. The computer screen lit up. There was picture of his father-in-law right there in front of him; stark naked; having sex; with a child. Jay took out his iPhone and took a photo of the screen. In fact he took a lot of photos. Then he went to hotels.com and found himself a place for the night.

## FORTY TWO



CINNAMON GIRL

**T**HALITHA HAD STARTED going to the local church in her neighborhood. It was Anglican and she was Catholic but the Catholic Church was on the other side of town and she figured, what the heck, it's the same God. She, like her mother Daisy, was extremely devout and lived by the word of God. She hadn't asked Brooks too many questions about the business but clearly he was good at what he was doing. He, well they, because she was living with him, had a large apartment on the upper east side of London and the Tesla was brand new. All seemed good except she had a nagging feeling that something was not quite right. Brooks had come back from the meeting with his Bosses very distracted. He had left in such a good mood but was a little dark when he returned to the apartment. "Thalitha this whole thing is bullshit. I am not sure that we should have left Maun. We had a good life there. Look at me. I'm getting fat. I smoke too much. I can afford the best pot but it still is not as good as the shit I could buy on the streets back home. Plus I miss Mom."

JAY WENT BACK TO THE HOUSE the next day but there was still no sign of Zach. He asked the neighbor if he had seen him and the neighbor told him that he saw him leaving in what he thought was probably an UBER. The neighbor said that he didn't look too well.

“If he was going to a hospital where would he go?”

“Rand Memorial, definitely. Only real hospital on the island.”

“Thank you.”

Jay took an UBER to Rand Memorial. Zach was there. “I’m sorry Sir but he is in the Covid unit and no visitors are allowed.” His condition was listed as ‘stable.’

“Stable, what the hell does that even mean?” he thought. He called Lillian and told her what he had learned. “There is not much you can do there,” she said. “Covid takes a while. You might as well come back home.”

YVES MARIE MOLONEY was working the case with a small team. They knew for sure about the drug running and knew that they could bring Brooks in on that charge alone, but Moloney had a strong feeling that the drugs were just the tip of it. Brooks was burning through the burner phones. Moloney’s guys had found them in the trash. Brooks was cagey about what he said. He usually left the house and went for a walk when he wanted to make a call. His guys had filmed him. “It’s OK,” Moloney said to them, “it’s getting cold out. Soon he won’t be so interested in going out for any walks.”

It was the day after the US elections when they got a hit. Brooks got sloppy, or lazy, it didn’t matter. They got him on tape loud and clear. “We have over two hundred and fifty girls working but we only have sixty rooms in Hackney. They are stacked four to a room and they are getting restless. We have them by the short and curlys and they have nowhere to go but, well, you know, people, even girls, even little girls, have a breaking point. We need to let some of them go or buy more houses.”

The reply was short and to the point. “They are human garbage, and dispensable, and they can barely speak English, so screw

them. I need each girl to bring in at least two thousand quid a day. You tell them that and you keep the business running. Those kids are the cash cow.” Brooks had just hung up the phone when Thalitha walked into the apartment.

“What was that about?”

“Nothing.”

“I heard you talking about some girls. What was that all about?”

“Nothing.”

“Look I am not stupid. I know something wrong is going on. I have had a feeling for some time. What kind of business are you running Brooks?”

“Piss off Sis, this is none of your business.” Brooks stormed out of the room. The mic under the coffee table had it all recorded. Moloney’s guys gave each other a nod. They knew what their Boss would want to do next.

IT DIDN’T TAKE MUCH sleuthing to find the houses in Hackney. They talked to the neighbors but everyone was tight lipped. It was a poor neighborhood and no one wanted any trouble. The operation that Brooks was running was clever and quite complex. The girls were being picked up before dawn, before anyone was out. They were taken to a smart hotel in Hampstead Heath where the first clients came in around seven.

The hotel was owned by the Bosses and catered only to the sex business. On the outside it looked kind of grand; inside it was a place to churn through customers. The booking were done through TikTok. On the face of it TikTok was a video sharing app, but if you knew your way in through the back door customers could book and pay for the girls online. The encryption was so good, and the Chinese owners of TikTok

so clever that the transactions were seamless, and completely anonymous.

When the customers arrived at the hotel eye recognition software let them in and printed out a room number. It also gave out a time limit depending on how much the customer had paid. This was not your dad's brothel. This was nothing about picking out a girl and seducing her, knowing of course that in the end you were going to get laid. This was a strict money making gig. You got who you got and you only had the amount of time you had paid for. When the customers made the booking they clicked the age that they would like and that was where they were sent. The little girls were on the first floor. Those under 12. The middle floor was for the teenage girls. There was no third floor. This was not a whore house; it was a place to have sex with children.

The way that Brooks had set things up was ingenious. Customers could be in by seven and out by eight in time to catch the train to the office. Brooks had cameras installed everywhere. He was making more money selling the videos to porn sites than he was getting paid by the Bosses, but screw them. If they had come up with the idea then maybe he would have shared some of the income, but this was his idea and, as the Bosses liked to say, it was his cash cow.

MOLONEY HAD HIS GUYS follow Thalitha. She didn't go far from the house. Mostly just to the Starbucks on the corner and to the grocery store. Plus church. From the wiretaps it seemed as if she was unaware of most of what Brooks was doing with the business. Moloney stored that bit of information away. You never know.

JAY LANDED BACK in Montego Bay. He wasn't sure if he would tell Lillian about the photos that he had of his father-in-law. The photos were really disturbing. Jess would have been horrified.

## FORTY THREE

THE NEWS WAS ALL about the US elections. Joe Biden seemed to have won convincingly but Trump was refusing to concede. Instead he was trotting out his Cabinet and anyone else that he could convince to go on TV and dispute the results. To a person they read from the same script. The election was rigged and had been stolen from Trump.

Jay and Lillian flipped channels trying to find something else to watch but all the networks and the cable news channels had the same story. Biden had won and Trump was claiming, without any evidence, that the election had been stolen. "Why don't we take a look and see how Fox is covering this," Lillian said. Jay didn't reply so Lillian flipped the channel. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was the guest. He was looking smug. "Yes there will be a smooth transition of power," he said. "From Trump's first term to Trump's second term." The pretty Fox News Anchor smiled. "Thank you Mr. Secretary," she said. "Next up, the man that President Trump has hinted will become the next Ambassador to the UK, Mr. Harry Slattery." Jay knew in that moment what he needed to do.

Zach recovered quite quickly, surprisingly quickly the doctors told him. He returned to his apartment to recuperate and was sitting out on his little deck when he suddenly felt overwhelmed.

Since he had stopped drinking his emotions were much closer to the bone. For years he had been able to stuff them down, but no longer. He felt incredibly lucky to have come through Covid unscathed. He wanted to go back to the Zach he used to be before the drinking really started. He also wanted Arturo.

Zach called and made an appointment to meet with the geeky kid at Computer Kingdom. There were files on the hard drive that he needed to look at and the kid had told him that he could open them. With the spike in Covid he would not be able to go into the store but the kid would come out to his car and pick up the computer.

JAY CREATED A FAKE Gmail account. He had Slattery's cell number and used Google Messages to send a text. "I have a lot more where this came from mr ambassador." He purposely used lower case. He attached just one photo.

YVES MARIE MOLONEY now had the full attention of his higher-ups. They had staked out the apartments in Hackney as well as the hotel in Hampstead Heath. It was clear what was going on but Moloney was a well trained detective. As much as it gutted him to let things continue knowing that the children were being abused, he also knew that he had to build a case that would stand up in court. He needed physical evidence. There was no way that a judge would let him put cameras in the hotel so he settled for a camera installed on a building across the street that would film the girls going in and coming out, as well as the 'customers.'

Moloney called Jackspanky. "We are closing in on this," he said. It kills me to let this continue but we have to gather as much evidence as we can before we go in and nail them. There is something very wrong going on in there and it's going on right in front of our eyes.

ZACH SWUNG BY Computer Kingdom the following morning and picked up the computer. The kid brought it out to the car. "There is some pretty funky stuff on that computer Mister." I saved it all in a folder named Rosemary, after my cat."

"Thank you." Zach headed for the office at the Shipyard and immediately hooked it up. He scrolled through until he found the Rosemary folder and clicked to open it. There was more kiddie sex; that he had expected. There was also a number of Excel spreadsheets most of them containing names and phone numbers. The kid had cleverly converted more than a thousand emails into word documents. Zach started to flick through them and was horrified. The names and emails were from the early days of the business, before it all went online through TikTok, and the content was beyond vile. The last file he opened was a QuickBooks file. The kid had updated it so that Zach could use his current version of QuickBooks to open it and there were some early financial records of some company. No Company Name was specified but it didn't take Zach long to cross reference names on the Excel spreadsheets, the emails, and those he found in some transactions in QuickBooks.

LILLIAN AND JAY were anxiously awaiting the fourth season of The Crown which was due to stream the following day. They had seen the preview. It was going to be all about Margaret Thatcher's relationship with Queen Elizabeth as well, and this was the part that Jay was really looking forward to, the whole Diana mess. Meanwhile they were watching the news. Still no concession from Trump. He was digging in and encouraging a 'Stop the Steal' rally in Washington DC.

"Appletons?" Jay asked.

"Yes please. Just a small one. This news is driving me crazy." Jay got up and went to the kitchen. He poured a light drink for Lillian

and a stiff one for himself. Lillian was right. The news was driving everyone crazy. The rum would take the edge off. An hour later he was asleep on the couch. Lillian flicked through the channels and ended up on Fox. They were covering the DC rally. “What a bunch,” she thought. Talk about a crowd of misfits. What had Hillary called them? Deplorables?” She was just about to change channels when the ticker along the bottom of the screen read, “Harry Slattery, the famed DC lawyer has told Fox News that he was no longer interested in any Ambassadorship or a position in the next Trump Administration.” She clicked the TV off and shook Jay awake.

She told him what she had read on the TV screen. For the first time in a long time Jay felt a glimmer of happiness. “I told you Lillian the man is a no good prick. Not even good enough for Trump and that’s saying something.”

They moved outside to the fire pit. A car was coming up the hill at full speed. It turned into their driveway. It was Winston in his truck. He had a huge Jamaican smile on his face. He rolled down the window. “You guys hungry?”

“Always Winston what you got?”

“Take a look in the back. Under the cover there.”

Jay pulled back the threadbare tarpaulin and there were two huge king crabs; still alive, only just.

## FORTY FOUR

**Y**VES-MARIE MOLONEY had repeatedly tried to get a warrant to tap and install cameras in the hotel but the judge had dismissed each hearing. “I need to see more evidence of any wrongdoing,” she said.

Moloney called Plummer. “We are this close,” he said. “This close to busting this whole thing open but the judge won’t believe what I am saying. Do you have anything on your side that I can use?”

“No, all I have is the ship and the shipyard, both as money laundering operations and that can put them away for a long time, but what you have described as a sex trafficking business won’t be shutdown just because of the money laundering operations.”

“Ok let’s keep working on it. Give Jackspankey my regards.”

ZACH SAT IN HIS OFFICE, his face in his hands. He had just read and seen some of the worst stuff that he had ever read or seen. He was lonely, and very sad. He didn’t have anyone to talk to about it all. There was another Iranian ship in the dry dock but he didn’t care. “They are all crooks, the lot of them.” He thought about calling Jay but instead changed his mind. He flicked through his



contacts on his phone until he got to one that read, Amante. The voice on the other end answered.

“Si?”

“I need you.”

“I will come tomorrow.”

Zach picked Arturo up at the airport the next morning. Nothing was said. They went back to Zach’s apartment and sat outside watching the pelicans. “Arturo, now we are equals. I am not your Captain. You are not my crew. I am going to say this once only. I’m sorry.”

“Me too Captain,” Arturo replied. Zach gave him a look. “I’m sorry too Zach. For what I did. I was angry. I told the police.”

“I know, it’s Ok.”

The two men sat overlooking the water watching the pelicans squabbling over where they could nest for the night. “There is something I have to tell you,” Zach said.

It was well after midnight by the time they finished talking. Just like the time they talked after World Navigator had run over Cinnamon Girl, Arturo said simply, “You have to go to the police. I will call Detective Plummer tomorrow.”

PLUMMER WAS IN HIS CAR when the phone rang. He had been investigating a shoplifting case. He glanced down and saw that the Caller ID was Arturo. He pulled the car over.

“Officer I have some information that you might be interested in. Can I come and see you. I can be there tomorrow.”

“Sure.”

Zach drove him to the airport. He was up early and had copied everything off the hard drive to a separate drive and placed that

drive in the safe at the shipyard. Arturo had a separate set of files in his carry-on. They were just some of the files, not all.

PLUMMER ASKED JACKSPANKY if he could join him for the meeting. There was something in Arturo’s tone that had him intrigued. They met in the small conference room.

“How can we help you?” Plummer asked.

Arturo laid the hard drive on the table. “There is some very incriminating evidence on this hard drive. Evidence that I know you will be interested in. But before we talk about it I want to make a deal.”

Both Plummer and Jackspankey were taken aback. The Mexican had come all the way to Newport News to make some kind of a deal.

“Yes I know that this might be a surprise to you both,” Arturo said. “But hear me out.”

A couple of hours in, and after reviewing some of the hard drive contents they got Moloney on Skype. “I think that we have what you need,” Plummer said. He gave Moloney a brief thumbnail of what they had. “Bingo old Chap,” he said. “That’s what we need to convict.” Plummer looked at his phone. He said ‘Bingo?’

DETECTIVE PLUMMER flew to Jamaica. They were still in a pandemic and they did have budget concerns but this was too important. Jackspankey had signed off on the trip. Jay had agreed to meet at an outdoor caf  in Kingston. Plummer came right to the point.

“We had, have, been building a case against Mr. McKlowski,” he said. “But something has come up and I am here to talk to you about it.” Jay looked over at Lillian. “Go on.”

Plummer outlined what he and Arturo had discussed and a little of what was in the files on the hard drive that Arturo had shown them.

“How does this affect me?” Jay asked.

“I’m coming to that,” Plummer said. “We have perhaps enough evidence to blow this whole child sex ring wide open with what we have. We could use more evidence which we believe Mr. McKlowski has on a hard drive in the Bahamas. Arturo was the one who came to us but he came with strings attached. They want us to drop charges against McKlowski in return for the rest of the evidence.”

Jay glanced over at Lillian. She nodded ever so slightly. She also raised her eyebrows. “Let me talk to Lillian about this. I will get back to you. Are you staying on the island for the night?”

“Yes, I’m staying at The Liguanea Club. Can we meet for lunch tomorrow?”

“Yes.”

JAY AND LILLIAN booked an AirBnB for the night. They didn’t want to drive all the way back home only to be back in Kingston the following morning. Their AirBnB hosts had a nice deck and they were outside talking. “Jay this is totally up to you and I will support you all the way, no matter what you decide. You can push ahead with the charges against Zach, or you can work with the police to take down a child sex trafficking organization. It’s not going to be an easy decision.”

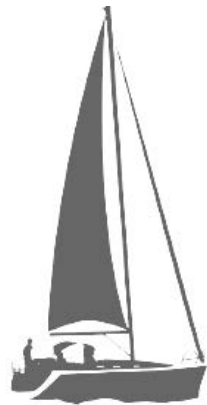
Jay had poured himself a neat Appletons. He chugged half the glass.

“I know.”

“I think that one thing you should do is call Zach and talk to

him about what happened that night.” Jay downed the rest of his drink. “I know. I will call him now.”

## FORTY FIVE



CINNAMON GIRL

**Z**ACH DIDN'T ANSWER right away. He let the calls go to voicemail. He was nervous. Arturo said, "You need to talk to him you know?"

"I know."

Jay had not left any messages. He tried Zach again the following morning, but no answer. He waited a few minutes and called again. This time Zach picked up.

"Hi Zach this is Jay."

"Hi Jay, how are things?"

"Things are OK – just OK. I am really happy that you were able to get through Covid. Are you better now?" Jay could hear the air conditioner struggling against the Bahamian heat.

"Yes, the doctors that treated me were amazed at how well I did. How are you doing?"

"Zach there is something that I need to talk to you about." Zach knew what was coming. They talked for a while.

"So you were not on the bridge that night. You know. The night when your ship hit my boat?"

"No, my deputy Hank Redmond was on watch. I was in my cabin." There was a long pause. "With Arturo."

Jay picked up on the pause. "With Arturo? As in with Arturo not just with Arturo."

"Yes." He paused. "We were having sex."

"Well fuck me gently," Jay said. "I am going to move along from that. That's none of my business. So you weren't directly responsible for the ship at that moment."

"Yes I was. I was the Captain and effectively in charge, but Hank was on watch and in charge of things at that moment. I had been on the bridge earlier because Hank had heard some VHF communication between a boat and a Chinese ship and he wanted my input about what to do but I quickly figured it out that there was some kind of miscommunication."

"So what did you do next?"

"I went back to my cabin, and Arturo."

"Ok thank you Zach. Do you mind if I call you again tomorrow?"

"No." Jay hung up.

JAY WAS UPSET. He didn't care about the sex. He was not even sure if he was upset at Zach. He was not even sure why he was upset except for the fact that his wife and two beautiful children were dead. He was mostly upset with himself. He stormed out of the room. Lillian let him go. She understood.

LATER THAT NIGHT Jay was still fuming. He had drunk most of a bottle of Appletons. Lillian had let him be after he fell asleep watching *The Crown*. "I'm going to bed," she said. "You know where to find me."

Jay woke up around two in the morning. He felt like crap. He dragged himself over to his laptop and pulled up his fake Gmail account. He had transferred the screen photos that he had taken

of his father-in-law from his phone to a secret folder. He typed slowly, in all caps.

"YOU WILL TRANSFER \$10,000 EACH MONTH INTO A BANK ACCOUNT THAT I WILL SEND IN A SEPARATE EMAIL. THERE WILL BE NO DISCUSSION. I ALSO HAVE A VIDEO." He attached two more photos and hit send and went back to bed.

He awoke feeling good, the first time in a long time. Lillian was already up making coffee, Blue Mountain Coffee, and Jay joined her on the deck overlooking Kingston harbor.

"I made a decision," he said. "Accidents happen. Child sex rings don't just happen. Jess and Pattie and Ollie paid a huge price but something good can come out of all of this. I am going to give Plummer the go-ahead.

PLUMMER MOVED QUICKLY once Zach had sent him the hard drive with all the evidence. He uploaded it to Moloney through a secure portal. "Bloody bravo old chap," Moloney said when he downloaded it all and called Plummer. "I think that we have more than we need now."

SCOTLAND YARD had a tail on Thalitha but quickly realized that she was a small fish in a big pond. Still they brought her in for questioning. She sat looking nervous in the interrogation room. She really had no idea what they were talking about. She had been suspicious that Brooks was involved in some kind of illegal behavior but what the detectives were talking about was so far out of anything that she might have imagined.

"You can go," they said.

Later that evening, after they finished the last of the Indian food, she mentioned the incident to Brooks. "They were really talking some kind of shit. Something about child sex crap. I told

them I had no idea about any of it. I told them that they probably had the wrong person. In the end they agreed.”

“What did you say to them?”

“Nothing. I had no idea what they were talking about.”

Brooks knew that the gig was up. He had long since planned their escape.

SCOTLAND YARD moved quickly now they had all the evidence that they needed. Unlike before, the judge signed off right away. They moved in before dawn the following morning. They knocked – as per protocol – but when there was no answer they crashed in through the front door. The apartment was empty. There were some hard drives on the dining room table – and a note that read. “HAVE AT IT.”

BROOKS AND THALITHA were on the M20 heading for Folkstone. In the Tesla. There would be a boat there to take them across the English Channel to France where Brooks had already lined up a ride to Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. He knew that Heathrow and Gatwick would be monitored as soon as they found the note. Brooks hated to leave the Tesla but that was just the price of doing business. They got into the boat and the driver gunned the engine. They would come ashore in France in a little harbor outside Calais. Brooks was acutely aware that the French probably had them on radar, but his burner phone had a driver lined up and they would quickly disappear into the French countryside. He already had fake passports for himself and Thalitha. He had long since been on Orbitz and had two tickets booked to Nice.

They landed in France. The car was there. “Thank you,” he said to the boat captain. I know that you have already been paid but here is a little extra. Remember, this never happened,”

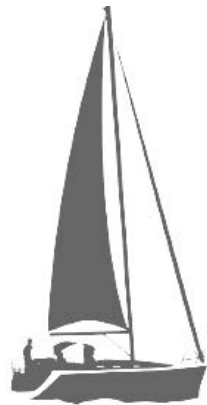
he said. He handed the boat captain a wad of cash and he and Thalitha hopped into the car. The driver sped along the country roads heading for Paris. Brook could not help himself. He kept looking over his shoulder. Thalitha was beside him, weeping.

SCOTLAND YARD is no slouch organization. They were on full alert. Police around the country were on the lookout for a silver Tesla. They found it on the dock in Folkstone. They alerted the French police but very quickly the trail went cold. They presumed that the couple was heading for de Gaulle but they also knew that Brooks was a cunning person. He had left the hard drives, but had not left any passwords. They knew that he needed time to make his escape.

THE CAR ARRIVED at de Gaulle airport. Brooks said, “You are going to have to wear this.” He handed Thalitha a Burka. “Just put it on, it won’t kill you. Besides it counts as your mask.”

There were police everywhere. Brooks pulled his mask up thankful for the first time that a mask might be a good thing. “We are going to have to get out of here,” he said. “Too many cops.”

SCOTLAND YARD had Brooks on their eye recognition software. The mask did not cover his eyes. Maloney’s boss was on the case. “They are at de Gaulle,” he said. “Let’s pick them up.” Brooks was no fool. He had grown up on the streets of Maun and knew a hustle when he saw one. He grabbed Thalitha by the hand. “We are going out the back way. Soon they were in a taxi. Brooks knew that cash-only transactions would leave no trace. “Maisons-Laffitte,” he said, and they took off through the dark streets of Paris.



CINNAMON GIRL

## FORTY SIX

**S**COTLAND YARD quickly busted the hard drives open and a judge signed off on the warrants. Three prominent London businessmen and two members of Boris Johnson's Parliament were arrested. It was just the start of what would become one of the biggest scandals in UK history. Brooks had left everything on the drives. Client information, money transactions, everything. The police raided the apartments in Hackney and 276 girls were taken into child services. The hotel in Hampstead Heath was closed; indefinitely.

BROOKS PAID CASH for a small Citroen at a dealership in Maisons-Laffitte. He paid well over the asking price and the salesman offered to get the car registered. He didn't ask any questions, he was just happy for his big payday. Early that same evening they set off for the south of France. "We'll drive only at night," he told Thalitha.

She started sobbing again. "So what those policemen told me was true??"

Brooks avoided eye contact. "It was just business."

"Business that involved children?"

"Yes."

“The Lord will never forgive you,” Thalitha said. “And our mother won’t either.”

“She doesn’t have to know about it.”

They stopped for some food in Dijon. It was just after midnight and they pulled into a gas station. Brooks filled the car and went inside to pick up some sandwiches. He was already inside when he remembered his mask and had to go back to the car to get it. He grabbed two baguettes and some Dijon mustard.

“Here,” he said to Thalitha. “You have to try this mustard. He smeared a thick wad on his baguette and devoured the sandwich.

It was just getting light when they arrived in Lyon and found a place for the day. Brooks got Thalitha her own room. She was a sobbing mess. He flicked the TV on and the lead story was the child sex scandal in London. He watched the Bosses being dragged off in handcuffs. He changed channels. Trump had still not conceded. When the reporter from CNN asked him about the scandal in England, Trump sneered. “It’s just fake news. Boris is a great guy.”

JAY WAS FEELING a little bit better. Well sort of. As good as one could feel after losing his wife and children. But at least he had Lillian. They were sitting out on the lawn of the small house that they had rented in Port Antonio. Lillian said, “I am really sorry that the sailing trip didn’t work out. You are a good man Jay and you were a good family man. Well except for the affair. I miss your children too you know. I don’t know how to change things that have already happened. I got what I wanted and I know that’s an unfair thing to say. I fell in love with you the first time I saw you in that silly Captains hat.”

“It’s OK. Sometimes one makes a deal with the devil. And no, you are not the devil. My conscience will hound me for as long as I live. I will live with the guilt. I deserve to feel some pain.”

Lillian sighed. There was nothing more for her to say. They sat there in silence for a while. “I’ve been thinking,” she said. “My sister has a friend who has a plot just outside of Boston Bay. Their pig had piglets last week. What do you think?”

Before he could answer there was the sound of a car coming up the road at speed. Winston had come over for coffee. “So you guys want to go out on the boat?”

“I think we are ok,” Jay said. “I think that we are going to stay in today.” He kept flipping through the Bank of America app on his phone. Lillian was wondering why so much attention. Then it landed; Ten Grand in his account. “The fucking fucker is going to pay for the rest of his life.”

IT WAS CLEAR THAT INTERPOL was on high alert and Brooks and Thalitha were their top priority. They parked the Citroën in the long-term parking lot and entered the terminal cautiously. Brooks had already printed their tickets out. Nice to Gaborone with a stop in Kinshasa, Zaire. They checked in at the remote check-in station using their fake passports. The machine spat out boarding cards. So far so good. “Let’s get something to eat,” Brooks said.

“Ok.”

France had entered Stage One lockdown and only restaurants with outside seating were available. They pulled up a couple of chairs at La Plage. The waitress was taking their order when Brooks spotted the man. He was on Zello, the walkie-talkie app on his phone but he was looking directly over to where they were sitting. “We need to get the fuck out of here,” Brooks said. Let’s hope that there is a back door to this restaurant. “You go first. I will meet you at the car.” Thalitha got up and asked the waitress if the restaurant had a bathroom. She said no, that Thalitha would have to use the ladies room on the main concourse. She took off

trying to act as casual as possible. The man was still on his phone when Brooks entered the restaurant. “Monsieur S’il vous plaot no,” the man behind the bar told him but Brooks had already spotted a way out through the kitchen. He started to run and was quickly heading down a flight of stairs to the lower concourse. He glanced up and the man with the walkie-talkie was at the top of the stairs pointing at him.

“Fuck.”

They took Thalitha in. She was not quick enough and Interpol arrested her. Brooks ran and was soon at the long term parking lot. No one had chased him but he was sure that they would have the exit blocked. He abandoned his plan and crept cautiously down the fire exit steps. Sure enough there were two gendarme’s at the parking lot exit. Brooks slipped out and called a taxi. In a few minutes he was safely away from the airport. The taxi dropped him at a small hotel and Brooks checked in paying cash. The next day, wearing a disguise, he retrieved the Citroen and started driving toward Greece. He had no idea where Thalitha was but was not too concerned. She had no idea about the child sex business and would probably be ok; he hoped.

ZACH AND ARTURO were outside watching the pelicans squabble. For some reason the birds all wanted the same branch. The island was small and Zach wondered why all those birds had chosen that tiny place to call home. He liked the noise and commotion. “You know Captain, err Zach, you did the right thing. Telling the police. I know that it will probably cost you your job but we can always find another ship. I know that Cēsar is still looking for work.”

“I dunno Arturo, I am thinking of getting into Real Estate.” He looked over at his friend and smiled. Then he leaned forward and gently kissed him on the lips.

“BENZ, BROOKS. YES I KNOW that you didn’t recognize the number. It’s a burner phone.” Brooks was just pulling into Athens feeling quite confident that he had shaken Interpol; for now. “I need some help.”

Benz had run the human trafficking side of the operation. “I need a boat to get me to Lebanon.”

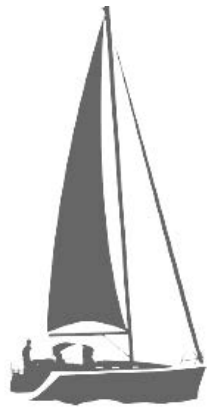
“No problem. You paying cash right?”

“Yes.”

A week later he was smuggled ashore in Beirut. Benz had arranged for a driver to take him to Damascus. Syria was a mess and Brooks knew that he would be able to get a flight out without too much trouble. Benz had arranged for a colleague to meet him at the airport and to stamp his passport with a Syrian entry visa. Benz had also purchased the ticket through a third party; Damascus to Johannesburg; direct



## FORTY SEVEN



CINNAMON GIRL

**H**IS FLIGHT LANDED at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. Brooks had slept the whole way from Damascus. He cleared customs without any problems. He didn't dare use any of his credit cards to rent a car and instead had a taxi take him downtown where he picked up some pre-paid debit cards. He had closed his UK accounts before he left town and transferred the money to his Monrovia bank account which he felt was probably pretty safe to use; for now. As soon as he was back in Maun he would transfer the money there. He spent the night in Sandton and using a fake Gmail account booked a ticket to Gaborone for the next morning.

THEY HAD THALITHA in an interrogation room. She was back in London. She had not slept in days, at least it felt that way. At night she would pray and sometimes fall into a fitful sleep but mostly she was awake, sobbing. The police were asking her questions that she didn't have answers to. She had been in charge of the ships and keeping an eye on things with the shipyard, but the child sex business? She had no idea. She had been arrested but with nothing much to offer, the police let her go. There would, however, be a court hearing which was set for the following June. The courts were backed up because of Covid

ONCE BROOKS LANDED in Gaborone he was starting to feel quite confident that he was free from Interpol. But he was also smart enough to not take any chances. He hired a young kid to drive him to Maun. It was over a thousand miles. His mother Daisy had once ridden a charity bike ride between the two towns and as Brooks watched the dry, dusty scenery pass by he grew a new respect for his mother. He was looking forward to seeing her again. They drove up through the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park. Big herds of elephants roamed close to the road. They saw all of the Big Five except a leopard. Lions, rhino, elephants and buffalo were plentiful. Leopards were much harder to spot. Makgadikgadi Pans had been his backyard as a child. His step-father Pete was a wildlife scientist and they had camped there many times. It was just before dawn when they drove into Maun. Not much had changed since Brooks had left a few years earlier. He recognized some of the street hustle. He was hungry. "I know a place where we can get a good meal," he said.

They pulled into the dusty parking lot of the Akacia Caf . The staff was new and didn't recognize him which Brooks was OK with. He ordered a lemon crush for himself and his driver plus a heaping plate of vetkoek filled with mince as well as some plain vetkoek with syrup on the side. Stuffed and satisfied they left heading for his mothers small plot.

THALITHA STARTED to pack things up. The apartment was eerily quiet without Brooks. She tried to put it off but after a week or so she called her mother. She had to do it. Her Catholic guilt was eating at her. Daisy was horrified by what she heard. At first she could not believe what she was hearing but after Thalitha broke down crying, well sobbing to be more precise, Daisy got it. She was mad and she knew that the best way to deal with mad was to take it out on her garden. She was there when Brooks and his

driver drove up. She looked up and saw a car approaching. She barely recognized Brooks. He was fat, had a bad beard and a smirk that had not been there before.

"I talked to Thalitha," she said. "Is it true?"

"Yes Mom, it's all true."

"Then you need to get out of here." Daisy's skin was darker than the rich Botswana earth but Brooks could see a red flush. He knew when his mother was mad. He turned to leave when he saw two police cars approaching the home. "Let's go," he told the driver and slunked down in the passenger seat as they passed the two cop cars.

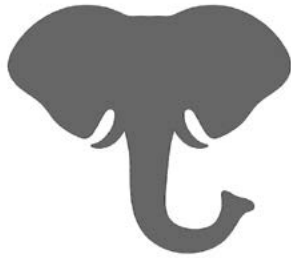
"Fuck."

He found his father at the Tshilli Cafe. He was well into his fifth Tusker. "Dad I need your help." Brooks sat down and hesitantly started to tell him what had happened. His father downed the rest of his beer. "OK my boy. I am not asking any questions but I know a place out in the Okavango Delta where you can hide out for as long as it takes. It will cost you but they will never find you."

And they never found him.

Or did they?

COMING NEXT



  
**BROOKS**

Published in 2023 by Great Circle Publishing

**T**HE HERD WAS MOVING ALONG just below the escarpment. The old matriarch knew better than to have them all silhouetted against the early evening sky where they would be vulnerable. She was wary, her trunk sniffing the air. She could taste the dust and dung from a herd of buffalo far below on the plains. She could also taste the peppery smell of tobacco. People were close by. She could also taste death. It was still bitter in her mouth. Five days earlier her herd has come across a killing field, a mass slaughtering. In the hot sun lay around 30 elephants, all of them maimed and bloated. All of their tusks had been removed. Cut off with chainsaws. The matriarch had quickly gathered the young ones to make sure that they would not witness what she had seen. She knew, however, that the stain on their tongues would be there forever. They moved quickly, the night air was getting cooler.

The matriarch knew that they were vulnerable. It was an instinct passed down through the blood of her ancestors. It was in her blood and she would pass it on in some magical way to her offspring. The sun set quickly, as it always does in Africa, and the herd slowed down taking time to breath in the night air. The plan was to move toward the waterhole where they could relax a little. As they got down onto the floodplain the elephants started moving with less urgency. They stopped to enjoy the sweet msasa leaves and after that they feasted on mopane leaves. They liked the high protein content of the mopane, but they also knew that the tree had a weapon to protect itself. As soon as elephants start to eat their leaves, the mopane tree reacts by pumping chemicals from its trunk into the leaves and they turn bitter and acidic. The elephants quickly moved on.

The waterhole was packed with buck and warthogs. The matriarch held back keeping an eye out while letting the youngsters drink first. The young bulls were getting restless. They were horny. It's a problem with all teenagers, including four legged ones. Once satiated the herd kept moving. They would usually sleep at night but the matriarch's instinct told her that on this night they would be more vulnerable after dark so she kept the herd moving until dawn when she found a thicket for them to rest in.

It was starting to get light and she was dozing off when she heard the guns. They were far off but their murderous sound carried on the light morning breeze. She hustled her herd awake and they set off in the opposite direction. The matriarch knew that they had to get as far away from the noise as possible. She still had the bitter taste in her mouth from the killing field. Despite her best instincts, and her complete love for her herd, they too would fall victim to the guns.

## COMING SOON



Coming Spring 2025 from Great Circle Press

**L**EE LEE AND TAM were picnicking on the banks of the Song Cam, the beautiful river that wraps itself lovingly around the city of Hai Phong in northeastern Vietnam. Their home was not far away and it had become their routine to spend most Sunday afternoons lounging in the shade of a large banyan tree drinking wine; secretly of course. The Vietnamese officials frowned on public drinking, but Lee Lee had it all worked out. Their thermos was filled with one of the more expensive wines that the high-end gourmet shop on the corner not far from their house sold, and the red solo cups gave nothing away.

“I love these times, Tam said. “I love when I don’t have to share you. You are go, go, go all week and when you come home at night you are too tired to even think about sex.”

Lee Lee kissed her. “I know. I’m sorry. I love you to the ends

of this earth and back and all of the other earth's inbetween, but the business is exploding and I am the only one there that can run things. Tam lay back on the blanket. She let a lop of her long brown hair flop in front of her left eye. She knew that it turned Lee Lee on. "I know," Tam said. "I know. But I have been thinking. I am getting tired of waiting tables. I was thinking of sending my resume to the Hilton Hotel, you know the new one near the airport that they are building? They are looking for receptionists."

Lee Lee rolled over. "You know that I can support both of us?" she said. "I make a lot of money and I could make a lot more if I wanted to. I'm the boss and I set my own salary."

Tam sat up cross-legged. "I guess, but I need to find something more to do with my life other than wait tables." She brushed the hair off her face.

Lee Lee was leaning in to kiss Tam when the first gunshot went off. There were two punks on a motorcycle. The guy on the back had the gun, but luckily he was a bad shot. The bullet was meant for either Lee Lee or Tam, it didn't matter, but instead it hit the banyan tree and ricocheted off and hit a small stray cat that had been begging for scraps. The cat yelped and ran off.

"Let's get the fuck out of here," Tam yelled. They were running toward their home when the punks came by a second time. The second shot also missed. "Nhưng ngudi dong tinh chet tiet," they yelled. "Fucking gays."

LEE LEE GREW UP ON THE Mekong River Delta in Vietnam. Her Mom had a stall where she sold pho; not just any pho. She sold the very best pho on the whole Delta. She was a legend. An absolute legend. People came from all over Ho Chi Minh City to enjoy her food. She had a secret ingredient; cinnamon basil. Plus there was a lot of love that went into in each and every bowl.

Lee Lee was running to the edge of the park when the bullet hit her; in the calf. She fell to the ground faster than a moose dropped by an AK47. Tam screamed. She turned, but the shooters were gone. She could see a trail of blue smoke where their motorbike had been. There was a strong smell of gunpowder in the air.

Lee Lee was clearly in pain. The back part of her leg was gone. Tam grabbed for her cell and called the emergency number. Five minutes later an ambulance arrived. "You fuckers," Tam yelled, but Lee Lee said simply, "the only way to change any of this is to change all of it." Then she slipped into a place where only people with massive pain go.

DUC GREW UP MODESTLY. His family tree went back many generations and they had all made a decent living. Duc was looking to make more than just a decent living. He was young and ambitious. He was willing to try anything and for a time had run a food truck. It was an OK way to pass a day, but he needed more. There were a few years when he ran his own limo company but UBER took over most of his market and within a few short months his cars sat idle. That pissed him off more than just a little. One morning, while reading the papers with his cup of hot green tea, he saw a brief article about a young businessman who had declared that he was running to unseat President Nguyen Xuan Phuc's.

Duc was intrigued. He had recently read an article which outlined how to make a lot of money; in the shortest amount of time. It was in the New York Times and the gist of it was that there were only two easy ways to make money quickly; politics or religion. Duc was an atheist so politics it was. He contacted the young businessman. His name was Nguyen Phu. He was part of the Vietnam Parliament and was a rising star mostly because his

platform was to pass new laws and to tighten up on existing laws, especially when it came to homosexuality. His stump speech was the same every place that he went. "I am an atheist," he said, "but if there is a God I am sure that that God would not approve of men sleeping with men or women sleeping with women. It's just wrong. Wrong," and to make his point he said "wrong" a third time. He was gaining a following not only in Ho Chi Minh City, but across Vietnam. Nguyen Phu came close to toppling Nguyen Xuan Phuc but the President had the machine behind him and he prevailed. Nguyen Phu might have lost but he had sowed a whole lot of hate across Vietnam.

Duc had played a small part in the campaign. He didn't approve of the message, but he understood charisma and Nguyen Phu had charisma; in bucket loads. The day after the election Nguyen called a meeting with his team.

"What did we do wrong?" He asked. "There was a groundswell of support all across Vietnam. We should have won." Duc looked at him. He looked feeble, like a man who had just lost his dog. "We did win," Duc said. "We did win, but Vietnam is changing. Your charisma got us only so far, but I think that your message was a little off. People in Vietnam are becoming more tolerant of gays, both male and female." Nguyen Phu stared at him. "If that's what you think then you are fired." Duc stood and left the room. He had known all along who he was dealing with but he thought that Nguyen might change. It wasn't to be. Nguyen remained in Parliament and ran again five years later but lost by an even larger margin. Duc watched from the outside looking in. The man was sowing hate across the country, but it wasn't working.

Thankfully.

**Lee Lee will be published in early 2025 by Great Circle Publishing**

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- Living Life - The Ocean Globe Race story (coming February 2025)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**B**RIAN HANCOCK is an acclaimed author, adventurer, and expert in the world of offshore sailing. His extensive experience on the open seas and deep understanding of the intricacies of sailing have made him a respected figure in both the maritime community and literary circles.

Born in South Africa, Hancock's fascination with the ocean began at a young age, leading him to a life that would be defined by exploration, challenge, and a relentless pursuit of adventure. Hancock's sailing career spans several decades, during which he has accumulated over 300,000 sea miles including three Whitbread Round the World Races which is considered one of the most grueling and prestigious sailing competitions in the world.

His first-hand experience with the trials and triumphs of ocean racing lends a palpable authenticity to his writing, allowing readers to feel the wind, waves, and raw emotion that come with a life spent on the high seas. As a writer, Hancock has a unique ability to translate the complexities of sailing into

compelling narratives that resonate with both seasoned sailors and avid readers alike.

Brian is the author of 12 books including two memoirs (Two Bricks and a Tickey High and Lapping the Planet), a murder mystery (Murder at your Convenience), two novels (Cinnamon Girl and Brooks), two books of short stories (Twisted Tales and More Twisted Tales) and four children's books in the Adventures of Fat Cat series. He also authored the definitive guide to all things sails and sailmaking (Maximize your Sail Power). In addition Brian has written for numerous magazines around the world and is a heralded public speaker.

Brian lives in Marblehead, Massachusetts with his wife Sally their cat Ziggy and scruffy West Highland Terrier named Maisy. Their five children and a grandson stop by every now and then for a hot meal and a warm bed.





It started as a dream and ended up a nightmare. Then the story gets really interesting. From the yuppie town of Marblehead, Massachusetts to the hot waters of Jamaica, this story will take you on a wild ride of love and desperation, tragedy and recovery and then to the dark side of the child trafficking and sex industry in the back streets of London. Finally an escape to the Okavango Delta in Botswana.

In all it's a hot mess, a Caribbean stew if you will.

"If you are looking for another War and Peace don't read this book. If you are looking for a fun beach or airplane read, then this is the book for you. Highly recommended."

--- Sally Holtzman



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