

MURDER **AT YOUR** **CONVENIENCE**



BRIAN HANCOCK

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a novel by BRIAN HANCOCK

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For Sally - the love of my life

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THE FIRST SHOT went off and it hit the brand new cooler that Mr. Gupta had just installed. It ricocheted and went through the drop down ceiling causing a little dust to settle on the meat on the meat counter. Richie, the butcher, had been packing up for the night but, luckily for him, he had gone outside for a smoke. The second shot was no better. It hit the new display of cookies sending them splattering everywhere. It was the third shot that hit its intended target. Carlos used to work at the store but this time he was there just to pick up some groceries. His wife had made a list for him that included eggs and some extra thick bacon. She had been planning on making pasta carbonara for a late dinner. The violence of the bullet had lifted Carlos and dumped him on the meat counter right next to the meat slicer.

The killer made a run for it. She immediately regretted what she had done. She hopped in her car and was heading out of town down West Shore Drive when Sergeant Bigblow flicked his lights on. The killer had a light out on her right rear side. She pulled into the parking lot of the VFW. The cop pulled up alongside her.

“May I see your license and registration please?” Sergeant Bigblow asked.

The killer reached for her license and registration, grabbed the gun, which she had stashed under some Dunkin’ Donuts napkins in the glove compartment, and shot the police officer in the chest. Adrenalin can make you do crazy things. She was in a crazy state of mind. Her son had been kidnapped.

The killer took off being careful to drive under the speed limit. She had no idea why the cop had pulled her over. West Shore Drive was deserted and she was out of town before a jogger found Sergeant Bigblow on the ground beside his police cruiser.

The jogger called 911 and within minutes the cavalry arrived. Five squad cars, three fire trucks and an ambulance. Luckily he was near the recycle station where they had just marked off an area for helicopters to land. Medivac. It didn’t help. Sergeant Bigblow was pronounced dead before the helicopter landed on the roof at Mass General Hospital.

MARBLEHEAD CONVENIENCE STORE is a local institution. It’s where all the townies shop. They are allowed to put their groceries on “the tab.” This was particularly attractive to those on a weekly income. On Monday’s they were usually broke most likely because they had spent the last of their paycheck on a six pack at the liquor store adjacent to the Convenience Store. Sunday afternoons were for hanging out on the couch watching a ball game and drinking beer. Monday they could charge their groceries and by Thursday they could pay their tab. That was when their paycheck cleared.

The store prices were a little higher than the other supermarkets in town but people were happy to pay a little extra for the

convenience. Plus they liked the folksy atmosphere. Some had been heard grumbling that the place was starting to look like a 7/11 since Mr. Gupta bought the store, but for now most of the regulars were still shopping there.

RICHIE WAS HANGING OUT behind the liquor store taking the last drag on his smoke when he heard a muffled sound. It was a bit like the sound of a cork coming out of a champagne bottle. He snuffed his cigarette out with the heel of his shoe and reached into his right pocket for a nip of Jack Daniels. The smoky mix hit his gut and Richie started to feel a little better about life. He liked his job working the meat counter and he had also recently patched things up with his wife. He was considering going back into the store to close up the deli and to pack the meat away, but instead decided on a second smoke. He noticed a white Honda CRV pull out of the parking lot followed moments later by a black sedan. Whoever was driving seemed to be in a hurry. Richie took another pull on his cigarette and finished the last of the Jack Daniels. He needed to go back into the store to pack up and lock up.

THE KILLER STOPPED AT a convenience store in Swampscott. She needed some cigarettes. Her hands were still shaking and she had to calm herself before entering the store. She didn’t want to act suspicious or draw any unnecessary attention. The clerk at the counter pushed the box of cigarettes under the Perspex shield that had been installed because of Covid. The killer swiped her debit card and left the store. She didn’t give a moment’s thought to the fact that she was on CCTV. She lit a Salem Lights and took a long drag, holding it in for a while before exhaling slowly through her nose. The smoke rose slowly curling up like a blue snake. It eased her nerves a little. Ahead was the Swampscott Police Department. She thought about

turning around but instead took her chances. The police station was quiet and before long she was at the Nahant rotary. Ahead she could see the Porthole Pub. The killer pulled into the parking lot and made her way to the edge of the concrete breakwall. The water was black and still. Just a few stars reflected on the calm surface. She tossed her gun into the water and quickly headed back to her car. It was dark out and she was sure that no one had seen her. It was only when she got back to her car that she saw the camera mounted on the roof of the Porthole Pub.

“Fuck.”



CARLOS RAMIREZ grew up dirt poor in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. Their tiny two room apartment was on a back street off the 308. It was just a stones throw from the Supermercado Mr. Special where Carlos ate for most of his childhood. He and his sister knew when the supermarket would dump their expired food, and they would be hiding just out of sight. The food, much of it still good, was in high demand among the neighborhood kids but Carlos had an analytical mind and figured out the supermarkets schedule to know precisely when the food was going to be dumped. He always made sure that he and his sister were first in line for the good stuff. They ate well.

Their schoolhouse was a dimly lit place, brutally hot without much through breeze. Carlos struggled with every subject. His Dad was furious when his report card was issued. “Carlos,” he would yell. “Entra aquñ ahora mismo. Get in here right now.” Carlos would hide outside behind the water catcher but his Dad would find him. He always hid in the same place. “Mi hijo,” he would say through gritted teeth. “You are bringing dishonor to this family. Mi familia. Tu familia. Your family. How can you be

such a stupid boy?” It was only years later when Carlos delivered a sailboat to Florida that someone diagnosed him with dyslexia. But let’s not skip that far ahead just yet.

Carlos and his sister were a team. While Carlos had the swarthy good looks of a pirate, his sister Maria had blond hair and, depending on how the sun caught them, green eyes. Mostly they were blue but every now and then there was a glint of green and she preferred to believe that they were green. Figuring out the Supermarket’s schedule was Carlos’s doing; figuring out how to sell the extra food was his sister’s domain. They would always take more than they needed for themselves and Maria would go door to door with her small satchel filled to the brim with produce and sell the food to the elderly. She would use her charm, and it worked. With the money they made Carlos invested in fishing gear. By the time he was ten, and Maria eight, Carlos had enough money to buy a small skiff. While Maria was out selling veggies and expired milk in the morning, Carlos was out on the water catching mahi mahi and snoek, both of which were plentiful on the north side of the island. He would send Maria out in the evening to sell the fish. Their parents didn’t care if they were in school or not. It was only when the authorities knocked on their door inquiring about the children that they returned them to the schoolroom, but it was only a matter of days before they were back on the street, or in Carlos’s case, back out on his boat. It was an all-cash business and they hid the money in a box in the rafters of a falling down shed on the side of their home.

Their Dad was a ditch digger and was gone most of the time. He might have provided a decent life for Carlos and Maria had he not enjoyed a few beers at the end of each day. Actually the beers were not the real problem. It was the gambling that accompanied the beers that was his downfall. He told their mother. “La pryxima semana seremos ricos. Next week we will be rich.” Their mother

would stare at the ground and say, “Eres una no buena vaga. You are a no good bum.” Sometimes they would get into a fist fight and by the time they were done there was a fair amount of blood spilled on both sides.

Their mother knitted things which she sold at a farmers market on weekends, although calling it a farmers market was a bit of a stretch. She did not make much from her knitting but she met a lot of people there and, well let’s just say, she had a much more profitable side business taking care of men, and sometimes women, in the lane behind the laundromat. Ten minutes of quick rubbing could net her ten dollars in cold hard cash. She too kept her money hidden.

By the time they were teenagers Carlos and Maria had expanded their business to include buying and selling drugs. They were clever about it, keeping things well under the radar. They knew that if the drug cartels in San Juan found out they would be in for a lot of trouble. As usual Carlos would make the deal and Maria, with her charming good looks, would sell the drugs. Then one day it all changed. Maria met a boy, a sweet kid from the next town over. “Carlos,” she said. “Jojo is nice to me. I want to spend more time with him. I am getting tired of selling drugs.” Carlos was furious but kept his anger in check. He knew that he could not operate on his own but Maria was becoming more infatuated with Jojo. One day Carlos walked in on them having sex on the kitchen floor and that was when he snapped. “What the hell is going on here?”

Maria yelled back. “You were supposed to be on the stupid boat.”

“Stupid boat? That’s my boat and it’s named after you and it’s how we make our money and the boat had engine problems, and now this.” He pointed at Jojo who was tripping over himself trying to pull up his pants. Carlos took a swing at him but Jojo

was quick, despite his pants being pulled up to just above his knees. He dodged the punch and returned the favor with one of his own which caught Carlos under his left eye. Maria screamed; Jojo fled.

“That stupid fucker,” Carlos ranted. “I am going to kill him. You need to stop seeing him. We have a business to run.” Maria was crying. “Please don’t say that,” she said. “Jojo loves me and I love him.” Carlos skulked out of the room but things were not the same after that. He was jealous of Maria and his own hormones were starting to take control of his thinking. A few weeks later he pleaded with Maria. “I can’t run the business without you. Jojo is getting in the way of everything. You have to stop seeing him.” Maria was defiant at first but after a while she said, “Ok I will tell him it’s over between us.”

It wasn’t long after that when their dad moved in with his girlfriend.



THE KILLER HAD not thought much beyond killing Carlos. Her rage was blind and she knew what she had to do, but now that he was dead, or at least she presumed that he was dead, she was at a loss. And more than a tad stressed. They had her kid, Ray, and even though she had given him up for adoption years earlier, she was still his Mom. And she was still in love with the man who she had just shot.

The killer knew that her husband would be expecting her home any minute. She had left a note stating that she and a couple of her friends were going out for dinner. She purposely didn’t say where or which friends, and she purposely didn’t give a time that she would be home. She knew that this would drive him crazy. Her husband was a controlling jealous Trump supporter and the combination was not, what one might call, healthy.

She drove past the Lynn campus of North Shore Community College and turned onto the Lynnway. A slick black limousine was coming in the opposite direction. There was a police escort and the killer knew that it was the Governor heading home. His

sprawling house was just over the town line in Swampscott. She stopped at a red light and wasn't surprised when the Governor and his escort didn't stop. "I bet that fucker never stops for a red light," she said out loud. "Fucking Republican."

The killer turned right at the Shell Station and found a liquor store that had a neon "open" sign in the window. The cashier was sitting behind a wire mesh and what looked like a bulletproof Plexiglas screen. He took the cash and handed over a fifth of Fireball. The killer had quit drinking after having been stopped for a DUI. She had attended all the mandatory classes and decided to remain clean, but now things were different. She cracked the top of the fireball and felt the liquid burn a hole in her stomach. "Fuck," she thought. Now she wanted her son released. She had done what they had asked her to do. She didn't have the money to return. Killing Carlos had been her only option.

WHEN THE KILLER ENTERED the Marblehead Convenience store earlier that evening Carlos was the only one in there shopping. The kid working the register had not paid any attention to her. He was watching Tik Tok videos on his phone and had noticed a person pass by, but had not paid any attention. "Just another customer," he thought. It was getting close to closing time and he was getting ready to meet his friends down at Stramski's beach. They liked to hang out there for a couple of hours before heading home. School had just started for the Fall semester and the nights were getting cooler. When the first shot went off the kid had no idea what it was. It was just a pop. By the second shot he had figured it out and made a beeline for the door. He was almost at his car when he heard the third shot.

The kid lived with his Mom and step-father and their house was just down the street from the store. He went straight home and found his Mom on the couch watching the latest season of

Breaking Bad. He was surprisingly calm. "Mom," he said. "There was a shooting at the store." His Mom flicked the TV off.

"A what?"

"I heard a gun go off and I ran."

"You heard a gun and you ran? Are you sure that it was a gun and not just some car backfiring?"

"It was a gunshot Mom. In fact there were three shots."

RICHIE FINISHED HIS SMOKE and went back into the store to pack up the meat department and close the store. He noticed that the kid was not at his register and then he remembered that the kid drove a white Honda CRV. "Flipping kids these days," he mumbled to himself. "If you don't watch them every second they will cut corners and bolt." He turned into the aisle that had the butchery and deli at the end of it. At first he could not believe what he was looking at. There was blood smeared all over the wall and floor and what looked like two size ten sneakers hanging off the edge of the meat counter. He approached cautiously and what he saw was nothing short of horrifying. He didn't recognize Carlos at first. There was so much blood. It was running in rivulets and pooling on the floor. He was scared too touch the body to feel for a pulse. Instead he ran for the store phone and dialed 911.

THE KILLER FINISHED THE FIREBALL and tossed the plastic bottle in a nearby trashcan. Then her phone lit up. It was her husband looking for her. The message read, "how long until you are home?" She didn't answer. The horror of what she had just done was slowly creeping up on her. The Fireball wasn't helping enough. She went back to the liquor store and bought a second fifth of Fireball. That was when she noticed the CCTV camera in the corner.

“Fuck. I need to be more careful,” she thought. “Still, there is no law against buying booze.” She climbed back into her car and took off toward the center of Lynn. The Fireball was sitting hot and heavy in her stomach. She had been clean for months and that much strong booze on an empty stomach was not a good thing. She took another long hit and then started to cry. It had all been too easy, or hard, depending on how you looked at it. She had cased out the store for a few nights. She had also cased out Carlos’s house. The message that she had received earlier in the day had been clear.

“He’s gone or your kid is gone.”

Carlos’s wife usually got home around 8pm. Sometimes a little later. She would pour herself a drink and make a shopping list for Carlos. He would dutifully head off up to the store getting there just before closing when the store was pretty much empty. This particular night she had watched him leave his house with the shopping list in hand. She had followed him up to The Convenience Store still unsure if she would be able to go through with it, but they had her son and her son was everything to her. It was only when she saw that the store was completely empty, except for the kid at the register, that she realized that she might never have a better opportunity.

The killer watched him pick up a few groceries and saw that the kid had his head down intensely looking at his phone. There was only one other car in the parking lot. A white Honda CRV which she presumed belonged to the kid. The gun was in her purse. She left the engine running and walked casually into the store, not before pulling her collar up and baseball cap down. Her hands were shaking but she felt calm. She saw Carlos stop by the dairy section. She saw him reach in for some eggs. That was when she fired the first shot. She saw that it had missed and she fired again. Cookies splattered everywhere. The third shot hit

Carlos in the neck. She saw him lift off the ground. It was all in slow motion until he landed on the meat counter. The rest was just a blur. She had just killed the only man that she had ever really loved.



KIM GRACE GREW UP in the leafy suburbs of Peabody, Massachusetts. She did not have an easy childhood but she was OK with it. It made her tough, a trait that she would need later in life. She met her husband at the North Shore Mall. There was a dance competition. Kim had bought some tight jeans, a pair of high heel shoes, a blouse with sparkles and she rocked his world. It was love at first sight. They were married a month later. They had no idea what trouble, and bliss their future held.

Kim was a bright student but her parents were in a bad marriage and they took their frustrations out on her. She was an only child. Her dad never hit her. It was her mom who would often take a swipe, mostly after a few bottles of Schlitz. Kim knew that it was coming and to be quite honest, she didn't really blame her mom for her violent behavior. Her dad was a big man, originally from the Azores Islands, a cluster of beautiful islands off the coast of Portugal. He was also a womanizer and seemed to enjoy flaunting his latest conquest in her mom's face. Her mom was small, and was scared of her husband, so she took her frustration out on Kim.

When she was a child she would cry herself to sleep every night. She wanted a brother so badly. She would have even settled for a dog but her parents made it clear that a dog would not be welcome in the house. She had once found a stray and brought it home but her father kicked the dog and then threw it out. This added to her miserable childhood, but once she turned thirteen things changed. Her dad moved out and it was just Kim and her mom in the house. "It's good that he's gone," her mom said, but Kim could see the hurt and pain in her eyes. "He was a no-good sonofabitch. We are better off without him in our lives."

Kim missed her dad but she did not miss the violence in the house. She noticed that her mom was drinking more than usual and would quite often switch from Schlitz to the much harder stuff. Her mom was a happy drunk and late at night, long after Kim had gone to bed, she would hear her singing. After a while Kim started to notice a pattern. When she drank sweet liquor, like Baileys or Kahlua, she would sing softly, sometimes just humming to herself. When she hit the hard stuff; Captain Morgan or worse yet, Gilbeys Gin, she would belt it out, mostly Janice Joplin. Kim would lie awake and listen for the inevitable crash. She had tried to sleep with a pillow over her head but it never worked. She knew that her mom would crash, usually around midnight, and that was when she would get up, find her mom, and carry her to bed.

On weekends Kim would hit the Peabody Mall, sometimes with a school friend, but often alone. Most of her friends were into shoplifting, but Kim, despite the fact that her family was poor, never stole anything. Her mom would tell her, "God is always watching so be a good girl." The first time that she had sex she was terrified. Not because of the boy but because she kept seeing God looking down on her. In fact she was so worried that she was 18 before she had her first orgasm.

Kim would sneak out of her bedroom window. Once she knew that her mom was well in her cups she would leave so that she didn't have to hear the singing; or the crash. Most of the time she would walk around the neighborhood counting the steps and counting the minutes until she was pretty sure that her mom had either made it to bed, or crashed, and only then would she go back home to pick up the mess.

One summer night she was almost back at her house when a police cruiser pulled up alongside. The officer rolled down his window and beckoned her. Kim sauntered over and looked in the cruiser.

"What are you doing out this late?" the cop asked. Kim took the gum out of her mouth and flicked it into a nearby rhododendron bush. "Nothing," she said.

The cop said, "do you need a ride home?" Kim looked at him. His face was partially hidden by the visor which he had pulled down. He had also pulled his hat down so that his eyes were shaded.

"Nah," she said, "I live just up the road."

The cop said, "you should not be out this late. Get in and I will give you a ride home." Kim didn't want an argument, especially with a cop, and against her better judgment, she opened the passenger door. The first thing that hit her was his cologne. It was both bitter and sweet and it stung her tongue.

The cop said, "Let's go for a little drive just for fun. I will take you home after." Kim felt her body stiffen. Something was not right but he was a cop and she was just a small girl. The cop took off heading toward Salem. He didn't say anything. Kim listened to the police radio crackle as HQ called in various crimes and incidents that were taking place in the dark of night. She was too scared to say anything. Instead she fidgeted and swallowed hard.

She knew instinctively that things were not going to go well. Her worst fears were confirmed when the cop turned abruptly just past the Walgreens on Boston Street, onto Pope Street. Up ahead was Gallows Hill, a dark area where it was said that the witches that were hanged in the Salem Witch trials were buried.

The cop didn't worry about pleasantries. "Take your pants off," he said.

"What?" Kim tried to open the door but the cop had it locked. There was no way that she was getting out of the car. "Take your pants off." Kim froze. The cop said, "don't make me have to help you with your pants. Take them off now. Kim looked around. It was dark out. The nearest house was a few hundred yards away and there was only a single light in what looked like an outdoor shed. The rest of the house was dark. The cop reached over and grabbed her by the breast. "Nice tits," he said. "Now take your pants off."

The rape took only a couple of minutes. The cop pulled out and came on her blouse. He then reached for a button and unlocked the passenger door. "Get out," he said, and pushed Kim out of the door. The cop drove away, his lights flashing. He was almost back to the Walgreens when Kim heard him hit the siren.



THE KILLER WAS half asleep when her phone lit up again. It was her husband. This time he was more insistent. "You need to be home soon," the text read. She took another pull on the Fireball and her eyes glazed over. She was in a parking lot where the morning commuters who took the ferry to Boston would soon arrive. "Fuck him," she mumbled before passing out.

The cop pulled up alongside her car and shone his flashlight through the window. The killer was asleep, her hand on the fifth of Fireball. He knocked on the sunroof. The killer stirred but didn't open her eyes. The cop opened the door and shone his flashlight in her eyes. "You are drunk," he stated flatly. The killer was suddenly very much awake. She sat bolt upright but the Fireball would not have any of her indignation and she slumped onto the wheel. She was drunk. "You are drunk," the cop repeated. "So what," she slurred. "I'm sleeping, not driving."

"That does not make any difference," the cop said. "You are behind the wheel of a car and you are under arrest." The killer giggled a little and said, "Fuck you." The cop called in for

reinforcements and in less than a minute another police cruiser pulled into the parking lot.

They put her in a cell in a small prison in Lynn. The booking process seemed to take forever. They took her cell phone and fingerprinted her. She was out of it, slurring her words. "Is there anyone who can bail you out?" the cop asked. The killer sneered. "You can call my husband. Good luck with that."

Her husband came at four in the morning. The killer was trying to sleep it off on a hard cement bed when the cop shone his light through the bars. "Get up," he said. "And flush your piss."

They took her to the booking room. Her husband was there. She could see that the red flush was well beyond his neck. His jaw and nose were on fire. He moved toward her but the booking cop stepped in. "Please just sign here," he said. "And sir, don't do anything stupid. Your wife seems to have had a rough night. You can take her home now."

HER HUSBAND WAS APOPLECTIC. "You embarrassed me you stupid cow," he yelled. "Do you have any idea how humiliating it was to have to go down to the police station and post your bail money? Worse yet it was in Lynn. I never go to Lynn. It's a hell hole."

The killer sat with her head down. She was starting to sober up. "You're a snob," she said. "There is nothing wrong with Lynn. It's a great city. Now piss off and leave me alone."

Her husband was having none of it. "Since when did you start drinking again? I paid for all those DUI charges. You promised me that you would stay sober."

The killer just waved her arm at him. "Good for you. If you weren't such an asshole I might have remained sober. I'm going to bed."

Her husband was not in any mood to being left alone with his own rage. "You need to answer my questions," he yelled.

"Read tomorrow's papers," she said. "You might get some idea of the kind of night I have had."

BOTH CRIME SCENES were cleaned up before the sun rose. The blood in the parking lot of the VFW was a challenge. There was a hose on the side of the building but it didn't reach the murder scene so the clean-up crew had to carry buckets of water.

The blood on the wall and floor of the Community Store was easier. It was on tile. They had taken Carlos off in an ambulance and called Mr. Gupta and he showed up at his store. He was mad as hell. "I need to open my store at seven," he said. One of the cops pulled him aside and said, "this is a crime scene now. You won't be able to reopen for at least a week."

THE SUN ROSE ON A CRISP Fall day. It was as if nothing had happened. Unless, of course, you were the killer, or Carlos's wife, or Sergeant Bigblows family, or indeed Carlos himself. The killer had tried to sleep but the reality of what she had done was starting to sink in. She had murdered her lover. Carlos was the only man that she had truly loved but she had no option. They had her boy. She had never told anyone about the child. Only her mother knew about him. She had given him up for adoption shortly after he was born, and she had never expected to see him again.

She heard her husband on the phone calling in to work. He got the answering machine which was his intent. He was faking a cold. "I can't come into work today," he coughed. "I think that I have the flu. It's probably best that I get a test and stay home until I get the results. He had curled up on the couch trying

to get some sleep but the words his wife had said before she stormed upstairs was on a continuous loop in his brain. “Read tomorrow’s papers.” It was three simple words that would come to haunt him.

MRS. RAMIRES WAS AT THE hospital trying to get some information. The police had not said anything other than he had a bullet wound and that his condition was ‘serious.’ She knew in her gut that it was worse than that but she had not thought for a moment that he might be dead. She had taken the cops advice and had gone to the Emergency Department at Salem Hospital. The nice lady at check-in had been vague about things. “Please take a seat,” she said. “I am sure that a doctor will be out to see you soon.” The check-in lady already knew that Carlos was dead. The check-in lady knew everything that went on in the Emergency Department. She felt sorry for Mrs. Ramirez but these days it seemed as if there was at least one bereaved wife a night sitting on the hard chairs waiting for the news, and the news was never good.

A very young doctor came into the waiting area. “Are you Mrs. Ramirez?” he asked kindly.

“Yes.”

“Please follow me,” the doctor said. They went to a small room. There was a cot and a computer and an old coffee cup that smelled bad. She sat down and the doctor, who looked like he was no older than 20 said, “I am sorry to tell you Ma’am but your husband died. We did everything that we could but his wound was severe. You know that he was shot right?”

Gloria sobbed.



LLISA LING GREW UP IN CHINA. Her parents had immigrated to the US when she was a teenager and she attended Boston Latin, one of Boston’s most prestigious schools. She was a very good student and a very talented athlete. Her Mom and Dad were proud of her, even more so when she won a scholarship to Harvard University. Lisa was ambitious to the point of it being an unhealthy obsession. She had to win at everything. Coming in second was never an option. Luckily she had the chops and winning came easily.

When Lisa graduated with a degree in biotech she immediately landed a job with Novartis, one of the leading biotech companies in the world. They were based in Boston and mostly recruited from Harvard so Lisa was a shoe-in for a good position. She quickly rose through the ranks and started dating one of the senior vice presidents. She was on a fast track to the pinnacle of success. Lisa was still in her twenties when the senior vice president asked for her hand in marriage. He lived in a mansion right on the water in Peaches Point, one of

Marblehead's most exclusive neighborhoods. He needed a wife to cover up a dark secret, one that he knew his bosses would not approve of.

CARLOS HAD EXPANDED his little fishing business by recruiting three other fishermen. He had loaned them money to buy their own fishing boats and deducted their weekly payments from the money he took in from the fish market. His sister was no longer selling door to door and she was still seeing Jojo. Carlos was not happy about it. "He's a no good bum," he told her. She would always reply, "he loves me and I love him. He's a good man."

The second time he walked in on them having sex was to be the last time. They were doing it on his bed and his already short fuse suddenly got a lot shorter. Carlos exploded. "On my fucking bed?" Maria was mortified and said that she would break it off with Jojo. Jojo was not happy. In fact he was very unhappy and his temper got the best of him. "Your brother is a manipulative fuck," he yelled. "El esta arruinando nuestra relacion. He is ruining our relationship." Maria was torn. She loved her brother and she loved Jojo, but Jojo was not that forgiving.

Maria told him that it was over and he sulked for the first few days. Then he started to stew. His rage building, slowly at first, slowly but surely. He tried to call Maria but she would not answer her phone. His rage got worse until one night when he woke well after midnight in a pool of sweat. He knew that he had to see Maria. He also knew what he had to do. Jojo pulled on some sweatpants and sneakers and drove over to her house being careful to park up the street. His old truck had a hole in the muffler and even though he had it taped there was still a distinctive and very noticeable throb. He parked and walked slowly in the shadows toward the small house where Maria lived

with Carlos and their mom. It was a new rental in a better part of town. He knew which room was hers and shimmied up a pipe that was outside her bedroom window.

A cold moon was occasionally blocked by some tropical clouds. He was at her window looking in. Maria was asleep, the sheets covering most of her, but not her legs; and not her delicious looking backside. Jojo was sweating and it was not only from the warm night air. He knew what he had come to do. Jojo tapped on the window, but Maria did not stir. He tapped louder. There was no response. The window was locked. He tapped again. Maria rolled over. Jojo was disappointed. She had pulled the sheets up and her delicious looking bum was covered. He tapped on the window again. She suddenly sat bolt upright trying to focus. Jojo tapped again and then shone a light through the window. Maria slipped off the bed and opened the window. She was half in a dream. She kissed Jojo and he said, "come with me baby."

They were in his car driving toward the Punta Higuero Lighthouse on the west side of the island when Jojo said, "you know that I love you right?" Maria nodded. "Where are we going?" she asked. Jojo said nothing. They drove in silence. The moon had set behind some scudding clouds and suddenly it was really dark. Jojo pulled his car into the small parking lot right next to the path that led up to the lighthouse. He took Maria by the hand and walked her away from the lighthouse toward the picnic area. He had been there earlier in the week scouting things out. Maria noticed that his hand was unusually sweaty. It was humid out; but not that humid. There was something in the way that Jojo was acting that had Maria on edge. He was being quiet and a little mysterious. Maria went along with it. "Perhaps he will say something," she thought. Jojo said again, "you know that I love you right?"

The beam from the lighthouse swept the rocks ahead of them. One second they were bathed in light, the next they were in pitch

darkness. Jojo said, "follow me carefully." Then he repeated, "you know that I love you right?" Maria was getting nervous. She had never seen this side of Jojo. She wondered if he was going to propose. She knew what her answer would be and she also knew that Carlos would be furious.

Far below the waves were crashing against the rocks. The smell of salt filled the night sky. The light from the lighthouse scanned the landscape. Jojo was still not saying anything. He took Maria in his arms and kissed her. "I will love you forever," he said. Maria felt his strong arms around her. She started to say something when she felt his arms stiffen. Jojo had taken her to the edge of the cliff. The lighthouse light swept the two lovers and that was when Jojo pushed her. He did not hear her hit the rocks below. The sound of the ocean drowned out the noise. Jojo stood for a few moments watching the light from the lighthouse scan the ocean, and then he jumped.

Both bodies were found the next morning. They were impaled on an old wrought iron staircase that once led visitors to the waters edge.

THEY WERE JUST A FEW years into their marriage when Lisa Ling found out that her husband was gay.



THE KILLER'S HUSBAND was up and out just as it was starting to get light. He had tried to sleep on the couch but his mind was racing. He jumped into his car, a brand new Tesla, and headed toward town. A flock of Canadian geese flew overhead in tight formation. They were heading for Waterside Cemetery. Most of the people in town complained about the geese and the mess that they made, but he liked them. It was that time of year and he loved to hear them honking as they prepared to fly south.

There was a news stand on the corner of Pleasant and School. It was run by Lenny, an elderly gentleman who had been a fixture of the town for almost three decades. When the weather was nice he set up shop outside but in the winter he had to move indoors and the Marblehead Little Theater had kindly allowed him to use their entrance area. The killer's husband looked over and saw that the stand was there but Lenny was not. "I know where he is," he thought, and parked on the street outside the National Grand Bank.

Henry grew up on the wrong side of the tracks. His family was

from Broughton Road, the projects if you will, where housing was subsidized by the town. His dad had run a sub shop downtown. It was an institution and Henry took it over after his father passed. The locals would come in every morning for their coffee. They had their names printed on their own cups. Lenny came in every morning at six, before he opened his newsstand. His papers were delivered to the sub shop because Henry opened at five.

“Hey Lenny are you up for the usual?” Henry asked.

“I will take the usual,” Lenny said. “This time make sure that it’s hot.”

“Sorry about that,” Henry said. “Every now and then the burner goes off. Anything to eat?”

“Just the coffee.”

“Coffee it is then. Maybe you could tip a bit more. You are kind of stingy. You tip ten cents on a five buck sandwich.”

“Well that’s because I am a Republican,” Lenny said. “We have never tipped very well. The best tip I ever gave you was to vote GOP.”

Henry laughed. “I come from a lifelong family of democrats

The door opened with a squeak. Henry had once thought to install a bell but he kind of liked the squeak. In the doorway was the killers husband looking like he had been up all night. “Hi Jack,” said Henry and then laughed at his own joke. “Hijack. That’s funny. Anything I can do for you? Coffee? A breakfast sandwich?”

Lenny said, “Hijack, I never put two and two together. That’s funny. Let me buy you a coffee.”

Henry said, “Did you hear about the murders last night? I had my police scanner on and it came up right away. Seems like someone murdered a cop. Sergeant Bigblow.”

Both Lenny and Jack had to sit down for this news. Bigblow

was a regular. “I can’t believe this,” Lenny said. “Bigblow is dead?”

“Yea, some jogger found him beside his cruiser in the VFW parking lot, you know, off West Shore Drive. There was also a shooting at the Convenience Store. Do either of you know Carlos Ramirez? He came in here occasionally.” The killer’s husband felt his gut turn.

“Can I get that coffee to go?” he asked.

“I can’t believe that Bigblow is dead,” said Lenny. “And Carlos. I knew Carlos. He came by my stand every now and then. Nice guy. He always bought, well, you know, the blue magazines.”

Jack left. “Thanks for the coffee,” he said. He felt ill. He had long suspected that his wife had been having an affair with Carlos but could never find proof. “Perhaps it was a different Carlos,” he thought. His wife was not capable of murder but then again she had been out most of the night.

And she had started drinking again.

MARBLEHEAD IS A SMALL seaside town just north of Boston. It used to be a fisherman’s town but the yuppies moved in and housing prices skyrocketed forcing the fishermen to buy homes in the nearby towns of Lynn and Salem. Even a small fixer-upper was selling way north of five hundred K. It was a tight knit community and had been that way for decades until ‘Trump for President’ signs started to show up on front lawns and small fractures began to appear. Some of the local online communities started to fill with a lot of hate.

This morning, however, it was all about the murders and speculation about who might have done them. Sergeant Bigblow was well respected in the town. He was the only cop who seemed to go out of his way to help people. Some people knew Carlos. They all knew the Marblehead Convenience Store. The comments

came in fast and furious.

“I bet it was Gupta, the new owner,” someone wrote.

“That place is going to shit,” someone replied.

“I heard that the mafia from Nahant is starting to move into our town.” This started a long thread that ended up with a bunch of Trump haters blaming it on the former President.

Jack read it all. He did not want to go back home. Not yet anyway. He was still digesting the news. Sergeant Bigblow was dead. So was Carlos.

THE KILLER WOKE AFTER NINE. She saw that the Tesla was gone. She had bought the car as a gift when they first started going out. Now she wished that she had saved her money. She felt like crap. She tried to piece the events of the previous night together but somehow her mind blocked parts of it out. She could distinctly see the bullet hitting Carlos in the neck and the impact which had lifted him and dropped him on the meat counter. She presumed that he was dead but wasn't really sure until she went on Facebook and Marblehead Patch and read the various threads. Carlos was most definitely dead. As was Sergeant Bigblow. She was sorry about Bigblow. She had panicked. Adrenaline can do that sometimes; and memories.

And they had her son.



JACK WAS DRIVING AROUND, his mind reeling. He had gone online to see what people were saying and had confirmed that it was the same Carlos whom he suspected had been having an affair with his wife. He simply could not get his mind around the fact his wife might have been the murderer. But she had said, ‘read tomorrow’s papers,’ and there it was plastered all over the news.

Out of morbid curiosity he drove over to West Shore Drive and up toward the VFW. The road was detoured because of all the TV news vans that had assembled. They were all there, lights on and reporters all made up to look like plastic dolls, all reporting on the double homicide. It was a big New England story and all the local news stations were there. The police had kept the camera crews away from the area where Sergeant Bigblow had been gunned down, but there was plenty of room on the other side of the VFW and the place was humming. The police had set up a detour down Waterside Road and Jack followed it until he came up Dodge Road just beyond the media circus. He could

not help himself and glanced over to where the yellow police tape had cordoned off the area where the murder had taken place. Up ahead he saw that the Convenience Store was also completely cordoned off. There were police everywhere and a cop stopped him. "What business do you have here?" he asked suspiciously.

Jack said, with a slight edge to his voice, "I was heading to the store to pick up some milk."

"Do you live around here? The store is closed."

"No. I do need milk but truthfully I wanted to see what was going on. I read about the murders."

The cop said, "Yes it's tragic but I think that it would be best if you went to Crosby's Supermarket for milk." Jack drove off.

"What a circus," he thought. "This can't possibly have been caused by my wife."

THE MARBLEHEAD CHIEF of Police, Chief Jackson, had his top detectives around a conference table. "This is probably the most important case we have ever had on our hands," he said. "And it's not only because one of our own was murdered in cold blood." The detectives all nodded. "This is a double homicide and we need to find out who did this."

Detective Slater tapped his pencil on a binder and said, "You are presuming that there was only one killer. The two murders might be unrelated." The Chief shook his head. "I have been running this place for almost 16 years and there has only been one other murder on my watch, in fact it was my first year as chief. You remember? The guy who threw his wife overboard from his sailboat weighed down with two cinderblocks.

He had strangled his wife and then taken her out on his boat.

Police records showed that he had wrapped her in a black plastic garbage bag, loaded her into a dock trolley, loaded her into his dinghy, motored out to the his boat and then dragged her onboard." The Chief paused as if it was fond memory. "He then went back to his pick-up and carried two cinder blocks and some twine to the boat. No one thought it strange that he was casting off alone after dark to go out for a sail. Later that evening he tied the cinder blocks to her feet and dumped her overboard on the north side of Children's Island. She was found by Johnny Snow, the lobsterman, when he pulled his traps. These two murders happened at the same time, less than a half mile apart. It can't be a coincidence."

Detective Slater tapped his pencil. "You may be right," he said. "But you may also be wrong. I say that we explore every possibility." The Chief nodded. "Let's start with the CCTV footage that we have."

It turned out that the video from the Convenience Store was useless. The previous owner had installed the absolute cheapest CCTV that he could find reasoning that the cameras were there more as a deterrent than for their video quality. The footage caught the killer coming into the store but the person had their collar pulled up and their baseball cap pulled down. It was hard to tell if it was a male or a female but judging by their size they presumed that it might have been a female. Or a slightly built male. The footage showed Carlos shopping. It showed him reaching into the cooler to pick up a half dozen eggs. It showed him getting hit by the bullet that launched him onto the meat counter. It showed the killer, but there was very little to go on. The killer had shot Carlos and run out of the store. All that they could get from the video was an obscure logo on the front of the killer's baseball cap. It looked as if it might be some kind of symbol, but even with the best HD angles they had, no one had

any idea what it was. “Let’s send that out for closer analysis,” the Chief said.

They had no footage from the VFW. They had a CCTV camera installed on the front and back of the VFW but they had long since stopped working and no one had thought to fix them. The dash cam on Sergeant Bigblow’s cruiser didn’t offer much either. It was dark out when he pulled the killer over and her license plate was obscured. It was clear why Bigblow had pulled the driver over. The right rear light on the car was out, but Bigblow pulled up alongside the car, instead of behind the car, and the camera recorded some trees and what looked to be a stack of lobster pots. There was audio but it was muffled. “Let’s send that out for more analysis as well,” the Chief said. “Do we have any tire tracks and do we have the forensics from the store? And has anyone been to see the kid who was working the register?” Slater said, “We have fingerprints and we have run them but there was no match with anything that the FBI has on file. There were literally hundreds of fingerprints. It’s a store after all. I am scheduled to meet with the kid and his parents later today. The guys are looking for tire tracks but you know that the area behind the VFW is used by the landscape companies to park their trucks and there are dozens of them all driving in the vicinity of the murder.”

“That’s not good enough,” the Chief said taking a sip of his stale coffee. “You’re telling me that the three most important pieces of evidence, fingerprints, tire tracks and the CCTV video shed no light? Did we search every dustbin for a murder weapon?”

One of the other detectives said sheepishly, “Today was trash day and all the garbage was picked up long before we had a chance to even think about it. The trash was dropped at the Transfer Station and the guy working there, I think his name is Ralph, he told me that the truck came at 10 to pick up all the

garbage that had been dumped into the tip. It all went to Peabody and from there Ralph, yes that was his name, he had no idea what happened to it.”

“So we have pretty much fuckall to go on.”

“We do know that the car was a sedan and it was either dark blue or black. That’s about it.”

DETECTIVE SLATER met with the kid and his parents but he had very little to offer. The kid admitted that he was on his phone watching a video on TicTok when the killer entered the store. Slater already knew that. They had that part on video and they could tell that the kid was not paying any attention to the person who just moments later would become a murderer. The kid said that he thought that the person might have been a female but he also added that he was not sure about anything. The video showed the kid running for the door and had recorded three gunshots. There were no cameras mounted outside otherwise they would probably have seen the kid driving away, as well as the killer.

“This is bullshit,” said the Chief. “We are going to have to do a lot better. Sergeant Bigblow was one of us just doing his job.” The Detectives looked a little sheepish but said nothing.



THE TOWN WAS STILL in a frenzy about the double homicide. Marblehead is a very affluent area and the fact that it had suffered two murders on the same night had everyone on edge. It was the only thing that people were talking about. The Marblehead Facebook sites had much speculation about who the killer might be with a lot of it just absurd conjecture. Many people were sure that it was Mr. Gupta who had committed the crimes. Word on the street was that the store had been losing money steadily since he bought it and he was looking for a distraction. “It was a publicity stunt,” one person wrote. “Plain and simple. Just a way to get people into the store. Once the mess is cleaned up people are going to flock to the store. We can’t help ourselves. It’s like staring at a bad car accident.”

“Why then would he murder a cop? This is a rubbish thread.”

There were other posts that were blatantly racist. Mr. Gupta was from India and many of the town people were not above a little discrimination. “I have been saying for years that it’s a mistake to let darkies into this town,” someone wrote. Their post

was quickly removed. A couple of people came to Mr. Gupta's defense. "I like the store much better now than how it was before," one person wrote. "It was a bit seedy before. Mr. Gupta has been trying to modernize it." That post set people off. It seemed like there was a fine line between old country charm and a place being a bit run down.

The Nahant mafia thread was another strong one but no one could answer the question about why the Nahant mafia would bother to come all the way to Marblehead to murder someone. Carlos was being drawn into the conversation too. His upbringing in Puerto Rico didn't help, nor did his color and there was definitely some suspicion that he was part of some kind of mafia or drug cartel because of it. Others came to his defense. "I knew Carlos for a long time," one poster wrote. "He was above all a decent and honest man. He would never hurt a fly."

The police were monitoring the posts looking for any kind of a clue but most of it was just angry, and at times scared rambling. People had a right to be angry; and scared. They loved their town and were heartbroken by the murders. Others were more heartbroken about the possibility that their home values might drop.

JACK FINALLY RETURNED HOME. He had no clue what to say so he didn't say anything. The killer was mute on any and all of it. She did say, "Thank you for bailing me out," but then went back into silent mode. Jack returned to work the and the killer went to Village Liquors and bought a pint of fireball which she hid in her bag. Her license had been automatically suspended for 90 days on account of it being her second DUI. She flicked through her phone and dialed in a lift from Lyft. The kid driving the Lyft could not have been much older than 18. "Isn't there an age limit to become an Lyft driver?" she asked. The driver said, "yes there is but I faked my ID. I am supposed to be my older

brother." The killer laughed. She said, "Don't worry I won't tell anyone. Flick your app off and take me to Crocker Park. I will pay you in cash."

She was dropped off in the parking lot. "OK I will see you back here at five," she told the Lyft driver. "Or thereabouts. I realize that you might be on some other trips. Any time around five would be good." The driver waved as he drove off. "I will be back then," he said.

The killer found a bench overlooking the harbor. It was a beautiful Fall afternoon but she hardly noticed. Her gut was a mess and the only thing that she knew would help would be a long, hard pull on the bottle. She looked around to make sure that no one was watching before taking a drink. There was a couple sitting on the steel beams under the lighthouse. They were into each other and had barely noticed her. The liquor went down hot and hit her hard. After almost a year of sobriety any type of alcohol would be hard to swallow. It didn't help that she had not eaten anything since the murders. And she had started smoking again. She was getting desperate. They had her son. She had carried out her side of the deal by murdering Carlos but they were not responding.

In the distance she could see a couple working on their boat. It looked like they were bagging sails. A launch pulled up alongside and they jumped onboard. The killer felt the fireball slosh around in her stomach and then suddenly the fall foliage got a little brighter.

CARLOS WAS DEVASTATED by the death of his sister. He didn't care about Jojo. The police had conducted an investigation. There was no conclusive evidence of what had happened. Carlos was certain that Maria had been pushed. The police said that it was more likely that both had been too close to the edge and had

fallen. Either way they were both dead. The funeral didn't help much. Carlos was fuming and could barely contain his fury.

He turned his anger into growing his fishing business. He was trying to grow the drug side of things too but he was scared of getting on the wrong side of the San Juan cartel. He expanded his fishing fleet to twenty boats funding each fisherman for the purchase of their boat and taking his payment from the buyers at the fish market. He bought his mom a nice car to ease her through her own grief. When he saw his father at the funeral it was the first time that he had seen him in more than two years. He looked like crap and disappeared right after the priest gave the eulogy.

Then one day he was walking the docks when a well dressed man stopped to talk to him. The man had been admiring the fishing boats and asked if Carlos knew any of the fishermen. Carlos said that he knew most of them and the man said, "can I buy you a coffee? Or perhaps something stronger?"

10



TRACY GILES moved to Marblehead the mid 90's. She had taken a gap year after graduating from West Virginia University and had traveled all over Europe, backpacking mostly. Istanbul was her favorite city. She loved the coffee shops and the people were kind, and generous. When she had her wallet stolen a couple noticed her stress and took her in. She stayed with them for a week while they navigated the tricky process of informing her bank as well as the police. Some time later the police stopped by the house with her wallet but it had been cleaned out. Her credit cards were still there but they had long since been shut off. All the cash that she had in the wallet was gone but she was happy to have it back. The wallet had been a gift from her grandmother. She had given it to her a week or so after Tracy had announced that she was heading for Europe for an indefinite period.

Her gap year turned into two years and along the way she met a handsome, charming man. She was in a cafe in Lisbon drinking a coffee and enjoying a Pasteis de Nata, a small custard tart that Portugal is famous for. She was flicking through Facebook on her phone when the man stopped by her table.

“I’m Ricardo,” he said. “May I join you at your table? All the other tables are full.” Tracy was a little flustered but said yes, and Ricardo sat down with his coffee. They were soon chatting; and laughing. Tracy felt at ease with the handsome stranger and when he suggested that they go to his place for lunch she didn’t hesitate. There was no lunch. Just a crazy afternoon of *Vino Verde* and a whole lot of sex. Tracy was smitten. She told Ricardo about her travels and Ricardo told her about a yacht race that he and some American partners were trying to get off the ground. The American’s were looking for sponsorship for the event and Ricardo had a file full of contacts. One of them was the deputy mayor of the town of Portimao on the southern coast of the country. He told Tracy that he had some meetings there the following week and invited her to join him. “One of the partners I have,” he said, “is the Tivoli Hotel. They always give me their most luxurious suite.” Tracy had been in backpackers hostels for most of her time in Europe. A luxurious suite in Portimao sounded like heaven.

The following week was amazing. The hotel was more than Tracy had imagined and Ricardo was a pure gentleman. His movie-star good looks opened many doors for them. When he was away at his meetings Tracy lounged by the pool. On a couple of occasions she wandered down the boardwalk that ran along the beach and stopped in one of the restaurants for lunch. She had become addicted to sardines. She loved their oily, salty taste and a plate with a bottle of wine was close to heaven.

The week was coming to a close and Tracy, after more than a single bottle of *vino verde* asked sheepishly, “is there any chance that you might consider living in the States?” Ricardo rolled over and looked her in the eye. His eyes were deep and dark. He said, “yes.”

The Chief of Police was holding a meeting with his detectives. “Forensics has picked up a potential fingerprint match,” he said.

“It’s a long shot but this lady had been convicted for trying to pass some fake checks. It was a few years ago but she lives in Marblehead and her fingerprints were all over the store. I suggest that someone go and interview her.” Slater nodded. “I will go,” he said.

The Chief continued, “I have recently received all the CCTV footage from Marblehead and Swampscott. As you can imagine there is a lot of video. I have the boys going over it. I am looking for a match not only of the murderer but more importantly, the strange logo on the baseball cap. I believe that this might be a key piece of evidence. Also the lab is starting to be sure that the voice on Sergeant Bigblow’s dash cam was that of a woman.”

The cops were out of their depth. Most of them usually worked street detail. A full-on police investigation into a double homicide was daunting. They were small town cops; not really criminal investigators.

“OK that’s it for now,” the Chief announced and the detectives picked up their folders and left.

RICARDO FLEW on the same plane as Tracy and they landed at Logan airport in Boston. He had managed to sub-lease his apartment in Lisbon: or so he said. Tracy’s best friend picked them up and for the first week they stayed with her and her boyfriend. They found a small apartment in Winthrop, a seaside town just north of Boston. Most nights they were kept awake by planes flying right overhead on a flight path to Logan. The sex was awesome and Ricardo was still working with his partners trying to pull his yacht race together. Tracy got a job waiting tables at a cute Italian place right on the water. Cafe Rosettis. The pay was not great but she was over the moon happy. On weekends they would explore the surrounding area and both

of them fell in love with Marblehead. Ricardo loved it for the seafood. Tracy loved it because Ricardo loved it. They were lucky enough to find a small apartment on State Street, a stone's throw away from the famous pub Maddie's. When Tracy was not working and Ricardo could pull himself away from his cell phone they would go to Maddie's for lunch. Ricardo always got the catch of the day. Tracy had the burger lunch special. Less than five bucks for a burger and fries. A dollar extra if you wanted onion rings instead of fries.

"This place should serve sardines," she said.

Ricardo replied. "The sardines only taste good when you can smell the ocean and hear Portuguese people laughing. Don't try and bring them to America. Just as your burger would not taste as good in Lisbon. You need the context of it all for it to taste like it should."



THE KILLER MOVED into the guest room, Her husband Jack had not said anything to her but it was clear that he suspected that something bad had happened that night and that she might have been involved in some way with the murders. She had forgotten that she had said, "read tomorrow's papers." She was certain that Jack had no clue about her affair with Carlos and she was also certain that he didn't know that she had started seeing her son, in fact she had been visiting him for almost a year. Jack's job was demanding and he usually left the house early and returned late. On weekends they had separate interests. He went golfing with his mates. She told him that she was going sailing, but she wasn't.

THINGS HAD CHANGED for Carlos after his meeting with the mysterious man on the dock. The man was well connected in local Puerto Rico politics and his proposal to Carlos was quite simple. He needed a local fishing fleet to rendezvous with some fishing boats from the Dominican Republic. They both fished the same area and quite often slipped into each other's territorial waters.

The Dominicans would leave packages submerged, marked with a small red buoy. Each package had a tracking device. The devices were rudimentary but they had a transmitter that the fishermen could pick up with an onboard transponder. The fishermen would pick up the packages and hide them under their catch. The police were paid off to look the other way when the fishermen returned to port. Their catch, and the packages, were picked up and taken to the local market where some of the ladies earned extra cash smuggling the packages out in their underwear. You can fit a lot of cocaine in your underwear if you try. They wore colorful, flowing dresses and no one would suspect, or dare to ask what was under them. They dropped the goods off, along with the transmitter, at a corner shop run by an elderly gentleman. He had his son mail the transmitters back to an address in the Dominican Republic. The whole operation was seamless. The old man noted which fisherman had picked up which package and they were compensated accordingly.

Carlos' father started to sniff money. He had moved back to Cabo Rojo and had tried to make amends with his ex-wife, but she was having none of it. He noticed that Carlos had rented a very nice apartment and was driving a fairly new Audi. "You seem to be doing well with the fishing business," he said. They were at a small cafe. Carlos wasn't happy about the meeting after what he had done to his mother, but tried to put his emotions aside.

Carlos replied, "there are fish everywhere. All you need to do is look for them." His father tried to press things a little. "I am tired of digging ditches," he said. "I would love to fish." Carlos looked at him. He said, "Papa, fishing is for young people but I may have something for you. I could use a new partner. Someone who can get things done but not attract the attention of the police. My friend Jose, you know Jose who runs the corner shop right? He is getting too old. Maybe you can take over from him."

Carlos's dad gave him a strange look. "I am not interested in running a store," he said.

Carlos said, "I am not talking about running a store." He clicked his fingers and the waiter came over. "Um cafe para meu pai. A coffee for my father." By the time they left the coffee shop Carlos had explained his business and his dad was fully onboard.

DETECTIVE SLATER pulled his cruiser up in front of a modest home on the east side of town. He checked his notes and then walked up to the front door. He knocked, but there was no answer. He walked around to the side of the house stepping carefully over garden equipment that had been blown over in a recent storm. Indian summer was extra special and the sun was warm, reflecting off the early Fall leaves. On the back side of the house was a large deck and sunbathing on a comfortable chaise lounge was a very attractive woman. She was completely naked. Slater cleared his throat but the woman had dozed off. She looked Chinese but that didn't matter. Slater cleared his throat again and the woman opened one eye. She jumped when she saw the cop but didn't try and cover herself, in fact she may have opened her legs, just a little, Slater wasn't sure. Her back yard was completely private and there was no law against sunbathing in the nude. "Can I help you?" she asked.

Slater had no response. He tipped his cap and left. "I will come back later," he said.

JACK HAD STARTED to make it a habit to get coffee early in the morning on his way to work. The coffee was lousy but he was looking for any clues to help him piece things together. His wife was still not speaking to him. "Good morning Jack," Henry said.

"Your usual?"

Jack nodded. "Can I also get an egg sandwich with ham?"

"Coming right up," Henry said.

Jack said, "Have you heard anything more about the police investigation into the murders? Henry shrugged. I heard that they suspect that the murderer was a woman but that's about it. There doesn't seem to be much to go on. Here's your sandwich."

"Thanks." Jack and took the coffee and sandwich to go.

DETECTIVE SLATER went back to the house the following morning. There was a cold breeze blowing and he was sure that there would not be any nude sunbathing. He rang the doorbell and a fully clothed lady answered. "Good morning," he said. "I'm Detective Finnigan. May I please come in? I have some questions to ask you." The lady stepped aside and he followed her into her kitchen.

"I just have a few questions for you," he said. "I understand that you had some previous issue with fake checks."

"Yes," the lady said. "That was a few years ago. My lawyer straightened things out."

Finnigan continued, "do you shop for groceries at the Community Store?"

"Yes."

"I presume that you heard that there was a murder there a week ago."

"Yes."

"Did you know Carlos Ramirez? The man who was murdered?"

"No. I heard about the murder though. Terrible news."

"So as far as you know you never had any contact with Carlos?"

"Nope, no clue who he was. I am sorry for his family. I heard that he had a wife."

"Yes he did."

"OK if you are sure that you never knew him that's fine. Do you mind if I take a look around. You have a lovely home."

"Yes I do mind. There is nothing to see here and I don't want anyone snooping around. My husband will be home soon."

"Ok, well thanks." Slater left. His detective radar was up. She had been fine until the point where he asked if he could look around. She seemed to get defensive. He wrote in his report.

"Possible suspect."

12



CARLOS HAD BEEN RUNNING his cocaine business for almost a year when the shit hit the fan. His well dressed boss had rubbed someone the wrong way at City Hall and one Friday evening when the fishing fleet arrived back at the dock the police were there and busted them. Carlos knew that the gig was up and fled to the mountains. He had a friend who had a cabin. He laid low for a few months, out of sight, while the fishermen were brought up on drug smuggling charges. To a man they all implicated Carlos but none of them knew where he was and none of them had the means to make a run for it. Carlos's only point of contact with the outside world was a corner cafe that had WiFi. He set up a fake gmail account and struck up a conversation with a friend of his in Ft. Lauderdale. The friend had a sailboat in the same marina where the fishing boats were and he needed his boat delivered to the US. Carlos got a message to his mother.

“I am going to be out of town for a while.” His father had been caught up in the police sting and was awaiting trial. His mom replied, “take care mi hijo.

Lisa Ling was unhappy in her marriage but her career seemed to be taking off. The big bosses had noticed her intellect and had steadily promoted her until she was working on a new vaccine that they were developing to combat malaria. One afternoon she didn't feel well and asked if she could leave early. Her boss said that it was okay. She took the train to Swampscott and had an UBER pick her up. She really didn't feel well and tried to nap on the short ride to Marblehead. They were on the road to her home in the cove at Grace Oliver beach when she threw up. Her UBER driver was kind and had pulled over just in time. Lisa waved him away. "I live in that house right there," she said. "I can walk from here. Or crawl if I have to." She tipped 25% on the app and the driver left her among the hostas still retching.

After a half hour she started to feel better. Luckily none of her neighbors had driven by. Lisa started to walk slowly toward the house. She noticed that her husband's car was in the driveway. There was another small red BMW parked alongside of it. "Hmm," she thought. "He must have left work early. I could have copped a ride home with him." Lisa and her husband had barely spoken a word to each other in the past year. They both still worked for Novartis but in different areas. Her husband was in the executive branch; she was in the exciting branch, the part of the company that made the company money and he was more than a little jealous of her success. There were other reasons for their marriage becoming distant. Lisa was horny pretty much all of the time. He was not, well at least he never mentioned it. At first it had not been an issue but after some time she was climbing walls and had no idea what to do about it.

She sat on the porch taking in the view, trying to feel better. She wondered why her husband was home but didn't feel like dealing with it. The cove was one of Marblehead's most stunning areas and their house was perched on a rocky outcropping that

gave them not only a view of the cove, but of the Atlantic ocean as well. Lisa burped. It was a good sign. Her nausea had subsided. She decided to go in and see why her husband had come home early from work.

The house was huge. The florist had obviously been by earlier in the day because the arrangements in the entrance hall were stunning and she could smell their fragrance as soon as she walked in the door. There was a noise coming from one of the bedrooms upstairs. Lisa had taken her shoes off, as was required by her husband's House Rules, but she had not noticed a pair of Christian Louboutin men's lace up shoes in the wicker basket beside the door. She stopped in the powder room for a pee before going up.

"Are you home?" she said out loud. The noise in the room stopped, replaced by some scuffling sounds. "Fuck it," she thought and opened the door. Her husband was naked on the bed, but he was there alone. "What the fuck," he yelled. "Don't you knock?" Lisa noticed that the lace curtain was blowing gently in the wind. The window was open.

"I was ill and came home early from work," she said. "I didn't expect to find you home."

"I had an appointment with Doctor Sibella. I thought that I had told you that."

"You barely talk to me these days," she said. "Cover yourself. I have no interest in seeing your dick." Lisa moved toward the window. Her husband started to panic. He knew what she would find. The boy was naked and shivering on the terra-cotta roof. She recognized him as one of the alter boys at the "Our Lady, Star of the Sea," the Catholic Church on Atlantic Avenue.

"I can explain," her husband said.

"Save it. Save it for your day in court."

CARLOS HAD THE FAKE PASSPORT couriered to the cabin. His friend in Miami had arranged for three young boys to ready the boat and provision it with enough food for the thousand mile trip to the States. Carlos had told his friend, “just make sure that there is a lot of rum on board. Tell the boys that I like Captain and Coke. Oh, and popcorn. I have to have popcorn.”

His friend who owned the cabin had arranged for a neighbor to drive him to the marina at two in the morning. Carlos was not taking any chances. The boys had the boat ready and the engine running when he got there. They slipped the lines and motored quietly out of the marina. Carlos kept looking over his shoulder but no one had noticed them. There was nothing illegal about going sailing in the middle of the night, even though it might be considered a little odd. A light southerly breeze greeted them once they cleared the breakwall and the boys unfurled the jib. Carlos cut the engine. He had not checked the forecast. Some wind was coming their way.

13



THE CHIEF OF POLICE had his detectives back in the conference room.

“OK,” he said, “the suspect is definitely a woman. Forensics have confirmed that and they also analyzed the shape of her car. They say that it’s an older model Lexus sedan, probably 2015 or so. They came up short on the tire tracks, too many landscape trucks fucked things up but we do have a person of interest. Detective Slater interviewed a woman whose fingerprints were all over the store and she acted a little suspiciously. She also had some criminal issues in her background. Problem is that she doesn’t drive a Lexus. We need to expand our search and I have ordered all the CCTV footage in Swampscott and Salem to be reviewed. Plus we have petitioned the court for all the Nest footage, you know, the video footage that people have on their homes. Seems like that’s becoming a thing since people have been losing their Amazon packages that are stolen off their front porches. We will have to wait on that but I am sure that we will find out something.” The detectives nodded. There was still very little to go on.

KIM WAS RAPED A SECOND TIME, by another cop. This time they were on a date. It was before she met her husband and Kim was playing the field, so to speak. She had agreed to dinner at the Outback Steakhouse on route 114, but halfway through the meal he turned a little strange. He started asking her some fairly lewd questions. She didn't mind so much the ones about her previous relationships and why they had not worked out. It was when he asked if she had brought any pets into the bedroom to participate that her antennae went up. At first she thought that he was kidding but it soon became obvious that he was not. Her date kept on ordering drinks and insisting that she 'just relax and have some fun.'

Kim was well plastered by the end of the meal. Her date had picked her up, which she had chalked up to excellent manners, but now she had to have him drive her home. She wanted to get an UBER but she had deleted the app from her phone and in order to download it again she would have to remember her Apple password and that was not so easy. She was having a hard time remembering her own name. Her date drove her home and invited himself in. He suggested that she 'slip into something more comfortable' which Kim thought was a good idea; at the time, but he followed her into her bedroom and raped her. Kim didn't remember much other than his breath smelled of stale beer, and that it hurt. He left immediately after, thankfully, but Kim never had any respect, or trust for that matter, of the police.

CARLOS AND HIS CREW knew that they might be in for a rough night when the sky to the west first turned gray, then black. There was not much wind to start with but it picked up quickly. Carlos had the boys reef the main and change the headsail to a smaller sail. The water also turned black and the first strong

gust hit just as the sun slipped below the horizon. The boat took it in stride, but the second gust did some damage. The furling line on the jib let go and the sail came undone. There was nothing to do but take it down, but taking it down was not as easy as it sounded. Carlos had the boys on the foredeck but they were inexperienced and were skidding all over the place. Luckily they were clipped on, Carlos had made sure of that. The wind was starting to really howl and the autopilot was struggling to keep the boat on course. The instruments at the navigation station showed gusts of over fifty knots. "You guys had better get back in the cockpit," Carlos yelled. "We need to talk this thing through." He could barely be heard above the screech of the wind and the noise of the sail flapping, but the kids returned to the relative safety of the cockpit. Carlos said, "when the wind is blowing this hard you have to pull the sail down. It won't come down on its own. It's going to need at least two of you to get it down. I will manage the halyard. You guys get the fucking sail down."

There was a slight moon, but other than that the night was dark. The boys went forward and Carlos crawled to the mast. There was a jammer that had to be released first before the sail could come down. He wished that he had not downed a double Captain and Coke earlier in the evening. Carlos was hanging on while the boys waited for the sail to be released. He made sure that the halyard was on the winch before releasing the jammer. The mast shook when he let the halyard go and the boys started to pull the sail down. It wasn't going well. The sail seemed to be stuck.

"Pull the fucking thing down," Carlos yelled. Then he made his second mistake, the first being the Captain and Coke. He tried to go forward just as a curling wave crashed over the deck. It hit Carlos in the chest and swept him to the leeward side. He had

forgotten to clip his harness on. He hit the leeward shrouds and the wind was knocked out of him. A second wave washed him down the side deck and then overboard.



THE FIRST REAL BREAK in the case came when forensics figured out the symbol on the baseball cap. They had worked hard to get a clear image, well, as clear as they could get given that it had been so dark out. They then they ran it though a software program designed to detect and interpret symbols.

“The symbol was Chinese and was the symbol for ‘love, peace and happiness,” the Chief said. The detectives stared blankly. The Chief was animated but for now no one had any clue how the symbol could help them solve the case.

TRACY AND RICARDO settled into life in Marblehead. It looked like Ricardo may have pulled off a deal with the City of Portimao to sponsor his ocean race. His American partners were really happy at how things were going. Tracy was just blissfully happy because Ricardo was happy. She had found a job working as a waiter at The Driftwood, a quaint restaurant right on the harbor that served breakfast and lunch. Ricardo came home one evening and said, “I have to go back to Portugal. It looks like the mayor

of Portimao is willing to sign the sponsorship deal. At least that's what his aides told me."

"That's awesome sweetie," Tracy said. She helped Ricardo pack and was surprised by how much he was packing.

"How long are you going for?" she asked. Ricardo shrugged.

"As long as it takes." She dropped him at Logan airport with a promise to update her as soon as he had some news. That was the last she heard from him. He changed his phone number and email address and seemed to simply drop off the planet. Tracy was devastated. Her best friend came to stay with her and together they dug through the Internet. Ricardo had given them the name of his race but they could not find anything online. Her friend then suggested that one of their old school mates who spoke Portuguese might be willing to help. He had lived in Portugal for a few years.

They called him and asked if he would be willing to call the mayors office in Portimao. They gave him the background and their friend made a call. Tracy and her best friend waited anxiously. Finally the phone rang. "I managed to get through to the deputy mayor's office," he said. "No one has heard of him there and no one had any idea about any yacht race that was being planned. Tracy broke apart. Ricardo was the first person that she had truly and deeply loved. She simply could not believe that it was all bullshit. It turned out that it was all bullshit. Ricardo's real name was Ricky. He was known around a certain area of Lisbon as Mr. Casanova. He was also known as Mr. Scam Artist. Tracy knew none of this. Her best friend had to go back to her boyfriend. Tracy dropped her off at Wonderland where she would take the T into Boston. On the way home Tracy stopped at the Bank of America ATM on the Lynnway. Her cash withdrawal with declined. She looked up her balance. It was a big fat donut. Ricardo had ripped her off and disappeared into the night.

THE CHIEF HAD A CALL. "I have something for you," the Chief of Swampscott police said. "Your killer stopped in a small convenience store in Swampscott, actually the store is just before the police station, only a hundred yards or so before. We have it quite clearly on our CCTV footage. It's definitely a woman. She's wearing the baseball hat and the symbol that you sent us is quite visible. What the fuck is the symbol, some kind of Chinese crap?"

"Yes," the Marblehead Chief replied. "The symbol is Chinese and it's the symbol for love, peace and happiness. Who knew?"

"Seems like it doesn't work if she killed two people."

"You know as well as I do that people are strange. I will send over one of my detectives later to pick it up."

"I can just upload it if that's easier."

"It's easier but our computers this side are crap. Budget cuts. If I can get the tape I will have a duplicate made and get the original back to you. Thanks for the info. We may be onto something."

CARLOS SAW THE BOAT sail away from him. He was not sure if any of the boys had noticed him falling overboard. The water was warm, the sea rough. Carlos swallowed a bunch of water and choked. He tried to yell but the salt in his throat burned and very little came out.

"Fuck."

The boys were still struggling to get the sail down when they noticed that Carlos was not at the mast. "I will find him," one of them said. The deck was awash and the noise horrendous. The boy clawed his way along the deck and looked in the cockpit. He was not there. He grabbed the railing in the companionway and went below.

“Carlos?” he yelled. “Nothing.”

“Carlos,” he yelled again.

“Nothing.”

The boy looked aft in the owners cabin but there was no one there. He looked up forward in the forepeak and there was no one there either. The sail locker was open and he was not in there. The boy panicked. “Carlos,” he yelled at the top of his voice. “Carlos,” but there was no answer. The boy dragged himself up the companionway and back into the cockpit. “Guys, Carlos might have gone overboard. I can’t find him,” but his words were lost in the wind. He grabbed the windward stanchion and started to move forward. The sail was still flapping madly. The noise of the sail and the wind was like some kind of oncoming freight train. The boy made it to the foredeck. “I think that Carlos might have been washed overboard,” he yelled. “He’s not below and he’s not in the cockpit.”

“Fuck.”

Suddenly the luff tape on the sail ripped and the sail washed overboard. It was still attached to the boat but most of it was dragging in the water. The boys were screaming at each other. They managed to get the sail back onboard and stuffed it down the forehatch and made it back to the relative safety of the cockpit. That was when it hit them that were going to have to find Carlos. He was probably dead if he was overboard.



THE KILLER WAS STILL tight lipped. She could not believe what she had done and certainly was not going to tell anyone, especially her husband. She tried to make contact with the kidnappers. They still had her child but they were not responding. She had done what they wanted her to do to save her son Ray. It was an agreement that she had made because she no longer had the money.

She went back to both crime scenes, as most killers do. The cops had removed the yellow tape. There was still a stain on the tar by the VFW. She was not the only one driving by to check things out. Mr. Gupta had reopened his store and, as the online poster had predicted, the store was jammed, no-one buying much, but looking where the murder had taken place. Richie was working his meat counter but not saying anything. Fact was he didn't know anything. The police had questioned him and Mr. Gupta had taken a piece of his arse off when he heard that Richie had been outside having a smoke and not working, but what was he to say?

The kid quit his job and was replaced by a nice looking boy.

Or was it a girl? Jilly was transitioning from a girl to a boy and preferred to be called Jacob but for now she/he was a bit of a mess. A nice mess though with funky hair, a few piercings, and a very pleasant disposition. Even the tight arse community of Marblehead was going along with it. There had been a lot in the news recently about not only gay rights, but also about transgender rights as well. Most residents were coming to realize that this was just a part of being human. Most, but not all.

The cops had set up a camera at both crime scenes. They were well hidden. They were quite certain that the killer would return to the scene of the crime and they were hoping for a clue. The killer had not thought things through very carefully and was wearing the same baseball cap. The cops caught it on camera.

THE BOYS ON THE BOAT were a lot smarter than they looked. They got the engine started and motored back in the direction that they came from. It was really difficult but they knew that Carlos was overboard and they were determined to find him. They started to search in a grid pattern which was a real challenge because of the sea state. The storm was not letting up, not even a little bit. In the east there was a sliver of light under some ominous clouds. They knew that it would soon be getting light out but the problem was the height of the waves. They might be able to see Carlos if he was on the crest of a wave at the same time as they were on the crest of a wave. If he was in a trough though, there would be no way to find him.

The oldest of the boys had taken charge. "We are going to keep looking until we run out of gas," he yelled. "We can't let Carlos die."

The sun came up but it was a milky sun that cast mostly shadows and very little warmth. The boys kept searching, motoring back and forth, shivering from being wet for so long as well as from the horror that they might have lost their captain.

One of the boys yelled, "I think that I see something." He pointed but there was nothing there. He was tired and his imagination was playing tricks.

CARLOS WAS TRYING to not panic but things were not looking good for him. He had always been a good swimmer and could tread water as good as anyone, but they had been halfway between Cuba and Florida when he went overboard and there was not much shipping in that area. His only hope was a fishing boat but that was a remote possibility at best.

THE CHIEF CALLED A MEETING. "OK, we have something to go on. It's definitely a girl. She has long blond hair. Looks to be around five feet five inches. Her car is a Lexus. Gray. The fucking CCTV did not get the license plate but it's definitely her. She was wearing the same baseball cap. We also have her buying smokes in Swampscott. She must have done a run after the murders. I am asking my counterpart in Lynn to request CCTV footage in Lynn as well. She was heading that way and we might find out more.

Detective Slater said, "we need the CCTV footage in Nahant as well. If she was in Swampscott she might just as easily have gone into Nahant and you know as well as I do that the Nahant mafia are on the move. Not to murder people, but to flex their muscle."

"Good point Slater," the Chief said. "Let's explore all possibilities."

As they left the room one of the detectives said to Slater, "I think that we are going on a wild goose chase. My gut tells me that these murders were committed by someone who lives right here in Marblehead."

"Me too."

CARLOS WAS STILL TREADING WATER and starting to feel as if he might slip soon. The milky light had turned into full on sunlight by midday and the heat was intense. The wind had died down a little but the sea state was still a mess. Cross waves colliding with cross waves churned things up. Every now and then he swallowed a gulp of salt water and started to choke. There was very little chance that he was going to survive.

THE BOYS ON THE BOAT were panicking. They were exhausted and the gas gauge was getting close to empty. There was nothing out there. Carlos was fucked. "Let's just give this up," the older boy said. "He will probably have drowned by now." The other boys shrugged. They were exhausted. It was a big ocean with a lot of currents. Carlos could be anywhere and yes, he was probably good and gone by now.

CARLOS DECIDED THAT it was time to take his own life. There was no use fighting. He was never going to survive anyway. "Lets just make this quick," he thought. "I will gulp down as much water as I can and then slip under." He was about to take the first gulp when he felt something brush up against him.

"Fuck."

He saw a fin surface a few feet away. The fin was heading away from him but then slowly, and seemingly deliberately, it circled back.

"Double Fuck."

16



JACK WENT TO Eric's Barber Shop for a haircut. His life was a mess. He was not certain that his wife was the person that carried out the murders, but he was more than a little suspicious and the fact that she was so tight lipped didn't help. He didn't mind that she was sleeping in the spare room. His stress level was so high that his interest in sex was not there. He loved Eric's and was looking forward to an hour of relaxing, and yes, to a little bit of pampering.

Owen was going to cut his hair. He was a young kid, fully tattooed but then all of the guys working there were fully tattooed.

"Number three on the sides?" Owen asked. "And we just fair it in with scissors?"

"Yes."

There was quiet buzz in the place and Owen was going about things. The guy in the chair next to him said, "The cops think that they might have a lead on the person who murdered Carlos and the cop."

“Oh.”

“Yea I have a friend who is a detective there and he told me, strictly off the record of course, that it was definitely a lady and she had kind of long blond hair. They think that she was driving a Lexus, an older model.”

Jack froze. His wife drove a Lexus. She also had blond hair. He stiffened a little. “Did I cut you?” Owen asked.

“No it’s nothing. I’m sorry.”

“Do you want me to trim your eyebrows?”

“Thank you.”

The guy in the next chair over carried on. “I heard from a friend who had spoken to a friend of his that Carlos had been having an affair. It’s hard to keep that stuff quiet in this town. The ladies get together at Shubies and exchange notes. It seems like they are all having affairs.”

Jack tilted his head back and Owen trimmed his eyebrows.

“OK,” Owen said, “let me shave your neck and you can be out of here.” He splashed some tonic on Jack’s neck and he was good to go. He paid cash. Eric’s only took cash.

THE TENSION IN THE HOUSE was thick enough to cut with a knife. He knew what she knew but she didn’t know what he knew. He had once been a varsity rower and had actually won some races in the Head of the Charles Regatta in Boston. He was a decent enough guy and wanted to do the right thing but at the same time he didn’t want to open a can of worms. He was quite sure that his wife was either the killer or had something to do with it. He was also quite sure that his wife had been screwing Carlos. And there were some Saturday afternoons when she said that she was going shopping but she never came back with any packages.

The town had a memorial service for both Carlos and Sergeant Bigblow and the killer and Jack attended. It was in the memorial park opposite Starbucks. The whole town turned out. This was a big story not only in Marblehead, but across New England. New England Cable News had the murders as their lead story for a while, but had moved it back until after the half hour, as new information was hard to come by. The cops were being tight lipped and other than some grainy footage of the killer in the Convenience store that had been leaked, there was not much to go on.

“You know that you have a court date coming up for the DUI?” Jack said.

“What the fuck does that matter to you?” she replied.

“This time you are paying for all of it.”

“Don’t make this about me. You are just as much of a wanker as the rest of them. Don’t think that I don’t know some of the crap you have pulled. I know about the little hussey that works the counter at Montey’s. She does have a nice ass, I will give you that, but did you ever think to tell her that you were a married man?”

“I just said that you have a court date coming up.”

“You are a twat.”

The killer was getting more and more stressed. She had not heard a word from the kidnappers since the murders.

THE SHARK CAME BACK and brushed up against Carlos, this time with a bit more force. He could feel the rough skin rub against his leg. The shark was not hungry. It had eaten a couple of wahoo earlier. It was mostly being inquisitive. Carlos didn’t know this and was starting to panic. That was when he saw a low slung fishing boat on the horizon. It was clearly a bit

suspect. Carlos could see that the hull was rusted and the gantry broken. It didn't matter. The boat was heading toward him.

THE CHIEF CALLED another meeting. He was getting some pressure from the Selectmen to figure out the murder and bring in the killer. "We now know that the killer went first to Swampscott and then either went to Nahant or into Lynn. What we have is this. It's a woman, around five feet five or so. She drives an older model Lexus. She wears a baseball cap with some strange Chinese symbol on it. The footage that we got from the convenience store in Swampscott was clear enough to put her age at 35 or maybe a little older. We also know, well at least we suspect, that Carlos was having an affair, but no one is talking. Least of all his wife. We need to find out who it might have been and, well let's say, have a little chat with her."

Detective Slater said, "We are all having affairs. That does not mean anything. Sex is sex; murder is murder. The two things are in two completely different categories. "I'm pretty sure that the CCTV footage is a waste of time. Just a red herring. We need to keep our focus closer to home."

A DECKHAND on the fishing boat saw Carlos floating in the water. The captain altered course a little and pulled up alongside Carlos. He was still afloat, hanging onto some debris, but he did not look good. The deckhand jumped overboard and swam toward him.

"Despierta secur. Wake up."



THE FISHING BOAT was out of Cuba took Carlos to Havana and turned him over to the Clinica Central Cira Garcia Hospital. They had tried to reach the boys on the single-sideband radio but with no luck. Carlos figured that they had no clue what it was or even how to turn it on. The hospital gave Carlos a quick check over and said that he was good to go. He was dehydrated and had suffered a scare but that he was strong as an ox and that he would be fine.

THE WIND DIED and the boys on the boat finally gave up their search for Carlos. "We will never find him," the oldest boy said. "Hopefully some ship or fishing boat will find him." Up ahead Andros Island in the Bahamas loomed low on the horizon. They had been blown off course.

The boys found some paper charts in the nav station and decided that they would go to Nassau to report what had happened. A lazy slop left over from the storm had them flopping about in the lee of the island. One of the boys was digging around in the lazarette and found a small gerry can of diesel which they used

to top up the tank and they fired up the engine. The sun was just starting to set when they motored into the marina on Paradise Island.

THE CHIEF OF POLICE was having a meeting with his detectives. He was pissed that there had been little progress on the case. “What the fuck,” he said. “You have not uncovered any more evidence? I am getting some shit from the Selectmen. The public wants us to solve this.”

“I do have something,” Slater said. “It’s not much but I have a hunch about this.” The Chief looked at him. “This had better be good,” he said.

“I talked to Lenny, you know the guy who has a newsstand on the corner of Pleasant and School? He told me that one of his customers grew up in Nahant and knows everyone there. Her name is Heather, I think. She told Lenny that Carlos was part of the Nahant mafia. I also heard the same thing from Warren, you know the grumpy old guy that works the liquor store next to the Convenience store. He had a long relationship with Whitey Bulger, not in any criminal sense if you know what I mean. He grew up in Southie and used to get his beers from Whitey on Sundays back when the liquor stores were closed because of the Blue Laws. Whitey ran an operation out of his basement. Warren told me that you got whatever kind of beer that Whitey wanted to sell you and you didn’t dare argue, but I digress.”

The Chief was less than impressed. “There is no fucking way that some person from Nahant was going to drive all the way to Marblehead to murder someone. It doesn’t make sense. Plus we have it pretty much confirmed that the killer was female. Most mob operations are strictly all male. You are good detective Slater and we will run down every lead but I am not sure that this one is going to go anywhere.”

“Listen, people are not as they seem,” said Slater. “Carlos used to work both in the liquor store and the Convenience Store. He always seemed a bit of a dodgy character to me. He worked a minimum wage job but his house on Schooner Ridge must be worth close to a million. I think that there is something there.”

“What do you mean Warren, and yes I know Warren, I get my beer there as well. What do you mean Warren knew Whitey Bulger?”

“He grew up in Southie and everyone knew Whitey. They didn’t dare not know him. I think Warren is a bit shady as well. He says he ran a garage that serviced cars. It was an Inspection Station too but he also lives in a fucking mansion. I dunno. There are a lot of shady people in this town and I think that there is more to this story than meets the eye.”

“OK,” the Chief said. “Keep digging. We need to get to the bottom of this and we need to get to the bottom of this soon. The bosses have my ass in a sling and I need to keep my job. Run a check on Carlos but don’t waste too much time on this.”

CARLOS PLACED A CALL to the owner of the boat. “What? Where are you,” he asked. “The boys told me that you were dead. That you had fallen overboard. Jeezus, Carlos, is this really you?”

“Yes it’s me. I fell overboard in a storm but was luckily picked up by a Cuban fishing boat and they took me to Havana. I just got discharged from the hospital. I should be dead but I guess that I am the lucky one that made it.”

“I heard from the boys this morning. They are in Nassau. They reported your death to the local authorities. Fuck Carlos we all thought that you were dead. Drowned. But here you are. I don’t know if I should be pissed at you, or relieved. You

gave us one huge scare. I will call the boys now and let them know. Meanwhile I will have my assistant look into tickets from Havana to Nassau. I need you to finish the delivery. And by the way I am relieved. The boys have been horrified. I will call them now.”

18

CARLOS AND THE BOYS made it to Ft. Lauderdale. It was just a short hop from Nassau and they motored most of the way. They were mid Gulf Stream when they came across a small fishing boat with four locals. They seemed to be in a bit of distress.

“Which way Bimini?” one of the fishermen yelled. Carlos looked at his chart. “You need to steer a course of 095 degrees.” The fisherman yelled back. “No man, we have no compass. Just point.”

The owner of the boat had smoothed things out before they got there and he was on the dock at the Bahia Del Mar when they pulled alongside. “Fuck Carlos,” he said, “don’t ever do that again. You scared the crap out of all of us. We thought that you were dead. Carlos laughed and said, “maybe I am, but if I am alive I know a place where you can take us for lunch. I have been hearing about this place for years. The Southport Raw Bar.”

“Done.”

They drove over the 17th street bridge and took a right on Cordova Road. The place was pretty much as Carlos had imagined it. A sailors

bar. A bit of a dive but with a good vibe. They ordered a couple of pitchers of Michelob Ultra from the bartender who went by the name of Captain Tits. They also ordered three dozen oysters. They were celebrating the fact that Carlos was alive. The food started to flow and after the oysters had been downed most of them went for the dolphin tacos. Carlos got up to take and piss and was standing minding his own business doing his business when he noticed that the man next to him was trying to write his name on the urinal. "Hey buddy," the man said. "Do you want to make some money?"

Carlos was just happy to be alive. "Yes," he replied. "I do want to make some money. What do you have in mind?" The man finished peeing and shook it. He reached into his back pocket and said, "I run a business. We always need drivers. If you really want to make money give me a call."

Carlos went back to the table. The Michelob had kicked in and the boys were on a rip. He looked at the business card. It read. "Mikes Bike Hike and Trike."

"Hmmm."

Captain Tits brought them over another pitcher of Michelob. "Where you guys from," he asked. "You look like sailors. Did you just do a delivery here?"

"We brought a boat up from Puerto Rico, via the Bahamas. How did you know that we were sailors?"

Captain Tits said, "It takes one to know one. Let me know if you need more beer."

By the time they got back to the boat the boys were plastered. Carlos was intrigued. There was a payphone at the end of the dock and he made a call. "Hello," a voice answered.

Carlos said, "hello this is Carlos. We met at the Southport Raw Bar at lunch today."

The voice said, "Yes I remember you. So you want to make some money? Let's meet for breakfast tomorrow at Dirty Ernies. Do you know where that is?"

"No."

"If you leave the Raw Bar and take a left. Keep going down Cordova. Go under the 17th street bridge. There will be a Piggly Wiggly on your left. Dirty Ernies is opposite, on the right. I will be there at seven."

Carlos went back to the boat. There was some Appletons Rum on board and he poured himself a stiff one. He was a still working on the adrenalin of having survived and his mind was racing. One of the boys sat with him for a bit but he might have had a few too many and was having a hard time articulating things. Or even sitting up straight. Carlos watched him stumble down the companionway and land with a thump on the starboard bunk.

The next morning he took a taxi to Dirty Ernies. The place was behind a brand new TD Bank. It looked like the owner of Dirty Ernies had refused to sell out to TD Bank and the bank had built the business around his restaurant. There was a heavy smell of bacon in the air. Carlos went in. The place was dimly lit and smelled of cigarette smoke. Florida had recently imposed a ban on smoking in restaurants but Ernie, the restaurant owner obviously didn't care. He found the man tucking into a plate of pancakes. He waved him to the seat opposite. It was only then that Carlos realized that the waiters were all female; and all of them were topless.

"This is my favorite place for breakfast," the man announced. "And it's not about the tits. They make the best buttermilk pancakes here." Carlos ordered a couple of eggs, sunny side up, with a side of grits."

“So you are interested in making some money then?” the man asked. Carlos nodded. “Have you heard of the Route 95 Corridor? It runs from Miami to Maine. All the way up the eastern seaboard. The only bit to worry about in Florida is between Daytona Beach and Jacksonville. The cops there are assholes. They won’t even take a payoff. Further up there is a stretch between Myrtle Beach and Wilmington that you have to worry about. After that you are good until New Jersey, but if something happens in New Jersey you just need to call me and I will make some calls on your behalf. We have the Massachusetts cops in the palm of our hand. Fuckers there are as corrupt as hell.”

“Ok.”

“You do have a drivers license, right?” The man asked.

“Yes.”

“OK tomorrow afternoon you need to meet me at the Raw Bar. My friend Jeffrey will be there. He will have a black Subaru. We always use Subaru’s. No one would ever suspect a Subaru driver.”

“And?”

Carlos had to admit that the grits were the best he had ever tasted. He was trying to concentrate on what the man was saying but seriously, the waitress had tits that pointed skyward and Carlos had not been laid in a long time. The waitress gave him a glance.

“So what’s with this car?” he asked. “Is this one of those snowbird things. When people come to Florida to avoid the winter up north and need their car delivered back while they fly to Boston.” The man nodded. “Sort of,” he said. “Just meet me at the Raw Bar at noon.”

The waitress brought the check. She handed the check to the man. She handed her phone number to Carlos.

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CARLOS SHOWED UP early at the Southport Raw Bar. He wanted to have another dolphin taco before meeting up with the man, who he thought strange that he had never introduced himself. He pulled up a chair at the bar and ordered a Dark and Stormy from Captain Tits.

“Back so soon?” Tits said. “Now I know that you are definitely a sailor. Or maybe you are a pirate. Only pirates drink rum before noon.” He left Carlos with his Dark and Stormy and went off to serve another customer.

Carlos was in a good mood. The waitress had a small apartment a block back from the beach. She had it decorated in 60s retro. When Carlos arrived she had the incense lit. They sat outside for a bit enjoying the night air but the girl was not messing around. “You have seen my tits,” she said. “Now do you want to see the other bits?”

The girl left early for her shift at Dirty Ernies. She told Carlos to let himself out. He went back to the boat to square things with the owner and to say goodbye to the boys, and then taxied over

to the Raw Bar. He was just finishing his taco and a half carafe of white wine when the man walked in.

“Good. You are here,” he said. “Let’s talk business.” Carlos nodded.

“I hope that I didn’t mislead you yesterday. This car delivery is not for some, what did you call them? Snowbirds? This is a special delivery. There is no spare tire. That area is filled with, you know, cocaine. If you get a flat use this number to call AAA. On the back is my account number. Hopefully that won’t happen but just in case. I am going to give you an envelope with twenties in it for gas and tolls and some food. That’s it for now. When you get to Boston, this is the address. You will meet my business partner there. He doesn’t say much so don’t expect any kind of conversation. Just give him the keys to the Subaru. He will give you an envelope with money. That will be for you. Two thousand.”

Carlos nodded. “I presume that there is a map in the glove compartment and also one of Boston.” The man said, “we have done this before. It’s all there. Now. You can always do a runner with the cocaine. But don’t. We will find you and you will be fucked. It’s just best that you carry this out and if you want to do more trips call me. I will fly you back to Ft Lauderdale and set you up with another Subaru. The cars actually make us a little profit when my partner sells them in Boston. No rust on a Florida car.” He slid the keys over. “It’s in the parking lot right under the tree. It’s black with a Florida Raiders sticker on the rear window. If you run into any trouble you never knew me so forget my name until you get to Boston. And good luck.”

Carlos sat for a while. He had not expected this but two thousand is two thousand and he was pretty much broke. His account in Puerto Rico had been frozen. He went back to the bar. A Dark and Stormy please Captain.” He was losing his nerve.

“What if I get caught?” he thought. He could always just call the man and back out. The drinks made him bolder so he ordered another one. By mid afternoon he was drunk. He took the keys, paid the bill out of the envelope of twenties, and went to find the car.

IT’S A 30 HOUR TRIP from Ft. Lauderdale to Boston; depending on traffic. Carlos kept under the speed limit. The car ran well and he ticked off the miles stopping only at the South of the Border for a quick bite. There was a small stretch when a state cop was behind him but he didn’t panic. The cop got impatient with him for driving the speed limit and passed him. He didn’t even glance his way. Carlos noticed that his palms had been sweating. There was another cop on the New Jersey Turnpike. He sat for a while right behind Carlos but then overtook him. It was just getting dark when he saw the lights of Boston up ahead.

The address that the man had given him was not actually in Boston. It was in Nahant, a small seaside town fifteen miles north of Boston. Carlos made his way through the Callahan Tunnel and drove past the airport. There was quite a bit of traffic but he was soon on the causeway that connected Nahant to the mainland. To the south Boston twinkled. He pulled over and used the flashlight that was in the glove compartment to study the map. The house would be easy to find. Once he was off the causeway and past Little Nahant he would take a right on Castle Road. The house was the forth one on the left.

Carlos pulled up alongside. He was nervous and sat in the car for a while. He lit a smoke and listened to the radio until the cigarette burned out. It was time to drop the car off and find a place for the night. He knocked on the door and a small child answered. “Is your daddy home?” he asked.

“Dad there is someone at the door that wants you.” A middle-

aged man wearing a Red Sox baseball cap came to the door. "Can I help you?" Carlos stepped outside and pointed to the Subaru. The man said, "just a moment and went back into the house. He came back out with an envelope. "Let me check the trunk first." Please unlock it." The cocaine was all there and the man handed over the envelope. "Keys." That was it. Carlos had to walk to a payphone on Nahant Road to call a taxi. There was a Comfort Inn on the Lynnway where they had clean room for \$60 a night. He emptied the envelope onto the bed. The money was all there. Carlos was exhausted and fell into a restless sleep. The next morning he made himself available at the breakfast bar. It had a waffle machine with all the fixings. Carlos was well and truly stuffed when he called the man in Florida. "I need a plane ticket. I'm ready for another drive north."

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JACK, THE KILLER'S HUSBAND, had been doing some digging. He had managed to hack into his wife's Facebook account and discovered some chat between her and Carlos. It seemed to be innocent enough but there was a lot of innuendo in their online conversation. He had never bothered with Facebook otherwise he might have picked up on it earlier. He knew that his wife had a TikTok account but he had no idea how to break into that one. His dilemma was what to do about it. He could go to the police. That would make sense but then all hell would break loose. What if she was arrested, or worse yet convicted? She had most of their money tied up in trusts with her name on the documentation. She also had stuff on him that he would rather not have out in public. For now she was still sleeping in the guest bedroom and was trying to be civil to him during the day. The arrest and DUI stuff was taking its toll, say nothing of the murders. That plus the kidnapers still had her son and had gone silent. Their phones rang out and their emails bounced.

Tracy was still steaming over the, what she liked to call, "The Ricardo Situation." She kept working her job at The Driftwood.

Only her best friend knew about the money that had gone missing. She had told her customers that Ricardo had disappeared only when they asked, but she didn't want them to think that she had been duped. She started dating a townie, very cautiously at first. He was a nice enough chap if you like 'baseball cap on backwards' kind of guys. He drove a Ford pick-up and worked at the Little Harbor Lobster Company. "One day I am going to own this place," he told Tracy and a year later he did. Tracy admired his pluck and despite some of his quirks, and the fact that he was no Ricardo, she stuck with him.

"I have big plans for this place," her boyfriend said. "This place might look a bit run down but it has the most spectacular water views in all of New England and I am going to capitalize on that. I have submitted a proposal to the town for a permit to open a restaurant above the lobster shop. At first it will be BYOB because it's hard to get a liquor license these days, but can you imagine sitting up there with a plate of calamari and a bottle of cold white wine looking over Little Harbor? Just magic." Tracy was impressed with his ambition. "You can sell sardines," she told him.

OUT OF THE BLUE Ricardo called. "Hi Tracy this is Ric," he said. Tracy felt her heart jump and her vagina constrict at the same time. "Look I'm sorry," he said. "I have a lot of explaining to do and I will pay you back the money. I was driving over the Ponte 25 de Abril Bridge this morning. You know the one. We drove over it many times. I thought of you and of how your hair smelled of citrus, and knew that I had to call. It was time, and so here I am calling you."

Tracy said, "Ricardo, I have moved on. It wasn't much money but I really did love you. I can't understand how anyone can do that and just disappear. I thought that you loved me. You didn't

say anything. One day we were together and the next you were gone into thin air. With my money."

"I'm sorry," Ricardo said. "I really am sorry. One day I will explain it all but for now I just wanted to call and apologize."

"Two fucking years Ricardo. Two years and nothing. My emails bounced. Your phone was shut off. I don't even know how to be pissed at you. I loved you and you screwed me." She felt her tummy get warm when she said the word 'screwed'. She was pissed, but somewhere back hidden there where these things hide, she remembered the sex and then she was no longer as upset as she was trying to be.

"You have my number now. Call me if you want to talk. If you ever get back to Lisbon I will buy you some sardines." Ricardo hung up and was suddenly gone again just as abruptly as he had before. Tracy pulled on her running tights and sneakers and took off. Running had been her survival method. It unscrambled the scrambled thoughts in her head. She was three miles in when she stopped. "Fuck him," she said out loud. "Fuck him. I'm happy now," but she knew in her heart of hearts she wasn't happy.

CARLOS LANDED BACK at Ft. Lauderdale International Airport. He took a taxi to the Southport Raw Bar. He was going to stop by the boat to see if the boys were still on board but hunger and the thought of a dozen shucked oysters won out and fifteen minutes later the taxi dropped him off. He placed a call to the waitress, whose name he never had thought to ask, and she picked up right away. "Can I see you tonight? This is Carlos." The sex had been really quite decent but he mostly needed a place to stay for the night.

"Yes."

The man had made the flight arrangements so he knew that

Carlos would be back in town but told him that he could only meet the following day. "I can't make it but Jeffrey will be there with a new car," he said. "I told him where to find you."

Captain Tits was slinging drinks when he walked into the Raw Bar. "A dark and stormy?" he asked.

"Nah just a pitcher of beer. I have to drive."

"Coming right up."

Carlos was enjoying the fried shrimp basket and feeling good about life. He had some run around money in his pocket and a decent paying job. It was not very different from the fishing gig that had gone all wrong. He didn't dare text or call his mom in case her lines were being monitored. He wondered how his dad was making out. "He was always such a loser," he thought. He missed his sister. He had told the waitress that he was at the Raw Bar and halfway through his pitcher of Bud she walked through the door.

"Hey, I thought that I would never see you again," she said. The last time that they were together Carlos had focused mostly on her tits, and, well, the other bits too if you have to know. He had not realized how beautiful she was. "Come and sit," he said. "What do you like to drink."

"Dom Pedro," she said. "In a big glass."



CARLOS AND THE WAITRESS were well and truly drunk long before happy hour even started. They had stuffed themselves on fried clams and a really delicious smoked fish dip. They were just getting ready to leave when Carlos plucked up the courage to ask the waitress her name. "I'm Maggie," she said. "Maggie Mayweather. I knew that you didn't know my name and that made you even cuter. I was wondering when you were going to ask. Now, let's get a taxi to my place and go and fuck."

Carlos was scheduled to meet Jeffrey the following morning. He called the man. "We have another driver," he said. "Can you get another Subaru?" The man said that he would call him back. An hour later he got a call. "Jeffrey will have two cars for you. Does this other driver know the deal?"

"Yes."

Carlos and Maggie were at the Raw Bar early. They wanted to have a few drinks before leaving for Boston. "I was sad to tell Ernie that I was leaving. He was a good boss," Maggie said. "It was an OK job. I didn't mind showing off my tits, which you have

to admit, by the way, are really good looking tits. Ernie is a good man. He works his ass off. The customers were generally happy and the food, I think anyway, is excellent.”

“Here’s to a better, or should I say, a different life,” Carlos said.

Jeffrey arrived. He had two sets of keys. One for Carlos and one for Maggie. “The cars are in the same place as before,” he said, but didn’t hang around for any small talk. Carlos and Maggie ordered another round and then settled their tab. Carlos said, “I will go ahead and you follow me. Don’t worry, this is going to be OK. There will be four grand at the end of this for us. That equals a lot of tips.” Maggie nodded. “If I get pulled over I will just pull up my shirt and show the cop, well you know what.” She laughed. Carlos said, “those tits are mine for now. Don’t go showing them to anyone else.”

They were on the road by mid-afternoon. Maggie followed Carlos as close as she could but they had not anticipated the traffic on I-95. Carlos was weaving in and out and Maggie had a hard time keeping close. Once the traffic cleared out a little she caught up to him and flashed her lights. Carlos pulled over. “You drive too fast,” she said.

“Sorry, I am just so happy these days. I will drive slower. We can stop at South of the Border. There is a 24-hour place there where we can get something to eat.” The drive was uneventful but their timing was off. It was three in the morning when they got to Boston. Carlos pulled over. Maggie stopped right behind him. “There is a Comfort Inn about five miles away. Let’s get a room. They have an amazing breakfast buffet. We can deliver the cars tomorrow.”

CARLOS AND MAGGIE were making a lot of money delivering Subaru’s. They had found a small apartment in Nahant. It was on a month-by-month lease. Carlos heard that his Dad got a year and

most of the fishermen got five. He did feel kind of bad about it all. The well dressed gentleman got fifteen years.

One Sunday afternoon Maggie suggested that they take a drive. They had not explored the area north of Nahant. It was early Fall and the foliage was stunning. Carlos asked, “wouldn’t you like to live in Swampscott? This place is really beautiful. Maggie said, “I heard that Marblehead is even more beautiful. Let’s keep driving.”

Maggie was right. There was a sign that read “Welcome to Marblehead.” On the right was a huge house. There was a man in his driveway hosing his BMW. “Why does he need to wash his bloody car?” Maggie asked. “You would think that he could afford a car wash.”

“It’s probably therapy for him.”

“I guess.”

They took a right just after Stowaway Sweets. Carlos said that he wanted to see the ocean. What he saw was nothing short of stunning. The beach was amazing but once they got across the causeway that connected a small island to the mainland the houses were more than either of them could have ever imagined. “These gardens have to be some of the best,” said Maggie. “Who lives here? It’s almost like we are walking into a Disney movie. Carlos, what do you think? How many runs will it take before we can buy a house here?”

“As many as it takes,” Carlos said. “As many as it takes my love.”

THE KILLER WAS NOT DOING WELL. As hard as she tried she could barely remember what had happened that night. It was as if someone else had followed Carlos to the Convenience Store and murdered him. Things with her husband were terrible and

she was hitting the bottle hard. She was also smoking two packs a day which had done a number on her gym routine. She had still not heard from the kidnapers.

Most mornings, after she had finished her morning coffee, she started to crave a glass of wine. She knew most of the UBER drivers by name and they all knew where to take her. Even the checkout lady at Vinnin Liquors was on a first name basis. She tried to stay off the Fireball until after noon but some days she didn't quite make it. The wine was good. It dulled her senses. The Fireball was even better especially when she needed her senses dulled. She was getting frantic. Then she got an encrypted TikTok message. "Good job on the murder, but we still need the four hundred K."



THE KILLER TOLD her friend Heather. She didn't come right out and tell her that she was the one that had murdered Carlos, but she alluded to it. She needed to talk to someone. She knew that Heather would not judge. Heather had a rough go of it as a kid attending a Catholic school and knew what it was like to want to kill someone. Father Jim was more into little girls than little boys, if you know what I mean. Heather also knew that she had been visiting her son on most Saturdays, but was sworn to secrecy.

"I think that I know who killed Carlos," she said.

Heather replied, "It seems that they suspect that the murderer was female. You fit that description. How do you know?"

"Carlos was having an affair. You know that I was having an affair. I told you about it." She left the conversation dangling in the air. Heather sniffed. "Things can get pretty ugly when there is sex involved. And money."

Heather had a wild shock of hair and she had always used it to her advantage. Even when she was a little girl she always stood out because of her hair. She was sweet and kind, she also

had a sharp wit and, probably because of her Catholic upbringing, some real insecurities.

“Sex and money,” she said, “I’m not getting much of either these days.”

THE CHIEF OF POLICE said, “we have found the company that makes the baseball caps with that symbol on it. It’s an outfit in the South Boston. It seems like they are the only place that makes the caps with that exact symbol. They don’t make that many but over the years they have made quite a few. I asked my friend Chief White to dig into things. It’s pretty much all we have to go on as far as I can tell.”

Then they got an anonymous tip. The caller used WhatsApp and had encrypted the number. “The person that killed Carlos Ramirez was a female,” he said. “She lives in Marblehead. She was having an affair with Carlos. Maybe his wife knows something.”

Detective Slater made a call. He knew that Carlos’s wife would not be thrilled by his call but he called anyway. She agreed to stop by the police station later that afternoon. Slater was pleasant, well as pleasant as he could be given that he was generally an asshole. He led her to a small room. “Please take a seat,” he said.

“I’m sorry about your husband. We are trying to solve this and find out who killed him. We got an anonymous tip that the killer is a female. I’m really sorry to ask you this but the person that left the message said that you husband was having an affair and that the person he was seeing might have been the killer.”

“Am I under oath?” she asked.

“No we are just talking,” Slater said. “You are not under oath and we are not filming or recording.”

“Truth is Carlos was screwing around as much as he could. I knew about it but, well, you know. I can give you something that you can really chew on though. Go and ask Ralph up at the transfer station. They were big buddies. He might know something. Carlos was always there. He liked to pick through the metal bin. Most days he came home with something that he had found. Some table or one time he found a brand new pressure washer. Once he quit his job at the Convenience Store and the liquor store he was bored. He had enough money. He was just looking to fill the hours. Ralph might know something. You know how men like to brag to their friends.”

Slater drove to the transfer station. Ralph was working the tip. Slater asked if they could talk. Ralph said that there was a small room where they could talk but that he didn’t have much time.

“The tip get full quicker than one would think and someone had to deal with it.”

“I heard that you were friends with Carlos,” Slater said. “You know Carlos who got shot at the Convenience Store?”

“Yes I knew Carlos.”

“I heard that he was a little loose with the ladies. Did he ever talk to you about any of his affairs? His wife seems to think that you might know something.”

Ralph said, “I should probably get back to work. Carlos was a bit of a blowhard. He talked a lot of crap. Many of the people who come through here talk crap. We are kind of stuck listening to them. Sometimes it’s as if we are their shrinks. All I can say is that Carlos was screwing around but I don’t remember names.” Ralph was lying. He knew exactly who Carlos was screwing but didn’t want to get involved.

Slater left. Ralph watched him drive away and then flick his lights on. There was someone driving too fast down West Shore

Drive. “That guy is a twat,” Ralph thought. He wandered down to the Convenience Store to get a coffee. Phil was working the register. Phil used to own the Mobil gas station on Atlantic Avenue. He was retired now but he knew everyone who was anyone. Ralph poured a coffee and took it to check out. Phil said, “that one is on the house. Just don’t tell my boss.” Ralph winked.

“You got it Phil.”

CARLOS AND MAGGIE bought a small house on The Neck where the rich in Marblehead live. They both worked the I-95 Corridor and would do at least three trips a week; each. The money was rolling in. That was when Carlos got greedy. He was not new to the drug smuggling game. He knew that the load of Cocaine in the spare tire well of each Subaru was worth upwards of two hundred K. Plus the man was being a prick and his partner in Nahant was not much better.

“Maggie,” he said. “I have been talking with an old friend of mine who lives in Nashville. He used to live in Puerto Rico. We talk through an encrypted WhatsApp. He says that if the cocaine is pure and not cut, that he could get us at least a two hundred K each. We might cop some shit from the man and that surly wanker in Nahant, but there is a lot of money on the line. They have no idea where we live. We can ditch the phones and start fresh with four hundred big ones in the bank. I have been looking into offshore banks. We can leave the money there for a while. I am getting tired of the drive from Florida anyway. What do you think?”

Maggie looked at him. “There are no topless bars in Marblehead. Where am I gonna work if this all goes to shit? We just bought a house.”

Carlos said, “With four hundred K in the bank you won’t ever have to show anyone your tits ever again.”

“OK let’s do it,” Maggie said.

The kid flew them back to Ft. Lauderdale and they met Jeffrey at the Raw Bar. Lunch before a long drive had become their routine. They had tried everything on the menu except the snails. “Why the heck does a fish place serve snails?” Maggie asked Captain Tits. “This is a seafood restaurant.”

Tits replied, “the owner of this place lived in Paris for a couple of years and loves snails. We don’t sell many but we have them and they are really good.”

Carlos said, “OK let’s give them a try. It’s always fun to live close to the edge. Two orders please.” Maggie gave him a look. “Close to the edge huh? I could go right back to Dirty Ernies and get my old job back. I am not sure that I like living close to the edge.”

Carlos said, “relax, I was just having some fun.” The waiter brought two orders of snails. They were delicious. It helped that they were drunk, Carlos and Maggie that is, not the snails. They found the cars right where Jeffrey always left them and were soon on their way with a belly full of snails and a gut full of cheap white wine.

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CARLOS AND MAGGIE took the well-worn route up I-95 but as they approached Savannah, instead of continuing north they took a left onto Rt.16 heading west toward Nashville. They stopped in Macon, Georgia for a bite to eat at an all night truck stop. What they didn't know was that the man had planted tracking device in each car.

The man got a message on his phone that the cars were not following the route that he had pre-programmed. He went to his MacBook Pro and pulled up the APP. It was quite rudimentary but he could see that the cars were heading west. He saw that they had stopped in Macon. He saw that they started moving again at around three in the morning, still heading west.

Carlos and Maggie hit rush hour traffic in Atlanta but found Rt.75. They passed through Chattanooga mid-morning and pulled into Nashville just before noon. Maggie flashed her lights and Carlos pulled over. He walked back to her car. "Are you sure that we should be doing this?" she asked.

Carlos said, "this time next week we can pay off half of our

mortgage. I'm sure. Do you want to get some lunch before we meet up with my mate?"

"OK."

They stopped at a rib place and had lunch. Maggie was quiet for most of the meal. "If this shit goes bad," she said. "You are going to take the blame."

"Don't worry," Carlos said. "I made sure that the man has no idea where we live. We can just disappear with four hundred K. I'm also getting tired of the driving and would like to pay down the mortgage and get a fishing boat."

THE MAN CALLED A FRIEND who had a friend in Nashville. "I need a big favor," he said. "And I will pay. A lot. There are two black Subaru's near Joes Smoky Ribs on 14th street. I am not sure exactly where but I suspect that they stopped for lunch so they are in that vicinity, probably even at that restaurant. I need your friend to follow them. I have a tracker in both cars but they are not 100 percent accurate. I want someone to follow them and pinpoint exactly where they end up. I suspect that they are going to sell the cocaine and make a run for it."

"OK."

Luckily the friend lived just four blocks over from Joes Smoky Ribs and quickly found the two black Subaru's parked side by side in the parking lot. He pulled over and lit a smoke. A half hour later a swarthy looking guy and a pretty blond came out of the restaurant and jumped into the cars. They had clearly had some drinks and were in a better than good mood.

He followed them for four miles and watched them pull up in front of a small brick house. A man came out of the house and greeted them gesturing for them to pull into the driveway. Carlos backed his car up and moments later they were unloading the

cocaine into a wheelbarrow. They did the same with Maggie's car. The owner of the house didn't seem to care that it was the middle of the afternoon and they were moving cocaine in broad daylight. In plain sight is sometimes the best way to do illegal things. The friend noted the address and took a photo of the house.

Carlos and Maggie left right away and headed north on Rt. 64. They would be back in Marblehead by the following afternoon.

KIM AND HER HUSBAND were working hard trying to get through life without too many scrapes. They had two children, a boy with a tussle of blond hair and a girl, Jessie, with jet black hair. "It's funny how kids can look so different when they both have the same parents," her husband had once said. Kim had felt a twinge of guilt but was not saying anything.

LISA LING WAS AMBIVALENT about her husband's affair. They had not had sex in a long time and if she was to be honest with herself, there was an intern at work that she was hot for. Actually she was very hot for him. She knew that she might be risking her job when she asked him out.

They went to the Pacific Street Cafe on Pacific Street a few blocks over from the Novartis offices. There was a string quartet in the corner playing Mozart. The lights were dim and the bar full. Lisa ordered a pink martini for herself. The intern had a Bud Light. They mostly made small talk. Lisa knew ten minutes into the 'date' that the intern was going to get very lucky that night. What she didn't expect was for the intern to turn her down. She had been squirming on her bar stool most of the evening imagining him naked but when she asked him if he would be interested in heading back to the hotel room that she had booked for the night, she got a flat rejection.

“I don’t think that we should be doing this,” the intern said. Lisa went alone to the hotel and used the showerhead to get rid of her frustration.

Her husband never did ask where she had spent the night.

CARLOS AND JENNY arrived back in Marblehead just as the sun was setting. The traffic on the Mass Pike was terrible as was getting through Boston. “Why don’t we get some fish at The Barnacle?” Carlos suggested. Maggie nodded. Let me first have a stiff Dom Pedro here at home. My nerves are shattered. I am still not sure that we did the right thing. I sincerely hope that your friend there in Nashville transfers the money. He looked a little shady if you ask me.”

Carlos said, “Let me pour you a pint size one and then I will take you out for a nice dinner. You love The Barnacle.” A day later the money arrived in his bank account. He immediately transferred it to the new offshore account that he had set up. It was all there and the account was in both their names. There was enough to pay down their mortgage and enough to buy a boat. He had been looking at a Hinckley Daysailer. He knew that he would have to modify it a little to use as a fishing boat but there was money for that as well. He thought it best to leave the money offshore for now not wanting to raise any suspicions.

The man notified his contact in Nahant. He gave him the address in Marblehead. “You call in a favor from your buddies there in the Nahant mafia and take care of both of those motherfuckers. My boys are already on their way to Nashville.”



THE HIT CAME TWO days later. Carlos was at home browsing online looking for a boat. Maggie had a gym membership at the YMCA and was out. There was a loud knock on the door. It startled Carlos. He too had been feeling a little uneasy about the whole thing. He answered the door. There were two men standing there. One was tall and skinny; the other short and fat. “Are you Carlos?” the short, fat one asked. Carlos said yes.

“Is that your black Subaru parked out front?” Carlos said yes. The tall skinny one pulled out a gun and pointed it at him. Do you mind if we take a look in the trunk?” Carlos knew at that point that he was pretty well fucked. He led the men out to the car and opened the trunk. There was nothing there. “Get inside the house,” the small fat one said.

They pummeled him to within an inch of his life. Well if truth be told they thought that he was dead. That was their mission.

They slipped out of the side door and the tall skinny one planted a dusting of cocaine in the trunk of Carlos’s car. He then left a message on the anonymous tip line at the Marblehead Police

Station. When Maggie came home she found Carlos unconscious on the living room floor. There was blood everywhere.

Maggie helped him onto the couch. He was still alive. Carlos had grown up on the back streets of Puerto Rico and it was going to take more than a beating to kill him. Even though he was in bad shape. His eyes had been beaten closed. There were clearly some broken ribs. Maggie could see that there were at least two teeth missing and his left leg looked like it might be broken.

“What happened?” she asked. Carlos tried to speak but could not get the words out. His tongue was swollen.

“Don’t worry,” Maggie said. “If you can nod, just nod. Was this about the cocaine?” Carlos nodded.

“We need to get the heck out of here before they come back for me.” Carlos nodded. He groaned and then said, “I need to get to a hospital. Can you call an ambulance?”

The cops arrived at the house just as Carlos was being loaded into the ambulance. They took in the situation and left. There would be plenty of time to question the two of them and also to get a judge to sign off on a search warrant for the car.

THE OTHER HIT CAME around the same time. The three thugs from Ft. Lauderdale drove up to Nashville and jumped the cocaine buyer. It was long after dark when they broke down the front door and found him in bed. He was sleeping with his golden retriever. The dog bolted. The buyer was not quick enough and took two shots; one in his chest and the other, well you know. The thugs had their signature move. They always blew the balls off their victims. They never found the cocaine.

Maggie booked a room at the Salem Waterfront Hotel. It was close to the hospital. She was not going anywhere near the house.

She figured that the cars must have been what gave them away and took her Subaru to T. Tires on Canal Street in Salem. She knew Nick, the owner. “I think that this car might be bugged,” she said. “Can I leave it with you for a few days?” Maggie rented a car from Enterprise. It was just a short walk from Nick’s shop.

The cops stopped by the hospital a week after Carlos had been admitted. His eyes were no longer swollen and he could speak. They were generally friendly at first and then they got down to business. They were doing the good cop, bad cop thing.

The good cop asked, “do you have any idea who might have done this to you?”

“No.”

“How many people were there?”

“Two.”

Had you ever seen them before?”

“No.”

“I’m really sorry that this happened to you,” the good cop said.

“Me too.” Carlos tried to smile but his face still hurt and the smile turned into a grimace.”

The bad cop said, “there was a black Subaru parked in your driveway. Is that your car?”

“No.”

“Whose car is it?” he asked.

“I borrowed it from a friend. My car is getting some work done.”

“Hmmm. OK. Well we got a warrant to search the car and found traces of cocaine in the trunk. Do you know anything about this?”

“No.”

“Who is your friend? The person who you borrowed the car from?”

“I met him in a restaurant in Ft. Lauderdale. The Southport Raw Bar. He told me that he had a business helping elderly people who spend the winters in Florida. They wanted someone to drive their car back north once they returned home in the spring. I needed some money and offered to drive the car. He paid five hundred bucks, plus expenses.”

“You just said that you borrowed the car from your friend.”

“Look I’m not feeling too good,” Carlos said. “My leg hurts. My head hurts. I may have misspoken. I was supposed to deliver the car to a guy in Marblehead but was going to hang onto it for a couple of extra days while my car was getting the CV joint fixed.”

“You deliver cars for a living and you live in a house on Marblehead Neck? Expensive real estate out there on the Neck.”

“It was a one time deal. I thought that it would be fun.”

“Do you live alone?”

“Yes.”

“Who was that lady there when the ambulance people came to get you?”

“Just a friend. We had planned to get together that afternoon. I was looking to buy a boat and she was going to help me pick one out.”

“OK,” the good cop said. “We appreciate your cooperation.”

They were just getting out of the elevator when Maggie walked in. She was on her way to see Carlos. The cops didn’t recognize her. Carlos had his left leg in a sling and looked pale. “Are you OK?” Maggie asked.

“We need to get out of here and lay low for a while. There were cops here.”

Maggie said, “I passed them on the elevator. What were they asking you?”

“It’s nothing to worry about love. They were talking to me about who might have attacked me. I told them that they probably had the wrong person. They told me that there was a trace of cocaine in the trunk of the Subaru. I don’t have any idea how that could be. The drugs were hermetically sealed and in boxes.”

“We need to get rid of the car. Both cars in fact. ASAP. We were stupid to bring them anywhere near our home.”

Maggie’s cell rang. It was Nick. “We found a small tracking device above the right front wheel. What do you want me to do with it?”

“I will be right there Nick. Just hold onto it for now.” Maggie told Carlos about the tracking device. Carlos said, “fuck.”

Maggie picked up the Subaru. She was terrified that whomever was tracking them would know where she was and might be waiting outside of T. Tires but there was no one there. She gave Nick a hundred in cash and took the car and the device. There was a McDonalds up the street. She stopped and placed the device under the front drivers side wheel and drove over it a few times. She then tossed it into the drive-by bin.

Maggie took the Subaru to the Prestige Car Wash which was right next to T. Tires. She asked them to detail it. She was hoping that they would be able to wipe out any trace of Carlos or her having ever been in the car. She walked back to T. Tires and picked up her rental. Her car was still in front of the house on Flint street.

Carlos was asleep when she got to the hospital so she sat

in the uncomfortable chair that seem ubiquitous in all hospitals. She waited for him to wake up. An hour later he stirred and saw Maggie sitting there. “Hi love,” he said. “Thanks for being here for me.”

Maggie took his hand. “I got rid of the tracking device. I smashed it and threw it in the bin at the McDonalds on Canal Street, you know the one near Nick’s shop? The car is being detailed and will be ready tomorrow. I’m hoping that they wipe out any trace of us. I will ditch the car after I pick it up.”

“Good girl,” Carlos said. “You did good. Now we need to get your car that’s still parked in front of the house. We also need to rent the house and move somewhere. I’m sure that the police will be back asking questions but for now I don’t want the man to know where we are. If he and the wanker in Nahant don’t know where we are, they can’t hurt us. If we move to New Hampshire or Maine the cops here will probably give up on us after some time. I just wonder how there was cocaine in the trunk of the car.”

“Did one of the bags have a hole in it?” Maggie asked.

“No I think that it was planted. Probably by those two assholes.”

Maggie said, “I will go and get my car tonight, after midnight when I think that it’s safe to go into the house and get the keys. I will also get your spare Audi keys. Nick showed me where the tracking device was located on your car. I am sure that it’s in the same place on my car. I will get it and trash it and then take your Subaru to be detailed as well.”

“Thanks love. I am sorry about all of this but we have the money. And each other.”



MAGGIE WENT BACK to their house at two in the morning. She had set an alarm but didn’t need it. She couldn’t sleep. She drove into Marblehead and across the causeway and could see the lights of Boston twinkling in the distance to the south. It was a quiet night. She turned onto Flint Street. The Subaru was still parked in front of the house. The street was quiet. She drove up and down twice before pulling over a hundred yards from their home and walked the rest of the way. Her heart was pumping at double pace. She let herself in through the side door and found the keys to the Subaru. She also grabbed the mail which had stacked up. Using a flashlight she found the tracking device above the right front tire. She drove off the Neck to the parking lot at Devereaux beach and smashed the tracking device. Maggie then threw it into the ocean and went back to the hotel. She needed a Dom Pedro badly but all she had was a bottle of wine. Maggie poured herself a full glass. When she took a sip she noticed how badly her hands were shaking.

The next morning she picked up the car from the detailing

place and asked them to do the other Subaru. Maggie wore gloves and was just leaving when she saw two strange looking men entering T. Tires. One was tall and skinny; the other short and fat. She felt her gut turn. Carlos had given her a description of the two men that had beaten him up. She felt terrible for Nick and also scared for herself. The man had tracked the tracking devise to T. Tires. She pulled out onto Canal Street and drove back to Salem Hospital. There was a large parking area and Maggie left the car in a corner spot. She was walking toward the hospital to go and see Carlos when she suddenly thought, "they probably have cameras here." She put her gloves back on, climbed into the car and drove down Highland Avenue taking a right onto Jackson Street. Maggie pulled over, locked the car and walked back to the hospital.

They were going to discharge Carlos after lunch. His leg was in a brace but other than the two missing teeth he seemed to be OK. The doctors wanted to keep him there for a few more days but Carlos was anxious to get the heck out of there and out of the state as quickly as possible. They went to the hotel to talk things through.

"I will call Jane at Ravies Realtors and ask her to rent the house. She's a good egg. She will get cleaners in and if necessary she can get our stuff moved into storage. I would like to rent it fully furnished but whatever works. We need to get out of town. Tomorrow we can pick up the other car and ditch it as well. We can also pick up the Audi and get rid of the rental."

Maggie nodded. "I guess what's done is done. Now we need to cover our tracks for a while. I say we move to Maine. I heard that the fishing is good there."

THE POLICE RAN the registration of the Subaru. It was registered to a Mr. Jeffrey Dingle. Current address was 74 West Sunrise

Boulevard, Ft. Lauderdale. They found his number and called him a few of times but he never answered and there was no voicemail option. They let it go. For now.

CARLOS AND MAGGIE drove north on I-95. They went through the New Hampshire tolls and were soon at the Maine toll booth. Maggie said, "once we get past Portland we can get on Rt.1. It runs along the coast. It looks like there are plenty of nice seaside towns. Let's explore them all.

"Sounds good Love but perhaps we should stay in Portland for a bit. I need to find a dentist. No one would rent us a place with me looking like some kind of homeless weirdo."

"OK I have an old school friend that I think still lives in Portland. If I can find her number I will give her a call and see what dentist she recommends. Maggie found her number and called Alison. She recommended her own dentist and Maggie called to make an appointment for Carlos. The receptionist said that there was a bit of a wait but that they could fit him in at the start of the following week. Maggie confirmed the appointment. "Why don't we press on and explore the area around Boothbay Harbor. There is a lot to see there and we are close enough to come back to Portland for your appointment. Just keep your mouth shut so that they don't see that you have a few teeth missing."

"OK my Love. That sounds good."

THE CHIEF OF POLICE was getting frustrated. They had very little to go on and the case was going nowhere. He called his friend, the Chief of Police in the neighboring town of Swampscott.

"Hi Bill, this is Chief Jackson over in Marblehead." The two men exchanged pleasantries for a bit but then Chief Jackson got right to it. "We are not making any headway on this murder. We

have run down some leads. My detectives have interviewed some potential suspects. We know that the murderer was female.”

“What do you know about the murder victim?”

“Not much really. We know that he used to work at the store where he was shot. We talked to his wife. There was an incident a while back with some cocaine residue in the back of a car that he had driven, but that was that. We also talked to some of the workers at the Transfer Station that knew him. They all said that he was a good guy”

“So there was no good reason to kill the guy that you can see?”

“Not that my team can see.”

“Fax me over the details that you have on the dead guy. I have a friend in the FBI. They can run things throughout the entire US. We are limited and in that way and we only get half the picture. He will get us the full picture.”

“OK I will have my lady send it right now. And thanks.”

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KIM AND HER HUSBAND were both hard working people and they bought a small house in Peabody, a few towns over from Marblehead. Kim had told her husband about the rapes and it had helped getting it off her chest, but they were always on her mind, especially when they had sex. Kim was not very good in bed probably as a result of having been raped but nonetheless she was still rocking his world and their first child was born on a cold rainy day in May. A little boy that they named Tom. They could not have been happier even though the baby put some stress on their household finances.

On weekends they would take Tom and go for a drive, usually ending up in Marblehead. Sometimes they would picnic out by the lighthouse with some food and drinks that Kim had cobbled together. Other times they would get takeout fish and chips at Village Roast Beef and sit on the benches at Fort Sewell. Kim was content and relatively happy with things until her company hired someone to help her. Kim was working in a small fulfillment center for a new company called Amazon. At first it was just

books that she was packaging, but the company started to expand and a couple of years in they were boxing up all sorts of goods. That was when Amazon hired the new guy. He was strikingly good looking with a shock of black hair that he tied back in a small man bun.

They had Tom in daycare and Kim would leave work early to pick him up and start dinner. Her routine was mundane at best, but that's usually how it all starts. The new guy added a little spark to her life. He seemed to like her and would often tell her some very off-color jokes. They both laughed hard at the jokes, even though they weren't that funny. Then one day the new guy suggested that they get a bite at Bertucci's on Newbury Street. Kim's husband had not been feeling well and had stayed home for the day.

Kim made a call. "Hey my supervisor has asked me to stay a little later tonight. Can you pick up Tom?"

"Yes I'm feeling much better. We can get take-out for dinner if you like." Kim said, "you go ahead and eat. I'm not really that hungry."

Kim left work at her usual time and met the new guy at the restaurant. Bertucci's smelled great and they had the most amazing bread rolls. Kim had a glass of red wine and the sausage soup. The new guy was all in and had the linguini with clams and a cesar salad. Kim started to worry. She was out on a date without really even realizing it; and she had already said that she was paying for the meal. The new guy was telling jokes, some good and some not so, but she was having fun.

THE CHIEF got a call from his friend in Swampscott. "I have got something on this Carlos fellow. He used to run a small drug smuggling business in Puerto Rico. They rounded up I think 20 fishermen. They would rendezvous with fishermen

from the Dominican Republic and pick up drugs coming in from South America. Once they were in Puerto Rico they were essentially in the US and there was less scrutiny. That way they could get the drugs onto the mainland. They got busted. Carlos's father did some time, well he's still doing time. He was part of it, but a very small part. The fishermen are also doing some time, well most of them are still in, but somehow Carlos got away. He slipped out of the country and stayed under the radar. There may be something there that could help you piece this all together. Maybe not. In any event I will have my girl fax all the info over to you."

KIM WANTED TO SLEEP with the new guy but was not sure how to go about things. She had never had an affair before. Her husband was home with Tom. She could not stay out too late. The guy was definitely interested in her. "How far from here do you live?" she asked.

"Less than a mile away. Why do you ask?"

"Let's go back to your place for a bit," Kim said. "I can't stay long." Kim paid the tab and she followed him to his apartment. They were barely through the front door when Kim had his pants off closely followed by hers. The sheetrock walls in his apartment were the cheap thin kind. The neighbors in the adjacent apartment started banging on the wall around ten. Kim knew that she had to get home.

They carried on their secretive relationship for almost six months before Kim cut it off. She was wracked with guilt. She was also pregnant. When the baby was born it looked nothing like her husband and very much like her co-worker. Her husband loved the baby so much that he never noticed, or if he did, he never once said a thing. They called her Jessie.

THE KILLER'S DRINKING was escalating. One of her UBER drivers picked her up off the UBER clock and took her to Vinnin Liquors. He knew the routine. Sometime he would drop her off at the lighthouse and pick her up later in the day but most days she just wanted to go back home. Her husband was at work and she could drink in peace. She had a myriad places where she could hide the bottles, both the full ones and the empties. Recycling day was Tuesday and she would put the empties out after Jack had left for work. Their relationship was not getting any better, in fact since the murders and the night that she had spent in jail, they had barely spoken to each other.

She had still not heard from the kidnappers. It had been a month since the murders and nothing. The phone calls kept ringing out. She had given up emailing. She knew that they were going to bounce. She was getting desperate. So were Ray's adoptive parents. The killer had an encrypted TikTok number that she had been using to communicate with them for the last ten months since they had reached out to her because Ray wanted to meet them. They had no idea why anyone would kidnap their son. They had no idea that it was the killer's fault.

Maggie had a good lawyer but even he advised that she just plead guilty to being drunk behind the wheel of her car. The night of the murder when she was in jail they had given her a breathalyzer and she had failed; badly, but in Massachusetts, at that time, the results of breathalyzer tests were not admissible. They were deemed inaccurate. Her lawyer said, "This is how it's works. There was a reason why the cop that arrested you called in for back-up. It was not that he needed help arresting you. He needed someone to corroborate his story in court. It's a case of two cops against one. The 'one' being you. You will never win. The court will almost always side with the police, especially if there are two of them.

She pled guilty and because it was her second DUI offence, her license was suspended for 90 days and she had three months of classes to attend, even though she had already attended them after her first DUI.

Jack still didn't know what to do. He was the person that had left the call on the police tip line. He wanted to turn her in, or at least have her confess, but at the same time he didn't and so his reasoning was that the cops might take things out of his hands if he gave them a bit of a head's up. He was becoming a regular at the sub shop hoping to glean more information from Henry and Lenny but they both agreed that the trail had gone cold.

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THE CONVENIENCE STORE was becoming a bit of a tourist attraction. The murders were no longer the top story on the news but they were still in the news and people were coming to Marblehead to see where they had taken place. They had put up some barriers at the VFW to restrict people's access but Mr. Gupta wanted his store open and so people went there. Richie was cutting pork chops and chicken as fast as he could. The sandwich counter was cranking and for the first two months after the murder the store doubled its business.

Warren from the liquor store was in the store getting a few things for dinner. He was checking out and the trans kid at the cash register was scanning his groceries. "I heard that they have a suspect in the murders," the kid said. Warren looked up.

"There is no fucking way these cops are going to be able to solve this case. They mostly spend their time doing traffic detail. They wouldn't know a gun from a pistol. They barely know their ass from their elbow."

The trans kid said, "Detective Slater was in here the other day.

He seemed nice. We didn't talk about the murder but I think that he was scoping things out a little."

"Seeming nice and being able to find a murderer are two different things. That guy couldn't find the way to his front door without a map. I have a pretty good idea of who did it but I am not getting involved."

"Who do you think did it? Was it someone who came into the store?"

"I'm not going to say a word. There is never any gain by getting involved with stuff that is not your business. I learned that a long time ago."

"They will figure it out," the trans kid said.

KIM HAD A REGULAR ROUTINE of stopping at the 7/11 to buy lottery tickets. She always got one along with a chalupa which they sold for \$2.99. She never bothered to look and see if she had won anything but there was a buzz around the distribution center. Someone from Peabody had won \$86 million. At lunch Kim looked at her scratch tickets. It took her five times before it sank in. The numbers on her Mega Millions ticket matched the numbers on TV. The five magical numbers were there. As was the Mega Ball. The payout was less than usual but \$86 million was not bad for a day's work at the distribution center.

She didn't tell her husband right away. She didn't know how to. Instead she called her best friend from high school. "We need to meet for coffee. I have something to tell you." They met at Panera Bread in Swampscott. Her friend was a little white trash but under the make-up and torn jeans she was a really sweet person.

"I won," Kim said.

"Won what?"

Kim leaned in. "The fucking lottery."

"What?"

"I won the fucking lottery. Mega Millions."

"You are shitting me."

"Nope." Kim slid her phone toward her. She had a screen grab of the winning lottery numbers. She showed the numbers to her friend. It took her looking at it more than five times for it to register. Kim had won the lottery.

"Fuck me," she said. "Fuck me. You won. What are you going to do?"

Kim said, "I have no idea. I am terrified. I can definitely buy you lunch but I don't know what to do after that. I have never dreamed of having this much money."

Her friend said, "you may find this surprising, but I know someone. Do you remember the guy I screwed on that blind date last year? Turns out he was actually an investment banker. I made fun of him because I thought that he was bullshitting me but it turns out, he's an actual investment banker. I can call him if you like."

"That will be great," Kim said, "I'm not hungry, I can't eat, but if you are hungry I will buy you lunch."

"I'm so starving. This place has the best bread bowls with cheese and broccoli soup. Kim are you fucking kidding me? You won the lottery?"

KIM KNEW THAT SHE had to tell her husband but she was terrified. Their life had been stable and they were doing just fine. The kids were strong and healthy. Most Saturday nights she and her husband went out and he rocked her world until the early hours of Sunday morning. She was worried what that amount of

money would do to their relationship. She needn't have worried. Later that night after the kids had gone to bed she told him and showed him the ticket and the Mega Millions screen grab. "You know what we are going to do with this money?" he said.

"No, I have no idea and I am scared to have that much money. It will make us a target."

"We are going to donate it. All of it. We will set up a foundation to help rape victims." Kim looked at him stunned.

"This amount of money will only ruin us. We have no idea how to handle it. Maybe we can take some of the money and set it aside to pay for Tom and Jessie's college and you can get a new car if you like, and if you want to quit your job with Amazon that's fine too. \$86 million is a lot of money but we don't need all of it."

"How about we keep just one million?" Kim said.

"You know as well as I do that one million would screw us up just as badly as \$86 million. Either we keep it all or we give it all away."

"You are right, I know. Let's put some in a college fund and some in a retirement fund. My car runs just fine and I will keep my job at Amazon. I have friends there."

Kim had the lottery ticket stuffed under a box in the corner of their bedroom. She and her husband met with the investment banker two days later. He knew his stuff. He was shocked when he heard their plan but said, "If you know how many people's lives are ruined by a sudden windfall of money, you would know that you are probably doing the right thing. I don't think that I could ever be that generous but it's your money. I will work with our legal team to draft up a plan. The investment banker shook his head. "I dunno, that's a lot of money to give away. I hope that you know what you are doing."

Kim looked at her husband and said, "we do."

They left the plush offices and Kim said, "there is a place at Vinnin Square that makes the most amazing jalapeco margaritas. I went there with my friend Holly a few months ago. Do you want five?"

Kim was well and truly oiled and so was her husband, but the waiter was nice and called them an UBER and helped them into it.

Kim left a huge tip.



CARLOS AND MAGGIE checked into the Coveside Bed and Breakfast in Boothbay. It was a cute place. “Make sure that you come for breakfast,” the receptionist said. “My husband makes the most amazing chai spiced French toast and banana muffins.” Carlos said to Maggie, “I should have brought my own tin of tuna. I hate chai.”

The next day they set off along the coast road. The views were spectacular. Maine in late summer is quite possibly the most beautiful place on earth. They stopped at Red’s Eats in Wiscasset. There was a long line. Carlos said, “if there is a long line the food it’s probably good. I don’t mind waiting for good food.” The lobster rolls were well worth waiting for. They had packed a bottle of white wine and found a bench at the Fort Edgemond State Park to have lunch. “You know I could live in Maine,” said Maggie.

“It’s really nice,” Carlos agreed, “but I bet it’s as cold as a witches tit in winter.

“Probably.”

They carried on along the coast road ending up in Camden for the night. The majestic schooners were still at their dock but it was clear that the crews were trying to wrap them up for the season. The sails were off and there were boxes everywhere. Carlos booked them two nights at the Camden Harbor Inn. They were having an early dinner when Maggie said, “do you really think that we got away with it?” Carlos sipped on his Mai Tai. “I dunno,” he said. “First of all I can’t believe that anyone would let anyone drive off with two hundred thousand big ones in the trunk of each car and not have a better plan in place. How many runs did we do? Eighty between the two of us?”

“At least eighty.”

“So the thugs came and beat me up. To be honest I would take another beating like that for an additional four hundred thousand. So long as they never lay a hand on you.” Maggie took him by the hand. “That’s the sweetest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

They fell in love with Camden. “Let’s try and find a small rental for the next year or so, at least until the heat cools down,” Carlos said. He had been talking with a young kid on the dock. “My boss is always looking for help over the winter. I can introduce you to him if you like.”

Two days later Carlos met with Squid. That was not his real name. His real name is Mark, remember that, but before he became a swordfish fisherman he used to fish for squid out of Ft. Lauderdale. They were at a small cafe on the north side of Camden.

“What experience do you have fishing?” Squid asked.

“I have been a fisherman my whole life. I have fished in Puerto Rico since I was ten. I ran a fleet of twenty boats. We made some good money.”

“What happened to your fleet of twenty boats?”

“Government intervention,” Carlos said.

“That I understand. We are leaving Thursday. Grand Banks. We will be away for at least two weeks. Are you ok with that? And don’t fuck with me. I want my men to show up and work.”

Carlos said, “I will show up and work. I give you my word.”

RICARDO CALLED AGAIN. “I have a very important meeting in Boston with Liberty Mutual Insurance. I have been talking to them about sponsoring me in a race from Portugal to Boston. Can I stop by and see you?” Tracy stared at her phone. She could not believe what she was hearing.

“Whatever happened to the around-the-world-race that you were planning?”

“Funny thing,” Ricardo said. “We were just about to sign a major deal with the City of Portimao when the Deputy Mayor got indicted for embezzlement. The deal that we made was with him. One day he was in his office planning to meet with us; the next day he was in jail.”

“Let me think about it,” Tracy said, but she already knew what her answer was going to be. She could feel it in her undies. Tracy told her boyfriend that she was going to meet a friend of hers from High School. They were going to go into Boston and walk around Fanuiel Hall and have a few drinks.

She met Ricardo at Terminal E at Logan Airport. Her heart did a flip as soon as he came through the customs door. They didn’t say much to each other. Tracy had booked a room at the Hilton at the airport. They spent the afternoon drinking and screwing. It was just getting dark out when Tracy said, “I have to be going. You can keep the room for the night.”

“Are you Ok to drive?” Ricardo asked.

“I’m fine.” She leant over to kiss him. “Good luck with your meeting tomorrow. I hope that this one works out. She pulled on her sneakers and wrapped her hair in a ponytail. She did not say goodbye.”

CARLOS SHOWED UP at the fishing vessel Julie K at dawn. The engines were already running and the regular crew were sorting nets. They lived on board. Squid had a girlfriend in Rockland and he had spent the night there but he pulled into the parking lot just after Carlos boarded.

“Right we will leave in a half hour,” Squid said. The sun was up but only just when they tossed the dock lines ashore and motored out of Camden Harbor. The air was still and smelled faintly sweet. Squid had introduced Carlos to the crew but they were not men of many words and mostly he just got a grunt in reply. A lazy leftover slop met them as they passed the breakwater. “The forecast looks good for the next week,” Squid told them. “After that, not so much. Let’s catch as much fish as we can and hopefully we can be on our way back to Camden before the bad stuff comes our way.”

It wasn’t to be.



TRACY GOT THE NEWS in a phone call from her sister. Their parents had been planning an anniversary getaway to Nantucket and in a moment of extravagance, they chartered a plane. It was a small four-seater piloted by a man that went by the name of Tub. They didn’t ask why. They were excited about their upcoming weekend. The plane went down in Nantucket Sound. The FAA looked into the crash but never came up with a definitive reason, but said that fog was probably a major factor.

Tracy was devastated.

A month later Tracy and her sister were sitting in the conference room of the law offices of Peabody and Arnold overlooking Boston Harbor. The two lawyers made their pleasantries and then got down to business. “Do either of you know what your parents’ estate is worth?” Tracy shook her head. So did her sister. Their parents had lived very frugally in a small house on Beacon Street in Nahant. Both Tracy and her sister were shocked when they found out that they were going to charter a plane to get to Nantucket. The lawyers slid some papers over to the girls. Tracy

started to flip through it but it was just a lot of legalese. She saw quickly that she and her sister were the sole beneficiaries and then she saw a number. The better looking of the two lawyers said, “that number is correct. We have all the information on their assets. The only thing that might change is when the house sells, but for now the house is going to be in both of your names. When you decide to sell it, how you split things is your business.” Tracy looked at the paperwork again. “So this \$3 million plus figure is what they had in assets?” The lawyer nodded. Tracy looked at her sister. “I had no idea at all,” Tracy said. “No idea. They lived like they were as broke as church mice.”

THEY FISHED THE FIRST WEEK on the Grand Banks. The weather was good and they were hauling swordfish like no one’s business. Squid suggested that they get into deeper water for the second week. “The deeper the water, the bigger the fish,” he said. They motored south for six hours. Carlos rested in his bunk reading a novel by Wilbur Smith. He was becoming addicted to them and thought that one day it would be fun to visit Africa. The sea state had changed. It was relatively even on the Grand Banks but now there were some serious swells coming in from the west and the Sophie B was rolling from side to side. They fished for two more days hauling in all kinds of fish. The onboard freezers were almost full when Squid said, “we need to head back to Camden. There is some weather coming in.”

It turned out that ‘weather coming in’ was a bit of a understatement. There was a cold front coming down from Canada. It had stalled over Nova Scotia. There was also a warm front coming up from the Carolinas. The crew had been fishing in the warmer waters of the Gulf Stream. The weather service predicted that the two storms would collide south of the Grand Banks.

There was a definite calm before the storm but it didn’t last long. Squid knew the waters and he was doing his best to thread the needle between the two systems all the while trying to get clear of the Gulf Stream, but it was not easy and late Sunday afternoon, just as it was getting dark, the full brunt of it hit. The Sophie B was pretty well battened down and everything below had been securely stowed. Carlos was nervous remembering the last storm that he had been in. By midnight the winds were in excess of 50 knots. For a while it seems as if the wind had leveled out but then the other front hit. They were right on the edge of the Gulf Stream and the wind against tide was making the sea state worse than any of them had ever seen; Squid included. He was working both engines trying to navigate the turbulent sea. Carlos and the other crew were also on the bridge. There was no way that they could lie in their bunks.

They were not the only ones in the storm and the radio crackled with nervous captains trying to get more information on the storm. A fishing vessel 30 miles to the north of them was taking on water. Squid didn’t know the boat, or the crew. They had just received their permits and this was their maiden trip. “I am going to alter course and try and rendezvous with you,” he yelled into the radio. There was no reply.

At the height of the storm it was blowing 80 knots; hurricane conditions. The first fingers of light painted a bleak dawn. It was as if they had been dropped off on a different planet. The sea state was outrageous. The tops of the waves were getting whipped off and spindrift was flying everywhere. “We are lucky that our holds are full of fish,” Squid yelled. “That extra weight helped stabilize us during the night.”

They made contact with the boat taking on water. Things were not looking good for them. “Hang in there,” Squid yelled into the radio, “we will be on site in three hours.” He tried to call

them an hour later but there was no reply. They had the boat's coordinates plugged into their chart plotter and the Julie K was making slow but steady progress toward their location. Around noon they started to see debris. There wasn't much. A couple of life jackets and an undeployed life raft. There was also some wood. Squid started a grid search but it was almost impossible. The crew had gone down with their ship.

The Julie K made it safely back to Camden two days later. Squid said, "we will unload and get back out there on Monday. Those fish aren't going to catch themselves."

Carlos found Maggie cooking a seafood stew in their small apartment overlooking Camden Harbor. "I don't think that I am going to go back out there again," he said. "It was a nightmare." Maggie put her arms around him. "I was so worried. A group of us have been chatting every hour or so since we heard how bad the storm was going to be. You know Bethany right? You met her at the supermarket the day before you set sail. She has not heard from her husband. She did get a very short satellite text message that their boat was taking on water but that was the last news that she had."

All the Camden-based fishing boats made it back safely to harbor except the one that Bethany's husband was onboard.

"I remember Bethany. We tried to rescue them but by the time we got to their last known position all we saw was debris in the water."

The fishermen and their family held a vigil on the wharf.

Carlos said, "that's it. I am going to find another job."



KIM AND HER HUSBAND set up a new foundation to help rape victims. They met with the lawyers a few times and outlined what they wanted. First of all they wanted to remain anonymous. They wanted to focus to be on young rape victims. They made no stipulation about it but they would prefer it if the foundation focused mostly on the New England area. They had gone with the Investment banker to the lottery offices and told them that they wanted to take their winnings as an annuity. The lottery rules stipulated that the payout would be 30 payments over 29 years. The first payment would go to Kim and her husband. The rest would go to the foundation. The legal papers had been drawn up.

They left the office in Boston and Kim said, "how about we get well and truly pissed? We just gave away over \$80 million. I know a place." Her husband looked her in the eye and said, "I never thought that you would go along with this. Money is too tempting."

"I was raped," Kim stated flatly. "Twice. We don't need that

kind of money in our lives. The kids will be set for a long time and we will do a lot of good.”

They went to The Black Rose, an Irish establishment right next to the famous Quincy Market in downtown Boston. The waiter came over.

“Can I get you a drink?”

Kim said, “I will take Guinness as will my husband. Here, take this credit card and keep them coming. We are in a celebrating mood. When you see either glass get low bring another and keep them coming until one or the other of us fall off our barstools. That will be a sign when to stop. Charge it all on the card, tip yourself 40%, stick the card in my back pocket and call us a cab.”

THE KILLER WAS STILL LIVING in the spare room. She had most of the family money stashed where her husband could not touch it so she felt relatively secure from a financial standpoint, but her husband had said something to her a week earlier that had her feeling uneasy. He said, “I know that it was you who killed Carlos and the cop. I just know it and there are rumors around town. They don’t know that it’s you, but I do.”

“You have no proof so just fuck off. Since Trump became president you have become such an asshole. What do you see in that vacant prick. The guy does not have an original thought in his head.”

“He’s uniting this country with his rally’s and furthermore he’s paying for it all out of his own pocket.”

“Yea right, enjoy your stupid red hat.”

LISA LING GOT PROMOTED to Senior Vice President in charge of the malaria vaccine. They were making great progress on the

vaccine and the big bosses at Novartis recognized her talent. The promotion came with a substantial pay raise along with a bonus plus some Novartis stock. She was happy with the recognition but was still sexually frustrated. There were nights when her husband told her that he was working late but she knew that he was out screwing his toy boy. She wanted a toy boy but most nights she was too exhausted to go on any of the dating websites. She tried Tinder but backed out as soon as someone made contact with her. It was usually the showerhead or a quick rub that got her some relief.

Lisa invested the bonus back into Novartis stock and the stock took off. She and her husband kept their finances separate. They put money in a joint account to cover house and living expenses but their own personal finances were their own to spend. With the salary increases and the stock increase she was becoming fairly well off.

CARLOS WENT BACK to the Julie K. He knew that the job was going to be hard and he had never been a quitter. Two of the other crew had quit. Squid said to him, “I thought that you would quit this gig after that storm. Good on you. Just you and Skippy came back. This time we will be out for three weeks. I want to do more deep water fishing. I had some new freezers installed that can take more fish.

There was a bit of a delay getting the freezers installed and hooked up and working but they set off again. This time it was an easy trip and they landed more fish than had ever been caught in the past on the Julie K. Squid was beaming when they got back to Camden. He handed Carlos a grand in twenties and said, “thank you, that’s on top of your paycheck.”

Carlos went back to the apartment. Maggie was not there. She had left a note. “Thanks, it was a fun run. You can keep the house

in Marblehead. I have the drug money.” Carlos was shocked. He went back to the Julie K. Squid was in the cockpit. “Do you mind if I come on board?”

“Nope.”

“I need a drinking buddy. Someone who can really drink. I have a bottle of Jameson, but no ice.”

Squid said, “let’s go up to the bridge. I have ice. The other crew are down below, probably getting pissed.”

The bottle of Jameson didn’t last long. Luckily Squid had a few bottles hidden. He didn’t allow his crew to drink while at sea but he was the captain after all and, well, captains have certain privileges.

Carlos told him that Maggie had done a runner. Squid said, “that’s the fucking reason I never got married again. Sometimes you think that you know a woman, but you don’t.”

“She was a bloody nympho. That’s why we got along so well. Plus she had an arse that could melt a king’s heart.” Squid nodded, “she is a beautiful woman.” Both men were passed out when the crew got up the next morning to start offloading the fish.

Carlos sat out the next fishing trip. He was not only heartbroken but he also had some legal stuff to deal with. He had a call from an attorney. “I represent Maggie Mayweather,” he said. “I will be sending you some documents that you will need to sign. Ms. Mayweather has kindly agreed to hand over the house in Marblehead to you. No strings. I tried to advise her against it but she insisted. She wants to move back to Florida and go back to the person that she was before she met you. The house and all its assets will be yours if you sign the documents.”

“Do you know where she is?”

“Yes, but she asked that I keep her location, well you know, private.”

Carlos had already gone to their offshore bank account and the money that he had transferred there was gone. There was just 27 cents left in the account. It seemed that Maggie was a lot smarter than he had given her credit for. He contacted the bank and they told him that the money had been transferred but they could not or would not tell him where it went.

“Maggie was a signatory on the account and it was perfectly within her rights to move the money. I’m afraid that you will need a lawyer to file with the court before we can tell you anything beyond what I have just told you.”

Carlos slammed the phone down. “You know that I will do just fucking that.”



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CARLOS TOLD SQUID that he needed some time off. Just a couple of weeks to regroup. He was pretty sure that he knew where Maggie had gone so he pulled up Orbitz on his laptop and booked a trip to Ft. Lauderdale. The first place he stopped in was the Raw Bar. The fish tacos were as good as he remembered but they left a bitter aftertaste. It was not the fault of the tacos or the three Dark and Stormy's that he had pretty much downed. He had secretly hoped that Maggie might be there.

"Hey Captain Tits," he asked the bartender. "Has Maggie been in here recently?"

"Nope I haven't seen her in months."

"OK thanks." Carlos went back to his table. He kept his hat low. He was hoping to find Maggie but also worried about running into The Man. There was no sign of either of them.

He was up early the next morning and went to Dirty Ernies. She was not there. He asked Ernie if she was back at her old job. Ernie said, "I haven't seen her in months." Carlos went down to Marina del Mar. Maggie had once worked on a boat there. He

walked the docks for a couple of hours but none of the boat names rang a bell and he didn't see her. "Fuck, there can only be one other place," he thought. The Chart House. Maggie had once worked there.

He wasn't hungry but ordered the prime rib with the all-you-can-eat salad bar. He was on his third Dark and Stormy when he thought that he saw her working in the kitchen. He tried to look through the narrow windows of the swinging doors.

"Hey Mate, you need to move away from this area. I can bring your food to where you are sitting." The waiter had a very harsh Australian accent. Carlos went back to his seat. The all-you-can-eat salad bar was a bit lame. The salad looked to be a day or so old. The bacon bits were stale. The prime rib arrived. It was overdone. No sign of Maggie.

Carlos flew back to Maine. He was not sure what to do. He really liked Maggie, had maybe even loved her, but if he really thought long and hard about it he knew that it was mostly about the sex.

CHIEF JACKSON was feeling a little better about things. He had received some CCTV footage. It was a bit grainy but they could make out the logo on the baseball cap. It was from the rooftop camera at the Porthole Pub. It looked like the person had thrown something into the water. She turned around, and yes it was definitely a 'she', and as she was walking back to presumably her car she looked directly into the camera. The logo was clear.

The Chief called his counterpart in Lynn. After some small talk he got down to business. "We have that footage that you sent from the Porthole Pub. My detectives here have gone over it a few times. We are quite sure that it's the person that killed Sergeant

Bigblow and the man at the Convenience Store. It looks like she threw something into the water."

"Yes that's what it looked like to my guys here."

"Can we get some divers to take a look at what's down there?"

"Yes, but there is going to be a lot down there. This is Lynn. You never know. They might find a dead body." He laughed at his own joke. "I will get a team on it and let you know. By the way we have more footage. There is a liquor store on Commercial Street that seems to have her on camera. They installed a cheap system and the footage is not that clear, but the logo on the baseball cap is quite clear. I can get that over to you."

"Thanks."

The Chief called his detectives to a meeting. "We have some good video of the suspect buying booze in Lynn. The divers are going to start to see what was thrown into the water at the Porthole Pub. I think that we are making progress."

Slater said, "so what if we have a person with a Chinese symbol on a baseball cap. What, are we going to go and search every house in this town looking for a baseball cap?"

"Whatever it takes," the Chief replied.

CARLOS WAS LONELY. He and Squid were on the bridge drinking Jameson. Carlos had had more than a few. "You know Squid, the thing that I didn't tell you before. She took all my money, well all our money. Four hundred big ones."

Squid looked at him. "Where did you get that much money? That's a lot of cash." Squid was also over the limit, so to speak.

"We did a runner with two car loads of cocaine." Carlos said the words before he realized that he had said them and immediately regretted it. "What do you mean a runner?" Squid asked.

Carlos paused, then said, “before I came to work for you, Maggie and I were drug smugglers. Well, and even before that I had a business that also smuggled drugs. Quite clever too. I had a fishing fleet. Hang on, I need to pee.” Carlos walked to the door that led to a small platform off the bridge and took a leak watching the arc splash into the water far below.

“Where was I? Yea I had a small fishing fleet and I would have my fishermen rendezvous with some fishermen from the Dominican Republic and that’s how we got the drugs into the US. It was a small time operation but we made some good money. We got busted and I had to leave Puerto Rico. I was delivering a yacht to Ft. Lauderdale. There was a bit of a mishap along the way which I will tell you about some other time, but we got to the States and that was where I met Maggie. She was waitressing in a dive place, a topless breakfast place called Dirty Ernie’s.”

Squid said, “I know the place. Ernie and I go back a long way. Good guy.”

Carlos poured himself another Jameson. At this point he wasn’t bothering with the ice. Two fingers in the glass, no water.

“I started doing cocaine runs along the I-95 Corridor from Florida up to Boston. I got Maggie into it as well. We did around 80 runs and they paid well but then I talked Maggie into doing a runner. We didn’t deliver the drugs. We sold them to an ‘acquaintance’ of mine in Nashville. He paid four hundred grand. I had that money in an offshore account in the Cayman Islands two minutes after it hit my Bank of America account. Maggie had her name on the account as well and when we got back from that last fishing trip that I did with you she was gone, and so was the money.”

“Fucking bitch.” Squid leaned back in his captain’s chair and took a long pull on his cigar. “Broads, you know. I don’t know. So you are not getting laid and you lost all your money? Life

comes at you from different directions when you least expect it. At least you were fucking a beauty. Maggie is one of the prettiest women I have ever seen.”

“Ya ya I know. Life really does come at you from different directions especially when you least expect it. I got to keep the house in Marblehead so we were pretty much even on the money spilt. She signed all the papers over to me but I can’t really go back there. The man in Florida that I worked for found out where I lived, he had placed a tracker in my car, and he had some punks from the Nahant mafia beat me up. I might just sell the place but I like Marblehead and may go back there. I’m not sure.”

Squid said, “I have friends in Ft. Lauderdale. I used to work out of there. Squid fishing, if you know what I mean.” Both men laughed. “I knew a lot of shady characters. I can look into things. Get some dirt on the guy, the man. Did he have a real name?”

“Yes, at least I think that it was his real name. He said his name was Scott Tempesta, but liked to be called Scooter. Who the fuck knows why? OK I’m really drunk. I will see you Monday. What did you say? Two weeks or three?”

“Most likely two. Even with these new freezers we are filling up in a short amount of time. No need to catch what you can’t freeze.”

Carlos waved and stumbled. “I will be OK,” he said. He decided to leave his car on the dock and walk back to the place that he and Maggie had rented. “Sometimes the world sucks,” he said to a lamppost. He missed Maggie.

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THE COPS IN LYNN found the gun. Actually they found two guns. It was a bit of good luck. There was so much crap on the bottom of the bay. They found both guns at the same time which was good because they might have stopped looking had they found just one gun, and it might have been the wrong gun.

Forensics pulled fingerprints off both guns. The Chief in Lynn called Marblehead. “You are not going to fucking believe this,” he said. “We have two guns. I already told you that I know, but my guys here have been cross referencing the fingerprints with those that we have on file. We’ve had a case of a brutal murder that took place here in Lynn, oh I’m guessing, maybe three years ago. We knew who did it but we never had enough evidence to charge the person. It was a really strange case. The guy was from New Hampshire but he had a girlfriend who worked at a sail loft in Lynn. He was 20 years older than her and seemed to enjoy hitting her in the face. She had a restraining order against him and had tried to renew it, but the Judge said there was insufficient reason. One evening, when

she was leaving work, there he was. He pulled the gun out and shot her in the face.”

“I remember reading about that. Can you imagine? One moment you are at work packing up for the day and then the next minute you’re dead.”

“Yea, but on one of the guns we found his fingerprints. A perfect match. Ballistics is still looking into the bullet type but I am damn sure that it’s the murder weapon. We can nail this fucker once and for all.”

“What about the other gun?”

“My guys pulled everything that they could off of it but no match. Not yet anyway. They are still working on it.”

“OK thanks. Let’s see what they come up with.”

MAGGIE RETURNED TO WORK at Dirty Ernies. Ernie had her back, both literally and figuratively. He didn’t ask what happened. He just slotted her into her old waitressing position. Maggie had been one of his favorite employees. A few days later he saw Carlos walk into the restaurant and quickly shuffled Maggie out the back door. Maggie felt terrible about all of it. She loved Carlos but she had received a strange message that frightened her. Carlos was off on the Julie K at the time. The message had read, “I know where you are. I want my money back. I know that you have a child. I will take your child and keep him until I get my money back. Or until Carlos is dead.” She panicked and fled to Florida. She had no idea how they had found her.

THE CHIEF FROM LYNN CALLED. “We have some pretty clear fingerprints on the other gun. I can send them over. We have run them here and there was no match. Run them your side and if there is no match we can ask Bill over in Swampscott.

He has a friend over at the FBI that can do a more extensive search.”

He had a courier drop off the fingerprints. Chief Jackson had his team in Marblehead run the fingerprints but they came up empty. No match.

MAGGIE NEVER TOLD CARLOS about the child. It was a one night stand that had happened years earlier. One of her regulars at Dirty Ernies had asked her out and she agreed. “Heck the meal would be free and she could decide what to do after that,” she thought. It was a weird date. In the mornings when the guy came in for breakfast he seemed fun, but at dinner he was all quiet and acting a little strange. He asked if he could go back to her place and play some board games. Maggie thought that it was a pretty lame way to hit on her but she had agreed to worse in the past. They played scrabble, which Maggie won, and then they ended up on the couch. The guy was clearly nervous. Maggie was not really sure what to do. She loved sex, but she had an odd feeling about this date. The guy leaned over and Maggie thought that he was going to kiss her, but instead he sniffed her armpits. He then got up and walked out of the room.

He was back at Dirty Ernies the next morning for breakfast acting as if nothing had happened. Maggie served him his usual, trying to avoid making eye contact. He slid her a note that read, “sorry about last night. I wasn’t feeling too good. Can I make it up to you by taking you out tonight? We can go to the Chart House.”

Maggie wrote back, “that’s kind, but I don’t think so.” The guy showed up at her house that evening anyway. Maggie had opened a bottle of Prosecco that a friend had given her and she was almost through it when there was a knock on the door. It was him; with flowers. She was more than a little tipsy. They had sex. He never once sniffed her armpits.

She missed her period and that gave her a bit of concern but it was not the first time that she had missed it. She had always had an irregular cycle. One night she was sitting on the couch reading when she noticed that her nipples were tender. They were kind of tingling. Then she threw up. She knew enough about life to get a pregnancy test. She peed on the stick and two red lines showed. She checked the packaging a second time. Two red lines meant that she was pregnant. Maggie was crushed but she refused to have an abortion. She saw the guy most mornings at Dirty Ernie's and even when she was really showing he never put two and two together, and Maggie never mentioned a word.

Her Mom was there to help her through the birth. Maggie had already signed the papers to put the baby up for adoption. She was hoping for an immediate adoption, the same day as her son was born, but it didn't happen. She took baby Ray home. Ernie said, "take as much time as you need. I will keep your job open and I will pay you 75% wages. Sorry, I would do 100% as I know that you need the money, but we run on slim margins here." Maggie was grateful. The adoption agency called three weeks after baby Ray was born. They had a new family for him.

It was the worst day of her life but she knew that she was doing the right thing. She watched them drive their silver Chevy Blazer away with her baby strapped in the car seat. He was crying, a deep primal cry. Something died inside of her. There was a case of Budweiser in the fridge that hadn't been touched since the day she found out that she was pregnant. The case was almost empty when she looked in the fridge the next morning. That was just before she threw up.



SCOT SCOOTER TEMPESTA grew up in Palm Beach, in fact his home, well his parents home to be more exact, was not far from Mar-a-Lago. He went to the Rosarian Academy. Let's just say that he had a privileged childhood until he was a teenager. He was a bored teenager and thought that he was smarter than everyone else in the room. He couldn't help himself. He would pick arguments when most normal people chose watching sports on TV as a way to amuse themselves. His arguments led to a lot of conflict in the home, especially with his step-father, and a day after his seventeenth birthday he took the new Ford Pickup that his Mom had given him as a birthday present and headed west, without leaving a note.

He drove into Louisiana and found motel on the beach in New Orleans happy to be rid of his parents and anxious to start a new life. It was a teenage decision and probably one of the worst decisions of his life. He was walking on the beach looking for someone to get into an argument with when he ran into a nice gentleman walking his dog. The man suggested coffee. Scooter

agreed and they grabbed a cup at The Coffee House, a block back from the beach. The man was clearly gay. Scooter wasn't, but he was intrigued why the man had asked him to join him for coffee. Scooter had his radar up and was not going to be seduced, but the man was not hitting on him; he was recruiting him.

"There is money in drugs," he said. "A lot of money, in fact other than religion it's the easiest way to make a lot of money quickly. I can show you if you are interested." Scooter nodded. There was a lot of cocaine coming in from Mexico but the nice gentleman didn't have a nose for business, so to speak. He was too nice to be a drug dealer and was not very ambitious. Turned out he had inherited a fortune and the drug business was just a side gig. Scooter was ambitious, and a very good student.

He loved his life in New Orleans. He had a small apartment next to the Palace Truck Stop and Casino and was working for the nice gentleman, doing deliveries mainly, but diligently learning the trade. There was a lot of money to be made in drugs and the nice gentleman was leaving a lot of it on the table. Scooter was starting to get bored. Very bored, but he had learned one very important thing from the nice gentleman. He had told him, "Play the long game. Be patient. Play all your cards carefully and you will win in the end."

SCOOTER MOVED BACK to Florida. He didn't tell his parents. He had Jimmy Buffett on a loop on the car cassette player. One song stuck in his head 'A Pirate Looks at Forty.' It was his favorite song. "I've done a bit of smugglin' - I've run my share of grass - I made enough money to buy Miami - But I pissed it away so fast - never meant to last, never meant to last." Scooter thought, "I am going to make enough to buy Miami and I am keeping all of it."

He found a place to live. It was called the "NoTell Motel." They had rooms to rent by the week, in fact you could only

rent a room for a week. Overnight stays were not encouraged. The management didn't want any riffraff staying there. Just good paying customers. He was walking A1A trying to figure his next move when it hit him. The whole east coast of the United States wanted cocaine. The big cities especially. He knew what he was getting into and quickly figured out a supply chain. What he needed most was drivers. People that he could rely on to move the 'goods'. He was also smart enough to build what he liked to call, his 'back-up' team. Scooter was no fool and he knew that letting a complete stranger head off in a new Subaru with an awful lot of money in the trunk of the car was risky business. That was why he had the tracking devices installed. There had only been one person before Carlos and Maggie that had done a run and he was dead, not by his own choice. The thugs that killed him had shot him in the chest and then blown his balls off.

TRACY WAS OUT on a long run when her phone rang. She had been listening to Fresh Air on NPR when a number came up that she didn't recognize. Against her better judgment she answered it. She needed a break from her run. It was Ricardo. "I got the sponsorship from Liberty Mutual Insurance," he said. "They gave me a hundred thousand. The race starts next week. Can you meet me in Boston? I will send you the link where you can track the race online. Please say that you will meet me in Boston."

Tracy sat on a bench overlooking the ocean. "Ricardo," she said, "I will meet you. I will track your progress and I will be there on the dock when you arrive in Boston."

"Obrigado. Thank you," Ricardo replied. Then he was gone again. Tracy was not sure what to do. Her boyfriend was really sweet and they had had some fun together but he was mostly working long hours at the Little Harbor Lobster Company and

his business was growing steadily. Tracy continued on her run. She was most of the way around The Neck when she knew one hundred percent that she would meet Ricardo and that her relationship with her boyfriend would soon be over.

SCOOTER WAS MINING a gold mine. There was so much cocaine coming into South Florida and he was getting it out of there as quickly as he could. He was making enough money to buy at least Ft.Lauderdale, not Miami yet and he was not pissing any of it away. He was buying property in West Palm Beach.

And playing the long game.



TRACY HAD AN OLD PC but she was able to find the website for the race that Ricardo was doing and she found the tracker. Ricardo was seventh in a fleet of fifteen boats. He had taken a bit of a different route from the other skippers, a more southerly route and at first it had not paid off but he seemed to be catching up. Tracy only knew this from reading the race reports. She knew nothing about sailing, but was finding the race quite intriguing.

She rented a place on West Shore Drive without telling her boyfriend. This time she was going to make Ricardo stay. There was sex and then there was Ricardo sex and after you had sex with Ricardo there was nowhere else to go. She was pretty sure that he would agree to move in with her.

CHIEF JACKSON called a meeting of his detectives. “We have clear prints on the second gun but none of them match anyone in the FBI’s database. That may be a cold lead but we still have the CCTV footage and I am sure that we will find out who killed

Sergeant Bigblow. We have to find out who killed him. We did some background checking on the man who was killed at the Convenience Store and it seems as if he had a bit of a shady history. Drug smuggling, that sort of thing. He must have crossed someone at some point and that might have been a motivation for his murder. We have checked with our contacts in Nahant. I know that Warren and a few other people were sure that he was part of the Nahant mafia but it's doesn't seem to be true. We are still looking into it. None of it explains why someone would kill Bigblow."

Slater said, "I leant on Ralph up at the Transfer Station. He had been reluctant to say anything but I could tell that he had some information that he wasn't telling me. He told me that Carlos was a blowhard, always boasting about how much money he had even though he spent most of his days scrounging in the metal bin looking for stuff. He did bring up a name that Carlos had mentioned to him but he was not exactly clear. Carlos was screwing around and his latest fling was with an ex. Ralph thinks he remembers her name to be either Maggie and Meggie but it was definitely an ex and Carlos was definitely a little besotted with her."

"OK good, let's keep digging," the Chief said. "I presume you all saw that column in the Marblehead Reporter about how incompetent we look over this whole investigation. It was online as well and one person wrote in the comments that our police department was pretty much a traffic detail department. That's bullshit but we have to get to the bottom of this as quickly as possible." There was general agreement in the room.

RICARDO CAME IN THIRD. His southern strategy paid off but he run out of runway to haul in the leaders. Tracy was on the dock to meet him. So were hundreds of other people. The PR people at Liberty Mutual had earned their money and the scene

was chaotic, in a fun way. Ricardo hadn't shaved in over a month and his beard was a scraggly mess but to Tracy he looked like a rockstar. Liberty Mutual had paid for three nights at the Boston Harbor Hotel where the fleet was being docked. "I have some media obligations," Ricardo said. "There is a press conference with the first three finishers. It's in the hotel. I am not going to bother showering. I think that I look more authentic like this," he said tugging at his gnarly beard.

"You smell bad," Tracy said.

"That's all part of the image that a I am cultivating. Rogue solo sailor."

"Well you had better shower before we go to bed tonight." Ricardo flashed his signature smile. "So you are staying then?"

The press conference didn't take long. There were a few media people there. The sports writer from the Boston Globe had the most insightful questions. So did Trenni Kusnierek from NBC Sports. Ricardo was on his game. He wasn't quite sure if Tracy would spend the night but she was there in the back laughing at all his jokes. The big dinner with the Liberty Mutual staff was going to be held the following night. They wanted to give Ricardo a night to rest.

They ate at the Rowes Wharf Sea Grille and the food was exceptional. Ricardo was trying to rally but he had just spent 34 days at sea alone racing against some of the best sailors in the world and he was fried. He had taken a shower but left the beard. Tracy saw a number of texts from her boyfriend. She had made an excuse for being away for the night but he always got a little possessive when she was gone. She answered a couple of his texts but she wanted to be present with Ricardo and ignored the rest. They were pleasantly drunk when they got to their hotel room. Tracy was excited. She had new lace undies from Victoria's

Secret which she had bought at the North Shore Mall, and a new nightgown. “I just need to freshen up,” she said. She went to the bathroom and sprayed a perfume on her wrists. She had found it on sale at Marshalls. She scrubbed her teeth extra hard. She came back out to the bedroom looking (and smelling) like a million bucks but Ricardo was fast asleep. There was no way to wake him. He was done and dusted and didn’t wake up until noon the following day and that was only when Tracy shook him. He had a meeting with his sponsor and she didn’t want him to miss it.

Tracy knew that she was on a deadline. She had to know if Ricardo would move in with her or she would have to explain to her boyfriend why she hadn’t come home. Ricardo said, “I’m really sorry about last night. I was exhausted and a little drunk. That’s what happens when you are at sea for a month and don’t drink anything.”

“It’s no problem,” Tracy smiled. They were at the No Name Restaurant on the Fish Pier in Boston. Ricardo had been craving fried clams. Both were well into the third bottle when Tracy popped the question. Well to be more specific, it was more of a slur than a pop. “I want you to move in with me,” she said. “I rented a new place. I will break it off with my boyfriend if you say yes.”

Ricardo looked at her. His eyes were deep and dark. “I was planning on doing just that. Let’s enjoy the Rowes Wharf Hotel for the next couple of nights. I will have the boys sort the boat and I will take care of my sponsorship duties and then I will join you in Marblehead.” He slipped the cork on another bottle of white and Tracy felt blissfully happy. It was time to move on beyond the Little Harbor Lobster Company.



IT DIDN'T GO WELL when Tracy told her boyfriend that it was over. He never saw it coming. “You are always at work,” she said. “You love your lobsters more than you love me. You have done an amazing job with that place and I totally respect you for that but I need my old life back.” She knew that it was a red herring. It had nothing to do with lobsters. It had everything to do with Ricardo. I have rented a place on West Shore Drive. I can either take Fat Cat with me or you can have him. He seems to love it down at the lobster place. That might be why he’s getting so fat.”

“He loves the striped bass that we feed him, so what?”

“OK you keep him.” Tracy didn’t mention Ricardo. She knew that it would not go over well. Ricardo moved in a few days later. His crew had sorted the boat and he had sailed it to Marblehead and put it out on a mooring near Fort Sewell. The crew were living on board and would leave in a week or so, weather dependant, to take the boat back to Portugal. Tracy was blissfully happy.

Ricardo had more sponsorship obligations and was trying to

float the idea that Liberty Mutual might want to continue their sponsorship and perhaps expand it. Ricardo pitched the idea of a retro around-the-world-race, retro meaning that they would use boats from the seventies and eighties and race them around the world, just like in the old days. The marketing department at Liberty were intrigued, and interested, or at least that was what he told Tracy.

They visited the old haunts. Tracy never brought up the subject of the money that Ricardo had stolen from her. She didn't need the money now after her inheritance and more importantly, she didn't want to rock the boat. She wanted Ricardo.

They say that love is blind. Tracy was in love; and blind.

They found a better place for seafood than The Barnacle. It was in Gloucester. A place called The Causeway. It was a BYOB and was right across from where the fishing boats came in each day. It was partly because the fish was so fresh that they loved to eat there, but it was also about portion size. A cup, not a bowl of clam chowder, was almost enough for a full meal for the two of them, but they always ordered a main course and usually took most of it home in a Styrofoam container.

"You know Ricardo I really admire what you did," Tracy said. "That was quite an accomplishment sailing single-handed across the Atlantic. I learned a lot about sailing from the website. I now know why you went south in the beginning."

"Yes, there is historically a high pressure system that parks off over the Azores Islands," Ricardo said. "High pressure means no wind. Beach days if you know what I mean. The further you can get away from the center of the High, the more wind there is. I used to live in Horta in the Azores. I know all about high pressure and no wind. In the old days they used to hunt whales out of the Azores. Well actually not that long ago they were going

out in long boats and hunted whales. I am not sure of this but I think that it was because the seas around the islands were calm and it was easier to spear a whale. When I was a kid I would see the whaling ships coming in. They would strap it to the side of the ship. I guess they were either too big or heavy to bring on board. The whole town would gather to see the whale being cut up. Anyway, so I decided that if I went south right after leaving Portugal I would get more wind. At first it didn't look like a good move because the tracker worked simply on the distance-to-finish in Boston and I was near the back of the fleet. I was near the back of the fleet in terms of distance-to-go, but soon I got into better wind and started to overtake some of the other boats."

Tracy gazed lovingly. "I can't finish my lunch," she said. "I will get a to-go carton. We can have the rest for lunch tomorrow."

THE KILLER WAS GETTING FRANTIC, then out of nowhere, on an encrypted TikTok message, she heard from the kidnappers. The message read, "well done on killing Carlos. He stole my money. We still have your son. He's safe, for now. I need my money back before you get your kid back." The killer had spent the money, well not all of it. She had thought that shooting Carlos would be the end of it.

But she was wrong.

IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN a warning sign when Ricardo asked if he could borrow some money, but the sex was so good and Tracy was in love. Ricardo wasn't. He knew exactly what he was doing. His crew had his boat back in Portimao. Their crossing had been uneventful but there were some expenses and Ric had run out of money. The hundred grand that he had told Tracy that he had received in sponsorship was actually just \$20K. Tracy had told him about her inheritance. Ricardo had comforted her when she

started to sob talking about the plane crash. “They never found their bodies,” she sobbed. “They found parts of the plane but no bodies.” Tracy could see that Ricardo was tearing up as well. He held her closer and stroked her hair.

Ricardo said, “It looks like Liberty Mutual are going to sponsor the retro race but in the meantime they haven’t paid their last installment on the transatlantic race. Bureaucratic stuff they told me. It’s just a matter of time. The boys have the boat back in Portimao and I need to pay them. Can I borrow a couple of thousand to pay them? They have done such a great job and I don’t want to let them down.”

Tracy said, “yes my love. It’s not a problem. Here are my bank details. Take a thousand or two thousand, whatever you need.” They were back at The Causeway having lunch. Tracy had stopped working after she received the inheritance and they had time on their hands. Ricardo reached into the cooler that they had brought and pulled out another cold bottle of white. “Thank you,” he said. “I really love you.”

Tracy replied, “I love you too Ric. And I admire you.” The next morning Ricardo was gone. He said that he had a meeting with Liberty Mutual and took an UBER into Boston, actually to Logan Airport to be more specific. His flight to Lisbon was later that evening and he had the whole day to kill. He checked in early and found Legal Seafoods which was just past security. He had cleaned out Tracy’s account before he finished his first Bloody Mary.



BABY RAY’S adopted parents reached out. Ray was eight years old and had been asking questions. His mom and dad talked about it for a long time before contacting the adoption agency.

“Are you really sure that you want to do this?” the new lady asked. The person that had helped them with the adoption had retired two years earlier.

“Yes we do,” Sandra said. “Ray has been asking some very pointed questions. Brett and I think that it wouldn’t hurt if he knows more about his birth mother.”

“I see here that there was no birth father mentioned in the paperwork.”

“Apparently the birth mother didn’t know who the father was.”

“Yes that happens a lot. You can always be sure who the birth mother is, for obvious reasons, but often the dad either does not want to be a part of any of it, or the mom doesn’t tell him. Or, quite often, she is not sure. She may have had

multiple partners. If you are really sure about this I can make some inquiries.”

“We are sure.”

It wasn't easy finding Maggie. The agency had listed her last place of employment as a breakfast place in Ft. Lauderdale called Dirty Ernies, but when the lady, Julia, called she was told that Maggie no longer worked there and they didn't know where she was. They also called The Chart House where she had worked before Dirty Ernies. No luck there either.

Maggie was working the counter a few days later when Ernie said, “I had a call from Child Adoption Services. They were asking for you. I told them that you don't work here. I thought that I should let you know.”

Maggie swallowed hard. “Thanks,” she said. “Did they say anything?”

“No I just told them that you didn't work here.”

“OK.”

Maggie was in her retro apartment smoking a joint. She had lit a few incense sticks and was enjoying a Dom Pedro when she made her decision. She called the agency the following morning after her shift at Dirty Ernies and spoke to a lady named Julia. After some security questions she was told that the parents that had adopted Ray wanted him to meet her. She said that Ray had been asking questions about his birth parents. Maggie said that she needed time to think. “It's all right,” Julia said. “I know that this is not an easy decision.”

Maggie's head was spinning. She took a long walk along A1A. The palm trees were blowing in the breeze, the Atlantic crashing onto the shore. Her mind was in overdrive. She had tried to move past her past but it had not been easy. Her baby boy had been in

her thoughts each and every day. She constantly questioned her decision to give him up. Had she made the right choice by giving up her son? Should she ever tell his father that he was a dad? He was still a regular at Dirty Ernies. Then an elderly man with gray hair roller-skated past her. She watched him fly by, his ponytail flopping in the breeze. That was when she made her decision. Life is too short for this kind of crap.

She asked Ernie for a day off and called the adoption agency first thing the following morning. They told her that her son was living in Ft. Lauderdale and that they could set up a meeting. Maggie needed the day off just to cope with making the call. She went to the Raw Bar for lunch. Captain Tits was serving drinks.

“Hey Maggie, long time no see.”

“I've been busy Captain. I also have some things on my mind. Do you have a moment?”

“Sure.” Captain Tits slid her the cold beer that she had ordered. “That's on me,” he said. “What's up?”

“You don't know this,” Maggie said. “You didn't see me pregnant but I gave up my baby for adoption. It was eight years ago.”

Captain Tits said, “I had no idea.”

“I had a boy. I had him for almost a month before the agency found him a family. His name is Ray. I think about him every day. I am going to meet him soon.”

Captain Tits slid her another beer. “That one is also on me.” He could see that Maggie was tearing up. “You know,” he said. “Sometimes you just got to do what you got to do.”

“I know,” Maggie said, “but I'm scared.” She had given up smoking but said, “Captain can I bum a smoke off you.”

Tits pushed a packet of Camel her way. “That's also on me.”

The meeting was set up at the adoptive parents house for the

following Saturday when Ray would be home from school. Julia from the agency would drive Maggie and be on hand to facilitate things. Maggie was beyond nervous. The last she had seen of Ray was when he drove away crying in the car seat of the silver Chevy Blazer. Their house was a small ranch in an area of Ft. Lauderdale that Maggie never knew existed. The streets were neat; most of the houses needed some work. They pulled up at number 27. Julia checked the information that she had printed out. Their address was 27 Longwood Drive. Maggie noticed that they no longer had the Chevy Blazer. There was a white Honda CRV in the driveway. They had some Christmas lights dangled over the bushes in the front of the house. They seemed a little out of place. Florida was experiencing a heat wave.

Julia knocked. Sandra came to the door. She was clearly nervous. She was wearing a light yellow summer frock. "Please come in," she said. She took Maggie by the hand. "Ray is a little scared. He's in the back room with Brett. I'm so glad that you agreed to this. Your son was a precious gift to our family. I can't tell you how much I, I mean we, love him. We were never able to have any children. Ray is our shining light." She was speaking fast. "Brett and Ray go fishing all the time. I take him to the mall but he doesn't really like that. He likes shrimp. He's been a sweet boy. I will go and see if he's ready to come out. Oh, and once he went with his dad on a shrimp boat out of Key West. He loved it. I will be right back."

Maggie and Julia sat quietly on the couch. "She's just nervous," Julia said. The air conditioner was struggling against the heat. It was a window unit with quite a bit of rust around the edges. The overhead fan was doing its best to keep the cooler air near the floor but it seemed to be pushing down the hot air instead. Maggie heard some talking in what must have been one of the bedrooms. She smiled at Julia. Sandra came

back out. "He says that he's nervous to meet you. Can I get you some coffee?"

"Thank you."

Maggie could hear her popping the lid of a can of instant. A few moments later the kettle started to whistle. Maggie heard the door creak, ever so slightly. She almost froze, but then she saw one eye peeking out. Sandra came back into the room with the coffee. "I have milk and sugar," she said. "Coffee will be ready in one second." She went back into the kitchen. The door creaked again. Two eyes peeked out. Maggie could hear someone urging from in the bedroom. The door opened, just a little, and Maggie could see the face of baby Ray, only now he was a tall, handsome boy. He quickly shut the door. She was short of breath.

"Here's the coffee," Sandra said. "I also baked some cookies which was no easy task in this heat." There was a small bead of sweat that ran down her forehead, ran the length of her nose, and landed on the plate. Sandra brushed her hair away from her face. Maggie noticed the door opening again and her heart stopped for a moment. Ray came out of the bedroom and walked over toward her. Well she walked over to both Julia and Maggie. "Which one of you is my Mom?" he asked.

"I'm your Mommy," Maggie said. "Well actually your Mom is your Mommy, but you are my boy." Maggie had rehearsed what to say a thousand times and it came out bad. Brett was in the background, staying silent. He was a big man.

"I am your birth mother. Your mom, sitting right over there, is your Mommy." Maggie looked and saw that Sandra was crying. Ray noticed it as well. "Why are you crying Mommy?" he asked.

"I am just happy that God made this happen," Sandra said.

Maggie bit her lip. She was an Atheist. "Yes, sometimes the world turns just right," she said. Ray was munching on the cookies.

Maggie was trying to hold back tears. She asked, "So I heard that you like shrimp?"

Ray said, "My Daddy takes me out shrimping. Sometimes we go for squid instead of shrimp. Once we went out on an actual shrimp boat. With my Daddy. Where was that Daddy?"

"Key West," my son. "Do you remember the name of the boat?" Ray paused for a moment. "Was it the Margaritaville?"

"No that was where we had lunch. The boat's name was Fujimo."

They talked for a while. It was awkward. Sandra was talking too fast. Julia was trying too hard. Brett was not much of a conversationalist. Maggie was trying to hold back tears. Then Ray asked the question everyone had been dreading.

"Where is my Dad?"

Maggie pointed at Brett. "He's your daddy," she said.

"No, I mean where is my birth dad?" Maggie could feel her heart pounding. "It's OK my sweetheart, your dad loved you. But he moved away and I haven't seen him," she lied. "I haven't seen him in a long while. I heard once that he moved to Mobile, Alabama and got a job on a shrimp boat. That's probably where you get your love of shrimp from."

Ray looked her straight in the eye and said, "I got my love of shrimp from my daddy. My real daddy." He walked over to Brett and sat next to him.

"You got your love of shrimp, and squid, from your real daddy. But I do know that your birth dad loves you." Maggie looked at Julia. "We should be going," she said. "I'm sure that Sandra and Brett have other things that they need to do."

"We're good," Sandra said. "More coffee?"

"Yes please." Julia was still trying too hard. "Those cookies are delicious." Maggie was still trying to suppress her anxiety.

She had some more instant coffee and half of a cookie. "We should probably go," she said. Maggie got up and joined Brett and Sandra in the kitchen.

"You did the right thing," Brett said. "And we are grateful for the gift of your son. We really are. He has been a sweet blessing. I have never told Sandra this but I thought that Fujimo was a funny name for a shrimp boat so I asked the captain about it. He had an odd look in his eyes when he told me." Brett shifted from foot to foot. "I hope that it's ok if I tell you this story. It's a little off color."

"It's ok."

The shrimp boat captain said to me, "My wife and I, well she's my ex-wife now. Her name is Jane. She had broad shoulders and a sour disposition. She wanted me to be a lawyer. Actually I am a lawyer but I couldn't stand the profession so I bought a fishing boat instead. She was mad as hell. She asked for a divorce. I named the boat FUJIMO."

Maggie looked puzzled. "I don't get it."

"I named the boat FUJIMO. It's an acronym. Stands for "Fuck You Jane I'm Moving Out."

Maggie knew right then and there that Ray was in good hands.

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TRACY COULD SIMPLY not believe what had happened. Ricardo had cleaned her out a second time. Her inheritance was gone. All the money that her parents had made, well half of it anyway, thankfully because of her sister, was gone. She would still have half the value of their house when they sold it but it wouldn't come close to the amount that Ricardo had taken. Tracy was crushed. Actually she was beyond crushed; she was devastated. She thought that she loved Ricardo. She thought that Ricardo had loved her. She thought that it was more than just the Ricardo sex. How could she have been so shallow; and stupid? She had planned on finding an investment broker to help her put the money into some different areas but truthfully she liked it when she checked her checking account and the number was huge. For most of her life she had been poor and nervous about checking her account balance. It had been a relief to find it well into positive territory, so she didn't do anything about the money. Now she regretted it.

Her best friend suggested that she call the race organizers to

find out more about him. She had met them briefly at the prize giving in Boston, but they were not much help. “He entered the race as Ricardo Diniz,” the Race Director told her. “I thought that it was a little strange. Everyone here knew him as Ricky.”

Ricardo had already changed his email addresses and phone numbers before he flew out of Boston and when he returned to Portugal he slipped into gentle obscurity. He had his crew take the boat to Morocco and leave it on a dock in Casablanca. He moved to Spain and took a part time job as First Mate on a SuperYacht, a sleek black hundred foot Bruce Farr design that had a most unfortunate name; ‘Beaver Retriever’.

TRACY TALKED TO HER SISTER about taking out a home equity loan on the house so that she could hire a lawyer. Her sister agreed and two weeks later she engaged a lawyer in Lisbon. “I’m sure that we will find him,” he said. “Portugal is a small country. There are very few places to hide.”

“Thank you,” Tracy said. “His name is Ricky but I don’t know his last name. He told me his name was Ricardo Diniz. Maybe his name is Ricky Diniz. He owns a boat that I think is currently in Portimao, but I’m not sure.” Tracy also gave the lawyer the details of the race and the contact numbers of the race organizers. “I will get back to you when I have some information,” he said. “I will need an additional five thousand. I am going to have to hire a private investigator.”

CARLOS CONTACTED JANE at Ravies Realtors and asked her to list the house on Flint Street for sale. He wanted to return to Marblehead but not to the same place. Too dangerous, plus there were too many memories of Maggie in the house. He was still shipping out with Squid but it was no fun to come back to an empty apartment. Jane called a week later. There was a really

good offer on the house and Carlos accepted it. He and Squid were sharing a bottle of Jameson on the bridge to celebrate when Squid said, “I think that I might have some information for you. I asked my buddies in Ft. Lauderdale to do some digging around. One of them knows about your friend there Scooter. He’s actually one of the biggest drug runners in the area. He’s a pretty wily character; and pretty ruthless, or so my buddie told me. He has a bunch of henchmen that work for him and they are not beyond killing if Scooter orders it. It sounds like you got off lucky. Their signature move is to shoot the person in the chest and then blow their balls off.”

Carlos didn’t say anything. He had heard that his friend in Nashville had been shot in the chest and had his balls blown off. He had always known that they guy was a bit shady but now he knew that it was Scooter’s henchmen who had murdered him. Carlos felt his own balls constrict. They finished the bottle of Jameson and opened another.

“I’m not sure that I would go back to Marblehead if I were you,” Squid said. “It sounds like that Rat Bag has friends everywhere.”

“I think that I will be alright,” Carlos said. “I also have to go back to Puerto Rico. I got a message that my mom is in Hospice. I am more scared of that. At least there is no customs so I don’t need to worry about them identifying me that way but I have been reading about this new eye recognition technology and I worry that I might be in some kind of databank there.”

“Just wear sunglasses,” Squid said. “Hell if Bono can pull it off, so can you.”

“Good point. I might have to sit out the next trip depending on how she’s doing but I will come back and finish out the season with you but after that, I am going to try and see what life in Marblehead looks like.”

Squid was drunk. "That's OK," he said. "I'm really going to miss you. You are the only one on the crew other than Skippy that was with me in that storm. The other pussies ran. You stayed, and that counts." He poured three fingers of Jameson into Carlos's glass and settled deeper into his captain's chair.

CARLOS LANDED AT Luis Munoz Marin International Airport in Puerto Rico. He had not worn sunglasses on the plane but as soon as he embarked he put them on. He was not taking any chances. He had paid in cash for the flight, well not exactly cash but a pre-paid debit card, and planned to pay cash for everything while he was on the island. He took a taxi to the hospital in Cabo Rojo. He had been using his fake Gmail account to correspond with hospice and knew where to go. The nurse at the front desk let him in and she got another nurse to walk him to his mother's room. Carlos was shocked at the sight of her. His mom had always been strong as a rock but now she was small and frail with gray hair and even grayer skin. She was asleep.

He took her by the hand. "Mama it's me, Carlos. I am here for you." There was no response. The nurse said, "she's in and out. Just wait a while. I am sure that she heard you." Carlos pulled his chair closer to her bedside. The nurse said, "I will give you some time with your mother. Ring the bell if you need me." Carlos nodded. His mom didn't open her eyes but she did say, "Eres tu mi chico? Is that you my boy?" Carlos squeezed her hand. "Si Mama. It's me. I have come to say goodbye."

His Mom said, or should I say, she mumbled, "Carlos look between the fence and the shed. There is a box there. It's full of money. It's for you. Don't ask any questions and make sure that you father does not see one penny of it." She tried to open her eyes but it was more than she could manage. Carlos held her hand. It felt like a dry vegetable. He could see her chest moving,

but not much. The nurse came into the room. "Is everything OK?" she asked. Carlos nodded.

"Everything is Ok," he said. His mom coughed and tried to squeeze his hand but she was already gone. Gone to their home in Cabo Rojo, the one where she had been happy until Maria died and where Carlos had suddenly left mysteriously.

Carlos sat with her for a while. The nurse said, "take as much time as you need." He left just as it was starting to turn dark. He took a cab over to his Mom's home. It felt so strange to be back there. The house was a bit dilapidated. The lawn needed to be mowed. The living room had that old people smell. Carlos started to cry. He had not cried since his sister Maria had been murdered. He knew where to look for a flashlight. There was always that one drawer that had everything. He felt around and found a flashlight. Actually he found two of them and tested each. It turned out that the small one was the brightest. He made his way around the back of the house where the shed was. It was a little overgrown but there was box area that had once been used for composting but had not been used for years. He opened the lid and inside was a plastic carton. He lifted the carton. It was heavy. He took it inside before he opened it up. Carlos placed the carton on the kitchen table and slipped the lid off. The carton was full of neatly wrapped twenty dollar bills. There was a note. "Carlos this is for you. Don't ask me where the money came from. Don't give any of it to your father." There was nothing else. Carlos would never know about her side business all those years ago in the lane behind the Laundromat.

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CHIEF JACKSON WAS getting some crap from the Marblehead Selectman. They said that he was no closer to solving the murders than they had been on the day of the murders. Well that's not exactly true. They now knew that the suspect was a female, of slight build. They knew that she drove a Lexus, an older model, and that she wore a baseball cap with an interesting Chinese symbol embroidered on it. The Chief was sure that the second gun that they had found in the water off the Porthole Pub was the one that the killer had tossed the night of the murders even though none of the prints matched anything that they had in their databank.

"Ok so let's think about this from a different angle," Chief Jackson said. His team were all sitting at the conference table. Slater spoke up. "It was definitely, as far as I can tell, and I know that we will have to prove this in court beyond a reasonable doubt, that it was someone who Carlos was screwing. I have no idea why but my gut tells me so and when my gut tells me, I listen. Ralph at the recycling station remembers Carlos telling him

that her name was Maggie, or maybe Meggy, he didn't remember. I will bet you ten to one that she either pulled the trigger, or had something to do with it."

"Interesting," the Chief said. "Let's cross reference any fingerprints we have with anyone in this general area named Maggie, or Meggy. Or Margaret. Or whatever, you get my point. I also get your point about an affair gone bad, but none of it explains why Sergeant Bigblow was murdered."

"She panicked," Slater said. "Bigblow had obviously pulled her over because of the tail light that was not working. She had just murdered someone two minutes earlier. I would panic if I were her. I don't think that there is much more to that story."

Then they got a break in the case.

JACK HAD BEEN monitoring the news on Marblehead Patch as well as the various Marblehead Facebook groups. It was only when he was having coffee with Lenny and Henry that he decided it was time.

Lenny had said, "I heard that the killer's name is Maggie. I got that from one of my friends in the police department. It might also have been Meggy. They weren't sure. Isn't your wife's name Maggie?" Lenny laughed. "I'm just kidding," he said. Jack cringed but didn't say anything for a few minutes. They also said that she wore a baseball cap with some weirdo Chinese symbol embroidered on it. Jack knew the baseball cap. It was still in their closet.

After a while he said, "We are living separate lives now. She's drinking herself to death. Fucking Fireball. She's still living in the guest bedroom and I found the bottles. She thought that she could hide them, but I'm not a complete fool. I did vote for Trump though and now I know that might make me look like a bit of a fool, but when I voted for him I thought that he would make

a great President, but anyway. I came home early from work a month or so ago because I wasn't feeling too good. Maggie was not home but I looked in the recycling bin and there must have been a dozen empty bottles of Fireball. The recycling is picked up once a week."

Lenny looked at Jack. "You are not saying that your wife is the murderer are you? Is there anything that you are not telling us?"

Jack sighed and said, "I dunno. I dunno anything anymore. Henry, can I get another cup of coffee?"

Jack called the Marblehead Police hotline. "The person you are looking for is named Maggie," he said. "And she lives in Marblehead." He called through an encrypted WhatsApp number. Jack felt like his life was spiraling out of control. Maggie had the money. Jack had pissed off his boss and was skating close to the edge of losing his job. His boss had been hinting that he might want to update his LinkedIn profile.

SCOOTER'S HENCHMEN found out her name. "Maggie Mayweather." They also found out that she had once given up her child for adoption. They also found out that Maggie was living in Marblehead, Massachusetts, but they didn't have a specific address. Prior to that she had lived in Ft. Lauderdale, but Scooter already knew that. Carlos had told him. They could not find her address in Florida either but they did find the address of the adoptive parents and Scooter had his men, well they were hardly men, two of them were just out of high school, stake out the home and figure out the kid's routine. Scooter knew that once he had the kid he would have leverage.

Ray was walking home from school when apparently, according to some eye witnesses, he was offered a ride by someone in a black BMW with tinted windows. Ray jumped into a car. One

eyewitness later said that she noticed that most of the number plate was covered with Duct Tape and that the car sped off in the direction of Ft. Lauderdale.

The thugs took Ray to Scooters house. He had a large place right on the Intercoastal. He had three security guards that had originally been hired to keep bad people out. Now their job was to make sure that Ray was kept in. Scooter knew his game. He wanted his money and he wanted the parents to sweat. Scooter knew how to play the long game.

“Ray, you are going to be safe,” Scooter told him. “But your birth Mom is going to pay. In money and in her heart. I’m going to take care of you until she sweats enough to return my money. Your other parents will be fine. They didn’t steal anything from me.”

Ray had no idea what he was talking about.

MAGGIE WAS IN CONSTANT CONTACT with Brett and Sandra. They were also desperate for news and had no idea why Ray had been kidnapped. Maggie skirted tentatively around the edge of the question that she most wanted to ask; had Sandra and Brett been contacted by the kidnapper? She didn’t want to let on that she had received some threatening messages. She didn’t want Sandra and Brett to think that the reason their son had been taken was because of her. “There has not been any contact,” Sandra said. “We thought that maybe whoever took Ray might be looking for some money but we have not heard a thing.”

Maggie kept her mouth shut.

Scooter had no problem playing the long game. He has taken to heart what the nice gentleman in New Orleans had told him. Play the long game. He was patient but he knew that by sticking with it he would find out where his money was and he would get

it back. He was annoyed with himself for trusting Carlos with the cocaine and had never asked much about his ‘friend’ who also did the runs up the I-95 Corridor. The trackers planted in the cars had worked up to a point.

“Hey Boss,” one of the thugs said. “It looks like this Carlos guy is still alive. I thought that your men up in Nahant had killed him.”

“That’s what they told me. They also told me that they had beaten up some guy who owned a tire place. He had one of the Subaru’s so they beat him up for good measure.

Scooter called his contact in Nahant. “I thought that your guys had killed the bastard,” he yelled down the phone. “You guys need to learn a lesson from my team here in Florida. All it takes is one in the chest and one in the balls. Then it’s all over red rover.”

The man in Nahant said, “One moment please. He adjusted his Red Sox cap and conferenced in a third person. “Well we did beat the shit out of him,” the short man said. “He looked like he was dead. We are not so much into guns here in Massachusetts as you are in Florida. We like to do it the old fashioned way. With our fists.”

“Well your fucking fists didn’t work, you bunch of assholes. He’s still alive and so is his girlfriend.”

“We planted the cocaine and I know, through a friend that I have at the Marblehead Police Department, that they pulled him in for questioning.”

“What, you knew that he was still alive?”

“Yes but he moved out of town right after being questioned and we couldn’t find him to kill him.”

You guys up in Massachusetts are a bunch of amateurs.”

“They pulled him in for the cocaine but there was another big

drug case going on at the same time and the Marblehead police let the trail go cold.”

“Amateurs.”

Scooter stewed on the news about Carlos for a couple of days. He would sometimes go to a dark place and ponder things. Then it came to him. If holding Ray hostage was good enough leverage to get his money back from Maggie, it was also good enough to get Maggie to murder Carlos. She presumed that Maggie would know how to find him. The fucker was going to have to pay either way.

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CARLOS WAS BESIDE HIMSELF. He thought that he had moved on but he had heard that Maggie had married some guy by the name of Jack. He wasn't sure where she was living. He had met a nice Puerto Rican woman at one of his favorite restaurants in Lynn. She was a bit of a rebound screw but Carlos proposed after just six weeks of dating. And she had said yes.

The house on Flint Street was sold and he had rented himself a place on Village Street. He also bought a place on State Street which he figured he would paint and flip. The Village Street house was quite modest and he was living off the proceeds from the sale of his big house. Real estate prices had skyrocketed since he and Maggie bought the house on Flint Street so there was a pile of money in the bank. Plus the money from his Mom. Carlos was puzzled by where it came from but there was close to fifty grand in twenty dollar bills in the box. Carlos took a job at the Marblehead Convenience store just as a way to pass the time. He didn't need the money, but he found Mr. Gupta a little hard to take. He and Richie also butted heads.

“You have no idea how to truss a rib roast,” he said. Richie was offended. He had been cutting and trussing meat for almost 30 years. He didn’t know why Carlos was always in such a bad mood. He didn’t know about Maggie. Carlos quit after three weeks. He joined Warren in the liquor store next door.

“So are you back in town to stay this time?” Warren asked. He knew about Maggie. He had heard it from Ralph at the Transfer Station. “Or are you just going to piss off when you get tired of working?”

“I’m here to stay,” Carlos said. “It’s complicated. Maggie left me. I have no idea why. We had a good time together, but, well, life is life and now I have a wife.”

“You got married?” Warren asked. “As in a man and wife kind of thing?”

“Yea, her name is Gloria. I met her at that place in Lynn that you turned me onto.”

“Tipico Central Americano? That place? I love the fried fish there but I never thought that it was a pick-up place.”

“You never know,” said Carlos. “You just never know. And now we are married.”

MAGGIE HAD MET JACK at Dirty Ernies. He was on vacation in Florida. They started talking about Marblehead where Jack lived. “I know Marblehead,” Maggie said. “I used to live there. On Flint Street.”

“You lived on Flint? That’s some pricey real estate there.”

“Yea I know, but it didn’t work out.”

Jack had his radar up. “You sold the house then?”

“I gave it to my boyfriend. But I kept the money in the offshore account. There was plenty of it too.” Maggie was flirting. So was Jack. They should have left it right there. Jack was twenty years older than

Maggie but he was turned on by her boobs. It was the only reason he ate at Dirty Ernies. He was never very fond of breakfast food.

Jack came in for breakfast every day while on vacation. Maggie noticed that he always ordered the special but only picked at it. She knew the game. Most of their customers only came for the tits; not the grits.

“I’m going to miss you when I go back to Marblehead,” Jack said. “Me too,” Maggie said, “instantly regretting it.”

“The food here is good,” Jack said. “Maggie leaned in closer. “You only come here for the tits don’t you?” She was expecting a good tip. And she got one.

THE POLICE WERE WORKING every angle that they could to try and locate Ray. Sandra and Brett were distraught. They, along with Maggie were in constant contact with the police. They also had a team from The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children helping to look for Ray, but every lead that they followed came up cold. It’s never easy finding a needle in a haystack especially when there didn’t seem to be any reason for the abduction. Maggie wanted her son back but she was keeping her mouth shut on that front.

Scooter was playing the long game.

JACK HAD NOT BEEN BACK in Marblehead for two days before he called. “Please come and visit me,” he said. Maggie was reluctant but somewhere, in the far recesses of her mind, she thought that she might run into Carlos. Who knows? She could have called him but she was nervous. She had heard that he might have moved back to Marblehead. She was reluctant to call in case her line was being tapped. She knew that Carlos wouldn’t understand about her son. It was a lie that she had kept hidden for too long to suddenly

bring up. She was also worried that they would kill Carlos now that they had her number and that was part of the reason why she had run from Maine. Two weeks later Maggie took a Jet Blue flight into Logan airport and Jack was there with flowers.

They were both rebound marriages. Carlos married Gloria on a soft sunny summer afternoon. They had Tom McNulty, the town clerk and Justice of the Peace marry them on a dock in Marblehead. Maggie reluctantly agreed to marry Jack. He had rented The Boston Yacht Club which was much more than he could afford. There was snow outside, and a cold, biting wind blowing. It should have been a warning. She had never mentioned her son Ray once. Jack had no idea who he was marrying and what kind of mess he was marrying into.

SCOOTER, DESPITE BEING A CROOK and a thug, and a perfectly dishonest person, made sure that Ray was well taken care of. He was just leverage; a business transaction if you will. He wanted his money. There were two sides to every coin. He had also threatened Ray that he would kill his parents if he told anyone that he had been abducted. It was so easy to change Gmail addresses and phone numbers and there was always the dark web and that was how he knew that he would win; if he played the long game. Ray was not treated like the other boys and sometimes girls that came and went from his mansion. Ray had noticed them come and go from a side door but never said anything.

Scooter organized a tutor come in and school Ray. The tutor didn't ask questions. It was a job for her and just the way Scooter liked it. The less anyone knew about his life, the better. She too noticed the children coming and going but didn't say anything or ask any questions. Scooter paid well and she needed the money.

The tutor could tell that something was amiss. Ray was trying but seemed to have closed down. After two months she talked

to her friend, a child therapist. Scooter was never home and the three bodyguards thought that Scooter had hired a second tutor when both of them showed up one morning. They sat for a while with Ray. The tutor was teaching; her friend was observing. When they left that day her friend said, "There is something wrong with this picture. I don't think that Ray belongs there. And what's with those three thugs that keep hovering around?"

"I don't know. I just needed a job. He's a sweet boy. Can you come back tomorrow? I will pay you out of my paycheck."

THE LAWYERS IN LISBON hired a private detective, a man by the name of Alfonso, at least that was what he said his name was. He went to Portimro to take a look. Portimro is a lovely city on the Algarve coast. Alfonso asked the taxi driver where the marinas were and he said that there was only one marina in Portimro. "It's funny," the taxi driver said. "The marina is run by a lady whose name is Marina." He dropped Alfonso off at the Tivoli Hotel. "The marina is here. You just need to walk through the hotel and on the other side, once you go out the back door, you will see a small building to the right. It's the marina office. Ask for Marina." He laughed at his own joke.

Alfonso knocked on the door and a striking lady opened it. "I'm looking for Marina," he said. The lady said, "come in, I am Marina, how can I help you?"

"I am looking for a Ricardo Diniz. Do you know anyone by that name?" Marina looked at him and said, "Oh you mean Ricky? I know Ricky. I don't have any idea why he thought his name was suddenly Ricardo but I saw that he did a race across the Atlantic and went by the name Ricardo. He grew up right here sailing out of our local yacht club. Ricky was always a bit of puzzle. Handsome beyond belief but I digress. You are looking for Ricky?"

“Yes I am working for a lawyer in Lisbon. It seems that Ricardo, err Ricky, might have taken off with his clients money and I am trying to find him.”

“That wouldn’t be the first time,” Marina said. “But he’s not here. His boat was here a few weeks ago but they left. I think that they said that they were heading for Morocco.”



KIM, ONE NIGHT after they had set up the foundation and after smoking a lot of pot, confessed to her husband that he was not the father of their daughter. The lie had been eating away at her for years. She told him that she had had an affair and that Jessie was the result of that affair. Her husband said simply, “I knew about the affair and I know that she is not my daughter, but that does not make me love her any less. I’m glad that you have finally got that off your chest. Now can you please pass the joint?” Kim had never loved him more.

The first lottery payment had allowed them to pay the lawyers and the investment banker. They had also put some money into a trust for Tom and Jessie’s college fees and some went into a retirement fund. Kim did buy a new car, a bright red mini cooper. She also kept her job at the Amazon fulfillment center. Kim might have grown up rough and had suffered a long depression after the two rapes, but she was kind to her core. Their marriage had had some bumps along the way but Kim knew that she was still rocking his world. And he was still rocking hers, especially on Saturday nights.

Lisa Ling was not having any luck with interns. She was almost at the top job at Novartis, but her love life was lacking more than just a little. She knew that she was beautiful, but she was also very insecure. She went for the newest intern but got shut out again. She should have known better. She was the boss; they were hoping to climb the corporate ladder or at least land a full-time job. Her latest failure was a young kid from Cambridge. Lisa played it cool. It was a hot summer day and she suggested that they go rollerblading after work. The intern, whose name was Frank, went along with it because he wanted to land a job at Novartis. They both laced up and that was the high point of their outing. Lisa had no idea how to rollerblade. Frank was playing along until he realized that his boss was hanging onto him for a little longer than necessary. She was also laughing too loud. That was when they ran into Lisa's husband; and his boyfriend. They were jogging on the bike trail alongside the Charles River.

"Hey hi," Lisa said. "Funny seeing you here. I thought that you were working late."

"I got a text from the big boss that the meeting tomorrow was canceled."

"Oh I heard about that." Frank looked perplexed. They took off rollerblading in the opposite direction. "Who was that?" Frank asked. "That was my husband and his boy toy," Lisa replied.

"I wish that I had a boy toy that good looking." That was when Lisa realized that Frank was gay and her chances of a quick tumble between the sheets were as about as close to zero as you can get. They unlaced and went their separate ways.

Lisa drove north through Revere. She considered stopping at Kelly Roast Beef on Revere Beach. They had the best roast beef sandwiches on the North Shore, but instead she decided to push on to Marblehead. She was just pulling into town when she had an idea. She had only been there once before. She pulled up in front of The Riptide and locked her car. The place is a dive but it

was humming. There was a jukebox in the corner playing Dolly Parton. The seat at the bar closest to the door was free so she took it and ordered a pink martini.

"No one has ever ordered that before," the bartender said. Lisa was keeping to herself while surveying the room. The crowd was mostly on the younger side and definitely blue collar. Lisa ordered a second drink and was just about to take a sip when a tall man stopped by. "You look so lonely sitting here all by yourself," he said in a strong Australian accent. Lisa demurred, trying to play it cool. "I'm OK," she said. The tall man was having none of it. He came strait to the point. "Have you ever wanted to fuck a famous ocean racer?" he asked. Lisa was quick on her feet. "I have always wanted to fuck a famous ocean racer," she replied. "Can you sail?"

"I've done some sailing," the tall man replied.

"Are you famous?" Dolly finished singing and there was a pregnant pause. The tall man pulled his hair back behind his ears. He looked her directly in the eyes.

"Have you ever heard of the America's Cup?"

Lisa said, "yes our company, Novartis, chartered a yacht in Newport. This was quite a few years ago." Lisa realized that she was speaking way too fast but she couldn't help herself. "We went out and watched the racing. It was a lot of fun. Well that was until most of the invited guests allowed themselves to get a bit over-served, if you know what I mean. The wind picked up in the afternoon and the trip back to land was a little bumpy. Quite a few of our guests fed the fish." The tall man laughed.

"Have you ever heard of a sailor named Billy Black?"

Lisa blushed. "Yes, I read about him once in the New York Times. Actually I read about him a couple of times. He's a sailor, right? I think he skippered a boat in the America's Cup. Why are you asking?" The tall man extended his hand.

"Hi," he said. "I'm Billy." Lisa downed her martini and followed Billy to his room at the Pleasant Manor Inn. The room was small

but Lisa didn't care. She had never screwed an Australian before and she was going to make the most of her first time.

It shocked her bosses and her co-workers when Lisa resigned from Novartis. She had steadily climbed the ladder for the better part of a decade and a half. Lisa had woken up in the small cramped room at the Pleasant Manor Inn and gazed into Billy's eyes. The sex had been incredible. Billy took her to the Three Cod Tavern for a long lunch, and by the time they were done she had agreed to move to Australia. There was no point in staying in Marblehead. Her husband was gay and he had someone who apparently he liked, or maybe even loved. She had made loads of money so why not? There is never a good time to make a life changing move, but the morning after one of the best nights in as long as she could remember, she knew that it was time.



ALFONSO HAD a few friends in Marrakesh really, even though he had slept with one of their wives, but they were divorced now. He called him. "Hey Abdil," he said, "its Alfonso. How are you?"

"All that much better since my divorce. You did me a favor. How are you and what can I help you with?"

"I am looking for a boat in Morocco. Shouldn't be too hard to find but I need some advice. It's a 60 foot yacht. Black. A racing boat. It was heading to Morocco from Portugal. Do you have any ideas for me?"

"I can look into it," said Abdil. "What's the name of the boat?"

"Well here's the thing. The boats registered name is "Ervilha Doce. It means Sweet Pea in Portuguese. It recently did a race across the Atlantic and was sponsored by Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. You have heard of them, right?"

"Yes I know them. Bunch of crooks, but never mind."

"OK, so the boat is black. It might be branded and named

Liberty Mutual. It's Sixty feet long. Please check around if you can. The owner of the boat is a man by the name of Ricky, but he sometimes goes by the name Ricardo."

"I will look my friend. And I will get back to you."

"Thank you."

THE LAWYER IN LISBON was earning his money. He might have taken a decent retainer but through his connections in Portugal and with Alfonso's help he had discovered a lot about Ricky Diniz. He called Tracy. "First of all Ricardo is not Portuguese, he's English," he said. "He was born in England but moved to Portugal when he was five. His parents sent him back to boarding school in England when he was a teenager where apparently he was a top student. It seemed that he loved the Portuguese food better than English food and so he returned to Portugal when he was 18." The lawyer paused for a moment to let Tracy get her head around things.

"Go on."

"He and a friend started a small food truck business, well that might be a bit of stretch calling it a food truck business. They had a pick-up truck with a grill in the back. They would go to concerts or to any kind of outdoor event and set it up to grill sardines. He was an entrepreneur and wanted more, but even though he was smart and ambitious, he kept losing money. His dream, apparently, was to sail across the Atlantic and he spent most of his earnings on various different sailboats."

"I know all about that dream of his," Tracy said. "I know it all too well."

"Yes, I'm sorry."

"Thank you."

The lawyer uncovered a few fraud charges against Ricky, or

Ricardo, call him what you want, but somehow he had managed to escape conviction. He scammed some local businesses and walked off scot-free. He started getting bolder and tried a pyramid scheme that failed. Then he found his true strength. His looks. He was indeed a very handsome man; charming too. He told the women, and as it turned out, quite a few men, that he was just a simple fisherman trying to make a living. It wasn't long before he was recruited by a modeling agency and got a gig with Luisa Paixao, a Portuguese men's care company. It went well until he was caught having sex with the President's assistant; on the president's desk. Word spread rapidly and Ricky had a hard time finding work after that, much to the disappointment of many boss's assistants.

THE LAWYER CALLED TRACY AGAIN. "We have more stuff on your man," he said. "He's a bit of a rogue and more than a bit of a playboy. Oh, and he also has quite a long rap sheet. To be blunt he's a total scoundrel." Tracy was struggling with the news. She had once loved Ricardo, or Ricky, or whatever his name was, but she didn't want to think of him as a crook even though he had lifted all of her money as well as her inheritance, her parent's hard earned money.

"I think that we have enough to bring him in," the lawyer said. "Now the hard part will be finding him. His boat is in Morocco. He seems to have vanished. I have my guy Alfonso on it. I will probably need another five thousand."

It wasn't hard to find the boat. The sponsor's logo was all over it. Alfonso had a friend by the name of Joro who ran the marina in Casablanca. "Sim, yes the boat is here. The crew came in a couple of days ago but I think that they have left already. The boat is tied up alongside. Joro looked out of his dockmaster's office. " Wait a moment. I think that I see someone on board. I will investigate and get back to you."

Joro wandered down the dock. There was a man in a Speedo hosing the deck. He said "Ola." He saw that the boat was flying a Portuguese flag. "Ola," Ricardo replied. Joro said, "lovely looking boat. It's a racing boat right?"

Ricardo replied, "yes I just raced this boat across the Atlantic this summer. Alone."

"Alone, as in by yourself alone?" Joro asked. "That's pretty impressive. Wow." The two men talked for a while. Ricardo invited him onboard and they shared a pot of sweet mint tea. Ricardo was charming and seemed to be a very accomplished sailor.

Joro left and went back to his office. He called Alfonso. "I have your man but you will need to move fast. He's on his boat in Casablanca for just a few more days. He told me that as soon as he leaves Morocco he's going to Cape Town, South Africa, for a holiday. Apparently he had met some lady on the plane. She's wealthy and lives in Constantia. I guess it's a fancy area of Cape Town."

"Good work and thank you. I will have my boss contact the police there. Thank you again."

Ricardo was napping in the cockpit when he saw three very serious policemen walking down the dock toward his boat. He knew that they were coming for him. It was not the first time he had seen police coming for him. It was pure instinct. He slipped over the side of the boat. Luckily his dinghy was tied up alongside. There was a small cover and he hid under it. He heard the police knocking on the bow of the boat. They knocked a few times and after a while, they left. Ricardo waited for an hour before checking to see if the coast was clear, then he started the engine on the dinghy. It took on the second pull. He gunned it up the coast to the small town of Mohammedia. He had been there once before, with a lady who owned a ranch on the outskirts of

the town. He had managed to clean out her bank account. He didn't have too many options and the odds of running into the lady were small. The next marina was 20 miles up the coast so he pulled his dinghy alongside at Yacht Club de Mohammedia.

It was long after dark when he got back to his boat. The marina office was dark. He took the few belongings that he had brought and locked the boat up after first making sure that it was securely tied to the dock. He took a taxi to the airport and found a hotel room for the night. He paid cash. The next morning he bought a ticket to South Africa.



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JACK HAD HAD IT. His wife, who by now he knew was definitely the killer, was drunk texting him. In one text she wrote, “I have the money. And you have a tiny dick.” Jack was out on his deck smoking a cigar, a habit that he had picked up since this whole incident happened. He texted back, “well you have a Catch U Next Tuesday that looks like it has been crashed into by a drunken sailor.” Maggie replied, “he was not drunk.” That was when Jack dug deep into the closet and found the baseball cap.

He was more than a little over the limit when he dropped the cap off at the police station. He left it on the front steps. He left a note with it. “Here is your evidence. All you people do is traffic detail. You are never going to figure this case out. This is all the evidence that you need. There are fingerprints all over it.” Jack had worn rubber gloves when he dropped it off; but he hadn’t worn rubber gloves when he took it out of the closet.

Chief Jackson called a meeting of his detectives. “We have the cap,” he told them. “It’s the cap with the Chinese logo. Forensics

is running it now. They told me that there were fingerprints all over it. We will get a match.”

Years earlier, long before Carlos, Maggie had been screwing a marine photographer. His name was Onne and he was brilliant at his craft. It didn't last long. Onne was a married man and soon the guilt caught up with him. He left a note and a baseball cap; one that he had picked up in China when he was shooting the offshore sailing races at the Beijing Olympics. “To my best love. My sweetest little wanderer. I have to go.” Maggie was devastated.

ALFONSO MADE CONTACT with his friend Jannie in South Africa. He called him on his cell and after some pleasantries he said, “I need you to get in touch with your contacts there. The ones in the police department and maybe the court. Well quite probably the court. One of our suspects is in Cape Town. Constantia I believe, wherever that is. I need to see if your men there can find him.”

“Constantia huh. That's rich mans territory. Send me the details and I will see what I can do.” Alfonso emailed them. There were a number of recent photos of Ricardo plus his rap sheet. He also transferred some money to cover Jannies expenses.

Jannie made some calls. His first call was to an old school mate Martin Penny. Martin was a lawyer and had contacts in the police departments as well as in the courts. Within the hour Jannie got a call from the police. “I understand that you need us to help find someone. Is that correct?”

Jannie replied, “Yes. I can get you all the details.”

“OK send them to me.” Jannie forwarded the email that Alfonso had sent him. He also sent the same email to Martin Penny.

“I think that we can get an arrest warrant for your man,” Martin said. “I have a judge in my pocket who can be rather lenient at times when it comes to this kind of thing, if you know what

I mean. We play golf every Saturday. Give me a day or two. I already had a call back from the police and they are on the case. They will find him if he is in Constantia. If not, I dunno. South Africa is a big country.”

It didn't take long. Constantia is a small, extremely beautiful area of Cape Town tucked in under the Constantiaberg Mountain where the wealthy live. At the base of the mountain there is a very popular coffee shop, M's Cafe. The Cape Town cop had his men stake it out. It didn't take long. They recognized Ricardo immediately. He was with one of South Africa's top socialites, a lady by the name of Anneliese Hill. She had once been one of South Africa's top morning TV show hosts, but the weather had not been kind to her skin and despite a lot of makeup, her career came to an abrupt end. She had received an excellent severance package but she sued for age discrimination anyway and they settled on a large amount. It wasn't the money that made her famous; it was the TV coverage of her lawsuit that made her a household name.

The cops took photographs of Ricardo and Anneliese and reported back to Jannie who forwarded them to Alfonso who sent them to the lawyer in Lisbon who sent them on to Tracy. She replied tersely; it's him.

Martin called his golfing buddy/judge and explained things. It was a little difficult getting the judge to agree to an international arrest warrant but he reluctantly agreed to it given that Ricardo was always on the move, and, probably just as importantly, Martin Penny was his golf partner. There was enough evidence that Ricardo had done a lot of illegal things. It would take a jury of his peers to decide if he was guilty or not but for now there was an arrest warrant out for him.

The police matched the prints on the baseball cap with the prints on the gun. They found a lot of other prints on the cap, one of them belonging to a man named Jack Maxwell. He was

known to the police because of a bar fight five years earlier. They decided to pay him a visit. The first thing that they noticed was that there were a lot of Trump 2024 signs on his front lawn. There was also a Trump for President flag flying on a flagpole. Slater said, "I think that this guy is going to vote for Trump." His sidekick, Officer Harris, laughed and said, "I think you might be right."

They knocked but there was no answer. "We should probably come back later," Slater said. There was no car in the driveway. Slater drove by a couple of times in the afternoon until there was a car parked in front of the house. He called Officer Harris, "I think that he's home." Both squad cars pulled up at the same time. They knocked. Jack came to the door. He had stopped at Red Rocks, a restaurant just over the town line in Swampscott. He might have been a little over-served and probably shouldn't have driven home.

"Can I help you?"

"Yes may we come in?" Jack stepped aside. Officer Harris followed Slater into the house. Slater came right to the point. "We have your fingerprints all over a baseball cap that was dropped off in front of the police station. Do you know what I am talking about?" Jack was suddenly very sober. He lied and said, "no."

The baseball cap was worn by the person that murdered Officer Bigblow and a man by the name of Carlos who was shot at the Convenience Store. The one up on West Shore Drive. We have CCTV footage of her. We know that it's a female so you are not a suspect but we are asking why your fingerprints might be on the hat. It has a distinct symbol on the front of it. Jack shrugged. Slater noticed his left eye twitching.

"May I ask if you are married?"

"On paper, yes, but we are getting a divorce."

"And where is your wife now?"

"I dunno. She said that she was moving to Maine," he lied. Slater took all her details and they left. Jack watched the two cars drive away and thought, "what have I done?" His wife had the money and he had just been given a 30-day notice by his boss.



RICARDO AND ANNELIESE were having a coffee outdoors at M's Cafe. They were being watched. Ricardo was trading on his good looks. The cops followed them back to her house. They had already received the go ahead from the judge who had jurisdiction over Constantia. He had agreed that he would review the whole case after they brought Ricardo in. There are always two sides to every story and he wanted to hear Ricardo's side.

Ricardo and Anneliese were sitting outside on her stoep, a veranda if you will. They had moved on from coffee to a very decent bottle of South African white. The light on the mountain behind them was amazing. A few guinea fowl were doing their evening crossfit running around the yard clucking like crazy. Ricardo leant into Anneliese and kissed her. He said, "I think that I love you."

Anneliese replied, "I think that I love you too." They were well into their second bottle of Klein Constantia white when Ricardo brought it up. I'm having a little issue with my yacht in Casablanca. The harbormaster there is being a jerk. We had

agreed on a price for dockage but he somehow doubled it. I have been trying to wire money from my account but it's not working. Not going through I mean. I don't know why. It may be because it's Morocco. Is there any chance you can help me cover this month? I will sort it out and pay you back. Anneliese looked into his deep, dark eyes and said, "anything for you my sweetie." She gave Ricardo her bank information. "Take whatever you need." Those were, not for the first time, fateful words.

"Thank you," Ricardo said, "but let's not worry about this now. We have better things to do. When the police came through the gate the first thing that they saw was Ricardo's white arse. They were humping on the chez lounge and neither of them heard the gate click. Well Ricardo did. His radar was always on. The officer cleared his throat. Ricardo and Anneliese kept on having sex. There was a large window right in front of them and Ricardo, luckily being the one on top, noticed the police in the reflection but knew better than to acknowledge them. The two cops left. "Agh let them have some fun," the blond cop said. "My wife gave up on that stuff a long time ago. We can come back later."

Ricardo finished, and then they finished the wine. Anneliese said, "that was fun. I am going to take a nap."

Ricardo said, "do you mind if I borrow your car? I will run down to Woolworths to pick up some lamb chops for dinner."

"No problem, I love lamb. We can chuck them on the braai later." When she kissed Ricardo she could taste herself on his mouth. Ricardo jumped onto the free wifi at Woolworths and in minutes he had cleared out most of Anneliese's bank account. He left some money in the account because he kind of sort or even maybe liked her.

It was not difficult to find Maggie. She had not moved to

Maine. They brought her in for questioning. Now, the Marblehead cops mostly do traffic detail and a double murder was more than a little above their pay grade. They offered her a glass of water and then tried the good cop bad cop thing; Finnigan being the bad cop of course. It suited him. Maggie might have been a murderer but she was no fool and was ducking their questions. Finally she said, "I think it might be best if I get a lawyer. I don't like what you gentlemen are insinuating. I thought that I was just in here for a chat. Now you are trying to make me out as a murderer." The police had no option but to let her leave. "Don't worry," Finnigan said to Officer Harris. "I'm pretty sure that it was her. We can pick her up again anytime. We just need to build more of case that we can get a judge to sign off on. I was pretty sure that she would confess. The lady is not only pretty, but she is also pretty smart. Now can you arranged for that water glass to be sent over to forensics. Have them dust for fingerprints."

Maggie had her UBER driver stop by Village Liquors. She downed the fireball and chucked the empty bottle out one onto the front lawn. Then she packed her bags. Maggie was leaving town.

RICARDO LANDED AT the King Shaka International Airport in Durban, a thousand miles or so up the coast from Cape Town. He had given his personal card to a lady that he had met at M's Cafe. Anneliese was in the bathroom at the time. He had used his best, 'I'm just a simple fisherman eyes' and she had slipped him her number a couple of seconds before Anneliese come back to the table.

Ricardo had used burner phones most of his adult life. It was easier that way. He called her number as soon as he landed. She picked up right away. "Hello this is Gail."

Ricardo lowered his voice. "This is Ricardo from M's Cafe. I am in Durban. I would love to see you. Can we have coffee, or maybe something stronger?"

They met at the Point Yacht Club, a working mans kind of place right on Durban Harbor. Gail did ask about his 'friend', the one that he was with at M's Cafe, but Ricardo brushed it off. "She's just an old friend of mine. I once did a yacht race from Cape Town to Rio. That was a long time ago. I met her then and we have stayed in touch ever since."

"Well she was pretty. I thought that I recognized her. From TV maybe."

"Yes, she was the host of TV2, The Morning Show. That was a few years back. The years have not been kind to her but she is a dear friend." The Indian waiter came over with their drinks. Ricardo had ordered a Castle Lager. Gail a Savanna Dry.

"Cheers." They looked out across the harbor. There were a hundred or so boats moored. "You know," Gail said, "My dad used to race sailboats out of this club. He told me that back in the day there would sometimes be huge flocks of flamingos right in the middle of their racecourse. They are gone now of course." Ricardo feigned interest. He had noticed that Gail was wearing a lot of jewelry. Instead of mentally undressing her, he was trying to imagine how much money she had in her bank account.

They ended up back in Gail's small apartment. It was small but tastefully decorated. It overlooked the Indian Ocean and when Ricardo drifted off to sleep he could hear the waves crashing against the rocks below her apartment.

The cops got him the next morning. He was double dipping, so to speak, when they knocked on Gail's door. The South African police don't look that smart, but they are among the best in the world. Ricardo was still using the same burner phone. He had not given the number to Anneliese, but she had taken it once when Ricardo went to order more drinks, and jotted down the number. Woman's instinct if you will. The cops tracked him to

Gail's apartment. They took him into the station out on Point Road after first letting him put his clothes back on. Ricardo was acting indignant, just like any crook would, but the station officer confirmed that they were justified in arresting him. It all happened pretty quickly after that. There were multiple fraud charges against him in numerous countries. South Africa and Portugal had strong extradition laws in place and a week later he was on a plane heading back to Portugal.



MAGGIE RAN INTO CARLOS at the liquor store, the one that was adjacent to the Convenience Store. She had a hunch that he was back in town but didn't expect him to be working a minimum wage job.

"Hey," she said. Carlos looked up. He could not believe what he was seeing. There she was, right there in front of his eyes. "Hey, I thought that I would never see you again," Carlos said.

"Me too. I'm sorry. It's complicated." Carlos was quite probably the most handsome man she had ever slept with. She was going to order some Fireball but instead asked, "is there a rosñ that you can recommend?"

Carlos said, "Yes we have 'Rose-All-Day'. Two for \$20. I get off at five. What are you doing?"

"Maggie stammered, "I'm married."

"I heard. So am I. Isn't that funny. Who would have thought? There was an awkward silence then Carlos said, "there is a place on State Street. I own it but it's not rented right now. It's fully

furnished.” Maggie paid for the wine and left but she came back a half hour later. Carlos was gone. His shift was over. She asked Warren who was working the late shift. “Do you know where Carlos went?”

“Yea,” he said, “well maybe. He usually goes to the VFW for a couple of pops before he goes home to face his wife. Don’t tell him I told you that that but life is life and there can always be more than one wife. His wife is a piece of work.”

Maggie smiled and said, “Thank you Warren.”

Maggie walked into the VFW. The place was crowded. Mostly men, but there was a pretty woman near the end of the bar. Maggie asked her, “do you know a man by the name of Carlos?”

“We all know Carlos,” she said. She was chewing on Nicorette gum. There was a no-smoking policy at the VFW. “Last time I saw him he was down the end of the bar.” Maggie leaned forward and there he was, nursing a beer.

Maggie went over. “Hi,” she said. “I came looking for you.” Carlos had already downed a few beers. “They don’t serve Dom Pedro in this place but can I buy you a beer? That’s if you want to stay.”

“Yes and I want to stay.”

They were five sheets in when Carlos said, “I need to call my wife and tell her that I am working late. I will tell her that we are doing inventory.”

The place on State Street was tastefully decorated. Carlos had been trying to flip it and had hired a staging company to come and hang some pictures of places where Carlos had never been. It was still early enough that Carlos figured he had at least two hours before his wife would start to wonder where he was. He stripped down and climbed between the sheets. Maggie was in the

bathroom. “What the hell do women do in there?” he wondered. “They take forever.” Maggie finally came out. She looked amazing. She had left her dress on the floor.

“I’m sorry,” she said. I would have put on something more sexier if I had known that I would be seeing you tonight. These tighty whitey undies are not that sexy. She reached behind her back and after a few false tries, she unclipped her bra. Her tits still pointed the same way they did when Carlos first met her at Dirty Ernies. She did the same thing that she always did. The wire under the bra was a nuisance. Maggie scratched under her tits. “Those things are cruel and inhumane. Why do we have to wear them?”

Carlos said, “Just come to bed. It has been far too long. Maggie felt a sudden twinge of guilt and said, “we shouldn’t be doing this. I gotta go.” She had her tighty whiteys down around her knees when she said it, but quickly pulled them up. She grabbed her bra and found her dress. She ran for the door. Carlos was left with a hard-on gone wrong.

The next morning at the liquor store Warren asked, “so did that broad find you last night?” Carlos wasn’t saying anything. “I’m not sure what you are talking about,” he said. “What broad?”

“The blond one. She looks like she works out a lot, but she also bought some smokes. Salem Lights if I remember correctly so maybe it’s the smokes that keep her slim.”

Carlos turned to Warren and said, “it’s complicated.”

The next morning Maggie staked out the place. She noticed that Warren drove an old Ford. At noon Carlos came in for his shift. She had already written the note and slipped it to Carlos when Warren wasn’t looking. It read, “Meet me at the Wildlife Sanctuary on the Neck. Blink me the time that you get off.” Carlos blinked five times.

They had often had sex there when they lived on Flint Street. There was a tree that had fallen during Hurricane Sandy. Carlos knew right where to go. Maggie was there.

“I’m sorry about last night,” she said. “I got scared.” She had enjoyed a whole bottle of ‘Rose-All-Day’ and was well in the mood for some fun. Carlos looked nervous. “Is this for real or are you going to do another runner on me?” Maggie slipped her panties off. “It’s easier to run without undies,” she said. “You figure it out.”

The bark was rough and Maggie had some chafe on her back when it was all said and done. But it was well worth it.



SCOOTER WAS GETTING FED UP. He thought of himself as a businessman and he wanted his money, but holding Ray hostage was making him feel a little uneasy. He was worried that the tutor would say something to the authorities. He was worried that his bodyguards might say something to the authorities. It turned out that none of them spoke out. They were enjoying their paychecks and Scooter paid well. Then one day one of the bodyguards said, “Excuse me Sir.” He was talking to Scooter. “My son is struggling a bit at school. I see how well the two tutors are doing with Ray. I know that it’s an unfortunate situation with him but he seems to be doing great. Is there any chance I can have my son come over in the afternoons and sit in on the lessons? He’s the same age as Ray.”

Scooter turned and looked at him. He was a big guy and not someone to mess with. “Yes of course that would be fine, but did you say two tutors? I only hired one tutor.”

“There is a lovely lady that comes most days. Along with the first tutor that you hired. I thought that you had hired a second one.”

Scooter knew that it was time to make a move. It wouldn't take long before he got a visit from the authorities.

MAGGIE AND CARLOS met at the same downed tree a week later. They had met there most evenings except Sunday. His wife Gloria was home and she had a long list of house projects for him to complete. Neither of them spoke about their spouses and neither mentioned why Maggie had left Maine so abruptly. Carlos was tuned in enough to know that something had changed in Maggie and it was not only the fact that she was now married. It seemed like she was distracted and that the sparkle in her eyes had dimmed a little. Maggie was about to orgasm when she saw a man in camouflage coming their way. "Wait stop," she said. Carlos made like he hadn't heard but Maggie quickly pulled her pants up. So did Carlos. The man was spotting for birds and hadn't noticed them. He had a pair of binoculars glued to his eyes and was looking up into the tree branches. He had a notepad in his pocket. The man stopped every now and then to make a note, presumably of some bird that he had just seen. He walked right by Maggie and Carlos without even noticing them. "We could have kept on screwing," Maggie said. "He would never have even noticed."

Carlos said, "well there is always tomorrow. Same time?" Maggie nodded and kissed him.

Maggie was still on edge. She had been close to orgasm but it had ended abruptly. She watched Carlos drive away taking a right to turn onto the Causeway. She took a left and drove out to Chandler Hovey Park. She had been tense for a while and needed some relief. She knew that marrying Jack had been a big mistake. There was also some underlying tension between her and Carlos – he never mentioned the money or acknowledged that he got the house. Maggie convinced herself that it was just sex; nothing more, nothing less. But she knew that there was something more.

She pulled into the parking lot. Maggie took the parking space closest to the ocean and reached for the bottle of Fireball hidden under the passenger seat. She was halfway through the bottle when her phone dinged. It was Jack. "Where are you?" he texted. Maggie didn't reply. She was going to text, "none of your fucking business, but instead took another long pull on the bottle. A cute couple pulled up alongside and started to make out. Maggie took another long pull on the Fireball. The booze made her even more horny. She glanced over at the couple and watched them for a while. Then she took the bottle and placed it between her legs and squeezed. Maggie shut her eyes and squeezed a little more. She didn't want to think of Carlos; he had driven away too abruptly. Instead she started to think of Tom Brady, the quarterback for the New England Patriots. It didn't take long. The windows started to fog up. She turned the radio up a little so that the kids in the car alongside would not hear her orgasm. Maggie didn't even notice that they had already left. She rolled the windows down to clear them and tossed back the last of the Fireball.

She was not a half-mile from the lighthouse when she hit a lamppost. When the cops came they found her slumped over the steering wheel. One of the cops noted in his report that other than her being completely drunk, that the top button of her pants was open and the zipper down.

Maggie pleaded guilty and she had her license suspended for a month. Plus she had to do some classes. Jack was pissed. Maggie told him, "I really don't give a fuck if you are mad at me

Maggie and Carlos met most late afternoons at the downed tree. Occasionally Carlos would bring a hip flask for himself. Maggie had quit drinking cold turkey. She was attending DUI night classes in Lynn and if she was to be truthful with herself, she was not happy. They still had her kid, her husband was a twat, and

the sex with Carlos was becoming a bit monotonous. The police in Florida were useless and had no leads on the whereabouts of Ray. The people at The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children were speaking in platitudes. She also sensed that Carlos was getting bored. A couple of months after they had started the affair, Carlos started making excuses.

His wife Gloria was suspecting something. She was, as Warren at the liquor store said, 'a piece of work' but in some small part of Carlos's heart he loved her. She was different from Maggie. She was loud, bombastic and a bit rough around the edges but she could cook a mean paella and Carlos loved paella. Their daily trysts on the downed tree turned into weekly trysts until the leaves started to turn yellow and gold and the weather got cooler.

They tried the apartment on State Street but somehow it didn't feel right. It felt like they were having an affair; the tree sex felt like they were just screwing for the fun of it which was just what both of them wanted. Then one day Carlos said, "did I ever tell you that my sister was murdered?" Maggie was taken aback and said, "I never even knew that you had a sister."

"I did have a sister. Her name was Maria. She was pushed off a cliff in Puerto Rico by her boyfriend. The police say that she fell but her boyfriend died the same night. In my mind it was a murder suicide. We were business partners when we were kids, my sister and I. We used to raid dumpsters to feed ourselves. The dumpsters were right behind Supermercado Mr. Special, our local supermarket. We had it figured out. We knew when the supermarket was going to chuck out expired food and we were the first there, ahead of the other kids in the neighborhood. We took much more than we could eat and Maria would go door-to-door selling it to the elderly. There is a lot that you don't know about me," Carlos said.

"There is a lot that you don't know about me," Maggie said.

Carlos looked at her. "Really?" he asked. "I would never have believed you if you told me that you worked in a topless breakfast joint in Florida, but I know that you did."

"I would never have believed that you would go to a topless breakfast place for breakfast, but I know that you did. Listen Carlos," Maggie said. "I have a child. His name is Ray. I never told you and I don't know why. I gave him up for adoption right after he was born. "

"You have a child and you never told me?" Carlos said.

"You had a sister that was murdered and you never told me," Maggie replied.

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THEY SENTENCED RICARDO to five years. Well to be more accurate, 59 months with the possibility of time off for good behavior. The prosecutor was not looking to throw the book at him. He was a mid-level hustler but there were quite a lot of charges against him and even more evidence. Tracy did not attend the trial. She simply could not do it; she was still in love with him despite the fact that he was not who he said he was.

Tracy wanted to move on but instead she moved back in with her old boyfriend who owned the lobster company. He had expanded his business and was selling online. There was an empty warehouse that backed up onto his restaurant and fish market, and he got it for pennies on the dollar. He had most of the Marblehead lobstermen selling directly to him. No middleman. He never told Tracy this, but he had been, and still was screwing Jackie, the only female lobsterman that supplied his business. “I can play it both ways,” he told himself.

The online orders took off. He converted the warehouse into

a lobster prep area by building a dozen tanks and keeping them temperature regulated. He learned from watching YouTube videos just what to do. The lobsters were kept in the tanks for two days at an even 38 degrees Fahrenheit. The water temperature calmed the lobsters down before they were shipped off. The cardboard containers were in a different area. He had them custom made. They had ice packs on either end, and there were small compartments, just big enough to fit one lobster in each. They were placed in tail first, then covered with a damp cloth and taken to Logan Airport for shipping.

Tracy was almost happy. She and her sister split the money when their parents house was sold, less the legal fees that Tracy had taken out, and she got her old job back waiting tables at the Driftwood. Every now and then she thought about Ricardo and when she did her kegel clenched.

“I’M PRETTY SURE THAT we have our suspect,” Chief Jackson told the group sitting at the table. “We have her on camera wearing the baseball cap. She threw a gun into the water at the Porthole Pub in Lynn. We have her prints on the gun and we have the same prints on the baseball cap. Slater and I pulled her in hoping that she would confess but she went tight lipped and wants to lawyer up. We have quite a lot to go on with but not enough to convict. She drank out of a glass when we interrogated her and that glass is still with forensics. We have her prints and we will be able to match them against the prints that were found on the gun. We need to keep building our case before we move in and arrest her.”

Slater said, “We had our chance. Now she will be lawyered up and it’s going to be that much harder. And what if she does a run? And what would have been her motive?”

Chief Jackson said, “I will see if I can at least get a judge to sign off on a wire tap on her phone. Well an electronic tap. Wire

taps are a bit redundant these days I guess. Her motive? Not sure yet, but we will find out.”

THE THERAPIST who was splitting a paycheck with the tutor went to child services. She had an appointment with Dr. Moloney and explained what she had witnessed. She explained about the bodyguards and the fact the Ray was non-committal, at best, as to why he was being homeschooled. Moloney said that they would keep an eye on things and move in, if and when he thought it appropriate. The therapist left feeling less than certain about things. Moloney had one of his staff pay a visit to the house on the Intracoastal Waterway but there was no answer. The place looked deserted.

Scooter had moved his bodyguards and Ray to his beach house in Kill Devil Hills in the Outerbanks. He downloaded the Signal app on his phone and sent Maggie a message. “You need to kill Carlos or repay the money you took, or your baby is going to die.”

Maggie didn’t have much of a choice. She no longer had the money.

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A DAY AFTER she had been called in by Chief Jackson and Detective Slater, Maggie knew that the gig was up. She ditched her phone into the ocean at Devereux Beach and bought some burner phones at the CVS on Atlantic Avenue. She had no idea where she was going but took I-95 north until she got to Camden. She didn't leave a note.

Maggie got a place for the night and the next morning was sitting out on the small deck having a coffee and a smoke. She was about to go and check out and keep moving north when she saw a fishing boat chugging slowly toward the docks. It was the Julie K. The lady at the reception said that she could keep the room for a few more nights if she wanted. "For some reason tourism is down this year," she said. "Stay as long as you like."

Maggie watched the men offload their catch. Squid was there but left shortly after they docked. "Probably going to get laid," she mused. It took most of the day and part of the next to offload the catch. Squid came back around lunchtime. Maggie watched for a while and then walked to the docks.

“Hey,” she said. Squid looked up and saw her. “Well there’s a sight for sore eyes,” he said. “Do you want to come on board?” He extended a hand. Maggie jumped on board. “Where’s Carlos?” he asked.

Maggie said, “it’s a long story.”

“Long stories need a small splash of Jameson. Are you interested?” Maggie nodded. She followed Squid to the bridge and sat in a small chair opposite his reclining Recaro seat. Squid poured two fairly substantial glasses of whiskey. “So it’s a long story is it? Where is Carlos?”

“I killed him.”

Squid leant back in his captain’s chair. “Killed him as in dead?”

“Yes. I had no choice. No option. I loved him but they have my baby.”

Squid sat silent for a few minutes. “OK,” he said. “I have seen some serious shit in my time. Carlos was a good man.” He paused for a while and then took a long pull from his glass. “OK, well fuck me gently. How can I help? You need to tell me everything and I mean everything.”

Maggie was not sure why she was on the boat and definitely not sure why she was going to tell Squid everything, but somehow she trusted him and she needed to get it off her chest. She would have told Heather back in Marblehead, but she had panicked and run before she had the chance. She knew that Squid was no saint and she needed someone to talk to.

Squid really had done some bad shit in his life but he was the salt of the earth; or the sea if you prefer. Maggie said, “Do you mind if I smoke?” Squid shook his head. Maggie pulled out a pack of Salem Lights. She had just bought a new pack at the convenience store on the dock. She lit one and then started.

“I loved Carlos and we had a good relationship. He was a good man. He treated me well and we had some fun times together. But I had a secret that I kept from him. He never knew about my son.”

Squid squinted. “You have a son?” Maggie carried on. “OK there is a lot to unpack here.”

“I used to work at a topless breakfast place in Florida. Well they served lunch there as well, and occasionally dinner but only when Ernie felt like it. That’s where I met Carlos. I never screwed the customers, well maybe once or twice, but I did screw a guy once and got pregnant. I never told him that it was his child and I gave the baby up for adoption. It was the most heart wrenching day of my life when his new parents came and took him away. I cried for days. You can’t grow a baby in your belly for nine months and then give it away. It’s like losing a piece of yourself.” Squid nodded. He had no idea how to reply.

I knew that it was the right decision but it almost killed me. Squid’s phone rang. “It’s my girlfriend,” he said. He held up his hand. “I have to take this but I want to hear the rest of your story.”

IT WAS FIVE IN THE MORNING. A pale sun lit the eastern sky. Molly, Squid’s girlfriend, was slumped on the narrow cot in the bridge. She had joined them. There were two empty bottles of Jameson and Maggie’s mind was reeling. Squid said, “OK I used to fish out of Ft. Lauderdale. I have some contacts there. I needed to know all the details and you gave me them to me. I wish that I had known about this earlier. There was no need for you to kill Carlos, but it’s too late now and I understand. Carlos told me about a place where you used to eat in Ft. Lauderdale. The Southport Raw Bar, right? I have a friend who works there. Maybe you know him. Bit of a shady character. Goes by the name of Captain Tits. Nice guy actually. He may just be a bartender but he

has a lot of contacts. We can find your boy. I just wish that you hadn't killed Carlos."

"I know. I panicked," Maggie slurred.

"I'm suggesting that you go back to Ft. Lauderdale. Get Tits away from the bar so that he can concentrate. Tell him what you have told me. I don't judge you. I don't have kids but I think I can understand what you have been through." Molly shifted positions. "You have got no fucking idea Squid," she said. "No fucking idea."

Squid said, "do you want a coffee? We are out of Jameson." Maggie nodded.

"Do you mind if I smoke?"

"I'll take one of those," Squid said. They looked over at Molly. She had gone back to sleep and her mouth was hanging open. "We are thinking of calling it quits," Squid said.



IT TOOK MAGGIE a couple of days to recover. She was used to drinking Fireball and she thought that she would be all right, but the Jameson did a number on her. Squid and his crew shipped out. They were only going for a couple of days. Squid had heard that the waters just south of Winter Island was rich with haddock and monkfish. Maggie watched them motor toward the harbor entrance from her small deck. She was nursing a strong coffee and had a pillbox of Advil alongside the coffee pot. She had been popping a couple every hour.

Maggie booked a trip to Ft. Lauderdale and drove to the airport in Portland. She dropped the rental off. The flight had been easy. She had managed to get a few small nips of fireball through security and added them to her coke. She thought that the stewardess had noticed her tipping them into her drink, but if she did she didn't say anything and Maggie got a small buzz on. It helped ease her headache.

She landed at Ft. Lauderdale International Airport. It was familiar territory. Her UBER driver was from Cuba. He wanted to

talk about the earthquake that had recently taken out half of the island, but Maggie was concentrating on other things. She tipped the driver 20% on the app and handed him another \$20 in cash. “Thank you,” she said.

The Raw Bar has a distinct smell to it. A little seedy for sure. There was definitely a smell of spilled beer and crushed pretzels, and while this cannot be fully verified, it also smelled a little of pussy. The heat outside was intense. Maggie opened the door and the cool air hit. It took some time for her eyes to adjust but there was Captain Tits working the bar.

Maggie pulled her long blond hair into a ponytail and sidled up to the counter. Tits was chatting with an older lady at the end of the bar. He was animated; a long story about when he had once sailed from Costa Rica through the South Pacific to Australia. He turned and saw Maggie.

“Hey Mate, been a while. What are you having?”

Maggie smiled. “A case of the good stuff and half of it is yours.”

Tits poured her a big Dom Pedro. “So you are back in town?” Maggie nodded. “For a while.” Captain Tits was making himself available on her tab and just before the happy hour rush started he told Maggie a story.

“Did I ever tell you that I was once married?” Maggie didn’t have the words so she blurted out.

“To a woman?”

Captain Tits smiled. “Ha ha. Yes. Yes she was of the female sex,” he said. “I was twenty. Living in Sydney, as in Sydney, Australia. Rents were cheap back then. Not so much these days. But I got married. I had a job with the railways. One night I came home. It was a warm night. I unlocked the door and heard some

noise in the kitchen. I felt that warm glow in the lower part of my tummy. You know the one. I was a tad horny so I slipped my pants off. My shirt too. My underpants as well. It sounded like my wife was washing dishes. Bless her. I stuck my dick around the corner of the door and I said, “someone has their eye on you. There was a bit of silence so I looked around the door. It was my mother-in-law doing the dishes.”

MAGGIE AND CAPTAIN TITS went to Dirty Ernies for an early dinner. Ernie was thrilled to see Maggie. “Do you need your old job back?” he asked. Maggie smiled. “Ernie you have always been so kind to me over the years. This here is Gerry. Well you may know him as Captain Tits.” Ernie took him by the hand. “Tits and I go back thirty years. We are old friends. Accomplices even, if you know what I mean? What are you eating? I just upgraded the menu. The special tonight is alligator. It’s fried in buttermilk and Panco. I add some Thai green curry paste to it and with some mashed sweet potatoes and ochre on the side it’s a real feast.” Maggie looked at the menu. “That sounds good Ernie, but I think that I will have the pulled pork. Not the sandwich. The pulled pork dinner plate with rice and beans. Captain Tits said, “I will take the alligator.”

It was getting late when Maggie broached the subject. Tits knew of Scooter. “I know him. He comes into the bar every now and then. I would not trust that fucker as far as I could throw him. I know where he lives and I know his vices. He’s a pedophile you know? Hard words to digest but the man is a true wanker. A devious little prick. What can I do to help?”

Maggie let the words settle. She felt her heart sink. Then she said, “he has my baby.”

“She’s done a runner.” Chief Jackson was having a late morning coffee with Detective Slater. They were at the Java Sun Cafe on

Atlantic Avenue. “I asked Judge Foreplay or Foreman or whatever her name is, for a tap on her phone and she granted it, but the killer has long since ditched the phone. It’s probably in the bay off the Porthole Pub by now. But here’s the thing. I just got a message from forensics, literally ten minutes ago. The prints that she left on the glass of water when we called her in, match the prints on the gun they found in the water off the Porthole Pub. I think that we have enough to convict. But first we have to find her.”

“We will get her in the end,” Slater said. “You know as well as I do that criminals always come back to the scene of the crime.”

“I hope so. I am getting some shit from the Selectmen. I could lose my job if we don’t bring her in and charge her soon.”

“I know,” Slater said scratching his balls. “I know.”

MAGGIE STAYED WITH ONE of the other waitresses from Ernie’s at her place for a week. She was trying to be calm but it was hard to be calm when she knew that her child might be in more danger than she had originally thought. He had been gone for far too long and now she knew that his captor was a pedophile it was ten times worse. She went to the Raw Bar for lunch for the next couple of days but didn’t have much of an appetite. Captain Tits was sympathetic. “I have done some digging around,” he told her. “I may have some good news for you. I think that I know where your boy is.” Just then the phone rang.

“Hey Tits, Squid here. I heard that you met with Maggie. Anything new to add?”

“Yes, I think I may know where the kid is.”

“How so?”

“I’m a bartender. I know everything.”

“Is Maggie still there?”

“Yes. She’s right in front of me as we speak.”

“Give her the phone. Every time I call her, her phone is either dead or the number has been changed.” Tits handed the phone over.

“Maggie hi. Squid here. I know that you and Tits have talked. I have some new information for you in addition to what Tits has told you. That guy Scooter once molested a boy by the name of Matt Grates. Grates is now a State Rep running for congress in Florida. He seems to have a chip on his shoulder, actually both shoulders if truth be told. He’s anti everything. Anti-blacks, anti-gays, anti-fags, and most definitely anti-women. You name it, he’s anti-it.”

“Ok so that’s all great. How is that going to help me?”

“He’s on the Christian Right, but has a soft spot for children. Not in any sexual sense. He is kind of a creep in every other way but he may be able to help.”

Maggie finished her dolphin burger. She wiped the plate with a small piece of leftover bun, downed the dregs of her Dom Pedro, and said to Captain Tits, “if you know where he is, when can we get him?”

CAPTAIN TITS had his own network. Most of them were old sailing buddies. His first call was to Woodie, but he didn’t offer much. He then called The Beast. “I will locate the child,” he said. “Don’t you worry about that.”

The Beast and his friends quickly found the house in the Outerbanks and after a week of staking it out they figured out the routine. They assumed that the kid that they saw was Ray and that he was being tutored by a pretty young red head. Tits turned up the heat. He had one of his friends pose as an Amazon delivery guy. The man knocked on the door. Ray answered but his new

tutor was right there. She took the package, signed for it, and told the guy to have a nice day.

“OK we have him.” He sent the video via Signal. Tits was slinging drinks at the Raw Bar when he got the message. He forwarded the footage to Maggie. “I can have my guys go in and get him. My guy had a hidden head cam. There may be some casualties, but if you can confirm that it’s your boy I will send my guys in as soon as possible.

A few minutes later the video landed in Maggie’s inbox. She could hardly believe how much Ray had grown. He was only on tape for a few seconds but Maggie knew that it was him. “Please go and get him,” she texted back. “Please.”

“Let me talk to Squid first. I know that you are anxious and you have every right to be anxious, but we need to take this fucker down once and for all.”



THE MARBLEHEAD POLICE. got a tip. Maggie was at Moodies Diner in Waldoboro, Maine. A couple of years earlier the local cops had convinced Vince, the guy who owned the restaurant, to install some cameras. “It’s harmless,” they told him. Just a precaution. Vince had agreed but what Vince didn’t know was that the video feed went straight to a website that used eye recognition technology to filter their guests and right there, on tape, eating a slice of pecan pie, was Maggie.

Chief Jackson mumbled into his phone. He was talking to the Chief of Police in Waldoboro. “Can I get one of your guys to get a tail on her? She’s eating at a place called Moodies Diner.”

“Good place that,” the Chief replied. “Good place. It has the best pies. Yes I will send one of my men over there right now. Please text or email me a photo of this young lady so that we have something to work with.”

Maggie was on her way back to Camden to meet with Squid. She wanted to discuss with him what Tits had said. She wanted to talk to him in person. She didn’t notice the white pick-up truck

pull out of the parking lot just behind her. It tailed her all the way to Camden and the cop watched while she checked into the same place where she had stayed before.

“Oh you’re back?” The sweet girl that worked the reception asked. “It’s so nice to see you again. Would you like the same room?”

“Thank you.”

The Jukie K was at the dock. Maggie could see the boat from her small deck overlooking Camden harbor. Some of the crew were doing maintenance. Maggie didn’t see Squid. She had called him the day before. Squid knew that she was coming and had stocked up on Jameson. Maggie had asked Tits to have his men hold off for a couple more days before getting Ray.

Maggie knocked on the hull and invited herself onboard. Molly was there. They had already started on the Jameson. Squid, quite out of character, gave her a hug. Molly extended a damp hand and lit a joint.

“So I talked to Tits,” Squid said. “We had a good long chat. His guys have definitely found your boy and they can go and get him whenever we like, but we also need to nail this fucker Scooter. Your boy is in the Outerbanks and we will pick him up there. First we need to nail this pedophile prick.”

“OK, I trust you. Actually I don’t have anyone else to trust.”

“Tits said that he has a friend who knows a guy by the name of Matt Grates. He’s a State Rep running for Congress. Another total wanker but he knows, or at least says that he knows, a judge that works at the Florida County Court. Tits had his guys put a tail on Scooter and they have him at his home not far from where he grew up in West Palm Beach, close to Mar-a-Lago, you know, where that asshole Trump lives? This guy Grates is running for congress and is a publicity hound. His politics suck, but he may be of use. I am glad that we are talking about this face-to-face. Let’s make a plan.”

Molly was lying on the narrow bunk on the bridge. She scratched her crotch and said, “top me up.” She held out her glass. Squid filled it with strait Jameson; no ice. Squid was hoping that she would pass out.

CHIEF JACKSON went back to the same judge who had signed off on the phone tap. “All I am asking,” he said, “is for you to authorize an arrest warrant. We are pretty sure that she was the one who killed Officer Bigblow and the guy at the Convenience Store. We have fingerprints all over the gun and the baseball cap that she was wearing the night of the murders. We also have her fingerprints on the glass that she drank from the day we pulled her in for questioning. It’s enough to convict, I’m sure of it. The town board is pissed at me. Property prices in Marblehead are dropping because of the murders. I have to show some progress.”

The judge, Judge Merryweather, looked at the Chief. “You and I are old friends,” she said. “I don’t like your language. This is a court of law. I will grant you an arrest warrant, but wait a couple of days. I will have my clerk contact the judge’s offices in Camden. I need to make sure that if she is arrested that they can bring her back to Massachusetts without any issues. Also you know that her defense lawyers will view the fingerprints on the glass as entrapment, right?”

Chief Jackson nodded. “Thank you judge. Thank you.”

SQUID, FOR ALL HIS BLUE-COLLAR upbringing, was pretty smart. “I have this new app on my phone,” he said. “It’s called Signal. It’s much better than WhatsApp. Let’s give Captain Tits a call.” They called him on the landline at the Raw Bar.

He answered the phone. “Raw Bar. What you smoking and

who are you poking? Captain Tits here.” Maggie stifled a laugh. She never got tired of his opening.

“Tits, Squid here. I am with Maggie. You are on speaker. Do you have a moment?” They could hear a pause while some glasses were being loaded into the dishwasher.

“Yup, the counter is empty right now. What’s up?”

Squid said, “I will wire you some money. Can you have your guys go in and get Ray. Get him to a safe place and let me know when you have him. You need to get that asshole Scooter as well. I am going to contact Matt Grates, you know that wanker who is running for Congress. He will be all over this. Get your guys to get Ray back to Florida as quickly as possible. I will organize a press meet. That fuckhead Grates can take credit for finding the boy. He will love the publicity and it will protect us for a while from too much scrutiny.”

Tits said, “hang on, I have a customer.” They could hear him on the speaker. “A double or a triple?” There was some clinking of glasses. “I’m back,” he said. “Sorry about that. I have my guys there already. It’s going to be a piss easy job. I will send you my Venmo details. When you say go, we will go.”

THE POLICE CAME TO The Inn where Maggie was staying and asked the receptionist if she could get Ms. Maggie Mayweather down to reception. The police in Maine are polite like that. The receptionist looked down at her register. “We don’t have anyone by that name staying here. Maggie had moved out. There was a spare bunk on the Juie K and Squid had offered it. It was not about money. Maggie had a lot of money but she was lonely and wanted friends. Her life was spinning on a really thin thread.

It spun a little more out of control when Squid knocked on her door well past midnight. The sex that they had was far better

than anyone else she had slept with, well maybe not quite as good as the sex she had had with Carlos, or Onne for that matter, but pretty close.

SQUID CONTACTED REPRESENTATIVE Grates office. “I have something that Mr. Grates might be interested in,” he told the lady that answered the phone. “When he has a chance can he call me back?”

“You need to be more specific. Mr. Slates is a very busy man.”

“Ok, I understand. Just tell him that the word is Scooter.”

Less than five minutes later Grates called him back. “What’s this all about?” He demanded.

“Your friend Scooter has abducted and held a small boy for over a year. I know where he is and I have a lot of information that might be useful to your campaign.”

“Go on.”

“My men are going to move in this weekend. They are going to get the boy and take in Scooter. They will tie him up and bring him to Ft. Lauderdale. Along with the kid. I will have someone brief your staff. I have already had Judge Aldridge give it the big OK. You just need to call him and tell him your side of the story. It could be a big press moment for you.”

Grates smiled, “payback has always been a bitch.”



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IT ALL HAPPENED pretty quick. Scooter liked to visit his place in the Outerbanks on weekends. He had recently bought a new two-seater plane. It was a way for him to bring young boys along without anyone asking too many questions. The commercial airlines were onto him and he was on a list of potential pedophiles.

He landed at Pine Island Airport just as it was getting dark. Captain Tits had his guys there and they watched the Lancair 320 land with a slight bump and then taxi to the hangar. Scooter got out with a boy who could have not been much older than 12. Someone took their luggage and hustled them into a waiting limo. They drove south toward Kill Devil Hills. The guys followed at a discreet distance. They parked behind a sand dune and hopped out of the car. Scooter let himself into the house and watched as all but one of the bodyguards left. The lights came on and they could see Ray's silhouette in the window. They could also see the other young boy.

“What do you think?” Zach asked. “Should we go in now, or wait?”

“Let’s wait a bit. He ordered pizza last Friday. I’m betting that he will order pizza tonight. If that happens we can get closer and when he opens the door we can take him. They crept closer to the house and sure enough an hour later a Domino’s van pulled up. The driver, a young kid with pimples, jumped out and went to the side of his van. He emerged with two boxes in a pre-warmed pouch. He rang the doorbell and Scooter answered. That was when they took him. The bodyguard was out back waiting for his slice of pizza and didn’t hear a thing. They grabbed Ray and the two boys as well. The kids were frightened. Scooter was indignant but the sock in his mouth muffled a lot of what he had to say. They hog-tied him and stuffed him into the trunk of the rental. “Don’t worry boys,” he said to the two kids, “we are taking you home.”

It was a twelve hour drive from Kill Devil Hills to Ft. Lauderdale. They could hear Scooter thumping around in the trunk but after a while he settled down. Zach called Tits and Tits called Maggie. “We have your boy. He’s safe. We also have that fucker Scooter. I am going to call Squid now and give him the news. I saw on my Facebook feed that State Rep Grates is going to announce a press conference. I sent him a text telling him that we had Scooter in custody. It turns out that Grates went to the University of Florida with the new Attorney General. I can’t remember his name, but he may come in use down the road. Can you call Sandra and Brett?”

Maggie was trying to hold back tears but it was a no-go. The past year had been a nightmare. She had actually killed Carlos. She had shot him; as in shot and killed him. The police were onto her but her boy was safe and that was what mattered the most to her. She left her bunk on the Julie K and went to the bridge.

“Did you hear?” Squid asked.

“Yes,” Maggie replied. “I heard from Tits. I was thinking of going to the press junket in Florida but the cops are on my ass

and I can’t be seen in public. I told Sandra and Brett and they are going. I can’t tell you how thrilled they were to get the news. Brett had taken the call and he was stoic but I could hear Sandra wailing.”

Tits called back. “Governor DeSantis is going to be there. They have been looking to bust this drug ring for years. Stupid fuckers; politicians. If only they came into my bar and ordered a drink or two. They would know everything that’s going on in their community. If they had only just asked, I would have told them. You have no idea the shit that goes down right here at this counter. Get anyone a few drinks in them and they open up. Let’s see what happens.”

They dropped Scooter off at the Broward County Jail. All they had to do was show the note from Judge Aldridge authorizing a citizen’s arrest. Their next stop was Sandra and Brett’s house. The boy that Scooter had taken to the Outerbanks was taken into Child Services.

Maggie had been trying to hold it all in but Tits’ guys had been Facetiming her on the drive from the Outerbanks to Florida. He Facetimed her when they pulled up to 27 Longwood Drive where Brett and Sandra still lived. When she saw Sandra run screaming toward the car and hold her son, Maggie lost it. Brett was a few paces behind her with tears streaming down his face. It had been almost two years since Ray had been abducted.

GOVERNOR DESANTIS, never one to miss a good PR opportunity, had changed his schedule. He was supposed to meet with a family who had lost their son in a drive-by shooting, but this story was just too good not to miss. He was there on the steps of the State House. Sandra and Brett were there too. Ray was there. Matt Grates was there. He couldn’t wipe the stupid grin off his face. You would think that he had just won the lottery.

Maggie was watching it all on a CNN News Feed on Squid's iPhone.

"Who the fuck did Grates's hair? He looks like either Beavis or Butthead. I can't tell which, plus it looks like he used potting soil as a coloring agent."

Squid laughed.

Molly was in the bridge too but she had smoked more than just a little pot and was squinting at the window. There was a loud knock on the door. Squid said, "Maggie hit the bricks. I can deal with this."

The cops knocked a second time. Even louder. Maggie ran for it. She went out the emergency exit and was in her cabin seconds later. She watched from below as the cops went into the bridge. Then she took the opportunity to make a run for it.

THE GOVERNOR had recently had his hair tinted and his teeth whitened. Matt Grates, the press had started calling him Slippery Matt, was there smiling more than was necessary. Sandra and Brett were dressed in their Sunday best. Ray was holding the Governor's hand but he didn't know why. It felt a little damp and more than a little sweaty.

"We have broken up this drug and sex ring," the Governor said. "The drug operation has been led by a Mr. Scot Tempesta who has been feeding drugs to all the main cities up the I-95 corridor and beyond. Plus there has been a child sex ring. We rescued a young boy who had been held by Mr. Tempesta for almost two years." The press core clicked away; the Governor and State Rep Grates beamed as if they had just won two tickets to the Super Bowl with free air tickets and accommodations thrown in.

Captain Tits was watching the press junket on the TV in the Raw Bar. "Whose the 'we' that rescued the boy and busted the

drug ring," he said out loud to no one in particular. "Fucking politicians. I bet that DeSantis couldn't get laid in a whorehouse with a hundred dollars in one hand and a fistful of recommendations in the other." The girl at the bar stifled a laugh. "You know that you are speaking out loud don't you?"

"I hate politicians," Tits said. "That guy Tempesta. He is lower than dirt. He even makes DeSantis look good, well except I have no reason to believe that the esteemed Governor ever molested any young boys, but you never know."

"You never know that's for sure," the girl said. "Do you remember that twat Mark Foley? He was charged with molesting two teenage boys who had formerly served as congressional pages. He later got the charges squashed. He had a record of anti-gay legislation and was later caught in a gay sex scandal. They are all a bunch of assholes. Politicians."

"This beer is on me," said Captain Tits. He slid a cold one across to the girl. "I am in a mood to celebrate."



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THE COPS BUSTED INTO the house in West Palm as well as the house in Kill Devil Hills. Scooter thought that he had been clever about hiding the kiddie porn on his desktop, as well as the details from his drug running business and the children that he had had sex with, but it turned out that he was not very good at hiding anything. It wasn't long before the two tutors were called in, the one from Ft. Lauderdale and the other from Kill Devil Hills. They told everything. Less than a week later they got the thugs, the ones that had murdered the man in Nashville and, as it turned out at their trial, almost a dozen others who had lost their balls because of Scooter. Their signature move was a good giveaway. Scooter was screwed. The judge had frozen his bank accounts and had granted him a court appointed lawyer. Governor DeSantis was making a big deal out of it all.

"We will never let this kind of thing happen in our great state again," he told the press. Of course he missed the irony of the I-95 corridor, the very same corridor that starts in Florida and had been fed by the drug trade coming up from South America

through the Caribbean for years. DeSantis had railed in support of Trump's border wall but the Florida coastline was still as porous as a pair of lace knickers on a hot summer night.

CHIEF JACKSON got fired. There was a blunt article in the Marblehead Reporter which was also picked up by the Boston Globe and Marblehead Patch. The part that burned him the most was the part that read, "Our police department is and has been run by a bunch of hacks who care more about how much their cops can make running traffic detail and earning overtime, than solving crimes. There were two murders in this town. A brutal murder at the Convenience Store and a murder in cold blood of Sergeant Bigblow in the VFW parking lot. Bigblow had two children, one at the Village School and one at the Veterans Middle School. They are now living without a father. Carlos Ramirez left behind a grieving wife."

The killer, a lady by the name of Maggie Mayflower, lived just a few blocks from the police station and they still couldn't figure it out. They can't find her even to this day despite the resources that this town has thrown at Chief Jackson's department. Enough is enough."

Chief Jackson called a final meeting with his detectives before leaving his desk for the last time. "You are a bunch of bumbling idiots," he yelled. "Especially you Slater. Your incompetence cost me my job. You were never any good at your job anyway. You are just a mean little prick who hides behind a uniform and a badge. We had her here and she escaped. Those fuckers in Maine are even more useless but you are part of my police department."

"Were," one of the detectives mumbled.

Slater stormed out but not before yelling, "If we didn't have

most of our cops on traffic detail we might be a half decent police force, but you want them directing traffic instead of being police officers. This is on you Chief Jackson. All you ever cared about was the overtime that the detail cops could earn and then have them hero worship you for their big salaries." Officer Harris started to protest, but quickly sat down. He knew that Slater was right.

"Well gentlemen, sayonara," said Chief Jackson. I am taking a well deserved holiday with my wife. We are going to Ft. Lauderdale. A friend of mine told me about a place called the Southport Raw Bar. I guess that they have good food there and the beer is cheap. See you losers later."

LENNY WAS SITTING at the counter. It was just past six in the morning. "A refill please," he said. Henry came over with the coffee pot. "Did you hear that Chief Jackson got the axe?" Lenny shrugged, "it was about time. The guy was as useless as tits on a bull. All he cared about was traffic detail. I knew that he would never be able to solve a murder. How hard can it be?"

"Here you go," Henry said. "Your breakfast sandwich. How come you wanted ham instead of bacon this time?" Lenny sighed. He said, "I am on a diet. My wife Connie is making me diet. I even have to take walk every now and then." They heard the door creak. It had creaked since Henry had taken the place over from his Dad twenty years earlier, but he had never done anything about it. Some places have a little bell to announce the arrival of a new customer; Henry had a squeaky door. Henry liked it that way. In walked Jack. He looked glum.

"Coffee?" Henry asked. "I got a new coffee maker. The burner on the old one finally crapped out."

"Thank you."

Jack plonked himself down on the seat next to Lenny. “You know, some days are diamonds and some days are stone,” he said.

“Very poetic,” Henry said. “Here is your coffee. He slid the sugar pot over and dropped off a few pods of coffee whitener. Why so down?”

“It was my wife who killed Carlos and Sergeant BigBlow. I know for one hundred percent sure that it was her.” Lenny looked at Henry and Henry looked at Lenny. Lenny said, “we knew that all along. Henry here, he and me, we figured it out months ago. If only the cops would stop by and get a cup of coffee here instead of Dunkin’ Donuts we could have told them.”

MAGGIE DROVE NORTH. She had a friend who ran a boatyard in Southwest Harbor which was at the end of a lovely peninsular on the coast of Maine. The yard manager, Cabot Lyman had known her Dad since they were kids and had told her, “You can hide here for a while but come spring, you are going to have to find another place to stay. We have our regulars come in for spring commissioning. They are going to need this place.”

“Thank you,” Maggie said.

It was early March and much of the snow had melted. The vendors with their street carts were already setting up their shrimp stands. “Just broil them lightly, add some Old Bay seasoning and it will be the finest meal you will have ever had. Plus there is a white wine that you can buy at Trader Joe’s. It costs only two bucks. I can’t remember the name of it but it goes very well with shrimp.” Maggie bought a pound and went back to her apartment. It overlooked the bay. There was already a little activity in the boatyard. Some of the boats had their plastic covers removed and the yard crew were starting to rig them. She

felt good, despite having murdered her lover. She knew that her son was safe. She might have been a crap mother but she had tried and she had feelings and now Ray was safe. She would always be his mommy.

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SQUID HAD BEEN TRYING to sell his fishing boat for a while. Molly was on his case all the time.

“You are never here and my child bearing years are almost over. It’s either the boat or me.” That was what she said over and over again, especially when she was high, which was most of the time. Squid was getting close to the end of his rope. He slammed the door to her apartment and bought a six-pack which he drank in his car.

Maggie had reached out to Squid through Signal. They were talking daily. She was laying low in the apartment that Cabot Lyman had loaned her. Maggie was living mostly on boiled shrimp and a box of french fries which she picked up at the gas station on the corner of Main and Cilchester Street. The fries were actually quite good especially with a little Franks hot sauce. She had moved the money offshore and frozen the account. There had been one cop that had come by, a bit of a dim-witted guy, but he was ever so pleasant. Maggie told him that her name was Sheila, not Maggie, and the cop left

Maggie messaged, “come and get me.” Squid already had the paperwork done. He had a hunch. He was at Molly’s apartment when the message came in. “Come and get me.” There it was in black and white on his phone.

“Come and get me.”

He told Molly, “I am shipping out tomorrow. I might be gone for a while.”

Molly took another long draw on her joint. “Yea fuckoff,” she said. “It doesn’t matter. I have been screwing Bert from the 7/11 when you’re gone anyway. He has a long, but delicately thin dick, in case you were wondering. Plus he always has good weed.”

Squid slammed the door. He went to the dock. He left a blank signed check at the dockmasters office with a note that read. “Write out what I owe you. Give yourself a little extra. It has been fun but I am not coming back.” There was an ATM right outside the dockmasters office. Squid took out as much as the machine would allow.

Squid motored north on the Julie K. He took only one crew with him. Skippy. One of his loyal men. The only one, other than Carlos, who had stayed on as crew after the storm on the Grand Banks.

“We are going to dock briefly in Southwest Harbor,” Squid told him. “You will get off. Here is some money.” He handed him an envelope of hundreds. “My fishing days are over.”

It was a rough night but Squid was as happy as he had ever been. Just after midnight they could see the lights of Stonington as they threaded delicately through the myriad islands to the south. At dawn they passed to the north of Swans Island and just before lunch the Julie K motored slowly into Southwest Harbor.

Maggie was on the dock when Squid pulled alongside. Skippy

tossed the lines ashore and then followed them. Maggie jumped on board. She looked amazing. Her blond hair was pulled tight into a ponytail. She lit a Salem Lights. Squid gunned the engine turning northeast once they had cleared the harbor. “Hold on tight,” he said. “This ship is heading for Canada.”

“Thank you Mark,” Maggie said. “Thank you. Do you mind if I light some incense?”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BRIAN 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 and their cat Ziggy. Their five children and a grandson stop by every now and then for a free meal and a warm bed.

BOOKS BY BRIAN HANCOCK

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and fun characters.”**

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