

A NOVEL

COINCIDENCE



ALAN MAY

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Toronto and New York

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*To Karen and Ryan,
for providing me
with the inspiration and motivation
to write this novel*

PREFACE

Writing a book had been in my mind for more than thirty years, but I was never able to come up with a viable topic. It was when my daughter Karen sailed around the world on the *Concordia* as her grade eleven year of high school, through the Class Afloat program, that the topic became obvious.

“How was the cruise?” many of Karen’s friends inquired of her upon her return, but her year away was far from a cruise. In fact, it was a lot of work. She and her classmates were required to help maintain and sail the ship while keeping up with a normal amount of school work. It was tough on her to get up in the middle of the night to do her two-hour watch, as it was when she and the entire crew were called on deck at night to perform sail changes. Not to mention washing dishes and cleaning the mess and galley, tasks routinely required of her and her fellow students.

Initially this book was a record of Karen’s travel, to provide insight into what was required of students aboard the ship. As I wrote the manuscript, however, it evolved into a novel. Although *Coincidence* is fiction, much of the story line was inspired by what happened that year, including the process of finding out about the program, the interview, and the romance. Names have been changed, including those of professional crew members. The names *Inspiration* and Blue Water Academy are fictional. To paraphrase Joseph Heller, from his book *No Laughing Matter*, everything in the book is true except that which is not.

Obviously the drug-running part of the story is totally fictional, but a medical emergency at sea did happen.

Karen, my son Ryan, and I have sailed onboard the *Concordia* and have a great love for the ship. The *Concordia* actually sank in a storm in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Brazil in February 2010. There was no loss of life, which is a testament to the continual training that was a normal part of life aboard ship. Some of that training is outlined in this book. I am pleased to say that a new ship has been obtained and the program continues.

I am also pleased to say, as I look back on it all, that my daughter’s adventure set me on an adventure of my own: writing this book, as well as a sequel, which will cover the rest of the first semester voyage from Easter Island through the South Pacific to Bali, Indonesia.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A great deal of thanks must go out to Terry Davies, the owner of the *Concordia* and the Class Afloat program, whose guidance and direction brought clarity and insight to this novel. Early in his life Terry had a vision of high school classes on the sea, an educational model which he developed in his master's degree thesis. He put his model into practice when he established the West Island College in Montreal and Calgary, and Class Afloat, which operated out of Montreal.

A number of other people provided invaluable assistance during the writing of *Coincidence*:

Carolyn Currie, who did a magnificent job of editing the original manuscript. Because this is my first book, I needed a lot of direction from Carolyn; I hope she will work with me again on future books. And Donald G. Bastian for his editing and publishing assistance.

Brian McClure and Jan Campbell, both teachers, who provided their respective opinions on the differences between the private and public education systems.

Andrew Baldwin, an onboard teacher who provided insight into the challenges teachers face when exposed to students twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

My daughter Karen, son Ryan, and Francois Ares, all of whom sailed aboard the *Concordia* and who provided knowledge of everyday life aboard an educational tall ship, as did Roger Nugent, the bosun of the ship.

Andrzej Straburzynski, Captain of the *Concordia*, who was forever concerned about the safety of his precious cargo, his students.

Wojciech Wacowski, doctor and second mate aboard the *Concordia*, and Dr. Bryan Thomas, both of whom provided medical input, helping me with my descriptions of the injuries suffered by the characters in the novel.

And finally, four particularly helpful books: *Dawn to Dusk in the Galapagos* by Rita Gelman and Tui De Roy (Boston: Little Brown, 1991); *Galapagos: A Natural History* by John Kricher (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Natural History Series, 2002); *Galapagos: Island Lost in Time* by Tui De Roy (Moore, NY: Penguin, 1980); and *Galapagos: Islands of Change* by Lynne Myers and Christopher Myers (New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1995).



Melissa came bouncing through the door on one of those highs she was famous for. She was overflowing with energy and bursting at the seams to tell someone, anyone, about the terrific movie she and her friends had just seen.

As with most teenaged girls, movie going on the weekend was a big part of Melissa's life. She would have preferred to go with her boyfriend rather than with other girls, but, alas, she didn't have one. That, of course, was the fault of her parents for making her attend a private girls' school rather than a coed school. She was not happy with this aspect of her education. She doubted her parents' view that one day she would look back on her school years and be thankful for the sound education the private system provided, in spite of the absence of boys.

The movie that night had been *White Squall*, the tragic and true tale of an old eighty-foot tall ship called the *Albatross* that had sailed around the world in the early sixties. The crew of the *Albatross* is a group of students—all of them boys; perhaps this accounted for part of Melissa's interest—completing their final year of high school aboard a working ship. They are exposed to discipline, sail training, and hard work in conditions that were often far from ideal. The owner/captain of the ship is the school's director; he and his wife and one additional teacher teach all the classes onboard. A cook and a bosun round out the crew. The students, who come from backgrounds ranging from middle class to filthy rich, are participating in this program for a variety of reasons: to gain sailing experience, to follow in family footsteps, to learn discipline, to overcome a family tragedy. In the case of one family, the parents want their son as far away from home as they can get him.

This assorted group is thrown together as a "family" forced to work out their problems and difficulties in a tough environment. Sailing such a ship is not easy. It requires day and night watch and maintenance, together with classes, studying, cleaning, and cook-ing—and all of this on very little sleep.

And then, at the end of the film, in spite of valorous attempts by the young crewmen, the ship sinks.

Even in the face of this heart-rending ending, Melissa fell in love with the thought of going on such an adventure. At seventeen, midway through grade twelve, she was ready to conquer the world. She had good marks at school and had been chosen house captain, class president, and prefect. She was tall—nearly six feet—and keenly athletic, excelling in every sport she attempted, with the exception of badminton and tennis, games in which she had a lot of power but not enough finesse.

And she was a sailor. Sailing had always been part of her life. As a scrawny, crop-haired six-year-old she had spent a winter with her family on a thirty-foot sailboat gunk-holing from island to island in the Bahamas. They had returned through the Intracoastal Waterway to her home in Pickering, Ontario, some two thousand miles away. The only thing she could remember about the trip was standing on an upside-down pail to steer the boat, and calling herself the captain.

She had taken sailing lessons at the local yacht club and by grade eleven had attained the second-highest racing level possible, the silver. She had been reasonably successful in many regattas, including the National Youth Championships, sailing a singlehanded thirteen-foot Laser Radial sailboat. She'd be a natural in a program like the one portrayed in the movie; she was sure of it.

The next morning she phoned her friend Stephanie to tell her all about *White Squall*. Wouldn't it be just super if they could spend a year of high school sailing on a ship like that?

But Stephanie's reaction was lukewarm at best. She had a friend, Johanna, who had taken a similar trip just two years earlier, sailing around the world while completing grade twelve. Stephanie had not found her description of the trip appealing. As far as she was concerned, the final year of school was difficult enough already, what with maintaining your grades and applying to university. Why would anyone want to add the extra pressure of crewing an old-fashioned sailing ship? Did Melissa even understand how much work that was?

But Melissa was undeterred. She got Johanna's phone number and called that afternoon, only to find that she was away at university. She was disappointed that she couldn't pump Johanna for information right that minute. She did manage to get the phone number for the program Johanna had attended—the Blue Water Academy in Montréal. But by then she was thwarted again. It was Sunday and no one answered the phone.

For the rest of the day Melissa could think and talk about nothing else. Phoning Stephanie again, she gleaned just enough information to further fuel her enthusiasm. Johanna's class had started their voyage on the east coast at Halifax, going on to cross the Atlantic, cruise the Mediterranean, and then head down through the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean, stopping in Australia, then crossing the South Pacific to Hawaii, ending in Victoria on Vancouver Island.

The thought of it all boggled Melissa's mind. This called for more investigation.



The investigation, as it turned out, was her father's responsibility. As Melissa got out of the car at the school the next day, she threw her backpack over her shoulder and reminded him one last time.

"Dad, please, please, please don't forget to phone Blue Water Academy."

Saying no to his exuberant daughter was not one of Craig Jordan's talents. The young-sounding woman who answered his call once he got into the office explained that the program was for grade eleven and twelve students who would continue their education while sailing to different parts of the world on a large ship that they would crew. She agreed to fax a copy of the brochure to him immediately and to put an application package in the mail.

"Well?" Melissa demanded the moment she entered the car when he came by for her after school.

She couldn't wait to get home and see the brochure. She read it from cover to cover again and again, from the Mission Statement ("drawing upon the social dynamics of life and work in the microcosm of a sailing ship and first-hand explorations in the macrocosm of the planet, Blue Water Academy students forge new standards in leadership, personal development, and academic excellence") to the Itinerary ("we have trekked across glaciers in Greenland, scaled volcanoes in Hawaii, visited with the descendants of the *Bounty* on Pitcairn Island, hiked in Patagonia, explored Easter Island, slept in caves beneath the Moa, camped in the Serengeti, and explored the ruins of Mount Olympus"). Her excitement grew with every word.

She didn't even need to read about the ship (the "magnificent" *Inspiration*) or the academic program (which might include an African safari or "engaging in political discussions with a Saudi Arabian Prince") to know she wanted to go. It would be just what it said in the brochure: a "Passport to Education."

Two days later, the application materials arrived. Melissa filled out the forms using her very best penmanship. She practiced writing the answers on scratch paper before deciding on which one to use. Craig and Carol, dumbfounded by the speed at which their daughter's whim was becoming reality, proofed her final edition. Melissa hand-delivered the package, along with a deposit, to the FedEx office, sending it priority mail for arrival the next day.

Then there were the reference forms. Who could she possibly ask to vouch for her? She needed two adults who knew her well and who could be counted on to write glowingly of her accomplishments and character. Well, the first was a no-brainer: Uncle Jack. He was an honorary uncle only, being no relation at all. He was her father's oldest friend. Nor, for that matter, was Jack his name, but he greatly preferred it to the one his parents had saddled him with: Bertram.

Jack and Craig had been steadfast friends all through school and university. Jack had introduced Craig to Carol and had served as best man at their wedding. He had been a regular fixture about the Jordan house for as long as Melissa could remember. He spent every Christmas with the family, bringing Melissa and her brother, Eric, exotic presents from his travels abroad, always wrapped in maddening layers of paper and tape. And every summer he joined them for a week—two if he could manage it—sailing. Who better to tell the Blue Water Academy administrators about her capabilities with a boat?

The second reference should be from a teacher, she decided. But which one? She got along fine with teachers as a rule, but which one knew her enough to say relevant things about her qualifications for sailing around the world with Blue Water Academy? And, come to that, which of the subjects she was studying at school was relevant? She had no idea.

After a lengthy debate with herself, she chose Mrs. Taylor, her drama teacher. She, as director of the three school productions Melissa had performed in, knew best how she maintained her cool under stress, in spite of long rehearsals and opening-night nerves. Surely that indicated her fitness for the BWA program.

Now all she had to do was ask. She took the same approach with both of them, in person to Mrs. Taylor and in an email to Uncle Jack: “I want to do this so much! Of course I wouldn’t ask you to say anything that isn’t true—but please try to make me sound good!”

With all of the forms taken care of, there was nothing to do but wait and see. This was the hard part. Waiting and seeing was not Melissa’s strong point. It was all she could do to keep her mind on her upcoming midterms. Everything paled in comparison with the adventure that lay ahead. Or that she hoped lay ahead.

A week and a half later, just as she and her family were sitting down to dinner, the phone rang.

“It’s Montréal,” Eric said, glancing at the Caller ID screen.

Melissa froze, a forkful of spaghetti, her favorite, on its way to her mouth. She sat, staring, until her father picked up the receiver and handed it to her.

“Melissa? Hello, it’s Kathleen Tutty from Blue Water Academy,” a young woman’s voice said. “I’m going to be in Toronto next week holding interviews with students interested in our program. I was wondering if we could schedule a time for you and your parents to come.”

Melissa responded calmly but was grinning like a Cheshire cat and nodding wildly as she scribbled down the date and time of the interview. Mrs. Taylor would have been proud of her.

After the call, Melissa walked over to the family’s monthly calendar of activities posted on the refrigerator. On the square for the following Thursday, she drew three big stars, then wrote: 11:30 A.M. BWA Interview.

The interview! Alarm at the thought suddenly registered on Melissa’s face. Carol could see what was coming. She moved in quickly, putting her arms around her daughter to ward off panic.

“Mel. You’re a bright, intelligent young woman. You are poised and self-confident—at least on the outside—and good with people. You’ll be just fine. You have nothing to worry about.”

Melissa knew she was right. Not a day had gone by that she hadn’t looked at the brochure. She had all of the qualifications—of course she did. There was absolutely no need to worry.

So why couldn’t she stop worrying?



The drive from Pickering to Toronto seemed endless. Melissa twisted the ends of her long dark hair into ever-tighter spirals as she gazed out the window at the traffic. She knew, absolutely, that Blue Water Academy was perfect for her and that she was perfect for the program.

But—but what if she fumbled the interview? She had no idea what questions might be thrown at her. What if she made a fool of herself? What if Kathleen saw her as a babbling schoolgirl and not as the resourceful, calm-under-pressure, competent sailor she was inside? And why did they need an interview anyway? Weren't her grades and her physical fitness and her sailing experience enough?

Well, maybe not, she had to admit to herself. The selection process had to be demanding to safeguard those accepted, and good social skills would have to be high on the list of criteria. Just imagine being stuck on a small ship with people you couldn't communicate with!

The only other person in the waiting room was a man who sat reading the newspaper. He seemed too old to be a student. Maybe he was a teacher looking for a job with the academy—or maybe he was just a client of the accounting office where the interviews were being held. After about a ten-minute wait, during which Melissa concentrated on keeping her fidgeting under control, she and her parents were called in.

Kathleen Tutty was as young as she had sounded on the phone. She was an attractive blonde, about twenty-eight years of age, and a Blue Water Academy student herself ten years earlier. Her first job after university was teaching on the *Inspiration*. Promotion to shipboard director and then program director followed.

Kathleen's smile put everyone at ease. She began by showing a twenty-minute video of life aboard the *Inspiration*, which clearly outlined the heavy workload the student crew could expect:

Breakfast at seven-thirty sharp; colors, where all meet to review the planned activities for the day, at eight; followed by classes, maintenance work on the ship, lunch, more classes, more work, maybe a little free time if you were lucky, dinner, still more classes, some type of evening program, free time, bed, and night watch. Most crew members slept during free time because their night's sleep was interrupted by the two-hour night watch. And any time sailing conditions changed and sails had to be set or doused, the crew had to drop whatever they were doing, because "all hands on deck" were required.

Melissa realized that her experience sailing a small craft for pleasure was nothing like this.

"What do you look for in a student?" she asked.

"We are looking for a good all-round individual," Kathleen said. "Not a super scholar, necessarily, nor an exceptional athlete; but rather someone who has demonstrated an ability to work hard and who can get along well with others. Those are by far the most important attributes for the program. In short, we want a well-balanced person."

"Do most of the kids already have sailing experience?" Craig asked.

Like his daughter, Craig had quickly grasped the difference between being a savvy leisure-time sailor and crewing a working ship the size of the *Inspiration*.

"Most have none, and in any case they all have to be trained together on the barquentine rig. That's a three-masted boat with a square-rigged forward mast."

"How many students are there on the ship?" Carol asked.

"The ship has a capacity of forty-nine, but we don't usually have a full complement."

"What is the ratio of boys to girls?"

This was from Melissa.

"The ratio fluctuates, but generally there are more boys."

Melissa's face brightened.

Craig hated to be the one to ask it, but someone had to. "How do you handle a problem with a student when you are so far from home?"

"It depends on the incident. Generally, problems are few, but disciplinary action ranges from cancellation of shore leave to being sent home for a week or so, and even, as a last resort, to being expelled from the program. Each of these has happened, although very seldom."

After many more questions and answers from both sides, Kathleen asked Melissa's parents to leave the room so she could speak directly to Melissa.

It was now Kathleen's turn to ask the questions.

"Why are you thinking that you'd like to be part of the Blue Water Academy experience?" Kathleen's warm manner had vanquished Melissa's initial anxiety. She was finding it easy to follow her parents' advice to be herself and answer the questions openly.

"It's something out of the ordinary," she said. "Sailing around the world and studying at the same time is a chance of a lifetime for anyone lucky enough to be selected. Seeing the world is something I've always dreamed of doing."

For her part, Kathleen saw in Melissa something of herself at the same age: a bright and eager young woman whose enthusiasm and determination would get her through any rough patches. She turned to some practical issues—some questions that the academy required her to ask, even though she was confident that, in this case, they were not necessary.

"Have you ever been drunk or tried drugs?"

"No and no, although my parents let me have some wine with dinner on special occasions."

"You know from the brochure that Blue Water Academy has a strict no-alcohol, no-drugs policy. What would you do if you observed a student who was impaired by either?"

"I'd probably help get them to bed so they'd be out of harm's way. If I thought they were a danger to the ship or to anybody else, or even to themselves, I guess I'd report them to a teacher."

"Do you consider yourself to be a loner or outgoing?"

"Oh, outgoing, definitely! I have a lot of good friends, and I don't really dislike anyone."

"Do you get along well with your parents and brother?"

"Yeah, I do. I think I have an unusually good relationship with both my parents—especially when I hear some of my friends talk about theirs. And don't tell him I said so, but I really love my little brother. I used to boss him around horribly when we were little. He's only a year and half younger, so I had to show him who was in charge."

"Sounds just like my big sister! It must go with the territory. If you are accepted into the program, you'll be away from your family for an entire year. Do you think you can handle that?"

"Definitely."

Melissa had one more question, although she was a little afraid of the answer she might get.

"How many people go through the process but aren't accepted into the program?"

"About a third of those interviewed go no further," Kathleen replied. "That could be either their decision or ours."

It isn't going to be my decision, Melissa thought. She just hoped with all her heart it wouldn't be theirs either.



The next few days were hell. One day she knew she would be accepted—how could she *not* be? The next she was equally sure she'd been rejected in the first cut. Her friends proved to be a good support network. They were prepared to share in the excitement of her acceptance but also assured her they'd be there for her if she was rejected—not that that would ever happen, they hastened to add. Stephanie told her that if they kept on such an emotional roller coaster much longer they'd all get whiplash.

Arriving home each day, Melissa's first question was, "Is there any news?"

A negative answer was not received with pessimism. Quite the opposite. She hadn't been turned down, so therefore she must still be under serious consideration, right? Right! She got her optimistic nature from her father's side of the family. There is really no point worrying about something you can't control, he always said. Even so, as each day passed, it was tougher for her to keep doubt from creeping in.

Ten long days later, Melissa received a call from Kathleen letting her know she had been accepted into the program; the official papers would be in the mail the next day.

Melissa hung up the phone in a daze. Every emotion possible was flowing through her body, and all at the same time. Relief came in great waves, making her legs feel wobbly. Exhilaration made her fingertips tingle. Triumph made her want to stand up on the old plaid couch and shout at the top of her lungs. Excitement made her want to

jump up and down on it. And sheer nervousness, coupled with an unexpected surge of sadness at the thought of being away from home for such a long time, made the tears roll down her cheeks.

This must be what it's like to fall head-over-heels in love, she thought.

Meanwhile, Carol, Craig, and Eric were all experiencing similar waves of emotion.

Craig knew it all along, he said; there was no way they'd have passed up an old salt like his girl for the program. How *he* was going to manage without his girl for the coming year was another question, one he was at a complete loss to answer. Who would keep him company on his drive to work every morning if he didn't have Melissa to drop off at school on the way, getting his morning off to a rousing start courtesy of her infectious zest for whatever the day might bring? Who would look to him for help for everything from quadratic equations to the psychology of the male? Who would humor him with the silly, repetitious night-night ritual begun when she was a toddler?

He couldn't blame her for wanting to go. If he had been given a chance like this when he was her age, he'd have been off like a shot, probably with scarcely a thought about the parents he was leaving behind. He'd love to do the same thing now, in fact. Maybe a few parents *ought* to go along, actually, just to make sure everything was kept on the straight and narrow. He could see about getting a leave of absence ...

No. No, of course he would do no such thing. This was Melissa's big adventure. His role—the harder role—was to let her go.

Carol was thrilled at Melissa's good fortune. She said so numerous times, her eyes welling up, when the family was having a celebration dinner at Luigi's. The restaurant had the only pasta that was even better than her own, and who knew when Melissa would be able to have such a meal again? Hardtack, that's what she'd get onboard, wasn't it? Nothing but hardtack.

Carol knew better, of course. But she had found that by pushing her worries to their most ridiculous extreme, she could get them in perspective. Still, she thought, it couldn't hurt to get Melissa some vitamin C tablets to take along, to counteract scurvy. And Band-Aids, of course, and antibiotic cream—she'd have blisters, no doubt, with all those ropes she'd be pulling.

And sunscreen! Carol would have to impress on her daughter again the importance of using sunscreen every time she was out on deck—even if it was overcast. Never mind that she'd been slathering SPF 45 on her children since birth; she'd have to make certain that Melissa understood how quickly one went from young girl to middle-aged woman, and how important it was to take care of the only skin she'd ever have before she started getting crow's feet or, God forbid, skin cancer. She'd seen it all too often as a nurse, hadn't she? And they all said the same thing: If only they'd realized at the time the damage they were doing ...

Carol sat up straight, suddenly realizing that she had been paying so much attention to Melissa-at-sea that she hadn't heard a word of what Melissa-beside-her was saying.

Eric thought going to sea was an outstandingly cool thing for his sister to do. He planned to apply to Blue Water Academy himself as soon as he got to grade eleven, in one more year. Would having a family member who had done the program help his chances? Had to be a plus, he was sure of it. He told Melissa he'd make sure her CDs didn't get rusty from lack of use in her absence. It was going to be awfully quiet around the house without her, he thought, repressing a sigh.

After dinner Melissa was on the phone letting her friends know the good news. They all offered encouragement and support, promising to write—maybe they could even visit her at some port if it was allowed. Stephanie, now that she was confronted with the reality that one of her best friends would be gone for so long, was beginning to wish she had applied to Blue Water, too. Why hadn't she thought of doing so? Hard work, sure, but hearing Melissa go on about it, it sounded like fun.

Melissa hardly slept that night. Every time her eyelids started to droop and her body started to give in to fatigue, she was jolted awake as the thought hit her again: In just a few weeks, the adventure of her life was going to begin.



“That’s the plan. You in or not?”

Stefano Bortardi craned his neck, trying to get a glimpse of Esteban’s face to gauge his reaction, but all he could see at this angle was his rough hand holding a cigarette through the cell bars. This was, in fact, the view of Esteban he was used to—the way he always thought of him during their three-year friendship at the Moore Haven Correctional Facility in Glades County, Florida. It took him by surprise every time he saw the rest of Esteban Bedoya out in the exercise yard; somehow he never pictured the figure attached to that hand as quite so short, quite so heavy. There was no denying that at five six, two hundred fifty pounds, Esteban was fat.

Esteban had had a successful career as a bank robber for years until his wife, who shortly thereafter became his ex-wife, ratted on him. He had carried a gun but never used it, relying instead on his brains to get him in and out of a job with no bloodshed. He knew how to use one, though. He’d spent six years in the army before deciding that was enough discipline for him. The rebellion against discipline had taken its toll. He was younger than Stefano by several years. He had been as good looking, too, but had let himself get badly out of shape. Anyone looking at them would have assumed Esteban was much older. Stefano was of medium build, lean and fit, his black hair just beginning to gray. His only distinguishing feature was his nose, which was long and pointy. If anyone commented on it, he would say, “All the better to smell you with, my dear,” at which he roared with laughter. His education had ended after two years in the eleventh grade. He had ten years of experience in drug running and had developed a wide network of contacts around the world. It was going to be easy to get back into the business when he was on the outside again. The only reason he’d been caught the last time was that his car ran out of gas and the police stopped to offer assistance. It was one of the little detail things that had haunted him in his cell. No way would he allow a thing like that to happen again.

Over the last three years the two men didn’t lack for time to reminisce about their capers, good and bad. They knew each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

“Well, *hombre*? You with us or not?” Stefano asked again.

“Whoa,” Esteban said, exhaling a mouthful of smoke. “You gonna steal a vanload of *perico* from the cartel, steal a boat big enough to take the coke and six guys to some island in the middle of the Pacific, and then send the stuff back here by airplane?”

“You got it.”

“You *loco*!”

“Maybe so. But soon I’m gonna be *loco and loaded*.”

“We been locked up here three years,” Esteban said. “How you know the cartel still trucking *cocaína* same way they used to?”

“Don’t, but what I *do* know is they moved it that way two weeks ago. My brother Juan seen the trucks and guards following same route from Cali to Medellin, just like before.”

“How many *guardia*?”

“Six. Always the same. A pickup in front with two, the cocaine in the van with two more, then another pickup behind with two more. They all got rifles.”

“So how you gonna take the stuff from six armed *guardia*?”

“My secret! I been working on it for three years. Juan says they take the same route every two weeks—says there’s a place close to ocean there where we can do it. We do it with five guys and one more on the boat.”

“Okay. Say you get *cocaína* on boat, how you gonna keep the cartel off your back?”

“We ain’t gonna leave no witnesses. And by time they find out the coke’s missing, we gonna be over sixty miles

out to sea. They're not gonna be looking for us in the ocean."

"But they gonna be looking for a stolen boat, *no*?"

"No."

Stefano shook his head, smiling.

"That's the beauty of the whole thing," he said. "We gonna take the boat from somewhere in Costa Rica or Nicaragua. They won't know nothing about it in Colombia. So, Esteban, you in or not?"

"Stefano, you still *loco*. If the cartel finds out, we dead meat. I mean goners. I gotta ask some questions."

"Go ahead."

"You got six *hombres* working the job. Who are these guys—can we trust them?"

"It's my idea. I'm the boss. Juan's gonna take care of all the details, so you know that's gonna be okay. You gonna be a gun. Then Severo Carrillo and Polo del Valle, two more guns. Severo, he's strong as an ox, and Polo—well, you know Polo. Phillip Ransburg—he's a gringo, but he's okay. I worked with him before. He's gonna handle the boat, and he knows boats."

"*Hermano*, how big this *barco* gonna be?"

"At least sixty feet long, and fast, too, eighteen, twenty knots maybe. It's gonna have everything."

"How far is this island?"

"Easter Island, it's about nineteen hundred miles west of South America."

"Just one more thing, *hombre*. How we gonna split up the money?"

"The stuff is worth somewhere around a hundred million. Me and Juan get half—that leaves fifty million divided by four for the rest of you."

Esteban let out a low whistle. Twelve and a half million—tax free—wouldn't be a bad start for his new life.

"What if we get *mareado*?" he asked.

He started to snicker. He could see the six of them hanging over the railing of the boat, too sick to care that they were brand-new millionaires. His wife had always told him he had a weird sense of humor.

"Juan and I been sailing all our lives—Phillip, too. No problem. If you get sick it'll only be for a couple days."

Stefano decided to press the question again.

"That's it. You in or not?"

"Give me a day."

"No! I gotta know now. Juan's coming at eleven and we gotta make plans. Last time: *Sí* or *no*?"

"It's *chalado* to go against the cartel, but what the hell—why not? *Sí*, I'm in."



Promptly at eleven o'clock Stefano was called to the meeting room, a small room with a table and two chairs where an inmate and his visitor could sit and do paperwork. A bored-looking guard stood at the door but he couldn't hear anything provided you kept your voice low.

Juan visited Stefano every month, always on the fifteenth, always at eleven in the morning. Detail was an obsession with him. Everything had to be in place and had to be perfect. Stefano knew the planning part of the job was in the best possible hands.

You could tell the two men were related. Juan had the same profile as Stefano, the same long, pointy nose. He was a couple of years younger than Stefano, early forties, and his hair was still very black. He was sitting at the table when Stefano entered the meeting room at a couple of minutes past the hour.

"Hey, Juanito, *cómo estás*?"

"Great. Everything's cool. How's with you?"

"It's good; we gonna do it."

"I was hoping you say that. Last Thursday was exactly the same again, same time, same route, same everything. Esteban is in?"

"He's in. Thinks we nuts for taking on the cartel, but he's in. You talk to the others?"

"Talked to all three yesterday and they all in. Severo, he needed a little persuading, but I got him to come around."

"I bet you did. Tell me about last week's run."

"They still taking the back route to Medellín. I been to the spot five times the last two years and every time they pass the curve at Buenaventura at one o'clock, give or take a couple minutes. They get into Medellín just before six, so we got nearly five hours before they catch on the van is missing. It's gonna be getting dark by then. They won't

be able to do nothing until the next morning. And anyway, we'll be five hours at sea before they even know anything's wrong."

"Beautiful. Okay, I'm outta here on July twenty-first. I wanna check out the truck run at least three times myself. Let's set it up for the last Thursday in September. Might be a little rainy then, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. And the weather should be good pretty good in the Pacific then. That house still vacant?"

"Yeah."

"*Bueno*. Go ahead and rent it right away. Get the guns and arrange for the others to move in by the middle of July. I'll be there on the twenty-third; Esteban'll get there about two weeks later. That'll give us time to go through the plan several times together. What you gotta do now is find us a boat in Costa Rica so Phillip will have time to look at the same kind of boat in the States. Or go to Nicaragua if you have to."

"I'm gonna try to find a boat by end of next week. I find something, I let Phillip know. He can find one Stateside so he can learn everything about it."

The meeting was over in twenty minutes. Stefano went out to the exercise yard, where he walked around the hard-packed dirt path three times before falling into stride with Esteban.

"It's set," he said, looking up at the sky as if interested in the clouds. "The last Thursday in September. As soon as your parole starts in August, you go straight to Colombia. Any problem?"

"No," Esteban replied.

"Just make sure you not traced."

"No problem, man."



With his usual attention to detail, Juan scouted out boats in Costa Rica, finally finding one in Puntarenas that he thought would do: a sixty-five-foot Real Ships motor yacht called the *Two Wise*. It was well equipped with twin Cats, two generators, inverter, water maker, stabilizers, and bow thrusters. It sounded perfect, and its owner, an American who vacationed on it only every three months or so, was expected to use it in August, so it was a fit, time-wise. He called Phillip, who found a similar boat for sale in Florida and made arrangements to check it out.

Renting the house turned out to be a bit trickier, even though Juan had been keeping his eye on it for several weeks. The property was just off the main road heading north from Buenaventura. The driveway, on the inside of a large curve in the road, was nearly two hundred feet long and was almost hidden by a cluster of trees and overgrown bushes. The Pacific Ocean was a little over a mile to the east. You could actually see the ocean as the land sloped gently down toward a cove with a sandy beach.

Juan walked with the landlord down the driveway to the nondescript house. Two of its bedrooms had twin beds, the third, a double bed. Somebody would have to sleep on the couch and it wasn't going to be him. He noted that the large kitchen had a freezer. Good. They'd be able to stock up on food inconspicuously, buying a little extra to freeze every time they went into town and then transferring most of it to the boat.

Behind the house was a large barn, still in pretty good condition, with two large swinging doors. It was empty except for a few rusting paint cans, a rolled-up rectangle of cheap carpeting, and the pervasive odor of mildew. It was plenty big enough to hold the van and the two pickup trucks, along with their own SUV. The whole setup seemed perfect.

"Looks all right," Juan told the landlord. "I'll take it for six months."

"No, no. I can only rent for nine months. The *dueno* are in Europe until next March. Their *hija* lives in Paris and is having other baby. They gone over to help. They want *siete mil* pesos a month for nine months."

Damn. This was not in the cards.

"I don't need it that long. Look, we're doing some—uh, climate research and being this close to the ocean here is ideal. How about thirty-five thousand up front for six months?"

"No, *mis instrucciones son de tener en nueve meses*."

"I'll sign a lease for six months at six thousand pesos a month up front plus six thousand pesos for you. What you say?"

The landlord made a quick calculation. He'd get to keep two thousand a month from the owner for looking after the property, plus the six thousand. Eighteen thousand pesos total, almost six months' salary.

"*Estamos de acuerdo!*"

"*Excelente*. Now, I'll have to ask you to leave us strictly alone once we move in. Our—our equipment is extremely sensitive and requires a high level of concentration to operate. We gotta have complete privacy. You

understand.”

“*No hay problema*. If I have come over, I phone night before.”

“That sounds fine. We’ll move in within two weeks. There may be up to six technicians here at a time.”

A handwritten lease was prepared and signed, and cash and keys were exchanged.



Phillip had phoned the yacht broker, Jim Higgins, in Fort Lauderdale, who had faxed him all of the specs on the Real Ship. The boat looked ideal. Quite a bit bigger than what he was used to, but he was sure he could handle it. After an uneventful flight from Chicago, he was ready to take the boat out for sea trials.

The guy looked a bit like a wild card, Jim thought, what with his baseball cap with a long ponytail hanging out the back and rumpled bermudas, no socks. But the laid-back harbor-rat look was just the impression Phillip wanted to create. Whatever happened, nobody would be out looking for a balding businessman.

Phillip handled the boat with ease. She quickly got up to ten knots once they cleared the Intracoastal Waterway. At sea she did everything she was supposed to do, and in spades.

Back at the dock they got down to the nitty gritty. Real Ship boats are pretty standard, all of them loaded with all the bells and whistles. Philip felt sure the *Two Wise* would be pretty much the same as this boat.

The engine room, with standing headroom, housed two 510 hp Caterpillar diesel engines and two Westerbeke marine diesel generators, a 10kw and a 20kw. The master electrical control panel was in the engine room, too, as well as a store of batteries. Off to the side was a workshop that had spares for everything. It had a sizeable electronics package with everything they could possibly need, including radar, COMSAT telephone, chart plotter, weather fax—you name it, it was there.

Phillip made a mental note of the locking system on the entry doors, the keyed ignition switch, and the keyed lock on the instrument-panel door. All would provide easy access with the right tools.

Accommodations were adequate for six. The galley housed a large freezer and refrigerator, so food storage would be no problem. The cocaine could be stored on the covered aft deck. There was no question this boat could handle the trip they were planning.

Jim, meanwhile, could almost taste his commission after spending four hours on the boat with Phillip, watching his painstaking appraisal of the mechanical and electrical systems, answering his detailed questions, and trying not to think about lunch while Phillip reviewed the comprehensive owner’s manual. Didn’t matter that the guy looked like a beach bum. He’d seen his kind before, coming in deliberately dressed down to hide his affluence, hoping to negotiate a better deal. This guy knew boats, that was for sure.

Dropping Philip off at the airport for his return flight, Jim handed him his card with his phone numbers—office, home, cell, and fax—on it, and told him not to hesitate to call any time if he had any more questions. What other questions the man could possibly come up with, though, was beyond him.

Phillip promised to get back to him within the week, and, for a wonder, didn’t even quibble about the asking price of \$1.2 million.

Philip knew the boat was perfect, but of course he had no intention of buying.



Spring and summer passed in a flurry of preparations. By her mid-August departure, Melissa had packed and repacked half a dozen times, changing her mind again and again about what was truly essential and what was not. (Sunscreen and vitamin C were *always* essential.) She was allowed to take only one soft-sided Blue Water Academy bag plus two small carry-on bags because storage space on the ship was limited.

In a way it was just as well that the academy rules prohibited any sort of portable CD players onboard ship, she thought, though how she was going to get along without hers she couldn't imagine. She loved music and did her best studying to a rock beat. But headphones weren't exactly conducive to the social bonding that was crucial to living in a small shipboard community. Besides, you had to keep one ear out at all times for emergency announcements.

In any case, there was no room in her luggage for her beloved Discman. Her bag came in at just one pound below the seventypound limit. Her carry-on bags consisted of a bulging backpack and a video camera, a farewell gift from Uncle Jack.

Customs, immigration, and security went without a problem; boarding and departure for San Diego were on time; and the *Inspiration* was the next stop. She was on her way!

On the flight there were four other "Floaties," as students on the ship liked to call themselves. They were easily recognizable by their red shirts, part of the BWA uniform. They were not seated anywhere near one another during the flight, however, so Melissa pretty much kept to herself, lost in her own thoughts. The flight was smooth, but her stomach was doing flip-flops as her emotions seesawed between elation and apprehension. No homesickness yet, at least. But then again, a few days after the orientation period her parents would be coming to San Diego to see her off, so it wasn't really a fair test.

The source of both her greatest excitement and her greatest anxiety was the prospect of all the new people she would be meeting and all the new friends she'd make. Might that even include a boyfriend?

Anyone looking at Melissa would assume she had scads of boyfriends already. She seemed to have everything going for her: a tall, slim, well proportioned figure; lustrous hair in soft waves that reached halfway down her back; a silky cream-colored complexion; and eyes so deep brown they were almost black. She was, in fact, a knockout. And she attracted more than her share of attention from the opposite sex. Heads swiveled in her direction wherever she went.

And yet she'd never had a boyfriend.

Unfortunately, the average male is only five feet ten inches tall. At just shy of six feet, even when wearing flats, Melissa was taller than most. It wasn't that she would reject a guy if he was shorter—she wouldn't have turned away a midget if he'd been nice. But the fact was, most guys felt intimidated around her. And attending an all-girls school decreased her opportunities to dispel any boy's awe of her. About the only boys she knew were Eric's friends, who were much too young for her.

But that was all going to change on the *Inspiration*. According to the list of names and addresses she'd been sent, there were twenty boys to twelve girls. Good odds, she thought. But the two male Floaties on the plane were disappointingly short. She wondered what the other eighteen would be like.

The plane circled San Diego Bay as it approached the airport. Peering out the window, Melissa was able to see the *Inspiration* docked next to the Marine Museum, right behind the *Star of India*, an old tall ship that used to ply lumber between Alaska and San Francisco. With its vivid color and distinctive three-mast barquentine rig, the *Inspiration* was easy to recognize. That green dot in the water, she reflected, which looked so tiny from the air, was going to be her home for the next year.



As Melissa heaved her bag off the revolving carousel, she was startled to hear a voice with a pronounced Québécois accent just behind her.

“Please, allow me to help you with that.”

Turning, she found herself looking up into the face of an extraordinarily good-looking young man—an extraordinarily good-looking young man some four inches above her in height! His red shirt identified him instantly as a fellow Floatie.

“I am Pierre,” he said, smiling at her.

“Melissa,” she had the presence of mind to reply, while thinking, “Oh my God, the plane must have crashed. I must have died and gone straight to heaven.”

Who knows how long they might have stood there in the baggage-claim area just gazing at each other had not a second tall and good-looking fellow come bounding in. This one was a bit older—about thirty, Melissa guessed. His blue shirt marked him as a Blue Water Academy teacher.

“Dave Cameron,” the man said, trying to catch his breath. “I had to leave the van in a no-parking spot about a mile away. All the luggage accounted for, Pierre?”

Pierre Rouleau realized he had not made the first move to help the other students with their bags, or even to welcome them to San Diego. No matter, they had retrieved them on their own and everyone was soon bundled into the van and heading toward the harbor. Pierre was glad a seat was open beside Melissa.

He had arrived the day before, he told Melissa as they bounced along. His eagerness to tell her everything about himself helped him overcome his self-consciousness in speaking English.

He was eighteen, he said, and lived with his mother and younger sister in Québec City. His older brother was away at McGill University. His parents, both chartered accountants, had divorced five years before, and his father had moved to the Montréal office of their accounting firm after the split.

Applying to the Blue Water Academy program was his mother’s idea, he said. He hadn’t been enthusiastic about the prospect at the time. But he was a pretty sure why his mother had enrolled him.

Hélène Rouleau had not been happy about the direction her middle child’s life was taking. At thirteen Pierre had begun hanging out with a group of kids whose idea of ultimate cool was to wear their hair long and their pants baggy, with big gangster-style metal chains attached to their wallets. All of which Hélène could have put up with as an adolescent fashion statement—after all, hadn’t she looked pretty silly herself as a teenager? Hadn’t most people? The swearing and smoking that were part of the group’s image, however, were another matter.

And although the kids spent their days skateboarding—or snowboarding in the winter—Pierre’s mom was afraid their activities might not be so innocuous when they got just a bit older. There had been a lot of talk among the parents about an underground culture that was springing up among skateboarders, a culture that involved not just the performance of risky feats of daring on their boards but drugs as well.

That’s why she packed Pierre off to the Caneff School for Boys in northern Ontario. Caneff had a reputation for working with wayward kids, keeping them in line through exhausting physical activity and rigorous discipline. Pierre had to be in top shape every morning, prepared for whatever was going to be thrown at him during the day—and that could be almost anything. The boys were united in their hatred of the place. However, they knew voicing even just one complaint wasn’t worth the consequences.

When Hélène saw how miserable Pierre was at Caneff, she began to think it was too high a price for a child who had never been in any serious trouble. Besides, some of the Caneff boys were far rougher than his friends in Québec, so perhaps it was not the best environment if she hoped to protect Pierre from unsavory influences. She hated having him so far away yet was reluctant to bring him home. One of his skateboarding friends—a cherub of a boy struggling desperately, at age thirteen, to look like a tough guy, cigarette dangling from his lips—had recently spent twenty-four hours in jail following a night of drunken brawls.

Then she heard one of her office partners talking about her daughter’s experience with Blue Water Academy. That, Hélène thought, might be exactly what Pierre needed. It would be a year of hard work and rigorous study, and discipline, too, *bien sûr*, but in an atmosphere of adventure and camaraderie rather than punishment. She would have to scrimp to afford the tuition, but it would be well worth it if Pierre emerged from the program the mature, capable young man she knew he could be.

“You will love it,” she had told him, nearly breathless with enthusiasm about the wonderful plan she had devised. She was disappointed when Pierre said he wanted no part of it.

“I felt like she just wanted to get rid of me,” Pierre told Melissa. “I was so happy when she said I didn’t have to

go back to Caneff, but then ...”

He was sick of authority figures telling him not to think for himself, to do whatever they said and do it quick, no questions asked, and was sure life on the *Inspiration* would be more of the same. And he was sure that the other kids on the ship would look down on him once they knew he had been to Caneff. It was practically a reform school, wasn't it? Everyone would assume he was a juvenile delinquent. They would all be rich kids, anyway; the concept of hard work would be foreign to them. And why were they all paying good money for the privilege of working their tails off, anyway?

Not that he was ever going to be accepted in the program.

“The interview was awful,” he told Melissa. “They kept asking me questions about drugs, about drinking. And I told them what I thought—that onboard ship, no, drinking should not be allowed, that could be disastrous, but on land? I said I didn't know what authority the program has over the local officials.

“And anyway, my grades were not so great. I was sure they'd never accept me over the other kids who were applying.”

But accept him they did. Ten days after the interview, to his chagrin and his mother's delight, he received the acceptance package. He had no choice but to go. And now he was beginning to think that maybe, just maybe, he was going to like it.



When the van dropped them off at the dock, Melissa was amazed by the size of the ship. It looked huge, certainly bigger than she had anticipated. All of the lines and ropes made it look confusing and exciting at the same time.

Dave Cameron told her she was assigned to cabin 119. Pierre showed her the way, lugging her bag down the stairway to her cabin for her. He had promised Dave he would go with him to pick up the last group of students at the airport, so he was forced to bid his new friend *adieu* for the time being.

Opening the cabin door, Melissa's first impression was, Oh, my God! Four people can't live in here for a year!

Four paces into the cabin was a wall with four sections of three shelves each, one section for each student. To the left was an aisle about three feet wide and six feet long with bunk beds on either side. There were two drawers under each lower bunk. That was it for storage space. Just inside the cabin door to the left was a tiny washroom with a small sink, a shower stall barely big enough to turn around in, and a toilet, or "head," as it was called onboard ship. The whole cabin was about ten feet square.

Two of her roommates had arrived earlier and taken the lower bunks, so Melissa claimed the inside upper one for hers.

The thought of unpacking was depressing. What would she do if her clothes and stuff didn't fit? It took almost half an hour to unpack; some stuff she simply left on her bunk until she could figure out what to do with it. Jettisoning it into the Pacific began to seem the best option. And she had been so careful, she thought, to pack only the most essential of items. Clearly there was a discrepancy between what the ship builder deemed "essential" versus what an average teenaged girl did. She realized why the students had all been given soft canvas bags—there wasn't any space for hard suitcases.

Melissa was just squishing her bag into the corner of her storage drawer, hoping she'd be able to close it afterward, when her three cabinmates opened the door, nearly falling on top of her as they entered.

"Whoa! That's one way of making introductions!" one of them laughed from the lower bunk into which she'd rolled in order not to step on Melissa. "I'm Nancy."

"I'm Kathy," one of the others said, stretching out a hand to help Melissa off the floor. "Kathy Reid."

"And I'm Trudy Baker," the third one said, when she had recovered from her fit of giggling.

The four traded preliminary information. Nancy Shore was from the Boston area, entering grade twelve. Kathy was a gradetwelve student as well, from Calgary, and Trudy was a grade-eleven student from Montréal. Trudy had been among the last group of students that Dave and Pierre had picked up at the airport, so she had to make do with the only unclaimed bunk, the outside upper one. But that was okay, the others told her. She was the "child" of the four of them, a mere sixteen to their seventeen, so it was only right for them to get first pick.

Melissa liked all three of her cabinmates instantly. She decided if it was at all possible for four strangers to get along in a space not much bigger than a doghouse, their chances were better than most.

At 1600 hours everyone was called on deck for introductions. The professional crew consisted of Captain Luke Marzynski; Dr. Elliott Williams, who was first mate as well as ship's physician; Henry Mattox, the second mate; two engineers, Matt and Sam; Jarred, the cook; Mac, the bosun, who was in charge of the ship's rigging; and the bosun's mate, Charlie. The teachers were Dave Cameron, Sharon Rock, Tom Michaels, Mary Wilson, and Anika Johnson, who was the shipboard director.

Melissa looked around at the Floaties assembled on deck. She checked out her competition among the girls and was dismayed to find it pretty stiff. But she always underestimated her own attractiveness. She noted with resignation that she was, as always, the tallest girl. As for the boys, they were the usual mixture of good-looking and nerdish and all points in between. But Pierre was the only real standout, so she resolved to reel him in him, hook,

line, and sinker, and the sooner the better. No other girl, no matter how cute and petite, was going to have a chance at him.

As for how she was going to put her plan into operation, she hadn't the least idea.

After the introductions, Captain Marzynski outlined the first week's itinerary. It would include moving the ship to another dock, where provisioning would take place, intensive training on lines, sails, and terminology, and getting used to laying aloft.

That first night the students ate onboard but were free to leave the ship after supper as long as they went in groups. For safety reasons, students had to be in groups of at least four when going ashore. Such security might not be necessary in San Diego, but it would be in other ports, so the rule was put in place for the duration of the voyage.

Melissa grabbed Nancy and made a beeline for Pierre, who was wandering around the deck with his cabinmate Dan, as if in search of something.

"Nancy and I are going ashore for a walk if we can just find two more people to go with us," Melissa said. "How about you two?"

There, she thought. That sounded plausible, not too obvious.

"I—we—were just looking for two people to go with us to get some ice cream," Pierre said.

Dan shot him a glance, this being news to him, but off they went with Melissa and Pierre taking the lead. Nancy and Dan tried to think of things to talk about, aware of how redundant they were. Melissa and Pierre weren't saying much either, but it was clear that they were communicating beautifully.

It was as if they were made for each other, Melissa thought, the way their strides matched, the way she could forget about her height altogether instead of feeling like a gawky Gulliver among the Lilliputians. She was surprised to find herself touching his arm as they walked. That was something she'd never have felt comfortable doing with a guy before. But Pierre didn't seem to mind. She hoped that meant he felt the same warmth and excitement she was feeling—a feeling she decided she would quite enjoy getting used to.

As for Pierre, he not only was warming up to the idea of Blue Water Academy, but he also was incredulous that it included the most gorgeous girl he'd ever seen and she was walking by his side. He was pretty sure she liked him, but it was always hard to tell with girls. He hadn't had much experience with them, thanks to his prolonged incarceration at Caneff. He'd flirted a little with one or two of the girls in his neighborhood when he was home on vacations, but he'd never really gotten to know any girl very well. What was the point if he was just going to be packed off to school again in a few weeks? Besides, he hadn't been so sure he wanted to have any romantic entanglements, ever. Look at what had happened to his parents' marriage. He'd be better off not setting himself up for something so devastating.

But that was before Melissa. There was just something about her, he thought. Something about the way she looked at him with her dancing eyes; something about the way she touched him, a touch that was exciting and comfortable at the very same time; something about the way she so often put into words exactly what he was thinking. There was, Pierre decided, something *inevitable* about her—about them.

Their feelings only increased as they spooned up their ice cream. They had both been torn between the espresso chocolate chip and the triple chocolate treat, so they ordered one of each to share. They were oblivious of Nancy and Dan as they talked about their families, their friends, their hopes. They found their outlooks remarkably similar despite their different backgrounds. By the time they reached the ship, just before curfew, each was convinced they were a perfect match.

Scarcely noticing when Dan and Nancy bid them good night, Melissa and Pierre moved to the bow and talked for another hour. They were both dead tired, but neither wanted to break the spell. Eventually, however, exhaustion took over and they agreed it was time to turn in.

Melissa took Pierre's hand in hers and looked into his eyes, marveling again that she had to tilt her chin to do so.

"I've really enjoyed this evening. I am so glad I met you, Pierre. Good night."

He squeezed her hand, then quickly raised it and brushed his lips against it, murmuring, "*Bonne nuit.*"



The next day, after breakfast and colors, it was time for sail training. Mac, the bosun, handed out a sheet of paper with diagrams identifying every line and sail onboard. All students, he announced, fixing them with his intense blue eyes, would be expected to know and understand the function of each one. Over the next few months, they would have training and theory classes every week for two hours at a time. A lot more time, he went on, his soft Scottish burr lingering over the *r* in *more*, would be spent on deck for hands-on experience.

“For example, ye need to learn how to handle a line under load and where to position yer fingers so you don’t lose them,” he said.

He and Anika passed out a numbered harness to each Floatie.

“Ye must wear yer harnesses at all times aloft and on deck during watch. Is that clear to everyone? Right. Now ye’ll have yer first try at climbing the yardarms. The lowest yard there is called the ‘course.’ Who’ll be first, heh?”

Pierre’s hand went up like a shot. Piece of *gateau*, he thought, after the rock-climbing he had to do at Caneff. And Melissa would be watching.

He climbed the rat lines to the course, then beyond it all the way to the “royal,” the small sail at the very top of the mast.

All of the students managed to get at least to the course, but some of them needed several more days of training before they could get to the royal. And a few were so uncomfortable with the climb that they never made it to the top.

“There’s nae shame in that,” Mac assured them. “We’ll work ye just as hard down the lower levels.”

Right after lunch Mac led the students back onto the deck. His stride was surprisingly long for such a short man. He walked with purpose, head down, bent forward slightly at the waist, with the barest hint of a left-to-right roll in his gait, the sole remnant of an accident many years ago. At fifty-seven he had more stamina than most of the kids on the ship. Combined with the advantage of experience, his energy enabled him to get any job done quickly and efficiently. He was slight, narrow-boned, but wiry and hard-muscled from years of physical labor. He had the agility and tenacity of a squirrel.

“Ready?” he murmured to Dave Cameron, standing at the rail. “Over ye go, lad.” Then he shouted, “Man overboarrrrrd!”

Dave enjoyed his role in these man-overboard drills. He had been a hero inadvertently several times in his life, not only finding himself on the scene just when someone needed help, but also having the presence of mind to know how to help them.

He had worked at a shopping mall, scooping ice cream, the summer before he started at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. Late one evening he’d been walking to his car in the mall parking lot when he came upon two teenagers kicking a younger boy. They were taking out their frustration on him because he had just a few dollars in his wallet.

Dave, although not half as brawny as the two thugs, had stormed into the fray with such vehemence that they had fled. One of them lost a shoe in his haste. The sneaker had dangled from the window lock in Dave’s bedroom for years until his mother converted the space into a library/guest room, with a rather more conventional décor when she realized her son had left the family nest for good.

The following year, Dave had been walking from the Queen’s campus to his attic apartment on King Street when a van came squealing around the corner in front of him. The passenger door flew open and a young woman landed on the pavement at his feet. In short order Dave took in the van’s make, model, and license plate number, flagged down a motorist to call 911, applied pressure to the bleeding lacerations the woman had suffered from her fall, and

talked her down from her hysteria as she told him of her abduction and sexual assault. Dave's quick thinking helped the police catch the three men who had assaulted her.

Yet a third incident had happened when Dave was in grad school. His first job after getting his undergraduate degree had been as a counselor at an outdoor program for young offenders, popularly known as "hoods in the woods." He loved the experience, feeling a rapport with the students, difficult though they could be. He decided he had finally found his calling and a use for his sociology degree. He would be a teacher. He enrolled in a one-year B.Ed. program at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. His plan was to teach high school social studies.

Toward the end of his program, he was practice teaching at a high school on Bloor Street near the U of T campus. Every morning he walked along Bloor on his way to school, Styrofoam cup of coffee in one hand, briefcase in the other—props he carried into his classroom each day to make him appear older than his students. One day, he smelled smoke and raced down a side street in the direction it seemed to be coming from. He zigzagged his way across alleys and streets until he found its source: a two-story house with black smoke billowing from an upstairs window and flames licking the roof. He could hear cries coming from inside.

Dave pounded on the door and rang the bell, then, using all of his weight, threw himself against the door again and again until the lock gave way. A young mother lay crumpled at the foot of the stairs, overcome by fumes. Two smoke-smudged toddlers were clinging to her and poking her, crying for her to get up. Dave scooped the woman up and hefted her over his left shoulder, tucked the smaller of the tots under his right arm, and, grabbed the hand of the older one. He staggered out of the house just as a fire engine careened up to the curb and five firefighters swarmed into action.

The city awarded him a citation for bravery for his actions, delighting his class almost as much as it embarrassed him.

Now he hit the water and swam briskly to the designated spot a hundred feet from the *Inspiration*. He relished his part in the man overboard—MOB, in sailing vernacular—drills. It was a nice change of perspective, after all, from being the too-heralded hero (and enduring the proud but anxious flutterings of his parents as well as the teasing of his friends) to the hapless victim, whose only responsibility was to flail about in the brine shouting for help.

Mac ran the drill according to a precise protocol. As the students would learn in their classroom sessions, it was the job of the spotter, the first person to witness someone overboard, to shout the alarm, then throw a life ring and MOB buoy from the bridge to the person in the water. As usual, Mac's aim was impeccable; the ring and buoy hit the water within an arm's length of Dave. Mac kept an unwavering eye on Dave, squinting into the light of the sun dazzling off the ripples, and kept his right arm outstretched, pointing continuously at Dave, first from the deck, then up on the rigging as he scuttled, using his left arm and both legs, to the mizzen shrouds. He remained with his gaze and finger fixed on Dave until the officer on watch—today it was Captain Marzynski himself—relieved him.

Anika provided running commentary for the students as the captain checked to see that the life ring and MOB buoy had been thrown in and then threw an activated SART—Search and Rescue Radar Transponder—into the water. He pressed the MOB button on the GPS and sounded the alarm signal—two short, two long, two short blasts, repeated three times. Had the ship been under sail, he would have turned it into the wind to stop; had they been under power, he would have executed a Williamson turn.

Because the captain was the watch officer today, the first mate, Dr. Williams, took command of the ship and carried out the rescue procedure. Anika explained that if a MAYDAY call—an urgency message—was deemed necessary, the first mate would issue it and then stand ready to communicate with the rescue craft on channel 16 of the VHF radio.

The captain assigned duty lookouts to take over observation of the MOB. The rescue-craft launch team, consisting of Mac and the second mate, Henry, and the crew members on deck watch, launched the Zodiac, an inflatable dinghy. Then the rescue-craft team—Henry and Sam and the second engineer—leapt into the Zodiac and made for the man overboard. Dave was floating on his back in lazy circles, luxuriating in the warm water, unconcerned about the drama unfolding onboard.

Dr. Williams and his first aid team stood at the rail with the "grab and go kit," a stretcher and a blanket, waiting for Dave's arrival. All other crew members were gathered amidships, ready to assist in any way requested.

Henry and Sam hauled Dave up and over the railing onto the deck into the waiting hands of the first aid team. This was the hardest part of the exercise for Dave; it went against the grain for him to stay as inert as a sack of barley while the others labored over him. He did his best not to be helpful as Dr. Williams demonstrated life-saving techniques. At the end of the exercise, the resuscitated MOB arose from the stretcher to thunderous applause and cheers from the Floaties.

The students were both exhilarated and exhausted after the MOB drill. They'd had no idea it was coming, which was exactly the way Mac had planned it. He firmly believed that the best method of instruction was to catch the kids

off guard; the emotion and initial uncertainty of the situation would ensure a vivid memory of the procedures called for.

“It beats a list on a chalkboard any day of the week,” is what he always said.



By mid-July, Juan, Phillip, Polo, and Severo had moved into the house in Buenaventura.

With his customary meticulousness, Juan had worked out a strategy that covered all contingencies. He had dispatched the others to Medellin, where they bought, using assumed names, an SUV, a Jimmy, and a moped. All were used but in good enough condition for their purposes. He had prepared a detailed shopping list and they had taken turns over the next six weeks going into town—taking care to go to several different stores to allay any suspicions—to buy provisions for the house and the boat.

On Thursday of the second week they got their first look at the drug convoy driving by. Juan had marked a spot six hundred yards from the driveway for calculating the speed of the trucks. Crouching in the tangles of ficus, tibouchina, peperomia, and passionflower at the edge of the drive, swatting mosquitoes away from their eyes so they could see, they noted that it took exactly forty seconds for the trucks to cover the distance, which meant the trucks' speed was close to thirty miles per hour. Another four observations told them the speed was fairly consistent.

By the time of the fifth observation, both Stefano and Esteban had arrived in Buenaventura. On this occasion, Severo followed the convoy from Cali in the SUV, keeping well back and turning into the driveway when he reached the house. Polo then took over, pulling out on a moped from a side road about a mile from the house and tailing the three vehicles a good part of the way up the back road toward Medellin.

The tailing had been Severo's idea. The whole operation was beginning to make him nervous. Why, he had asked, would the cartel be taking these God-forsaken, treacherous back roads? Wasn't there a safer way to Medellin?

"That's just the point," Stefano had told him. "Sure the highway is safer, but where do you think all the police are? When the drug runners started the route seven years ago, the highway hadn't even been built. They been taking the back roads since the beginning. You know as well as I do there's hardly any traffic on these roads. No traffic and no cops."



Juan outlined the details of the plan to them on the evening of the fifth observation.

It was simple, he said. Polo would drive the SUV down the driveway at a predetermined speed, swerve onto the road, and then sideswipe the van.

"Polo's gonna get out of the SUV, wearing only his bathing suit," he said. "Truck number three'll stop behind the van. Truck number one will have to back up to the accident. All the guards will have their guns drawn. As soon as Polo sees the guns he's gonna act scared—you got some practice acting like a coward, right, Polito?"

"Hey!"

"Relax! Just a joke, little *hombre*," Juan said, leaning over and giving Polo's head a hard rub with his knuckles. "So Polo here's scared shitless—he's gonna put his hands up and drop to his knees. Maybe he's gonna cry, who knows?"

Juan snickered.

"The guards, they're gonna see there's no danger, there's just this skinny little dipshit standing there half naked.

"Severo and Esteban, you gonna be hiding on the right side of the driveway, over by those big bushes with the rubbery leaves. I'm gonna be on the left side. We all gonna have semiautomatics.

"Stefano, you'll be across the road, in the bushes behind the sign. You got your semiautomatic, too. Anything

goes wrong, you're ready to shoot.

"As soon as Polo goes down on his knees, Severo's gonna take out the guards from truck number one, Esteban's got the guards from the van, and I've got truck number three. We gotta move in so fast they got no time to react to what's happening. Got it?"

Severo couldn't help thinking Juan was awfully sure of himself. Oh, yeah, the guy liked to think of himself as the great mastermind, the grand schemer who anticipated the smallest detail. But what if something didn't go according to his plan? What if something went horribly, disastrously wrong? There were so many things that could go wrong—and so many things that all had to happen exactly right. What were the odds? But he kept his misgivings to himself. He had no wish to incur Juan's derision. Severo was the strongest of the six, a burly, barrel-chested man. Years as a heavy-equipment operator had built his muscles to peak capacity. He had met Stefano at a bar near his last construction site in Florida, a hangout for the Hispanic workers. Stefano was recruiting, and it didn't take him long to convince Severo that he could make a lot more money turning his talents to the drug trade. Severo had been an associate ever since, helping out whenever a strong back was needed for a job.

Even Juan had to admit that Severo could be useful, but as for his attitude, well, that was another story. Severo was a chronic worrier. He was a man of considerable imagination, but only when it came to envisioning disaster. No matter how carefully Juan planned, Severo could see danger every step of the way. What if this happened? What if that happened? Always "what if?"

There was way too much negativity in that one, Juan thought. And he hated negativity.

"*Bueno*," Juan said. "Everyone's gonna have to move fast at this point. Severo and I gonna put the bodies in the back of truck number three. Severo will take them down the driveway to behind the barn, where we—where *you*," he corrected himself with a small snort, "will have dug a hole big enough for six. He's gonna wait there until someone comes to help him with the funeral.

"Meantime, Stefano's gonna jump into truck number two—that's the van with the coke in it—and drive it down the dirt road to the beach, where he'll meet up with Phillip. Polo's gonna get over his fright at the big bad men with guns and clear any crap from the accident off the road, and then drive the SUV into the barn. Esteban will drive truck number one into the barn. If either of the trucks don't start after the crash, I can tow them in with the Jimmy. As soon as the trucks are inside, Polo and Esteban gonna go help Severo dump the bodies and fill in the hole."

Yeah, Severo thought. Typical Juan. He sits in the Jimmy while we do all the work. And then he gets all the credit for his brilliant plan.

"While all this is happening, Phillip's gettin' the *Two Wise* ready. At 1:15 he'll take the tender to the beach. When Stefano gets there, they start transferring the bales to the tender. As soon as the bodies are buried and the grave's covered up, I'll drive you guys" —he nodded toward Polo, Esteban, and Severo—"to the beach in the Jimmy. Esteban, you and Severo gonna help carry bales. When all the stuff's out of the van, Polo will drive it back to the barn. I'll drive the Jimmy. We lock up the barn and the house and then come back to the beach on the moped.

"When we get all the bales onboard the *Two Wise*, we put the moped on the tender. We drop it into the water about halfway out, then haul the tender up onto the boat, weigh anchor, and head for Easter Island—six millionaires on a cruise."

Juan looked out the window for a few seconds, oblivious to the rain streaking down the grimy panes, smiling at this picture. Then he turned back to the others. His eyes were steely.

"We got just over forty-five minutes to do the whole job."

Jesus y Maria, Severo thought. The man is *loco* if he thinks this is gonna work.

In truth, all of the men except Juan and Stefano were having doubts about the viability of the plan. Forty-five minutes, start to finish? But they knew better than to question Juan. And if by some miracle it actually worked ...



The only thing left to do was practice. Every day for the next seven weeks, Juan studied the traffic pattern on the road. Only twice did a car come by near the time scheduled for the "accident." As unlikely as it was that that would happen on the actual day, they had to be prepared. Just one carload of adventuresome tourists deciding to get off the beaten track and experience the "real Colombia," or one old couple taking it into their heads to drive their wagon into town on a weekday instead of Saturday when the big market was open—just one fluke like that would screw everything up. It would be up to Stefano, squatting across the road amid thick ropes of thunbergia vines, to "deal with the situation," as Juan put it. He would do so, it was understood, with his semiautomatic rifle.

Every day for the next seven weeks, rain or shine, Severo drove the Jimmy, at thirty miles per hour, past the

driveway while Polo barreled down in the SUV and skidded onto the road, missing the Jimmy by five seconds. On the actual day, Polo would start five seconds earlier.

During those seven weeks, Severo and Esteban dug the grave hole behind the barn without complaint. They didn't complain, even though it was backbreaking work and the heat was almost overpowering. Severo was used to hard physical labor in all sorts of weather, but Esteban, overweight and out of shape, was convinced each day that he'd die before they were done.



In mid-August, Phillip flew to Puntarenas and checked into a resort hotel close to the harbor. Looking out his third-floor window, he could see the *Two Wise* rocking up and down in the water. For seven days he pretty much stayed in his room, binoculars pressed to his eyes, observing activity around the boat.

On the seventh day, a Friday, an American family arrived around noontime. Phillip put on his pony-tailed cap and shades and headed down to the harbor. He always found it easy to strike up a conversation with a boat owner. Most of them enjoyed nothing more than discussing the ins and outs of their crafts with anyone who showed an interest, especially someone with a little knowledge of sailing. And that Phillip had plenty of.

He'd grown up around boats in Miami, and had said from the time he was five years old that he was going to be a sailor. As soon as he was old enough to take the test, he had gotten his captain's license. He had met Stefano and Juan in Miami. All three had worked at marinas—Phillip to earn enough extra money to buy a Sailfish, and Stefano and Juan to help support their mother and sisters. They had started with grunt work on boats and around the docks, then had learned enough of the basics of sailing to shuttle boats from one dock to another as required.

Phillip had gone to college, earned a business degree, and moved on to an entry-level position with a firm in Chicago, but had continued to keep in touch with Stefano. When Stefano had called one raw February morning to ask if he'd be interested in helping him take a boat to the Virgin Islands, Phillip knew Stefano didn't have a pleasure trip in mind. He was rattled by the idea; he had never done anything like this in his life. He was so uncomfortable with the idea of what he knew was behind the request—a drug run—that he'd simply decided to ask no questions.

How complicit could he be, really, as long as he surmised and wasn't absolutely sure? And Stefano had offered an almost unimaginable sum of money for a few days of doing what he loved most, sailing—and to the Virgin Islands in the middle of winter at that. In the end, he called in sick. He told his boss he had the flu and was on his way.

He'd done a number of similar jobs over the years, usually with Stefano and Juan, occasionally with someone else he'd met on a run. After a while, he'd become comfortable enough with what they were doing to talk about it freely—and very comfortable indeed with the lifestyle it afforded him.

As Phillip had expected, the American was eager to show off his boat. When Phillip told him he was considering buying a similar one he'd seen in Fort Lauderdale, the man invited him to come aboard so he could see another version of the Real Ship 65.

"These are great boats, well built," he told Phillip. "My baby here's three years old, but they're virtually identical. All Real Ships are equipped pretty much the same way."

That was exactly what Phillip had hoped.

"They look exactly the same to me," Phillip said as he looked around. "When we did the sea trial in Fort Lauderdale, the water was flat; how does she take the waves?"

"Ah, she's a regular dolphin. There's enough of a flare on the bow to throw spray away from the boat so she stays pretty dry, too."

"Y'know, the anchor system was the one thing I didn't get to see down in Florida. Does the windlass pull the anchor up okay?"

"Oh, yeah, absolutely. You can control it either from the pilothouse or with a deck button at the bow. It's pretty heavy; there's something like two hundred and fifty feet of anchor chain, but the windlass pulls it up just fine."

"How about fuel? Diesel pretty easy to come by down here?"

"Well, you have to plan carefully on that score. Only places I know you can get it are here and a couple of marinas on the west coast of Costa Rica. Thirty-five hundred gallons will take you a long way, but the last thing I do after a holiday is fill her up. That prevents algae from growing in the tanks while I'm away."

Phillip noted that keys were in both instrument panels in the pilothouse. There was a separate instrument panel for each engine, one on each side of the wheel. Hot-wiring the engines would be a snap. The pilothouse door lock could be pried open with a screwdriver. The outside cabin walls were white fiberglass and the signage on the transom was a script vinyl—easy to remove. Everything was checking out just fine. Could it really be this easy, or was he

overlooking something?

Phillip stepped from the yacht to the dock.

“So how far are you taking her on this trip?”

“We’re heading up to near Managua in Nicaragua for a few days. It’s our favorite spot. Have to be back in the States on September first, so we’ll be gone for just a little under two weeks. Wish it were twice that!”

“Have a safe trip,” Phillip said as he shook hands with the man. “And thanks again. Maybe I’ll be sailing a rig just like her soon.”

Phillip walked down the harbor road, entered a little hole-in-the-wall bar, and ordered a Red Cap. Taking a table by the window, he took out a piece of paper and made a few notes. They’d have to strip the boat’s name off the transom and apply a new one. He liked the name *Coincidence* and visualized it in block letters twelve inches high. There was no practical way to change the color of the topsides, but he had figured out a way he could change the color of the cabin from white to blue. The vinyl used for signs comes in rolls about twenty feet six long. He estimated that given the cabin profile and windows, he would need eight rolls of vinyl twenty-eight inches wide for the job. He decided to put a twelve-inch blue stripe at the top of the topsides right next to the deck line.

He gazed out the window at the line of motor yachts broadside to the dock as he considered what else he would need. Two spray bottles for water to soak the backing paper off the vinyl. A slotted screwdriver for breaking the locks. Electrical tape to hold the hotwired connection together. A handheld Global Positioning System for backup, plus extra batteries.

Phillip’s plan was to sail due south at 180 degrees for three hundred and sixty miles, then make a left turn on a heading of 90 degrees for four hundred and thirty miles. That would take them to the cove near Buenaventura. To conserve fuel, they would travel at just over eight knots at 1900 rpm, using about ten gallons per hour. He scribbled some figures on his paper. The trip to Buenaventura would use a thousand gallons, leaving them with twenty-five hundred gallons for the trip to Easter Island. At the same speed, the remaining fuel would take them approximately two thousand miles.

Damn, he thought. It’s twenty-two hundred miles from Buenaventura to Easter Island and, building in a reasonable safety margin, they would need an additional five hundred gallons of fuel.

There was no way he would make the trip in that boat if they didn’t have full tanks before they left for Easter Island. Damn! Why hadn’t he thought all this out sooner? He was going to have to call Juan, and Juan was not going to be pleased.

Looking up from his calculations, he watched the American and his family preparing the *Two Wise* for departure. They slipped the bow and spring lines and loosened the stern line a little. The bow thrusters took the bow away from the dock and the boat pivoted on a large fender close to the stern. The stern line was hauled in and the boat quietly pulled away.

As Phillip had expected, Juan was not at all happy about the fuel problem. His voice on the phone was ominously quiet.

“Man, I trusted you with taking care of the boat. How many times do I have to say it? Details, details! Details are what make or break a run. You gotta plan for everything, you gotta have no surprises. You never, never, leave something like this to the last minute. If this plan goes to hell because you screwed up ...”

Juan didn’t finish his sentence before slamming down the phone. He didn’t have to.

The plan was now vulnerable, and none of the options looked good. Juan turned over the possibilities in his mind. Sleep was impossible until he had found a solution. If they didn’t add fuel before heading to Easter Island, they’d probably not get there. It would be risky trying to fill up somewhere before reaching Buenaventura. The closer they were to Puntarenas, the more likely it would be that someone would recognize the *Two Wise* and realize it had been stolen.

All right, then, he thought. What about buying forty-five-gallon drums of fuel and filling up the tank in the cove? That would be by far the safest place. No, that would never work. Those drums weighed a ton; there was no way to maneuver them down to the cove. They could wait until they got as far as Peru before refueling, maybe. But then the risk would not only be getting caught with a stolen boat, but getting caught with a stolen boat that was carrying a load of cocaine.

That idiot Phillip! And that makes me a bigger idiot, Juan told himself, punching his pillow. He should never have let Stefano tell him it would be better for somebody else to handle the boat. If he’d done it himself, he’d have known they needed a larger one. Now it was too late.



Early the next morning, after a fitful night, Juan drove along the coast road, looking for an out-of-the-way place that sold diesel fuel. He was still furious at himself. Wasn't he the man famous for nailing down every last detail? Stefano, he was the big-picture man, all right, the one who dreamed up the ideas in the first place. But Juan, the little brother, he had always been the one to deal with the all-important details. Stefano had relied on him for that, and he had never let him down. He might not have been good at anything else in his miserable life, he thought, but he was good at that, at thinking two steps ahead of everyone else, at anticipating all the potential pitfalls in a plan, and making damn sure they didn't happen.

He should never have put Phillip in charge of something so important. Sure the guy knew boats and was a regular whiz at the helm, but he had no concept of the painstaking attention you had to put into a job like this.

Eventually Juan found a likely spot at a marina in the harbor at Punta Magdalena, some ninety miles north. The marina closed at five every evening, but if he could entice the owner to come back after dark to service a late-arriving boat, it would be as good a spot as they could hope for.

The harbor at Punta Magdalena was dilapidated but well protected by a rock breakwater with an opening about two hundred feet wide. The marina was at the end of an old wooden jetty that extended into the harbor about two hundred and fifty feet. Juan was glad to see that the few fishing boats in the harbor were allowed to swing on their moorings. That would give them plenty of room to manoeuvre the *Two Wise* in the harbor.

The sides of the jetty were protected by long planks of wood with old used tires suspended from them for fenders. There was a gas pump, a diesel pump, and a ramshackle shed used as an office. Lighting was almost nonexistent. It was obvious that not much happened at night. They couldn't take a chance on being seen in the daytime; the camouflage Phillip had devised was okay for disguising the boat from the air, but at close range, in the light of day? Who the hell would stick blue vinyl all over a million-dollar yacht?

No, they would have to do the refueling at night, with as few people around as possible. Juan had found that it rarely took more than waving a few pesos under the nose of an underpaid worker to put him in a cooperative frame of mind. He jotted down the marina manager's name and number. He'd get Phillip to make the call. That was the one thing the little bastard was useful for—passing for an upstanding middle-class citizen.



That same day, Phillip was grappling with how to get seventeen rolls of vinyl aboard the boat. He hadn't wanted to make inquiries in Puntarenas, so had headed for San Jose, the capital. He'd had a frustrating afternoon going from one sign shop to another before he found one that could order the material he was looking for, in Flag Blue, one roll of each size. Even so, it would take two weeks to come in, and the shop owner was the chatty type, all inquisitive about what he was going to be doing with so much blue vinyl.

He'd had to invent a story, and a pretty darn good story it was, too, he thought, to have been hatched on the spot like that. He said he was filming a TV commercial and needed the vinyl to cover up the side of a building. The strips would come right off after the shoot, he'd said, warming to his theme. His film crew used it all the time.

Then the guy wanted to know why he hadn't just brought it with him from the States to begin with, in that case. He replied with something about all the hassles involved in bringing it through customs. The little man seemed satisfied at this, nodding and grumbling about the troubles the government caused with its silly regulation of this and that, and said that, as long as Phillip paid cash in advance, he'd be glad to order whatever he wanted. And if he should need any extras for the TV commercial, any locals maybe, for a crowd scene—No? Well, if not himself, he had a wife, mother, sister, nephews, nieces ...

Before leaving San Jose, Phillip located a small self-storage company and rented a medium-sized unit. It was larger than he really needed, but it was the only one available. He rented it for three months, paying in advance for the whole period. When the vinyl arrived, he would pick it up in a small rented van and deliver it to the storage unit until the day before they planned to steal the boat.

Philip went over the plan on his flight back to Medellin, examining it over and over for any problems unaccounted for, any ends untied. Two weeks before the heist was to go down, he, Juan, and Esteban would fly to San Jose and rent a small van in an assumed name. They would pick up the vinyl at the storage unit and drive to Puntarenas, arriving about four in the afternoon. That would give them time to buy food for the trip and observe both the harbor and the boat, making certain that everything was okay. Around eight o'clock they would drive the van to the boat, unload the vinyl and food, and leave the van in a parking lot close to the harbor. It should take them no more than half an hour to load the vinyl, break into the boat, start the engines, cast off the lines, and take off for Buenaventura.

What else? Was there anything, any detail, no matter how tiny, that—God forbid—he had overlooked that could trip them up? Anything at all he could add that would help—help them with the plan, and, most especially, help him get back into Juan’s good graces?

Goggles. Night-vision goggles. What if they could slip out of the harbor without turning on their lights at all? What if they could just glide right past the fishing boats, through the breakwater, and out into the open sea, with no more light than the moon and the stars provided? It was an idea, one that just might quell Juan’s anger at him a little.

He hated to think about being out in the Pacific Ocean with the man if it didn’t.



The day before the *Inspiration's* departure, parents arrived to see their kids off. Of the thirty-two students on board, fourteen had family members present to bid them farewell.

Carol and Craig Jordan, Melissa's mom and dad, arrived early in the afternoon and checked into the Holiday Inn Harbor View, directly across the street from the *Inspiration's* dock. Running straight to the window of their eleventh-floor room overlooking the water, her carry-on bag still in hand, Carol yanked the curtains open, eager for her first view of the ship that was her daughter's new home. She was horrified to find it nowhere in sight. Had they somehow come to the wrong place?

To the right, she could see planes taking off and landing at the San Diego airport. Looking across San Diego bay, slightly to the left, planes were taking off and landing at the North Island U.S. Naval Air Station. Several navy ships, including an aircraft carrier, were docked at the naval station. The Maritime Museum of San Diego was right across the street. But where was the *Inspiration*?

She dialed the front desk and was relieved to hear that the ship was just around the other side of the harbor for its final provisioning and would be returning soon to its usual spot.

Carol called room service and ordered tea, which arrived just as Craig appeared with the rest of their luggage. The two of them were sitting by the window sipping when the *Inspiration* hove into view, crossing slowly in front of the hotel and docking.



Melissa was standing on deck as the ship docked, keeping her eyes peeled for her parents. Now that the time of departure had arrived, she was fighting off pangs of homesickness. She'd already bid a tearful telephone good-bye to Eric, who was now back at school. She had mailed cheerful postcards to her friends, telling them how excited she was about the journey—and carefully not mentioning that she was writing rather than calling because if she heard their voices, she might fall apart entirely.

Suddenly she caught sight of her parents hurrying across the street toward the ship, her mom taking two steps for every one of her dad's long strides. Dad, she noted, was wearing the same old Aussie hat adorned with souvenir badges that had embarrassed her no end when he'd worn it to her regattas. Her face dissolved into a silly grin; she'd never been so happy to see anything in her life. She ran ashore as they neared the dock and scooped them up in a bear hug. Anyone passing by would have had no trouble translating the trio's babblings as expressions of joy.

Melissa gave her parents the grand tour of the ship and introduced them to her cabinmates. Craig and Carol were floored by the size of the cabin, even though they had been told its dimensions.

Thank goodness the girls seemed to get along so well, Carol thought.

And the washroom! That was tinier still, and, Melissa told them, not only could she barely squeeze herself into the shower, half the time the water was only lukewarm.

Carol, happy to be taking maternal charge again, whisked Melissa right up to the hotel room for one last long luxuriously warm shower before her little girl would be forced once more to brave the tepid waters of the hardy sailing life.

Afterward, Melissa, cozily bundled in a terry-cloth robe, sat on the edge of the bed as Carol sat behind her, unsnarling the tangles in her daughter's long thick hair. Of course Melissa was perfectly capable of doing this for

herself, but it was a ritual they enjoyed when they had the opportunity.

Craig sat in the armchair by the window, wondering how long it would be before he would witness this lovely picture again. Or might Melissa's experience on the *Inspiration* change her so radically that she would no longer even want to participate in these family rituals? That was such an endearing quality about his daughter, he reflected. As mature and capable as she now was, she was still perfectly happy to be as cuddlesome and snuggly as a four-year-old. It was like having a preternaturally thoughtful and self-sufficient toddler in the house; all of the charm with none of the hassles. Of course she had to grow up, he wouldn't want it any other way—but must *everything* change?

Both parents listened with rapt attention as Melissa related all of the details since her arrival in San Diego. Her words tripped over one another, her arms punctuated the ones she could get out, her head sometimes jugged forward with gales of laughter—until she felt her hair pulled to its limit against the brush and screeched “Ow!” followed by another fit of laughing. Almost all of the details, at any rate. Although Melissa told her parents that the boy-to-girl ratio was good, and that there were some cute guys onboard—some of them tall, even—she made no mention of Pierre.

At dusk they went to Planet Hollywood for dinner, followed by a last-minute shopping trip. Melissa needed a pillow as the small blowup one she had brought with her, hoping to save space in her luggage, had already sprung a leak. Once in the store, all three discovered little items that might just be the very thing to have along on a long and possibly uncomfortable journey: hand and foot warmers, a whistle on a neck cord, extra tubes of lip ointment, small plastic bags, and, to go in them, a supply of peppermint patties, Melissa's favorite candy. Melissa nibbled two or three as she filled up the baggies back at the hotel room, then stretched out on the bed and slept soundly until Carol got her up just before the ship's eleven o'clock curfew.

They held hands walking to the ship and said a teary good night. Carol had told herself sternly that she was *not* going to cry, that it would be quite unkind of her to put a damper on her daughter's enthusiasm with any selfish displays of bawling. But as soon as she saw Melissa's eyes begin to fill with tears, she couldn't hold any back of her own.

As for Craig, his eyes were half covered by his hat, which he had inexplicably put on even though there was no need for it now that the sun had gone down. He stood with his hands thrust deep in his pockets and said a hoarse, almost inaudible, “'Night, Baby.”

“It's okay,” Melissa said. “We're still going to see each other tomorrow.”

The gate to the floating dock was locked. The sign on the gate, which Melissa had never noticed, said it would be locked at ten-thirty every night. Melissa climbed the fence and boarded the ship. She moved to the bow, keeping her eyes on her parents as they walked back to the hotel. When they disappeared through the front entrance, she sat down on the bow and stared up at the eleventh floor. She spent most of the night sitting there, tears rolling down her cheeks.



The next afternoon, the day of departure, the crew held a reception onboard for the families. It was primarily a chance for the parents to get acquainted with the crew and the other students with whom their kids would be spending the next few months. It was also an opportunity for Captain Marzynski, Anika Johnson, and Edward Flynn, the founder of Blue Water Academy, to point out the elaborate safety mechanisms in place on the *Inspiration*.

“Lloyd's Register, one of the top ship-surveying companies in the world, performs an annual check of every single component of every single system aboard the ship,” Mr. Flynn told them. “Every five years, Lloyd's requires an even more thorough examination to reclass the vessel.

“For this, the inspectors walk through the door as if they've never seen the vessel before.”

He waved his hands in the direction of the engine room.

“They tear down the main engines and generators—all of the pumps and sea valves, the electronic systems, the navigation systems—and examine everything under a microscope.”

Craig couldn't help noticing that the man who was assuring them of the safeguards for their beloved children was missing three fingers from his right hand.

“Since the *Inspiration* is registered in the Bahamas, the Bahamian Maritime Authority appoints a surveyor to accompany the Lloyd's surveyors; together, they go through a rigorous checklist of items that literally number into the thousands. It takes more than two weeks to complete the survey. An imposing level of redundancy is required. If anything, no matter how minor, needs repair, the vessel is down until it is repaired. Blue Water Academy cannot operate the vessel until the certificate is issued.

“Furthermore, although the Lloyd’s requirement is that a vessel must go through two such surveys every three years, on the *Inspiration* we do it every other year.

“Bahamian registration requires that there be six licensed personnel onboard the ship in order to move the vessel. The captain must be certified as unlimited oceangoing and sail-endorsed. The *Inspiration* carries three people who are licensed at this level. First mate Dr. Elliott Williams and second mate Henry Mattox are our fully qualified backups. In the unlikely event the captain is injured or ill, they are eminently capable of taking over.”

Henry beamed. He had received his sail endorsement just six weeks before.

Dr. Williams gave a barely perceptible nod.

“And, in the even more unlikely event that some catastrophe should befall all three of them, well, our bosun Mac, while he does not hold certification, is as capable as anyone of sailing this ship.”

Mac gave a mock courtly bow at this acknowledgment.

“The *Inspiration* has two captains who rotate every six months,” Mr. Flynn continued. “Each has been with the program for over fifteen years. Captain Luke Marzynski here likely has more time at sea than any other living sail-endorsed captain. And now I will stop bragging about him and give him a chance to get in a few words of his own. Captain Marzynski?”

When the applause died down, the captain began.

“As you all know, this is no luxury cruise. This is a working vessel, and much of the unique learning experience we offer comes from the students pulling their weight with all of the day-to-day operations. They are not playacting. They are not engaging in busywork or performing superficial tasks. They are crewing this vessel, with all of the responsibility that entails. But I want to assure you that, in spite of the inherent risks involved in sailing, we do everything we possibly can to ensure the safety of every person on this ship.”

All of the parents had already heard all of this several times. Program safety had been stressed in the Blue Water brochure. Kathleen Tutty had gone over it with them at the time of the interview. It had all been laid out again in the admission papers. But no one minded in the least hearing it one more time.

“Students must wear the right kind of shoes on deck and when going aloft. There are stringent requirements as to when their safety harnesses must be clipped on. Stainless-steel safety lines are part of the rigging. The professional crew knows when to add an additional lifeline and when to demand that all students stay within the deckhouse. I’m happy to report that accidents have been few and far between—and the most serious ever was a broken arm.”

“And that from slippin’ in the soup he’d just spilt!” Mac called out. “Had nothin’ to do with the sailin’!”

“True,” the captain said. “Furthermore, no student is required to take on a job in which he or she is really uncomfortable—”

“They’ll peel tatties whether they like it or no’!” Mac put in, leaning forward in his best pirate-captain imitation, sweeping the crowd with an evil sneer that fooled no one.

“Other than peeling potatoes, of course,” Captain Marzynski said, suppressing a smile. “But no student goes higher on the rigging than is comfortable, no student handles lines that are too heavy for them to manage. *All* jobs aboard this ship are vital for its operation—”

“Especially tattie peeling!” one of the students yelled.

“Hear, hear!” several others shouted.

The captain grinned.

“We have conducted emergency drills every day since the students arrived—fire, man overboard, abandon ship, every conceivable emergency—and will continue to conduct them on the course of our journey. And, believe me, no one runs a tighter emergency drill than our Mac.”

The students let out a cheer. Mac had scared some of them silly with his gruffness in the first drill, but they had soon discovered that it was a cover for his sweetness and a manifestation of his abiding concern for their safety.

The truth was, if anything were ever to happen to a student in his care, Mac would never be able to forgive himself.

“And now,” Captain Marzynski said, “before our bosun’s head gets any more swollen than it already is, I’d like to introduce our ship’s director, Anika Johnson. She’s going to tell you a bit about the educational aspects of the program.”

Anika seemed slightly out of breath as she stepped up to speak and was rummaging about in her pocket.

Dave Cameron had been wondering where she’d disappeared while the captain had been talking. Was something wrong?

“One of the chief educational tasks the students face,” Anika began, with a graver expression than Dave had ever seen on her usually sunny face, “is the use of this crucial piece of equipment—”

Here she produced the potato peeler she had run to the galley to fetch, and raised it high over her head like the torch of the Statue of Liberty.

Fortunately for Anika, the crowd's laughter went on long enough for her to get her own giggles under control. She ran her hands through her close-cropped blond hair and began again, on a more serious note. The program directors, she told the parents, determine the itinerary eighteen months in advance.

"We take advantage of the prevailing winds, and we like to chase summer wherever it is, staying out of the low-pressure development areas of hurricanes or typhoons. Countries we plan to visit must be politically stable as well as offering a unique educational environment, which we integrate with our strong curriculum based in anthropology, marine biology, political science, economics, history, and geography.

"We must choose a route that allows us to travel fifteen thousand nautical miles in five months, and it must include eighty days at sea to provide the mandatory hundred and twenty-five hours of teaching time per course. We try to add a couple of new ports each year to see which ones are best. We also make every attempt to participate in major sailing events happening on our course. And home stays with local residents in some ports are always part of the itinerary, and one of the most valuable. There is no better way to learn about a culture than by actively participating in it with a host family.

"We have an impressive array of ports lined up, with some once-in-a-lifetime sights awaiting us. We have an outstanding group of dedicated teachers. We have a rigorous course curriculum. But I know Mr. Flynn will back me up when I say that the most educational part of the whole year will be what you learn about yourselves as you face the challenges of making the extraordinary journey that is before you. I hope you'll make the most of every minute of it."

Mr. Flynn did indeed back up Anika's words, and added more of his own. He spoke of the difficult journey that the parents would be making as they let their children go. The *Inspiration*, he told them, would be a floating "greenhouse" that would nurture the growth of everyone onboard, as well as that of the families left behind. Growing pains, he said, would be inevitable; sometimes they would be severe. Metamorphosis was not an easy process. Their journey, however, their metamorphosis, would be an experience to be treasured, an experience that few were privileged enough to make. He ended by asking the students to look carefully at the person standing on their left, and the person standing on their right.

"Although you have just met, it is these people standing beside you now who are about to become your best friends for life."

That was it for speeches. The moment that had been everyone's focus for the past several months had finally, unbelievably, arrived. It was time.

Hugs. Kisses. Tears. More hugs. Unnecessary reminders—"You won't forget to use sunscreen, will you?" One final hug all around, then Captain Marzynski, Anika, and Dave escorted the parents with firm courtesy off the ship, giving them their most reassuring smiles and waves.

Meanwhile, Mac had sent the students to change into their crew uniforms. As soon as they returned, he gave each of them a task. He knew it would ease the leave-taking.

The gangplank was taken aboard, and Captain Marzynski gave the order to single up the lines—they had all been doubled while the ship was docked. The engine was put in forward gear full to starboard to keep the ship steady as the lines were untied. Craig Jordan and some of the other parents helped with the untying. It seemed to Craig that it made him feel better to have something to do, even if what he was doing served to hasten his daughter's departure.

The breast lines were first to go, then the stern spring line, bowline, and stern line, leaving only the bow spring line attached. The captain swung the helm full to port and the stern started to move from the dock. When there was sufficient clearance, he put the engine in reverse and ordered the bow spring line released.

The *Inspiration* slipped slowly from her berth.



The *Inspiration* passed Point Loma and headed into the Pacific Ocean, southbound for Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. If everything went well, it would arrive there on the twenty-seventh of August, seven days away.

For the first supper at sea, Jarred, the cook, prepared one of the meals he had found to be especially popular with students: spaghetti and meatballs accompanied by fresh bread. Sure enough, most of the Floaties enjoyed it hugely, except the few who were feeling a little unwell; the thought of eating anything at all was the farthest thing from their minds. It wasn't unusual at the beginning for a few to be laid low, given the combination of the unaccustomed motion of the ship, fatigue, and a bit of anxiety. Those suffering usually recovered in a day or two.

After the meal, at eight, the first of the watches that would be their nightly routine for the length of the voyage began. The officers had drilled the importance of the watch into the Floaties from the beginning. Several of the Floaties had been sceptical—Pierre, in particular. Wasn't it just discipline for the sake of discipline? he wondered. Discomfort masquerading as "character building," with no real purpose? To much like Caneff, he thought.

And in any case, the radar alarm would sound if another vessel was approaching, allowing plenty of time to alter course. Why keep everyone in a chronic state of daytime drowsiness when technology had made keeping watch by night obsolete?

But that was before the captain related the story of a night, early in its voyages, that the *Inspiration* had come all too close to plowing into a shipping container. The container was lying too low in the water for the radar to pick it up; only the sharp-eyed Floatie on watch duty at one that morning had helped the ship avert a disaster.

"Then, too, as anyone familiar with computers could appreciate, sometimes even the most advanced technology could let you down," the captain said.

Well, Pierre thought, perhaps there was some justification for night watch after all. It was a shame that he had been put on the two A.M. shift for his first watch, though—and worse still that Melissa was scheduled for midnight. But at least they had been assigned to galley duty together.

Anika had divided the crew into six watch groups of five or six students each, with a mix, on each watch, of guys and girls. Students in the same cabin were assigned the same shift so that others sleeping in the cabin wouldn't be disturbed when it came time, two hours later, for a watch change. The watch rotation started at eight each night and ended at eight the next morning.

Some shifts were better than others. The first watch in the evening was deemed best because it ended at ten and you could still get a full night's sleep. A close second was the six-to-eight morning watch, again because at least you could have an uninterrupted night's sleep. All other times meant having to be roused from a sound sleep to go on deck and fulfill your duties. The best you could hope for was a gentle awakening.

As Melissa and Pierre were to learn, the person from the previous watch who came to rouse you from your much-needed slumber might be the type to come bursting into the cabin, snap on the light, and shout "Time to get up!" right in your ear. A different, more thoughtful type might gently touch your shoulder, whispering, "Your turn." After her first night at the mercy of the former sort, Melissa vowed to be one of the latter herself.

At the start of each shift, the watch group went amidships and reported to the officer of the watch, who took attendance. The captain, first mate, and second mate each took a nightly four-hour shift as officer of the watch. The officer assigned specific tasks if anything special had to be done, such as adding or dousing a sail. Each watch group appointed its own leader for two-week intervals, and each member took a turn as leader. The watch leader organized watch duty: two students must be on active watch on each side of the bridge for an hour at a time; two more, who were stationed close at hand but not actively watching, were to be on hand in case anything was needed. The remaining one or two were on call and could hang out in the classroom for the duration of the watch.

Most of the time the ship was on automatic pilot, but now and then it had to be steered manually. The watchers on the bridge enjoyed taking the helm and steering. Having something to do beyond endlessly scanning the horizon for the remote possibility of approaching danger helped them stay awake.

One person from each watch was assigned to galley duty each day. Six watches meant there were six people assisting the cook: two in the galley helping with food preparation, two in the mess hall serving, and two more washing dishes. All six had to help clean the galley and the mess hall after the meal.

Melissa and Pierre found they enjoyed mess duty. Partly because they would have enjoyed any activity that put them together, but partly, too, because the mess was the one place onboard where they could listen to music. The stereo pumped out a great dishwashing beat. The two discovered they could sing and dance and scrub pasta-encrusted plates all at the same time—at least until the ship made a sudden lurch. After losing a couple of plates, though, and nearly slipping in the water that slopped over the edge of the sink onto the floor, they remembered the poor Floatie who'd broken his arm sliding in the soup. They toned it down a bit, just swaying lightly to the rhythm while keeping a firm grip on the crockery.

After the dishes were dried and put away, they went out on the classroom deck, stretched out on their backs, and gazed up at the stars. This far away from the lights of any city, the sky was a deeper blue than Melissa had ever imagined possible. It looked like one of the pictures in a Christmas storybook she had loved as a little girl: her favorite picture of shepherds tending their flocks on a grassy plain, the velvet blue of the midnight sky illuminated by a single radiant star. She never would have believed that such a sky existed outside the pages of a book.

The abrupt change from the bright and noisy galley to the still darkness of the vast night made the couple feel shy with each other. Where only a few minutes before they had been laughing uproariously at the slightest provocation, each one prodding the other to greater heights of silliness, now they couldn't find words to express what they were feeling. Melissa was surprised feelings like this existed outside of a book, too.

Pierre was surprised by his feelings for Melissa. True, he had been struck by her from the moment he had looked up from the baggage carousel at the airport and seen her standing there. But in some way he couldn't explain, his initial animal attraction had grown, with every moment they spent together, into something much more. Much more serious, much more profound—and much more complicated.

He hadn't wanted to get involved with anybody in the program, not really involved. Sure, he had looked forward to meeting some girls and having fun and getting some practice in how to talk to people of the opposite sex, but not a serious one-girl, one-guy relationship. Not yet. He didn't know the first thing about that kind of relationship, and even supposing he turned out to be a quick learner, what would happen at the end of the year? They'd have to go their separate ways, never to see each other again—*non*, it was too terrible a thought—or else rearrange their lives to be together. He wasn't ready to even think about any of this. Then again, he hadn't counted on meeting someone like Melissa.

For Melissa, meeting a boyfriend onboard was practically part of the seagoing educational curriculum. And yet, in all of her imaginings about this boyfriend, there had been no face behind the idea, no real person behind the abstraction. She had pictured herself, like the girls she knew at home, blithely chattering about "my boyfriend," or having a sure partner for the informal onboard dances Anika would arrange, or sitting beside her tall and handsome guy (for invariably in these musings, he *was* tall and he *was* handsome), sipping fruity concoctions from coconut shells in tropical ports of call, her hand resting casually, possessively, on his arm as they engaged in lively banter with their fellow world travelers, marveling over the amazing sights they had seen.

This long-awaited boyfriend, she now realized, had been little more than an accessory in her mind—a mere escort for whom she had no specific feeling. Whereas the boy who was lying beside her on this brilliant clear night, his hands clasped behind his head, contemplating the stars—for *this* boy she was experiencing some very specific feelings.

She wasn't sure she was ready for the feelings, delicious though they seemed to be. Was Pierre feeling them, too? Surely he must be. She could tell that he was when he looked at her. She had known, from the first moment, way back at the airport, that some inevitable magnetic force was pulling them together. She was sure it was more than just physical attraction, however much that was a part of it. But at the same time, there was the closeness she had felt with Pierre from the beginning: the way they seemed to be on the same wavelength about so many things, the way it seemed utterly natural and comfortable to be with him.

Till this moment, anyway, she thought. Why was she suddenly, just now, feeling uncomfortable with him? Why wasn't he saying anything? How could you ever be sure what a guy was thinking? Did guys think at all?

She knew he enjoyed her company. Hadn't they spent every possible minute together for the past week? But could she dare hope it was more than that for him? She turned to face him, hoping she could pick up a clue from his eyes or his smile that she meant even half as much to him as he did to her. Her eyes found him propped up on one elbow, looking at her, regarding her with that slightly puzzled expression that came over him when one of the kids

used an English slang term.

“Melissa? Would you—” he began, very softly. Then he stopped and instead reached out with the back of his hand to stroke her cheek, very softly.

“Of course,” she replied, understanding now, beyond a doubt, what he was thinking.

And so it was official. Now that they knew where they stood with each other, their shyness vanished and they talked for the next hour about anything and everything. Most of all they talked about their feelings for each other. They agreed that there was simply no use trying to deny them and decided not to worry about what might happen at the end of the year until they reached that point.

Far sooner than she was ready for it, the time came for Melissa to begin her watch shift. Pierre was on his feet first, reaching a hand down to her. He pulled her up and into his arms in one fluid motion, then sought her lips with his own in a kiss that was as gentle as it was ardent.

Melissa stood watch on the port side of the ship that night. She struggled to keep her mind focused on her task. She had just entered the ranks of those who have been kissed. Gone in an instant from the girl who wondered if it was ever going to happen to her to *A Woman Who Has Been Kissed*. Pierre was her boyfriend! As she kept her eyes on the endless monotony of the sea, she was awed by the way the very first kiss of her life felt so exhilarating and at the same time completely natural.



Melissa got up early the next morning overflowing with energy. She joined the few other Floaties awake at that hour for the six-thirty aerobics class, then bounced into the mess hall and slid in beside Pierre for breakfast at seven-thirty. She was starving.

Pierre held her left hand as she dug into her breakfast with her right. Good thing she'd gone to aerobics, he said with a laugh.

She stuck her fork into one of Jarred's pancakes and a stream of grease spewed out onto her shirt.

"Here," he said, passing her the maple syrup. "Pour enough syrup on and they're not so bad. Still bad, but not so bad."

After breakfast the science teacher, Tom Michaels, rang the ship's bell eight times for colors, and Irene, a student selected at random that morning, raised the Canadian flag. Anika told the crew, as she would every day at colors, how many miles out they were from port, and how many they expected to travel that day. The land they could see off the port side, she told them, was the Baja Peninsula of Mexico. They were already in sight of their first new country.

Classes would not start for a couple of days. First the Floaties must get accustomed to the shipboard routine. Although they had practiced much of it during their week of training, it was more strenuous now that they were actually afloat.

After colors, Anika sent everyone to clean their cabins, including the heads, as was standard morning routine. Then, around midmorning, all hands were called to set the sails. The captain had told Mac which sails were to be raised, and it was Mac's responsibility to get the crew to raise them. To an outsider, this procedure would have looked like organized chaos. The first sail to go up was the main and it took no fewer than twenty Floaties, working together in five separate groups, to get the task done. Next came the mizzen, then the flying jib, and, finally, the outer jib. The whole process took over an hour. At last the motor was shut off and they were under sail.

Pierre and Melissa were both taken aback by how different it felt. Even though the generator continued to purr, making it sound as if the motor was still running, the sensation onboard was something completely new. The wind was on the beam, making the ship heel to starboard and rock slightly as each wave hit the boat. They hadn't noticed this rocking motion when the ship was under power only.

Just before noon Dave Cameron yelled, "Dolphins at the bow!"

Running forward, Melissa saw seven or eight dolphins frolicking in the bow wave. She had never seen so many dolphins at once, and never at such close range. They swam at the same speed as the ship, then began jumping out of the water. It was almost as though they were playing tag with the ship, nudging it, then darting away, daring it to catch up.

The rest of the day was devoted to chores: the many tasks that needed to be done to keep the ship running smoothly, and all of which the Floaties would soon have to sandwich between their classes and studying. In addition to the sailing skills they'd be learning, there was a staggering amount of maintenance to be done every day: scrubbing, sanding, "rust-busting," painting. Few of them had ever given a thought to what was required to keep a vessel the size of the *Inspiration* shipshape. In fact, the Floaties were getting a whole new appreciation of many figures of speech they had heard all their lives without truly understanding. Especially "learning the ropes."

"Do you realize how many lines they expect us to memorize?" Nancy asked Melissa as they took a short break in the afternoon. They were sitting on the port side on a little bench just outside the mess hall, right next to a pin rail.

"One hundred and thirty-four," Nancy announced, before Melissa could answer. "I've counted them. Look at the pins on the rail right there. There are twenty-six on that pin rail alone! Buntlines, leech lines, clew lines, halyards,

and jiggers. How are we ever expected to remember them all?”

“We’ve only been at it for a few days. In another couple of weeks we’ll probably have them all down pat,” Melissa replied.

She had a few doubts of her own, but goodness knows Mac was doing his best to drill the names into their heads as quickly as possible.

“I’m still freaked about climbing the rigging,” Nancy was saying. “I don’t think I’m ever going to make it all the way up to the royal.”

“I don’t know which is worse,” Melissa said. “Looking up or looking down!”

She had made it to the top of the mast, the royal, but not without considerable wooziness. It was only her steely determination not to allow mere terror to stand in her way that had kept her going.

“It’s funny,” she said. “When you’re on deck, the ship looks huge, but up there, looking down at it, it’s like the size of a sandbox. And then, when the ship rocks and you’re hanging out over the water—!”

Nancy shrieked at the thought. Then she yawned.

“I am so tired now I can hardly stand up!” she said. “How in the world are we going to be able to do all this and go to classes, too?”

Being disturbed in the middle of the night for watch duty, combined with the unaccustomed hard physical labor, not to mention the air, sun, and wind during the day and the sheer newness of the whole experience, was taking its toll on all of the Floaties. They were thankful to have a couple of “lazy” days to nap, write letters home, and soak their aching muscles in the warm sunshine before schoolwork was added to their daily load.

Dave Cameron, on the other hand, could hardly wait for classes to begin. He was elated about starting his first job as a certified teacher, and psyched about the opportunities being on a floating school would open up for learning about social studies and anthropology. He couldn’t imagine a better setup for teaching and learning than the Blue Water Academy program.

Dave, Anika, and the three other teachers, Mary Wilson, Tom Michaels, and Sharon Rock, had met in Los Angeles earlier in the summer for five days of orientation and training. They had spent the time planning the curriculum and discussing, far into the night, their philosophies of education.

Dave, a product of the Ontario school system and a fervent believer in equality of opportunity for all kids, was a firm proponent of public schools. They had served him well, after all, and how in good conscience could he—could anyone—deny that every child, from every income level, was entitled to a good education?

Anika was just as convinced that private schools were the better choice. They only had to look at her if they needed an example, she told them. She would never be where she was—lead teacher and shipboard director for a prestigious educational program—if it hadn’t been for private schools.

Growing up in Saskatchewan, she said, her schooling began in public school and had been in trouble almost from the first day. The class sizes were overwhelming—thirty or more kids in one room, presided over by a harried teacher trying to keep order, never mind accommodating so many levels of skills and experience. Anika had been shy and well behaved so she got virtually no attention. She was afraid of raising her hand in class—afraid of participating much at all. She was bored silly most of the time, with class discussions dragging along at a pace geared for the slower learners. The beleaguered teacher had no time for enrichment activities, or anything that might have sparked the interest of the brighter students.

Anika had coasted along year after year, giving her teachers no problem, but learning very little and becoming more and more disengaged with every semester that passed. Because her teachers kept promoting her, never noticing her much one way or another, her parents had no idea how distressed she was, although they certainly could see that their once cheerful daughter was looking increasingly glum. They chalked it up to adolescence, and assumed the phase would soon pass.

By the time she was ready for high school, Anika was fed up with the whole business, counting the days till she would be old enough to quit school and get on with her life. What exactly that life would be, with no high school diploma and no particular goal in mind, she didn’t know, but surely there had to be something better than wasting endless years of it trapped in a stultifying classroom.

Then, the summer before she was to start grade nine, Susannah moved in next door. Susannah was Anika’s age. She was tiny—not quite five feet tall—and a bundle of animated curiosity about everything around her. They became instant friends.

“You must be upset that you have to get used to a new school now that you’re in a new neighborhood,” Anika said to Susannah one day,

Anika was surprised to hear that Susannah never had to change schools. She had gone to private school from kindergarten on and would continue there right up to college. What’s more, she enjoyed it. She was actually looking forward to the start of the school year in September.

That feeling was foreign to Anika, who viewed the approach of the school year with the dread of a convicted felon facing serious jail time. And an *innocent* convict, too, she wailed to herself, unjustly accused and found guilty on the basis of purely circumstantial evidence. She was just marking the days until her parole, at age sixteen. What could Susannah possibly enjoy about going to school?

Plenty, as it happened. The classes were small, for starters, rarely more than ten kids to one teacher. In fact, teachers got to know their students so well they often were able to integrate math and science and language studies into projects that dovetailed with the kids' interests.

In grade six, Susannah said, her class had volunteered to make cages for the local Humane Society. It had been her idea, she confided, which came as no surprise to Anika, who knew how keen Susannah was on animals. The kids had spent one whole semester researching and planning the design, calculating the required amounts of materials, writing letters of inquiry to suppliers, figuring out the best deals, and building the cages. They'd kept a journal of the experience, with photographs and other student artwork documenting the whole process. Students in the grade seven class, who had chosen to spend their semester learning how to produce a television news program, filmed the presentation of the cages to the delighted animal shelter officials.

Anika had never even imagined school could be like that. She would have loved working on such a project herself, seeing some practical application for the lessons that usually just droned on around her while she retreated into her daydreams. Maybe she should look into this amazing school.

And then Susannah told her that many of the kids in her school would be applying to something called Blue Water Academy for grade eleven or twelve. Susannah said she was going to be one of them, for sure.

By the time Susannah had finished describing the program, Anika's mind was made up. She was going to do whatever it took to get herself accepted at Susannah's school and then into the Blue Water program. A prairie girl who had never even glimpsed an ocean, she was bowled over by the idea of going to sea for a year and using the whole world around you, wherever you went, as your classroom and curriculum.

It wasn't easy for Anika's parents to persuade the administrators at Susannah's school to admit her, given her late application and lackluster grades, but they persevered, and Anika was accepted—on probation.

"You can see that I made it through okay," Anika said. "That was the turning point for me. Once I discovered that school didn't have to be boring, I set out to become a teacher myself, to try to keep other kids like me from giving up on learning. Even if I hadn't gone on to Blue Water, just the change in atmosphere from public to private would have made all the difference."

"Oh well, yeah," Dave said. "That's a nice story—and we're all certainly very glad you didn't drop out! But not all private schools are as innovative as that one. And what about the kids who can't afford to go to a private school? Is it all right just to write them off?"

"But almost all private schools do have a better teacher/student ratio than the publics," Sharon said. "I've taught in both. No matter how motivated you are as a young teacher, no matter how committed to helping every child in your class succeed, you can't do it. The system simply doesn't allow for it."

Trying to balance the pros and cons in her own mind, Mary said, "Don't you think there's something to be said for the diversity you find in the public schools? I mean, some private schools are so insular, aren't they, with most of the students coming from the same background? I'm not sure that's the best education for learning to get along in the real world."

"But there's an accountability factor, too," Tom said. "In a private school, most parents are highly involved in their kids' education and hold the school accountable. It's much rarer for a child to slip through the cracks the way Anika did. And you can't get along well in the real world if you drop out."

"Plus there's the money private schools generally have to fund innovative projects, or field trips, or lab equipment, or whatever the kids need," Anika added.

"That's great for the kids whose parents can afford it," Dave said. "Look, I agree, that ought to be the model for every school. But I just can't see limiting it to the affluent and sticking the rest of the kids—who might be just as bright—with a second-rate education. We just have to do better for *all* kids."

"In any case," Mary said, "the Blue Water program must surely be the best of all possible worlds for both teachers and students. We've got it all—small classes, diverse students, dedicated teachers, supportive parents, the world as our learning lab, plenty of time to get to know the students—"

"Aye, there's the rub," said Sharon, who taught Shakespeare. "That's the only drawback I can see with the program. We're on duty twenty-four hours a day for a semester at a stretch and have to be perfect role models all that time. I find that just a little bit daunting!"

On that they all could agree.



On their second day at sea, just before lunch, all hands were called amidships.

Mac arranged students and teachers in a line and peered over his shoulder at Dr. Williams, who held a stopwatch in his hand.

“In thirty seconds, when I say ‘jump,’ ye’re all to jump up in the air—both feet off the ground, mind. Are ye with me?”

“Aye!” they shouted, having no idea what he was up to.

Dr. Williams counted down the seconds: five, four, three, two, one.

“Jump!” Mac yelled.

“Congratulations, mateys!” he called when they landed. “Ye’ll now be able to tell your grandkids that, in your youth, you jumped right over the Tropic of Cancer!”



Just after lunch on the twenty-seventh, the ship approached Puerto Vallarta. About eight miles from land, a large green mountain range could be seen. The offshore wind carried the sweet rich scent of a tropical forest. As they got closer, the water turned from dark blue to crystal-clear turquoise. Large luxury hotels dotted the skyline.

At 1400 hours the *Inspiration* arrived at its first port of call.



Puerto Vallarta. Melissa found just the name of the place intoxicating. The warmth that enveloped her, the softness of the breeze, the exotic plants, the bright colors—it was all so dazzling. She was itching to explore.

She wished she could have gone exploring just with Pierre, but the rule was that students must go in groups of at least four. Pierre and Dan and a couple of other Floaties who had brought along roller blades had decided to skate their way along the Malecon, the boardwalk that skirts Banderas Bay, so Melissa set off with Nancy, Kathy, and Trudy to play tourist for the afternoon. They wanted to call home, mail letters and postcards, and check out the shopping.

The city was an amazing blend of traditional Mexico and cosmopolitan resort. Near the marina, many of the buildings—hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, and shops—were new and ultramodern, having sprouted up during the past forty years as the town blossomed from a remote colonial-era fishing village into a major tourist destination.

As the girls made their way into the center of the city, however—up the hills toward the red-brick bell tower of Guadalupe Cathedral, its ornate crown-shaped top supported by a ring of angels—the scene changed dramatically. They walked along narrow, winding streets of cobblestones lined with lovely colonial architecture—white stucco buildings with red tile roofs. Flowers spilled from pots and window boxes and balconies: watermelonpink bougainvillea, geraniums in hues from white to scarlet, hibiscus plants the size of dinner plates, the stunning gold of *copa de oro*, all interspersed with waving fronds of ferns.

Not far from the cathedral, they came across an outdoor market. Here, too, they were delighted by the profusion of colors, scents, and sounds that greeted them. Stall after stall was piled with fruits and vegetables: fresh and dried peppers in a riot of green and yellow and orange and red and purple; fragrant melons, mangoes, and papayas; rows of multicolored corn; and baskets heaped with beans.

There was much bantering between the vendors, and a constant babble of languages in the crowd of locals and visitors from all over the world. Occasionally a burro sauntered through the crowd, its back laden with baskets of produce to replenish a stall. There were vendors selling an array of souvenirs, too: trinkets, hats, blankets, and jewelry. There were no prices on anything.

Nancy picked up a pair of earrings in the shape of curving fish and held them to her ears.

“Oh, look! I love these!” she said.

“*Muy bonita, Señorita!*” the vendor said.

“Very pretty!”

“How much?”

“Two hundred fifty pesos.”

“That’s way too much.”

The man quickly amended the price.

“For you, two hundred.”

Nancy put the earrings back on the table. She was crestfallen at having to leave the little fish behind, but the price was way out of line with what the earrings were worth, no matter how smitten she was with them. The four started to leave, but the vendor called after them.

“Okay.” He shrugged. “How much you want to pay?”

Want to pay? This was a new concept for Nancy. She looked at her friends in amazement, then offered one hundred pesos. The vendor shook his head sorrowfully and said, “I have to make a living here, *Señorita*. Give me one hundred fifty pesos and the pretty little fishes are yours.”

He held them up. The scales on the fish sparkled in the sunshine.

“Well ... how about one twenty-five?”

She was sure they couldn't be worth more than about ten dollars. That was about a hundred and twelve pesos—or was it? Nancy did some quick calculating in her head. Yes, more or less. Still, one twenty-five wasn't so very much more than that, and the man *had* come down a lot ... And they were so cute ...

At that point the haggling stopped. Nancy was thankful to be able to afford the earrings after all, and even more thankful that she hadn't agreed to the first price, which had been only a starting point in the negotiations. Now they knew.

The four of them found a McDonald's and had a burger and fries. Her mother, Melissa reflected, with only the tiniest smidgen of guilt, would be appalled at their choice of restaurant when they could have had their pick of interesting local places, but they were hungry for a taste of home.

What was unlike home, and in the most wonderful way, they agreed, was the weather.

“I'm almost too hot,” Kathy said as she took a large swig of her soft drink. “I'm not complaining, though. It won't be too long now before everyone at home will be digging out their heavy coats and boots and mittens.”

“Let's take some pictures to show them what they're missing,” Melissa said with an evil grin on her face.

Even though the ship was docked, everyone had to be back by 2000 hours for watch. Now, instead of keeping an eye out for danger at sea, they were to make sure no unwanted guests boarded the ship.

Melissa, unlike the other girls, was glad to have the curfew; she was eager to get back and find out all about Pierre's day and share her adventures with him.



The following day held more adventures, beginning first thing in the morning. The Honorary Canadian Consul in Puerto Vallarta had arranged for a group of children from a local orphanage to have breakfast on the ship. This was the first time the Floaties had hosted any visitors, and most took proprietary pride in showing the workings of the *Inspiration* to the children. The children looked around at the sails, the masts, the ropes, the anchor, the tiny cabins, and the heads in awe.

Melissa watched as one little boy, who had regarded everything with wide-eyed solemnity, shyly put his hand in Pierre's. She was touched at how gentle Pierre was with him, how he smiled, then knelt down to be at the child's level as he explained what was happening at colors.

The Canadian and the Mexican flags were raised. A little later, Melissa caught sight of the little boy sitting on Pierre's shoulders, laughing as Pierre loped along the deck like a burro.

This was also the day the Floaties were to have the first of their home stays. Melissa, true to form, was both excited and nervous at the prospect. She wanted so much to get to know someone her own age who actually *lived* here, someone who could tell her what it was like to go to school and work and do ordinary, everyday things in a place so different from her own home. At the same time she worried about whether she would feel comfortable spending the night with total strangers.

At 1300 hours the whole student body walked along with the teachers to the Miranda Hotel. They spent the afternoon swimming in the hotel pool with the Mexican students who would be their hosts and playing rollicking games of tug-of-war and volleyball. By the end of the afternoon, there were no more strangers.

Melissa went to the home of Jessica, a seventeen-year-old girl who lived right on the beach in one of the little coves dotting the shoreline of Banderas Bay. The house was modest in size and the furnishings were simple, but its warm stucco walls and wide curving arches, not to mention its idyllic location, gave it such a feeling of light and spaciousness and charm that Melissa thought it the most beautiful house she'd ever seen. She and Jessica sat in the courtyard around the small pool before dinner, asking each other a million questions.

The family took Melissa out for dinner at a beautiful seafood restaurant high on a hill above the hotels, overlooking the bay. The sun setting on the horizon over the deep blue water was spectacular, an ever-changing picture of radiant pinks and golds. The food was fantastic, too; Carol would have been happy to learn that Melissa had sampled some traditional Mexican cuisine and enjoyed it.

After dinner, the two girls left to meet all of the other kids at a disco called Friday Lopez. This was the official, BWA-sponsored get-together.

After the teachers went back to the ship, however, there was another get-together at another disco. This was unofficial and unchaperoned, and a few of the kids took advantage of the absence of teachers and had a drink or two. Melissa was tempted at first to have one but decided against it. The last thing she wanted was to be caught doing something against the rules and against the promise she'd made to her parents. Besides, she thought, as Pierre held

her close, whispering in her ear about his host family as they danced, she was pretty sure that she was already about as happy as a girl could get. What could alcohol add to her pleasure?



In the morning, the Floaties bid their newfound friends *adíos* and promised to keep in touch. Melissa and Pierre stood on deck holding hands as they watched Puerto Vallarta fade into the distance. It had been an interesting place, a place of great natural beauty, they agreed, and in some ways they wished they could have stayed longer. There were many more things to do than they'd had time for. But it had also been awfully commercialized and awfully touristy.

Their next destination, however, was the opposite of commercial: the Galápagos Islands, a twelve-day sail from Mexico.



Once classes began, Melissa was surprised to find her ship duties had become so routine she had no trouble finding time or energy to study. Besides, the courses were fascinating. The teachers tied them to the places where they were traveling. Melissa had always been a good student, but now she was riveted to her studies like never before.

Pierre, who had scraped by in school with a minimum of studying, was amazed to find himself enjoying the classes. Studying the history, geography, biology, and literature of the parts of the world they were sailing through made all the difference for him.

The enthusiasm of the teachers was contagious. They made themselves available at all hours if the Floaties had questions or wanted to continue an absorbing discussion.

A couple of days out, the wind died. The ocean looked like a mirror and there were no clouds in the sky. It was a perfect day for a swim call, Anika thought, and no telling when another might come along. She asked the captain if he would stop the ship. Because they had been making good time, he agreed.

Mac and Charlie lowered the Zodiac into the water and Dr. Williams climbed in it to keep watch over the swimmers. The students swam in small groups, divided on the basis of their galley watches. Watches E and F went first.

Pierre and Melissa, in watch F, jumped, hand in hand, from the side of the ship into the shining water.

“So warm!” Pierre shouted as he came up for air. “I can’t believe it!”

They paddled about in circles around each other for a few minutes, diving down and popping up to splash each other. The water, with the sunshine beating down on it, was warmer than the water in the showers onboard.

Pierre headed for the ladder, shouting, “I’m going to jump in again—but this time, from up there! Come on!”

Melissa looked at the bowsprit to which he was pointing, almost thirty feet above the water. Was he crazy? She was a good diver, and a competitive spirit, but there was no way she was going to jump from that height. She shook her head and gritted her teeth, one eye shut and one open, as she watched Pierre getting ready to jump.

Pierre’s leap into the water (“Whoa! *Magnifique!*” he shouted as he emerged from below the surface) inspired several other kids to climb up onto the bowsprit; once on it, however, and peering down—*way down*—into the sea below them, most of them inched their way back and jumped off the side of the ship instead. Only a couple were bold enough to follow Pierre’s example.

Soon their half hour of swim time was up, and galley watches C and D jumped in. Pierre tried to get some of this group to take the plunge off the bowsprit but there were no takers. Maybe all the physical challenges and discipline at Caneff had been worth something, he thought. Not that he would ever go back.

Suddenly there was a shout from Ryan, a Floatie in Melissa’s deck-watch group:

“SHARK!”

Everyone on deck raced to the side, hands shielding their eyes as they searched the water for the creature, pointing and shouting back and forth (“Where?” “What’s that over there?” “No, I don’t see anything!”) as they tried not to panic. Anika, fighting her own panic, was a model of calm on the outside. She yelled for those farthest from the ship to head for the Zodiac—“NOW!”—and for the others to come straight to the ladder, where Mac was waiting to help haul them over the side with all possible speed.

Within minutes, all of the students were safely onboard. No one else had caught a glimpse of the elusive shark, if in fact there had been one at all. But, even though it might have been a false alarm, watches A and B had to miss their swim.

“Another adventure to be tellin’ the grandkids, eh?” Mac said.



Anika had organized the first onboard dance for that evening. Just after 2000 hours, everyone—except those on watch duty, of course—gathered amidships. Mary Wilson had bought a big donkey-shaped piñata in Puerto Vallarta, and Dave had hung it on the main boom. The kids took turns whacking it with a stick until it finally burst, spilling brightly wrapped candies all over the deck.

After this rollicking start, however, some of the kids reverted to adolescent shyness. Pierre and Melissa lost no time in getting together on the dance floor, but most of the boys hung out on one side of the room, and most of the girls waited on the other.

Hoping the students would follow suit, Dave Cameron took Anika's arm and steered her onto the floor; Tom Michaels did the same with Sharon Rock; Mary Wilson followed suit and pulled Dr. Williams to his feet.

The second number was a Latin beat, a medley of fast salsa tunes that went on for nearly half an hour. Pierre and Melissa signaled for their cabinmates to get up and join them in a group dance. This inspired some of the other kids, especially the girls, to start dancing in informal groups. As the evening wore on, more students paired off into couples.

Melissa took special note of the way Nancy was dancing with Michael, a rugged-looking boy from Manitoba. They were looking pretty chummy, she thought, considering that Nancy had a boyfriend, Andy, back home in Boston. She had sworn that Andy was the only guy for her. He had been her steady since the beginning of high school. Nothing could make her change her mind about him while she was away. She'd gotten a little huffy when Melissa suggested that Andy might not be quite so willing to put his love life on hold until she returned.

We shall see, Melissa thought. We shall see.

Shortly before the dance ended, Pierre and Melissa disappeared outside and climbed onto the classroom deck. As before, they lay on their backs, studying the sky and hoping to see shooting stars. For every one they saw, they rewarded each other with a kiss. If they did not see one for a while ... well, a kiss was a good consolation prize, *n'est pas?*



In the morning the sky was gray and the wind had moved to the west. Captain Marzynski was forced to alter course so the ship could continue to sail. For the first time the ship was encountering large waves. It not only was pitching from front to back, it was rolling from side to side as well.

This is a deadly combination for anyone not accustomed to sailing in high winds and seas. Most of the Floaties were not. Many of them were going through what Dr. Williams liked to call the Ten Stages of Seasickness:

Stage One: Denial. The symptoms are burping, hiccupping, and nausea. The smell from the galley hits you but you say, "No, no, I'm not seasick. It's just a drain smell."

Stage Two: Acceptance: "Okay, maybe I *am* a little queasy. But in these seas it's not going to be so bad."

Stage Three: Contemplation of Positive Action: "Maybe I should just throw up and get it over with."

This is followed by Stage Four: Bravado: "I don't need to throw up. And I still want to be a Floatie."

Then comes Stage Five: Involuntary Response: You're at the rail and on your knees, calling, "Mooooooooohm! Daaaaaaaadd!"

Stage Six: Apathy: "I don't wanna to be a Floatie!"

Fear comes in Stage Seven: "Oh, God, please don't let me die."

And then, in Stage Eight, Despair: "Oh, God, please let me die."

Stage Nine is marked by Healing: "That wasn't so bad. I'm feeling better already."

Finally, Stage Ten, Resurrection: “Of course I want to be a Floatie!”

The bad weather lasted almost twenty-four hours. Pretty well everyone who was sick went from Denial to Resurrection in the same time period. Eventually the weather improved and the sun came out. The storm system had passed and the wind moved to its normal westerly direction, which meant the ship could return to its proper course.

A few days later, the *Inspiration* was nearing the equator, a milestone for many onboard. Those who had not crossed the equator by ship before were referred to as pollywogs; those who had, as shellbacks. The night before the crossing, Anika gathered all of the pollywogs together.

The crossing, she announced, would take place about 1100 hours the next morning. This was not something to be undertaken lightly, she told them. It would be necessary for all pollywogs to ask King Neptune to grant permission for them to cross. This was a ritual that all sailors must undergo on their first crossing. In preparation for tomorrow’s initiation, they must have the head of King Neptune’s spear painted on their foreheads.

Just before the ship reached the equator the next morning, all pollywogs—Floaties and teachers alike—had to climb down into the bosun’s locker to await their initiation. Evan, one of Pierre’s cabinmates, volunteered to go first.

“Whatever it is, I’d rather just get it all over with than have to stay in suspense,” he said.

The others were called on deck alphabetically.

As Captain Marzynski intoned his name, Evan crawled out of the locker on his hands and knees. The captain crowned him with a toilet-seat cover; then, in a vivid demonstration of Mighty Neptune’s powers in controlling the waters of the oceans, one of the king’s assistants—the one that happened to speak with a Scottish brogue—threw a bucket of seawater over his head.

The initiate was then led to an oversize chair, where several more of Neptune’s helpful assistants anointed his upper body with old motor oil, cracked eggs over his head, and then covered the whole gooey mess with a floury white powder. This was to demonstrate that the king also ruled above the water and could do whatever he wanted.

Next it was time for Evan to show his respect for the king by going on all fours through a canvas tube about twenty feet long and twenty-five inches in diameter. As soon as he entered the tube, the king’s ever-helpful assistants turned on the deck-mounted fire hose behind him to speed him in his travel to the king, not to mention tidy him up a bit for the royal presentation.

The final task was to kneel before the king and ask for permission to cross the equator. Was it Evan’s imagination, or did Neptune’s voice sound suspiciously like Anika’s? And wasn’t “he” awfully small to be so powerful? In any case, the king always granted this request and was in fact so delighted to add a member to his retinue that he graciously bestowed the gift of a cookie on the new shellback. His Majesty would be offended if one were to refuse to gobble up the offering in his presence, so Evan took a big bite. Bleeaah! He had no idea what was in the thing—he’d rather not know. It was all he could do not to spit it out.

The new shellbacks assembled at Neptune’s delicate feet and cheered on the dazed and soggy pollywogs as they appeared one by one. When the last initiate—Mary Wilson—came through, a thunderous cheer rose up to greet her.

The captain awarded the new members of the Shellback Club certificates to prove they had undergone the proper initiation. They posed for photos, smiling into the cameras in exuberant muckiness, beaming with pride at having crossed the equator and survived.

The following day the ship reached the Galápagos.



When Stefano awoke on Thursday morning, he looked out the window and saw a pristine blue sky with not a cloud in sight. He took it as a good omen. Not that he was worried. They were ready. They had spent the past four days honing his plan. Between his brilliant concept and his little brother's meticulous working out of every last element—Juanito might as well have examined the details under a microscope—what could go wrong?

Everyone was excited. Juan cooked a huge meal of huevos rancheros. They couldn't do what they needed to do today on tea and toast, he snorted, and it might just be their last square meal for several days.

"Yeah, especially if we all get seasick," Esteban said.

Severo was already feeling a little seasick. He didn't share the others' attitude that nothing could go wrong. Something could *always* go wrong, no matter how carefully you tried to prepare.

He could think of a million things without half trying. He hadn't slept a wink all night thinking of them. What if the trucks were driving too fast and Polo got killed in the crash? What if his rifle jammed? What if the cartel found them? What if the drugs were discovered on Easter Island? There was no way anybody could control everything. Not even Juan and Stefano.

It was all Severo could do not to hurl his untouched plate of eggs at the brothers and their self-congratulatory talk. He stabbed his fork in and out of his eggs. How could they possibly believe that the cartel wouldn't find anything for months? That the authorities wouldn't care? Juan and Stefano must be as ignorant as they were arrogant if they thought that was realistic.

By noon everyone was in place. Polo sat in the SUV in the designated spot in the driveway; Esteban was in the pickup truck on the side of the road, a half mile away. Juan was ensconced in the clump of ficus at the road to the left of the driveway, Severo amid a thicket of trees to the right. Stefano waited in the ditch on the other side of the road just past the driveway, camouflaged by the jumble of thunbergia vines.

Their engines were running and their guns were cocked.

Esteban heard traffic approaching just before one o'clock. He reached for his walkie-talkie. A few seconds later, when the first of the three trucks rounded the curve in the road, he put the walkie-talkie to his ear and pressed the button.

"They're here. On my signal, Polo."

Severo began to shake.

"Go," they heard Esteban yell and everything fell into place. Polo's foot lifted off the brake, just like in the practice runs, and the SUV started forward, picking up speed to twenty-five miles per hour as it approached the road.

Esteban pulled onto the road behind the last pickup in the drug convoy, edging up close to its rear bumper.

The timing was perfect. Polo swung the SUV out onto the road and rammed smack into the side of the van. Although this was the one maneuver they had not been able to rehearse, it went with impeccable precision. The van never lost control; it slid to a gentle stop just ahead of the SUV. To Juan, peering out from among the leaves, the impact seemed like a slow-motion sequence in a movie.

Then, pandemonium.

The lead truck squealed to a stop. Guards from all three vehicles swarmed out, drawing their weapons, shouting. Polo, pale as a boiled egg in his skimpy bathing suit, emerged from the SUV, raised his hands over his head and stood frozen to the spot, surrounded by six surprised guards, all shouting at one another and all with their guns trained on his scrawny figure.

The din let up for a moment as the guards, realizing that the vulnerable-looking little man before them posed no threat, began to chuckle. Polo, in a convincing display of terror, was falling to his knees, hands still up, invoking the name of his sainted mother. The tall guard, the one who seemed to be in charge, barked a terse command to the others. They lowered their weapons while the tall guard took a step toward Polo, and then—

Crack! Crack! Crack! The sound of rifles pierced the air as Severo and Juan fired, picking off the guards one by one before they could register that they were in danger.

All was silent for a moment, but for the echo of the rifle shots reverberating in their ears. Polo was up and on his feet in a flash, pulling on the pants and shirt he'd stashed in the SUV, joining Juan and Severo in their exhilaration and accepting Juan's compliments for his performance.

"Polito, *hombre*, you should get an Oscar for that one."

Juan had known that Polo could look the part of a sniveling coward, but he'd been amazed by the guy's acting ability. It was only Polo's instant return to his usual cocky self that persuaded Juan that it had all been an act.

Juan wheeled around, looking for Stefano, wondering if he'd been able to see any of the theatrics from his spot across the road.

That was odd. Where was Stefano, anyway? Why hadn't he come over as soon as the shots had ended? Juan bolted across the road to the ditch.

One look at his brother and Juan knew something was wrong—very wrong.

Stefano had been kneeling, his rifle aimed and ready, when he felt the searing pain tear through his left thigh. Next thing he knew, he was lying on his back in the ditch, using every ounce of will he possessed not to scream. Now, he looked down at his leg and was surprised to find it not only still attached, but bleeding very little.

"*Jesus y Maria*," Juan said, squatting down beside him. He fingered the small hole in Stefano's pants where the bullet had entered, then edged the pants leg up. There was no exit wound; the bullet must still be lodged in his leg.

Polo, Severo, and now Esteban had come running across the road and were standing over him. It must, they decided, have ricocheted off one of the trucks. There was nowhere else the bullet could have come from.

Shit, Severo thought. Hadn't he known all along that you couldn't anticipate everything, that something like this was bound to happen? And now that something had happened, and to the chief planner himself, what would be next? Shit.

Juan and Esteban helped Stefano hobble across the road and poured him into the van. He was pale and clammy but assured the others he would be okay to drive. Thank God the van was automatic. Leaving the door half open, his left leg dangling out so he wouldn't have to bend it, driving with his right, Stefano headed for the beach.

They had to rush now. They were losing precious time. The first thing was to take care of the bodies.

There was a staggering quantity of blood, far more than Juan had expected. Severo must have panicked and gone wild with the shooting, he fumed. Damn the man! He picked the tall guard up by his arms as Polo grasped the feet and they moved toward the pickup. Severo and Esteban approached the next body. It was lying face down in a pool of blood. When they picked it up, the dead man's insides spilled out onto the road. Severo dropped the man's legs and vomited.

More time lost, Juan thought as he, Esteban, and Polo struggled with the rest of the bodies. Severo's strong back was canceled out by his weak stomach. Juan was never going to work with the bastard again. Ah, what the hell was he saying? He'd never have to work again, period. None of them would. They'd all be retired and living a life of ease in just a few more weeks.

By the time they had loaded the last guard into the pickup, Severo had pulled himself together to drive it around to the waiting pit behind the barn. Esteban followed in the other pickup, and Polo in the SUV; they parked both vehicles inside the barn. Then they collected an assortment of buckets and rags from the house on their way back to the road.

Juan retrieved a broom and a shovel from the back of the Jimmy and began sweeping spent shell casings and glass shards from the SUV's broken headlight into the ditch, covering the lot with dirt and leaves. That left three puddles of blood—one of them nearly two feet across—on the right side of the road close to the driveway to contend with. Polo appeared with the pail of water and began sluicing the blood. He finished the two smaller spots, then started back to the house to refill the bucket as Juan spread the wet patches with sand and dirt from the shoulder.

Juan suddenly picked up the low whine of a motor approaching from the north. Waving furiously at Polo to get out of sight, he raced for the Jimmy. He moved it forward, its right-turn signal blinking, inch by inch, gauging time and distance so that he was just beginning to turn into the driveway—and just obscuring the large puddle of blood—as a rattletrap old Ford lumbered past.

Whatever you might say about Juan, Polo thought, you had to admit the *hombre* could keep his cool under pressure.

They finished cleaning up the road, then went to help fill in the hole behind the barn. Juan was pushing them all

hard now, trying to make up for lost time. It looked good in spite of their haste, he told himself, as they heaped the last shovelful of dirt and leaves on the grave. Hard to imagine that such a short time ago it had been the scene of brutal carnage. The earth was mounded and raw in the spots where it had been disturbed, but the first rain would take care of that. And within a few weeks, the rampant tropical vegetation would cover any remaining traces of the mayhem. No one would ever suspect.

They stowed the bloodied pickup in the barn and then squeezed into the Jimmy for the short drive to the beach.



Even without Stefano's help Phillip had managed to unload the cocaine from the van and pile it on the beach close to the tender by the time they arrived. Severo and Polo worked with Phillip to load the cocaine into the tender and onto the *Coincidence* while Esteban and Juan drove the Jimmy and the van to the barn. As they neared the barn, the van's two-way radio crackled to life. Above the static, Juan could make out that someone was inquiring about the progress of the cocaine shipment. Better to keep silent than try to fake a guard's voice, he decided.

When both vehicles were inside, they locked the barn door for the last time, then climbed on the waiting scooter and sped back to the cove.

Phillip and Severo were loading the last few bales of cocaine onto the boat. Stefano was lying on the sand, his eyes closed, his face ashen. Juan decided to keep quiet about the radio call, even though he knew the lack of a response would have the cartel out scouring the road for the missing trucks in no time. But there was no use worrying Stefano with this detail. There was nothing he could do if he knew. They just had to get the beach cleared of any evidence pronto, then get their butts onboard the boat and out of range before anyone even thought of looking at this out-of-the-way cove.

Juan set to work erasing tire tracks in the sand and gathering up bits of debris to drop into the ocean once they were beyond the cove. When the tender returned for its last trip, Severo hauled the scooter onboard so it too could be dumped. Then, as carefully as they could, Juan and Severo lifted Stefano to his feet and half-carried, half-dragged him to the tender, where Phillip was waiting to pull him over the side.

In spite of the setbacks, the whole operation, from the first sighting of the convoy to boarding the *Coincidence*, had taken just over an hour. Planning, Juan thought as he popped open two beers, one for himself and one for Stefano. It's all in the planning, he reminded himself as the cove receded from view. True, it had taken an hour rather than the forty-five minutes he had told the others they were aiming for. But he had planned it that way.



The *Inspiration* sailed through the Isabela Channel in the Galápagos, flanked by volcanic islands of fantastic variety and beauty. The ship made her way to Puerto Ayora on Isla Santa Cruz, where it would drop anchor for a three-day stay.

The students had already gotten a taste of the place from reading some of the literature associated with the islands. In addition to excerpts from Darwin's works, they had read Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which was based on the adventures of one Alexander Selkirk, a Scotsman who had spent four years on one of the islands awaiting rescue. They had read Herman Melville's description of the islands in his story "Las Encantadas." And they had just begun Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos*, a futuristic novel dealing with human evolution set in the archipelago.

For their teachers, the islands were a sheer delight, offering a rare combination of history, oceanography, geology, conservation management, and the evolutionary study of unique species. They loved being on these fascinating islands and showing their students firsthand what most people would never know except from books.

Dave Cameron began his lessons on the social history of the islands before the ship even docked. He told the students the islands were located directly on the equator about six hundred miles west of the South American coast. They were discovered by accident in 1535, when a Spanish vessel known as the *Bishop of Panama*, sailing to Peru, was becalmed in the equatorial doldrums. It was carried due west by the currents and eventually came upon the Galápagos. Because it was dry season when the ship reached land, the sailors thought the islands were worthless. They saw virtually no vegetation beyond the thistles on the volcanic rock.

Originally called *Insulae de los de Galopegos*, the islands were renamed *Archipiélago del Ecuador* after their annexation by that country. The name was changed again in 1892 to *Archipiélago de Colón*, in honor of Christopher Columbus.

A few decades later, the Galápagos became a base of operations for many English pirates and buccaneers who attacked Spanish galleons returning to Spain from the New World. The Galápagos lay not far from the route between the conquered Inca Empire of the Andes and Panama and New Spain, the center of Spanish activity in the New World. Among the pirates, the islands were known as *Las Islas Encantadas*, the Enchanted Isles.

Over the years the islands were used as a base for whaling fleets, as a prison colony, and as a salt mine, but many attempts to establish permanent settlements failed. Every new human encounter brought more destruction to the fragile ecosystem of the islands. This was the really interesting part, in Dave's view, the part he most wanted to impress upon his students.

He stopped his narrative as the ship pulled into Academy Bay, mesmerized by the sight before him. He had read so much about the history and ecology of this place, seen so many photographs, that it seemed completely familiar to him. But nothing had prepared him for the reality of it. There was Punta Estrada, its cliff face covered in guano and graffiti, sheltering the harbor. There were the mangroves, looking just as otherworldly as in the pictures, their prop roots coming down from their branches toward the water as if they were growing their own stilts for support—as, in fact, they were.

And there, most amazing of all, were the famed blue-footed boobies, the most improbable of birds. Surely such creatures could exist only in a cartoon. The thought popped into Dave's mind that they looked like caricatures of bewigged judges in a British court of law, wearing, with dignified eccentricity, their judicial robes, and, for some inexplicable reason, bright blue Wellington boots. The image made him laugh out loud.

The Floaties, who had been staring at the scene, began to laugh, too, and jabber about the sights before them. Pierre shouted and pointed to a booby plummeting straight off the cliff into the water. It was soon joined by dozens—maybe hundreds—more, in a great cacophony of honks and whistles, all furling their wings behind and then

dropping headfirst with such force into the bay that it was hard to believe they could survive the experience.

Tom Michaels, who had witnessed this behavior before but never failed to be dazzled by it, explained that the birds had spotted a school of fish in the waters below and were “plunge diving” in a feeding frenzy.

“Special air sacs protect their skulls from the impact,” he said. “The blue-footed boobies are only one of the many remarkable creatures to be found in the Galápagos. When Charles Darwin visited the islands in 1835, he found that fully half the birds and plants were different from the species known anywhere else on earth. About a third of the shore fish and nearly all of the reptiles also differed. These variations helped him establish his theory of evolution.

“Contrary to popular belief, however, Darwin did not leave the islands with a sudden dawn of enlightenment. He still believed in the creation of life along the lines of the Bible. The seeds of inquiry had been sown, however, and they matured in his mind over the years.”

Melissa loved to see her teachers’ excitement—in fact they were practically falling over one another in their eagerness to explain what was going on and to establish relationships between the different subjects. Back home she went from one class to the next never even thinking that they might fit together into one integrated whole.

It was a combination of human and environmental factors, Dave said, that had contributed to the deterioration of plant and animal life here. Humans, starting with the earliest explorers, had killed many of the native tortoises for food; some varieties had nearly become extinct. In addition, they had released, either accidentally or on purpose, the goats, pigs, burros, and cattle that were responsible for defoliating the islands, and had introduced rats, cats, and dogs, which ate the eggs or young of native birds and reptiles.

“Weather is the other major factor, but now we’re getting out of my field,” Dave said. “I’d better let Tom cover that.”

Tom leapt right in.

“Every few years, El Niño causes the equatorial and atmospheric circulation patterns to reverse, bringing warm water and air from the western Pacific. Along with the warmth comes rain—a *lot* of rain. The rains moisten the dry lowlands, allowing vegetation to flourish. With food abundant, the terrestrial animals, such as iguanas and finches, do well. But at the same time, these changes inhibit the upwelling that enriches the Galápagos waters with nutrients. While terrestrial life flourishes, it is a catastrophe for marine life. Seabirds of all types are unable to raise their young and mortality is high among marine iguanas and fur seals there.”

They had only just arrived, yet Melissa and Pierre were already beginning to grieve for the destruction of this extraordinary place.



The next morning, students and teachers went ashore to visit the Charles Darwin Research Station, just a one-mile walk from Puerto Ayora. Several Ecuadorian university students, there to receive hands-on training in science, education, and conservation, served as tour guides. After viewing a video that described the islands and explained the mission of the station, the Floaties were led down a winding path to see one of the tortoise corrals.

It took quite a while for the group to reach the corral. One Floatie after another halted suddenly in the middle of the gravel to marvel and to snap pictures.

“Look!” Kathy called out. “Lava lizards!”

“It looks like that one’s doing push-ups!” Trudy said.

And so it was, Luisa, their guide, told them.

“It’s a form of communication many lizards use, actually, to mark their territory and in mating rituals,” she said. “What’s really interesting about the Galápagos lava lizards is that the pattern of raising and lowering their bodies varies from island to island. You could think of it sort of like a whole-body regional accent.”

“Are those cactus plants?” Chris asked. “They’re gigantic!”

Luisa explained that several plants that had colonized on the islands had developed treelike forms.

“There are even ferns and sunflowers that grow as trees here,” she said.

The group now reached the pen that held the giant domed-shell tortoises.

“They like visitors,” Luisa said. “Some of them even like to have their necks scratched.”

The Floaties began clucking, whistling, murmuring “Here, Boy,” and making whatever other noises they imagined might entice a tortoise. Pierre simply stood still with his arm held out. It wasn’t long before one of the huge reptiles lumbered over to him and stretched its neck as far as possible up and out of its shell in sure anticipation of a nice long scratch. Pierre obliged as Melissa took snapshot after snapshot.

“I keep expecting him to purr!” she said.

“How do you know it’s a ‘him’?” Pierre asked.

Melissa answered that they all looked like old men to her, so that’s what she would call them, never mind the facts.

They traded places. By now several tortoises were enjoying neck massages. It was hard for the Floaties to leave their newfound friends, but they had much more to explore. Nancy took a final shot of Pierre and Melissa together stroking the “old man,” then off they went to the Breeding and Rearing Center to see newly hatched tortoises and land iguanas. The station collects eggs from several different islands, hatches them in incubators, and nurtures them for five years before repatriating them to their home islands.



The next day the students were given free time to go ashore and pursue their own activities, with the usual caveat that they remain in groups of at least four. Pierre and Melissa were torn between taking a bus up into the highlands and going on a boat tour. Most of the Floaties, including Nancy and Michael, decided on the highland tour.

This, they were told, would give them a sense of the whole gamut of vegetation found on all of the islands as the bus slowly wound its way through a cross-section of different climatic zones, from the arid coastal region through the agriculturalized middle elevations, with their coffee and banana plantations, to the lush green dampness of the scalesia zone higher up, and then the shrubby miconia zone at the top. The *garúa*, the mist that cloaks the higher elevations from June through December, supports the growth of epiphytic plants—including, Michael was elated to see, mistletoe, which clung to the branches of many of the trees. What could he possibly do, he asked himself, but kiss the girl sitting beside him every time the bus passed another clump?

As for Nancy, she was quickly losing sight of her boyfriend back in Boston.

As interesting as the bus trip sounded, Pierre and Melissa, after much hemming and hawing, had opted for the boat. Two Israeli soldiers they had met in Puerto Ayora, Asher and Ari, had organized the tour, and had invited them and a few other Floaties to join in and share the cost, making it a relative bargain. But what clinched the deal, at least for Melissa, was the prospect of playing with sea lions.

The small boat made its way from Academy Bay to the eastern side of Santa Cruz toward the Plaza Islands where large colonies of sea lions congregate on the rocks. Their guide spoke very good English. He had moved from Ecuador four years earlier because of his love of the sea. He stopped the boat in a little cove that was teeming with sea lions. The whole inlet echoed with their barking and squealing.

“Ah, *buenos días*, my flippered friends,” the guide shouted to them. “I have brought you a boatload of new playmates!”

The soldiers were the first to slip over the side of the boat into the water. As they swam, a small group of young sea lions wriggled off the rocks to see what was going on and then to play. The creatures had no fear of humans; they liked to be touched and allowed the soldiers to grab hold of their fins.

Melissa and Pierre soon dived in, too. The sea lions nudged them, darting in and out of the water and peering at them with their bewhiskered, inquisitive faces, as if daring them to hop aboard for a ride—which they were only too happy to do. It reminded Melissa of Sea World back home, where she had watched trainers get towed around by whales and dolphins. But this was infinitely more fun, because she was not just a spectator and the animals were wild and in their natural habitat.

They students swam and frolicked with the sea lions for over an hour. The guide then ferried them to another spot close to some cliffs where they were able to beach the boat. They climbed up the cliffs with the intent of jumping into the water about forty-five feet below. Pierre was the first to jump. The others, except Melissa, soon followed. As they jumped they let out the loudest roars they could, probably to overcome their fear of the descent. Pierre tried hard to persuade Melissa how much fun it would be to catapult herself off the cliffs to what she was sure would be her certain death.

Eventually she agreed to try it, provided he would jump with her and hold her hand on the way down. At least, she thought, it would make for an interesting obituary in her hometown paper. She could see the headline already: *Pickering Girl*—no, no, she amended it, *Pickering Woman* and *Boyfriend Lose Lives in Galápagos Island Tragedy*. As their feet left the firm foundation of the cliffs Pierre let out a Tarzan yell, but Melissa was holding her breath so tight she couldn’t make a sound.

Afterward, surprised to find herself still alive, Melissa felt a rush of triumph. She had done it! She had conquered her fear—well, perhaps not, but she had *done it* anyway. And thank you, no, she had no interest in repeating the feat.

The final destination of the tour was one of the spots where Charles Darwin’s boat, the *Beagle*, had anchored.

Here they went ashore and enjoyed a late lunch—they were ravenous by now—of fish rolls and tea in a tiny restaurant, which was actually a house that served simple meals. The Floaties exchanged addresses with Asher and Ari, promising to keep in touch; they felt that the shared experience of this incredible day had forged a bond with them far beyond what you'd expect from such a short acquaintance. It had been, they all agreed, one of the most exceptional days yet.



A few of the Floaties and teachers had stayed near Puerto Ayora that day. Some had wanted to return to the Darwin Research Station, others to explore the little town and shop for souvenirs and postcards.

Mac, who had seen all of the sights on Santa Cruz Island several times by now, headed straight for a restaurant with a bar. Three students joined him, ordering sandwiches and beer for lunch and listening with rapt attention to one of his tales of adventure. Mac had so many extraordinary stories the Floaties were never quite sure how many of them were true; indeed, by now, Mac wasn't always entirely sure himself.

He was just in the middle of one about his days working in the copper mines in Zambia when Mary Wilson and Tom Michaels walked into the restaurant—and immediately spotted the beer on the table. The students were all over nineteen, so of legal drinking age, but the BWA rules were absolutely clear on this point: No alcohol whatsoever for students in the program. Mary and Tom hated to do it, but they would have to tell Anika.

What made the situation even stickier was that Mac was with them, too. By rights, he ought to have enforced the rule even if the kids were willing to flout it. But he had been so involved in his story, he'd never given it a thought.

"At home in Scotland, the legal drinking age was sixteen," he said. "It didn't seem out of the usual to me for these young adults to be havin' a beer or two."

Silly rule, anyway, he thought, while apologizing profusely. It had been his responsibility, and he had blown it.

"Ye couldn't blame the kids for seein' what they could get away with; that's the way of kids. If there was to be any disciplinary action, it should be taken with me."

Mary and Tom were in full agreement with that. However, there wasn't anything they could do other than give him a light reprimand. Mac was an independent contractor, hired directly by Captain Marzynski, so he was not directly accountable to the BWA program. And the fact was, he was such a valuable member of the crew, such a steady and capable workman, with unparalleled skills and ingenuity, there was no way they could do without him.

In the end Anika decided to give the students a port suspension, meaning no shore leave at their next port of call. It was a lesser penalty than the usual two-week suspension at home but one she still hated to levy on the students. The next port of call would be Easter Island, another high point of the voyage and a fantastic educational opportunity. Why couldn't the kids have had their beer somewhere else on the trip? It wouldn't have been so bad for them to miss the sights of Puerto Vallarta, but Easter Island?

Easter Island was thirteen days away, she thought. A lot could happen in that time. Maybe the *thought* that they were going to miss out on seeing Easter Island would be punishment enough for the kids. It certainly was punishment enough for her.



Jon Tun Aung, crewman of the MV *Great Princess*, was brimming with good cheer this morning at breakfast, as he had been every morning since the oceangoing freighter had left from Taiwan twelve days ago.

The *Great Princess* was headed for Lima, Peru, fully laden with a cargo of textiles and electronic equipment. At six hundred feet in length, she was a modestly sized cargo vessel, with a crew of twenty-two, most of them from the Philippines. Her skipper was Captain Than Hun. She was now roughly three hundred and seventy-five miles west of the Galápagos Islands, about eight hundred and seventy-five miles from her final destination.

The reason for Jon's cheerfulness was simple: The day before the *Great Princess* had set sail, he had at last persuaded his sweetheart of several years to be his wife. The marriage was to take place as soon as it could be arranged after his return from Lima. He'd been grinning from ear to ear, unfazed by the teasing of his crewmates, ever since. This morning, as on every other morning, he was ravenously hungry. He could never seem to get enough to eat.

He was reaching across the table to pour himself a third cup of tea, imagining what his fiancée, Lili, might be busy doing today in preparation for the wedding—another fitting for her gown, perhaps?—when he suddenly felt as though someone had plunged a dagger into his back.

He collapsed against the table, struggling for breath, the pain radiating from his back through to the left side of his chest and all the way down his left arm.

His crewmates sat agape for a moment, unsure what the jovial Jon was up to now. Then, realizing the man was not joking, they laid him out on the floor and called for the captain.

Captain Than found no obvious external reason to account for the pain; no blood or signs of trauma anywhere on Jon's body. He ordered two crew members to get a stretcher to transport Jon to the ship's hospital room, where he could do a more thorough examination.

Like most merchant vessels of its type, the *Great Princess* had no doctor onboard. Both captain and first mate had to undergo a rigorous four-week course in first aid. The ship had a small hospital room, just big enough for a bed, a washroom, and four cabinets stocked with basic medical supplies. The ship's bible—*The International Medical Guide for Ships*, published by the World Health Organization and mandatory equipment on all ships—lay open on a shelf for quick reference.

Captain Than's first thought was that Jon was having a heart attack, even though he was only twenty-seven years old. He summoned the first mate, and they went down the list of symptoms: shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, continuing severe pain on the left side. They referred to the medical guide under "Chest pain: Associated signs." A number of possibilities existed: coronary thrombosis, pleurisy, pneumonia, pneumothorax. They made Jon as comfortable as possible without giving any medication or fluids until further direction could be provided from a doctor via satellite radiophone at a coastal station.

Captain Than reached Dr. Patrick Herrigan at his Philadelphia office, and described the symptoms.

"Is there any coughing?" the doctor asked.

"No," Captain Than replied.

"Any pain in the abdomen?"

"No."

"Continuing pain in the left arm?"

"No."

"Does he have tightness in the chest?"

"Yes. It hurts when he breathes, so he is making short gasps for air."

“And his heart rate has been consistently high?”

“Yes.”

“Any skin discoloration?”

“Yes, his skin seems to be turning a little blue.”

“How about his back, any pain in his back?”

“Not now, but at first he had a stabbing sensation in his back on the left side.”

“All right. I want you to listen to his breathing with a stethoscope. Check the right side of his chest first, listen to a few breaths and then do the same on the left side and tell me if they sound any different.”

Captain Than got his stethoscope. He heard movement of air when he listened to the right side of Jon’s chest, but nothing on the left side.

The doctor said, “Okay, I’m ruling out a heart attack. If he were coughing it could be pleurisy or pneumonia, but he’s not, so I’m ruling those out too. Is he tall?”

An odd question, the captain thought. *Jon was a little over six feet*, he told him.

“Does he smoke?”

“Two packs a day.”

“What I think we’re dealing with here is spontaneous pneumothorax. It’s far more common among tall people than short, and especially if they are smokers. How far from land are you?”

“We’re about nine hundred miles from Lima—that’s almost five days.”

“No good. He needs to have the pressure in his chest relieved as soon as possible. Is there nowhere closer?”

“If I alter course, we could get to the Galápagos Islands in just under two days. We’re around four hundred miles away.”

“This man needs a chest-tube insertion right away to allow air to be released so the lung can re-expand. I’m going to contact the Automatic Major Rescue System to see if there are any ships in your area with a doctor onboard. What are your coordinates?”

Within ten minutes Dr. Herrigan was back on the satellite radiophone.

“Captain Than, there is a doctor onboard the tall ship *Inspiration*, which is currently a little over sixty miles from your position. His name is Dr. Elliott Williams. He is going to contact you directly in the next few minutes. I’m strongly recommending you rendezvous with the *Inspiration* ASAP so he can do the insertion. He has the necessary equipment onboard to do it properly once he confirms the diagnosis. If he can solve the problem with a chest-tube insertion then you can likely proceed to Lima with no further delay. Good luck.”

The radiophone soon came alive again.

“Captain Than, this is Dr. Williams on the *Inspiration*. We have been advised of your medical emergency and are prepared to offer assistance if you wish. We are currently sixty miles northwest of your position. We are altering course and heading toward your position. Will you do the same?”

“Yes, I have already asked for a course change. How long is the *Inspiration*?”

“One hundred and eighty-eight feet.”

“Okay. We are six hundred feet long, so I would propose you approach us on our starboard side. I’ll slow down to three knots and you can come about and run on our lee side about three hundred feet away. I’ll need to keep three knots on to maintain steerage.”

“We have a fifteen-foot hard-bottom Zodiac that we can easily launch. We’ll transfer to your vessel on your starboard side.”

“We will lower a pilot ladder.”

“I will bring what I need to treat a spontaneous pneumothorax. Have you any anesthetics?”

“Only topical. We have sterilization equipment, an administration kit, and a catheterization kit.”

“Captain, have the cath kit and administration kit ready but don’t open them. I should be onboard the *Great Princess* in two and a half to three hours.”

“Roger.”



Phillip sat listening to the radiophone in the engine room of the *Coincidence*, not quite thirty miles southeast of the *Great Princess*.

He waited until the *Great Princess* had left the area, then waited an hour longer for good measure. He had not told Stefano his plan. He and Juan had agreed it was best not to. The guy was probably too far gone to understand, anyway, he told himself. And if this didn't work out, well ... Best not to tell Stefano.

He picked up the radio mike.

"*Inspiration, Inspiration*, this is the *Coincidence*, over."

A few moments later Matt, the *Inspiration's* first engineer, turned to Sam, the second engineer.

"Can you believe this?" he said. "We've got another medical emergency call. I don't remember this ever happening before, and now two on the same day. Some guy on a boat called the *Coincidence*. See if you can scare up Dr. Williams again, will you?"

In less than a minute, Elliott Williams was on the radio. Phillip described Stefano's wound as a "puncture wound," and was careful not to mention that it had come from a gunshot.

"It sounds badly infected all right," Dr. Williams said. "He'll need antibiotics right away. Have you any onboard?"

Would I be risking everything by calling you up if we did, ass-hole? Phillip thought.

"No," he said.

"How far away are you?"

"We're about an hour away if we alter course. We have you on our radar. How should we approach?"

"Captain Marzynski will change course and head in your direction. Not much wave action today, but it's still not a good idea to come alongside. Why don't you approach on our port side about a hundred feet off and stop in our lee? Is the patient transportable?"

Phillip hesitated. He sure as hell didn't want anyone boarding the *Coincidence*. Much too risky.

"We believe we can transport him, so we'll bring him to you," he said finally. "I'm not sure how we can get him aboard your vessel, though. Do you have a stretcher that can be lifted aboard?"

"Sounds like I'd better make another house call," Dr. Williams responded. "I'll come to you in our Zodiac."

Within an hour the boats were stopped one hundred feet apart from each other. Phillip told the others to stay out of sight while he dealt with the doctor. Juan didn't like the way the little *cabrón* was taking charge, but he had to admit Phillip would make the most respectable-looking front man, so he let it go.

Dr. Williams boarded the Zodiac and, as before, two members of the *Inspiration* crew took him over. They stayed in the dinghy while the doctor climbed aboard with his bag.

Dr. Williams was alarmed at Stefano's appearance. His face was a pasty gray, he was soaked with sweat, foul-smelling pus was leaking through the bandages, and he was thrashing from side to side in delirium.

"What happened?" he asked as he began to remove the dressings. He noted the swelling, the shiny, hot flesh, and the red streaks surrounding the wound.

Phillip chose his words carefully.

"Just before we left port, something hit Stefano in the leg. We have no idea what it was. It didn't bleed much and he was able to hobble around. We cleaned him up and I picked away some pieces of cloth from the area with tweezers and then applied a dressing. He was fine for a couple of days but has been going downhill rapidly since then. What do you think it is?"

Dr. Williams gently wiped away the yellow-green pus with an alcohol pad. Stefano's whole body went rigid and

his face contorted with pain. A high-pitched moaning came from between his clenched teeth.

"This man is in serious trouble and needs immediate medical attention. This is an acute missile wound. Was he shot?"

"I told you; we don't know what hit him. I was not aware of any shooting."

"Well, I'm pretty sure this is a bullet wound and that the bullet is still in his leg. Obviously it didn't hit a bone and it didn't hit the femoral artery. It must have embedded itself in muscle tissue; that's why it didn't bleed much. In a way that's too bad, because the bleeding would have flushed out any debris.

"My guess is that the bullet took some of the cloth from his pants into the wound. Dirt on the pants introduced pathogens, and we now have a pretty bad infection. This man needs attention right now. If he doesn't get it, gangrene will set in and he will lose his leg."

"Okay. Do whatever you have to do."

"There isn't anything I can do to help him. He needs to be in a hospital. He needs a general anesthetic and a surgeon to get the bullet out. He needs to have a drainage tube inserted to get the pus out of the wound and he needs antibiotics right now. I'll use the satellite phone and talk to a doctor at the coastal station to see if there is any way this man can be evacuated. It has to happen quickly, otherwise he'll lose his leg. If he doesn't die first."

"But wouldn't he be better off if you did it yourself right now? I mean, surely you have the equipment and supplies on the *Inspiration*."

The doctor shook his head as he gathered up the soaked dressings and tossed them in the trash.

"You don't understand. Even if we had everything we need onboard, which we do not, I'm not an anesthesiologist and I am not a surgeon."

He squirted some antiseptic wash on his hands and rubbed them together briskly.

There was no way Phillip was going to let anyone on shore know about the injury. That would jeopardize everything. He thought for a moment, then said, "You must have had *some* training in medical school for situations like this."

What was the matter with the man? the doctor wondered. Did he not understand the danger his friend was in? Why was he dragging his feet? He mustered as much patience as he could, but there was still a sharp edge to his voice.

"Certainly, I've assisted in this kind of operation, but assisting and doing are not the same thing. I'm going to get hold of the coastal station right now and see what we can do to save this man's life."

Phillip saw that he had run out of options. Pulling his gun from the inside pocket of his jacket, he said, "I'm sorry, Doctor. I can't allow you to do that. You are going to do whatever you have to do to save Stefano's life. You're going to do it right now. Your life is in the balance. So what's your plan?"

Doctors are trained to remain calm in panic situations. His first duty, Williams thought, was to the students on the *Inspiration*. One wrong move on his part would endanger them all. His second duty was to do the best he could to save this man Stefano, whoever he was. Performing surgery on his own with inadequate training and supplies would have to do.

"I don't understand what's happening here and maybe I don't want to, but I've got a ship full of students that I'm responsible for and I can't do anything to put them at risk. What happens to the *Inspiration* and the crew when it's over? You've got to guarantee they won't come to any harm."

"Doctor, you are in no position to negotiate. I have no idea what will happen to your boat if you pull Stefano through. What I *do* know is that if you refuse to treat him, you'll be feeding the fish. So let's go one step at a time, and let's start right now."

"All right. I'll give Stefano a shot of antibiotics. But we would be much better off doing the surgery on the *Inspiration*; she's much bigger and much more stable than this boat. I'm going to need all the help I can get. Can we at least move him to my first aid room?"

Phillip hadn't bargained on this. He would have preferred keeping the whole operation right there on the *Coincidence*, not getting the other boat involved at all. Just a quick patch-up from the doctor and they'd be on their way again, no one the wiser, that was the idea. And how did he know this doctor wouldn't try something heroic as soon as he was back on the *Inspiration*?

Still, if Stefano's chances were better on the more stable boat, how could he refuse? And the doctor did seem anxious about the kids—damn! Why did there have to be *that* complication? The only doctor in this part of the entire ocean, and he had to come with a boat full of kids.

Yet maybe they could be an asset, after all, these kids. Phillip considered himself a pretty good judge of character. The doctor wasn't going to take any chances where the kids were concerned, he was sure of that. In fact, it was a sure bet that nobody could stomach the thought of any harm coming to kids. Well, nobody except Juan, maybe.

"Okay," he said. "Give him the shot and then we'll go to the bridge and you can radio your captain."

Dr. Williams radioed the captain while Phillip told the others of the plan. They were to arm themselves with handguns but keep them out of sight. When the boats were tied together, he told them, he wanted them all to go onboard the *Inspiration*. They were to keep their mouths shut, stay alert, and not make any trouble—but if trouble came, they were to be ready to shoot.

Juan was beginning to boil over at the way Phillip had suddenly become the self-appointed leader of the team; he was getting way too cocky for his own good. He still said nothing, though. He'd take care of the little bastard later.

Henry and several Floaties put fenders on the port side of the *Inspiration* and made ready to take the lines of the *Coincidence*. Polo and Esteban put fenders on the starboard side of the *Coincidence*; Severo manned the docking lines. Phillip quickly maneuvered the boat alongside. The lines were made fast, with the Zodiac still tied to the transom.

Phillip and the doctor climbed aboard the *Inspiration*. Most of the Floaties were finished with classes for the afternoon, and had come on deck to see what was going on.

"Must be something really serious with the guy in this boat," Pierre said to Melissa. He had never seen the doctor looking so grave.

The students watched as Phillip, Dr. Williams, and Captain Marzynski conferred for a moment, then strode toward the captain's quarters. But they were soon distracted as Henry lowered a stretcher and Stefano was hauled up. He was strapped in securely, but was pitching himself around with such force it was all they could do to keep hold of the stretcher.

Pierre and Evan helped carry him to the first aid room. When Dr. Williams came in he asked them to leave, which they were glad to do. The man smelled awful.

"Do you suppose it's something terribly contagious and that's why everyone's looking so grim and acting so weird?" Melissa asked.

That would explain a lot, the Floaties agreed. But then why wasn't he wearing a mask? And why would the doctor have allowed anyone close to him?

The doctor, meanwhile, cut off Stefano's pants and took a closer look at the wound. The *Inspiration's* first aid room was well stocked for any of the complaints likely to befall healthy people on a long ocean voyage—seasickness, of course, plus colds, cuts, splinters, bruises, scrapes, strains, sprains, and even a simple broken bone. But it was not intended to be a floating hospital, and it had none of the heavy-duty anesthetics needed for surgery.

Dr. Williams had no way to put Stefano to sleep. He could freeze the wound itself, but that would require putting a needle into the infected area, which would risk spreading the infection.

He went to the drug cabinet in the hope of finding something that he could use to dull the man's pain. It was a shame the BWA's zero-tolerance rule on alcohol precluded the professional staff from having any booze onboard; he couldn't even give Stefano a stiff drink to take the edge off while he extracted the bullet. Unless ... unless maybe Mac had a wee flask stashed somewhere in his locker. He wouldn't be surprised if he did.

But what was this? Reaching into the far back of the meds cabinet, he pulled out a bottle of Diprivan, a fairly new anesthetic often used in outpatient procedures because of its tendency to wear off quickly. According to the instructions, he'd need to supplement it with an intravenous analgesic agent. He rummaged through the cabinet and finally came up with a container of Etomidate. That would do. It would have to.

Normally, at least three people would be involved in this kind of operation: a surgeon, a nurse, and an anesthetist. Dr. Williams was going to have to do everything himself, with Phillip as his only assistant. Phillip had insisted on staying in the room the entire time, and would allow no one else in, even though both the captain and Henry had at least some medical training and Phillip had none. If he was assisting, he'd have to put the gun down, and that would be a plus.

"All right, let's get started," Dr. Williams said. He spoke directly to Stefano, although he hadn't much hope the man could understand what he was saying. At least he was quieter now.

"I'm going to put a butterfly valve in your wrist so that I can start a saline drip. I'll also use it to administer an anesthetic called Diprivan. That will put you to sleep."

The doctor set up the IV pole. He scrubbed his hands, pulled on pair of latex gloves, then nodded to Phillip to do the same.

"While you're out, I'll use a small pair of forceps to remove the bullet and then flush out the wound with a saline solution to try and remove any debris left behind. When that's done, I'll insert a small catheter to allow the wound to drain, apply a dressing, and that's it, we're done. Within a couple of hours you should be awake and on the way to recovery."

He glanced over at Phillip, then continued.

"That's assuming that everything goes well. You've got to remember I've never done this before. I'm not trained to do it, but I'll do my best for you."

While the doctor was operating, the captain called all of the staff and students to a meeting in the mess hall. Polo and Severo stood silently on two sides of the room, their eyes roaming over the crowd, looking for the slightest hint of trouble. Esteban was keeping watch near the first aid room.

Captain Marzynski looked out at his crew and his students and listened as words he had never imagined having to utter came, somehow, from his mouth.

The men onboard, he said, were armed. Every command they made was to be carried out. Without question. The injured man was undergoing an operation. When it was over, they would, he hoped, return to their own boat and let the *Inspiration* resume its course to Easter Island. In the meantime, he was asking for—no, he was *commanding*—everyone's complete cooperation. Under no circumstances was anyone to try to be a hero.

There was stunned silence for a few seconds, then a buzz of voices as they all struggled to come to grips with what was happening. Armed men? Operation? So there was no deadly tropical contagion, then, after all, to put their lives in danger. Oh—but their lives were still very much in danger.

They lined up, the students first, then the teachers, then the crew, as Polo took their names and cabin numbers. From that point on, everyone onboard ship was to be accounted for at all times.

Everyone onboard ship, that is. Dave Cameron looked at the crew as they stood at the end of the line, waiting to give Polo their information. And again, just in case he had miscounted. No. *Everyone* onboard was supposed to be at the meeting; the captain's orders had been clear. But someone was not there.

Where was Mac?



Dave Cameron's mind was racing. If Mac wasn't with the rest of them in the mess, where was he? Did he even know what was going on? Did anyone else realize he was missing? Surely the captain or Henry would have noticed. Their captors could not have known, of that he was pretty certain. They'd have no way of knowing who was supposed to be aboard until they finished taking down the names and cabin numbers. And would the hijackers know of the bosun's locker?

Assuming no one else had noticed Mac's absence yet, what were the chances that it would stay a secret until he could warn them all how important it was to keep it that way? Because, it occurred to him, a secret person onboard could be a valuable thing. Extremely valuable.

It seemed to be taking a ridiculously long time for the man to take down their names. The other guy, Phillip, the one who'd done all of the talking, must be the brains behind the operation, Dave thought. The others did whatever he told them, and didn't seem to speak much English.

Finally, all of the students had given the skinny guy their information. One by one they left the mess. Outside on deck they walked alone or in small huddled groups, saying little. Melissa held Pierre's hand as if she intended never to let it out of her grip again.

The teachers and crew stood solemnly as well, most looking down or at the wall or anywhere except at one another, as they waited their turns. Dave kept trying to catch the captain's eye, but he, too, was looking stonily ahead. At last Dave reached the head of the line, mumbled his name and cabin number, then turned to go. He brushed the captain's arm on the way out, hoping he wouldn't be blown away by a bullet for the gesture. Captain Marzynski, last in the line, looked at him sharply. Dave signaled as best he could, with a subtle nod, that he would meet him outside.

When the captain emerged, they fell into step wordlessly, walking toward the bridge. Severo headed them off as they approached with a furious shaking of his head, his gun in his hand. Phillip had given him orders: No one was to be allowed on the bridge.

They turned and headed for the bow. As soon as they were out of earshot, Dave asked Captain Marzynski about Mac. As Dave had suspected, the captain had realized that Mac was absent, too. He agreed with Dave that this might be their one hope for escaping with their lives. For after all, no matter what Phillip had said about not wanting anyone to get hurt, how could the hijackers just let them go now? They had too much at stake. They had, as far as the captain could see, practically no choice but to kill everyone onboard the *Inspiration*. If they did not, they risked being charged with piracy, on top of whatever else it was they were up to. Which was—what?

"Drugs, most likely," the captain said. "Their boat is probably stolen, too. Did you notice the sides of the cabin? It's not blue paint but some sort of stick-on material. They've gone to a lot of trouble to disguise the boat. They probably have drugs onboard. And Dr. W. thinks the injured man has been shot."

Dave tried to get his mind in gear. Surely there was something they could do. And wasn't he the guy who came to the rescue, time after time? But those times, he'd acted on instinct; there was something to be done, he'd done it, he was a hero. And he'd had only himself to think for, if he'd been thinking at all. Now it wasn't just his own neck he'd be risking.

If only he could think of a plan. There were far more of them than there were hijackers ...

The captain had been thinking along the same lines.

"We ought to be able to overpower them somehow. We have the numbers. But they have the weapons. No. We can't take the chance. Not with the kids onboard."

"But maybe," Dave said, "maybe, with the element of surprise—"

“Which Mac might provide,” the captain said. “The first thing we have to do is find Mac.”

Dave went off to search, glad to be on the move, doing *something*. The captain stayed on deck, keeping his eyes on the hijackers. He walked, in what he hoped would be construed as a casual manner, over to the teachers, who were standing together near the rail trying to make sense of the situation. Most of all, they wanted to keep the students occupied, both to try to keep their minds off the danger as far as possible and to keep any of them from attempting, with adolescent bravado, something foolish.

“I think even the hijackers would have to see that it’s in their interests as well if the kids maintain their routine,” Anika was saying as Captain Marzynski joined them.

She was right, of course, they all agreed. And she, as shipboard director and lead teacher, volunteered to be the one to broach the subject with Phillip. And if he didn’t go for the idea—well, she didn’t care to think about what he’d do in that case. None of them did.

The teachers had been too distracted to notice that Mac was missing. Their eyes lit up when the captain told them; with Mac at large, unknown to the hijackers, they had a chance. And Mac, whatever you might say about him, was canny. There was practically nothing he couldn’t do, if he put his mind to it.

But it was essential to keep Mac’s existence a secret. Just one casual remark from just one student—one “Say, where’s Mac, anyway?”—within the hearing of the hijackers and the jig would be up. It was all the teachers could do to disband with no apparent haste, no apparent direction, when all they wanted to do was run to tell the kids before it was too late.



Mac heard nothing the first time Dave came to his locker to look for him. He hadn't heard the captain's announcement. He was sound asleep behind a screen of old sails, on a small shelf he'd rigged up for just this purpose. He was a hard worker and more than willing to do his share—hell, more than his share. He felt it was not in the least out of line for him to retreat, during the lull of the afternoons, to his locker for a wee tippie—the academy folk were great to work with, but this no-alcohol-for-anybody-onboard was just going too far—and a lie down.

The locker was the first place Dave thought to look. He strolled to the bow, his hands in his pockets, and looked out at the small rippling waves, forcing himself to stand and wait until he was sure he was not being observed. Where, he wondered, were those sickening rolls and lurches when you needed them? If only another nauseating round of turbulence would come along, sending the hijackers running for the rail, losing their guns along with their lunches over the side ...

Once he was sure no one was in sight, Dave opened the hatch of the steel box that projected from the deck. He crawled in, closed the hatch behind him as quietly as he could, and began scuttling down the first of the steel rungs that led to the bosun's locker.

"Mac?" he whispered. "Mac, you down here?"

No answer.

He peered down into the locker, some ten feet below him. The room was empty.

"Mac?" he called again, just in case.

No answer.

He heard footsteps above and froze for a moment, listening. He could hear muffled sobs, along with a soft murmur of voices making comforting sounds. He clambered back up and popped his head out the hatch, taking a small cluster of Floaties by surprise. He hastened to warn them not to breathe a word about Mac.

The news that Mac might be able to help cheered the group considerably, and they set off in better spirits to start alerting the other kids to keep mum about the bosun's existence. Dave refrained from mentioning that no one had any idea of the whereabouts of their hero-to-be.

He went below now, walking slowly along the corridors. Mac and Charlie, the bosun's mate, shared a cabin, but neither was in it when Dave looked. He debated with himself about leaving a note somewhere inside—where? The head?—telling Mac to go under cover to his locker, and Charlie to act as bosun, but decided it would be too risky. He continued knocking on cabin doors, keeping a sharp eye out for any of the hijackers, searching for Mac in every niche remotely big enough for a human being to fit into. Had the man disappeared entirely?

Oh, dear God. What if he had run into one of the hijackers and told him, in his inimitable way, to bugger off, and had been pumped full of bullets and tossed overboard? Although he was the kindest of men in his heart of hearts, Mac wasn't known for his tact. Or even his good sense when it came to matters of manly pride. In the rough Glasgow tenements where he had grown up, tact had not been the most useful commodity, especially for a boy of his short stature. He had found it more to his advantage to hone his scrawny body into wiry fleetness, and to mask his sensitive nature behind a tough façade. These tactics had enabled him to avoid most confrontations altogether, and to hold his own the rare times he could not. He was smart, he was sympathetic, he was as capable as they come, but he had been known to part company with common sense on occasion when someone got his goat. And what they were up against now was no mere squabble with rowdy pub-crawlers, but a group of ruthless drug dealers with their backs up against the wall.

Mac was nowhere below, Dave was sure. He passed several more Floaties as he continued his search. He could tell before he even talked to them which ones had heard the news and which had not. Those who knew had a faint

glimmer of hope in their faces, a purposeful way of walking. Don't look too purposeful, he had to remind them. Just keep walking and spreading the word as quickly as you can, but without appearing to rush—and if you see Mac anywhere, tell him to go to his locker and stay there.

Where else could the man possibly be, Dave wondered—assuming, of course, that he was still among the living? Was it conceivable that he'd secreted himself somewhere in the mess, in some infinitesimally tiny recess—he was a small and agile fellow, after all—and was biding his time now, waiting until it was safe to emerge?

Dave decided to have one more look in the bosun's locker before searching above again, just in case one of the Floaties had come across Mac and relayed the message to him.

He scurried down into the boxy space again, disappointed but unsurprised to see no sign of the bosun.

"Mac?" he whispered, knowing full well there would be no reply.

A soft nasal rumbling met his ears, followed by a whistle of expelled air.

"Mac!" he started to shout, then modulated his voice into a whispered croak.

"Mac?"

His voice reverberated against the gray steel walls. The metal chair by the small, cluttered workbench was unoccupied. Mac's jacket lay folded on one of the steel shelves built into the wall, his small kit bag sat on the shelf above.

Dave heard another soft rumbling, faint but unmistakable. Where in the world—?

Along one side of the locker, where two gray steel trunks hugged the wall—that's where the gentle sound seemed to be coming from. The trunks, Dave knew, were full to the brim with seldom-used tools and emergency equipment. Whatever anybody needed, Mac could find it in there somewhere if he hunted around long enough. On top of the trunks lay a precarious jumble of ropes, wires, and oddly shaped metal doodads of indeterminate usefulness; over them hung several old sails in need of repair.

Dave's eyes roamed over the piles of stuff. It was a wonder Mac ever found anything at all in this hodgepodge. Funny, though—that one back corner of the trunk on the right, he saw, was clear. It wasn't a big space, less than a foot long, he'd guess, and not as wide, but not a thing was in it—except a little silver flask, with its lid off.

Dave yanked the sails aside.

"Mac! Wake up! Mac!" he cried, shaking the bosun's shoulder. Mac grunted, his hand swatting the air around his face as if at a mosquito.

"For God's sake, Mac, wake up!"

Mac's eyelids flew open. If he was surprised to find Dave in a dither beside his hideaway, he gave no evidence of it as he unfolded his body and, catlike, hopped from the narrow shelf down to the trunk and then to the floor.

"What's the matter then, lad?" he asked, now wide awake.

Dave told him, as calmly and concisely as he could.

"Bloody hell," Mac said.



Melissa sat on one of the lower bunks in her cabin, looking at nothing in particular, clutching Pierre's hand. Nancy and Michael sat across from them, on the other lower bunk, Michael's arm around Nancy's shoulders. Trudy, Kathy, Dan, Evan, and Chris hovered nearby, sitting on the floor or leaning up against the ends of the bunks. The tiny cabin had barely enough space for its usual four occupants, much less the four more from Pierre's cabin and Michael, as well, but none of them could bear the thought of being apart.

No one could think of anything to say. They'd been through their situation a dozen times or more already and there were no answers, only unanswerable questions. The light buzzed overhead. Every little sound was magnified: Every throat clearing, every tummy rumble seemed an irreverent intrusion into their silence.

Melissa was still trying to comprehend how her life could have gone in a heartbeat from the unparalleled highs of the past few days to this unparalleled low. She was trying hard *not* to think that this might in fact be the end of her life altogether.

Her family! Her dear, wonderful parents. And Eric. And Uncle Jack. Would she ever see them again? Would her parents rue for the rest of their days their decision to allow her to apply to Blue Water Academy? And yet, if she had not applied, she never would have had these most amazing, most wonderful experiences of her life, and she never would have met Pierre. Getting through this without Pierre was unthinkable. If indeed they did get through it.

Of course, if she had not become a Floatie and met Pierre, there wouldn't be this horror to get through in the first place. But not having met Pierre at all was just as unthinkable. Her thoughts went round and round in circles. Her

head began to ache.

What time was it anyway? Would this awful day never end?

And if it ever did, *how* would it end?



He heard the voices long before he could make out the words. A vague burble at first, indistinguishable as voices, then clearer. Yes, human voices ... two of them, *verdad?* He recognized one ... didn't he? *Sí*, he was sure ... *claro* ...

The next time he woke his brain felt a little less fuzzy. How long had he been sleeping? That was Phillip's voice, *no cabe duda*, but who was the other guy? He pried his eyelids open.

Where the hell was he?

The light was blinding. His eyelids snapped shut again.

"Stefano?"

He half opened one eye, bracing himself for the excruciating brightness.

A face was bending over his, one he'd never seen before. It was blurry, but it seemed to belong to a gringo, a sandy-haired gringo with a neatly trimmed beard, blue eyes, and a steady gaze. A warm hand—did it also belong with this face?—was picking up his own hand, turning it over, feeling his wrist. Suddenly another face appeared on his left.

"You're doing great, *hombre!* You had us worried there for a while, man, but Dr. Williams got the bullet out okay. The infection ought to be clearing up in a few days. You'll be back on your feet in no time!"

Stefano turned his head slightly to the left. It seemed to weigh a ton.

Phillip was peering into his half-open eye. He was blurry, too. His face looked pale—even paler than usual—but he was smiling and nodding his head up and down, up and down.

What was he talking about—bullet? Infection? Why couldn't he get his own mind to think straight? His mouth felt like sludge. He tried to form the confusion in his brain into a coherent question, but the words wouldn't come together. Even if they had, he doubted his lips and teeth and tongue would have known what to do with them.

"You've had surgery, Stefano," the voice that wasn't Phillip's said.

Stefano rolled his leaden head toward the right and squinted at the face.

"You'll be a little groggy for another half hour or so, but the effects of the anesthetic will start to wear off quickly now."

This must be Dr.—Dr. What? The doctor Phillip was talking about.

"I was able to get the bullet out with no problem. The infection was pretty nasty—a few more hours without treatment and I believe you'd have lost that leg—but it's responding nicely to the antibiotic. You're very lucky."

Now the doctor was helping him lift his head up a few inches. Propping him up with more pillows. Holding something against his lips.

"It's too soon for you to drink anything, but see if these ice chips help a bit."

Stefano struggled to find the muscles that would open his mouth, that would allow his lips to curve around the ice chips and deposit them on his parched tongue. At this moment, that cup of ice chips was the most desirable object in the world.

The name came to him: Dr. Williams. *Sí*, that was his name, that's what Phillip had said, sure. The ice was making little channels of moisture as it melted, forging a narrow path through the forest of fuzz coating his tongue and throat. He swallowed. He took another mouthful, losing less down his chin this time; he let it slide down his throat, then took another. The swallowing was easier now. The cool liquid seemed to be penetrating the fog in his brain, too.

"Now," Dr. Williams was saying, "suppose you tell me what exactly is going on."

"You don't need to know," a different voice said. "In fact, your services here are no longer needed. *Muchas*

gracias. Now get out. You, too, Phillip.”

Juan was standing at the door.



Anika hated being called “perky.” She knew she was young looking for thirty, and she was enthusiastic and cheerful, she would grant you all that. But *perky*? No. Perky was for airheads, Gidgets, all those too-cute types.

She had cut off her long blonde ponytail during her second year of grad school in an effort to look professional, or at least less like an incoming freshman—had, in fact, donated it to a program that wove shorn hair into wigs for children with alopecia. Surely that wasn’t something most perky persons would have thought to do. She had tried to dress professionally, too, purchasing tailored slacks and jackets when she had started her student teaching. Now, of course, as a BWA teacher, she had to wear the same outfit all of the crew, teachers, and students were required to wear.

She was wishing she had something considerably more mature and professional looking on now as she made her way across the deck to where Phillip was standing. She’d have felt much more confident in her ability to get him to see the wisdom of her request if she’d been clad in something other than a casual T-shirt.

Oh, well, she thought, taking a deep breath, throwing her shoulders back, and putting on her most self-assured expression. It was a wise request, never mind how she was dressed.

Phillip eyed her as she walked toward him. Cute little thing, that one. Nice, trim figure—and that snug little T-shirt sure showed it off, too. But his thoughts turned almost at once back to Stefano and to Juan. He hadn’t liked the way Juan had looked at him, or the way he’d dismissed him from the first-aid room like that. Like he’d been nothing more than a stand-in, like he hadn’t taken control of a desperate situation and handled it like a pro. Yeah, well, Juan. Juanito. Your big brother would be dead by now if it hadn’t been for me.

The little blonde was coming over to him. She was close enough to touch.

“Could we talk for a minute?” she asked.

“Sure. What about?”

“I’m the shipboard director and I’m resp—”

“Shipboard director? Aren’t you kind of young?”

“I am the shipboard director,” Anika began again firmly, looking him in the eye, “and I am responsible for the education and well-being of the students onboard this ship. There are thirty-two students aboard. The last thing you would want, I am sure, is for those kids to start getting restless.”

She paused for a moment to see how this was going down so far, then continued.

“They’re good kids, every one of them, but you know how it is when teenagers get bored. And these kids are scared besides. They don’t know what to think. They could easily get out of control.”

She gave Phillip the warmest, most conspiratorial smile she could muster.

“I’m sure you wouldn’t want that to happen. The best thing for everybody concerned would be for the kids to go on with their regular routine.”

“And what’s that exactly?”

So far, so good.

“Well, they’re in class several hours every day. They also share in the galley work and the maintenance of the ship. They’re each on watch duty twice every day, once in the daytime, once at night. And we all meet on deck at eight every morning to go over the day’s activities.”

Phillip could see it would be best to keep the kids occupied. The babe was smart, too. And she was plucky. He liked that.

“Okay. I have no problem with that,” he said. “Just make sure they understand we are in control of the ship. Orders will come from me, not from your captain. And I don’t want anyone on the bridge except my men.”

His men. Yes. Screw Juan.

“What’d you say your name was?” he asked as she turned to go.

I didn’t say, she thought. Didn’t want to, either. “Anika,” she mumbled.

Then she lifted her head defiantly, looked him in the eye, and said in a clear voice, “Anika Johnson.”

“Mine’s Phillip. A pleasure to meet you.”



Mac sat in his locker, drumming his fingers against the metal of the workbench. He'd seen a great deal in his long and varied life—well, *lives*, really, would be more a more accurate way to put it. For his years on this earth had been sharply divided into three quite distinct phases: his childhood in Glasgow, his few years of relative contentment as a young man in Africa, and now his life at sea.

“At sea.” Now *that* was accurate. He had been at sea, adrift, cut loose from his moorings, whatever you cared to call it, since Caroline had left him. It had been his own damn fault, too; he'd not deny it. But that would nae bring her back again, now, would it?

Och! Would he never stop plowing these useless furrows of grief? What he had started to think was, he'd seen a great deal in his life, but this—this was of a different order entirely. Far beyond any one man's personal heartbreak.

The kids were foremost on his mind. They must be kept safe at all costs. And it was up to him to see that they were.

He opened up the tin of peanuts he kept on the bench and gobbled a handful, wishing he had a cold McEwan's to wash it down. Dave had promised to try to sneak some food down to him, but it wouldn't be easy with the hijackers patrolling the deck. But he could do with a bit of sustenance before it was time to put their plan into operation.

Their plan—well, he reckoned, it was stretching it a bit thin to call their highly tentative ideas a plan.

Whatever the hijackers were involved in—and the captain's assumption of drug running did seem the likeliest possibility—they had too much to lose now to leave any survivors on the *Inspiration*. Everyone aboard, adults and kids alike, had seen the hijackers clearly. Had seen their boat. Covered with some sort of blue plastic, Dave had said, so presumably stolen. If they left it covered, it was easily identifiable by anyone aboard; if they removed the covering, there was the stolen boat.

Suppose, Mac had said to Dave, suppose they were to help the hijackers concoct a new disguise for the stolen boat? The *Inspiration* had plenty of paint onboard, probably enough to repaint the cabin, and surely enough to paint over the name with a new one. But even as he was putting the idea forth, Mac realized it wasn't a workable solution. No matter how helpful the crew was in camouflaging the *Coincidence*, it wouldn't be enough. The hijackers would never trust them to keep their mouths shut after they sailed away.

Dave had gone off to report to the captain that Mac had been found, and to remove all traces of Mac's belongings from the cabin he shared with Charlie. Mac, they had agreed, was their wild card, the one hope they might have of coming out of this mess alive.

What would they do in the hijackers' shoes? That was where they needed to start, Mac thought, as he waited for Dave to return. The men had weapons and wouldn't hesitate to use them if necessary. They had, seemingly, been using them when the one fellow got himself shot in the leg. But would it make sense for them to take their weapons and just mow down the entire population of the *Inspiration*, then set it adrift, to be discovered God only knows how much later?

It would not, Mac decided. Too dicey. After all, there'd been the radio messages from the *Coincidence* about the man—what was his name? Stefano? Something like that—about whoever the fellow was who needed the doctor. That would directly link the *Inspiration* with the *Coincidence*. The hijackers couldn't take the chance of getting wherever they were heading and into hiding before the ship full of dead bodies might be found.

Far better, Mac thought, to make the deaths look like an accident—but how would ye go about orchestrating a thing like that, with the number of people involved? Sink the boat, maybe ... But how? No icebergs in these parts, that was for sure, and any structural damage to the hull would, eventually, be examined minutely; any suspicion of intentional damage would, once again, lead back to the *Coincidence*. Besides, boats took their own good time to go

down. The *Inspiration* had a superfluity of equipment for any such unlikely emergency; there was no way in the world everyone onboard would go and drown in such an event.

Poison, then? But where would they be getting a poison lethal enough to kill everyone aboard? And, even supposing that they “just happened” to have come prepared with a supply of some such toxin on the *Coincidence*—and that itself would be too great a coincidence by half—how would they go about delivering the stuff? Offer to cook them all a lovely little dinner in honor of the host ship’s hospitality?

Scratch poison.

An explosion might work. It would have to be carefully rigged, though: big enough to blow the *Inspiration* to kingdom come, leaving not a single survivor; yet timed perfectly so that the hijackers’ own boat would be well enough along its way not to get blown to bits into the bargain. But, even assuming they could get hold of the necessary materials, they could hardly start rigging up massive explosive devices unobserved. And if they were observed to be doing something that would lead to the sure and certain demise of everyone aboard the *Inspiration*, then some of those aboard—and he’d be the first among them, too—would give up their own lives to save the rest.

The hijackers, Mac was beginning to believe, had very few viable options open to them. Chances were good, he thought, that they were as much in the dark about how to get out of this god-awful situation as anybody else.

Bloody fools! Why had they had to go getting their legs infected and endangering his kids in the first place?



It was an uneasy confrontation for both men, but they had no choice. There were decisions that had to be made, boundaries that had to be set. Neither the captain nor Phillip had ever expected to be in such a predicament. Neither wanted to precipitate any violence and neither wanted to lose control of the situation. Their conversation was like a game of chess, each man trying to think several steps ahead as they negotiated their course of action for the next few days.

Mac's assessment had been exactly right. The hijackers had no good alternatives at their disposal. Juan had come up with the grisly idea of putting all of the adults on the *Coincidence*, tying them up, then opening the seacocks so the boat would go down. Then the hijackers, with the kids, would continue to Easter Island on the *Inspiration*.

And then? Stefano had asked him. The kids were not so young that they wouldn't know full well what had become of the adults, and would be just as capable as the adults of picking the hijackers out of a lineup. Besides, the *Coincidence* and the *Inspiration* were inextricably linked by the radio messages.

Sometimes his brother didn't have the sense of a pack mule, Stefano had thought. Great at the details once the plan was made, *sí*, but not exactly an idea man. Not that Stefano was coming up with any good ideas of his own. His head was clearer now, but no matter how he analyzed the situation, he couldn't see a good way out.

"Okay," he had said to Juan. "Here's what we gonna do for now. We gonna tie the boats together—get Phillip to talk to the captain about this, see whether it's better to tie them amidships or tow the *Coincidence* behind. Everybody stays together on the *Inspiration*. We gonna keep on course for Easter Island, at least for now."

Maybe, he had thought, they would find an isolated spot for the *Coincidence* to land. And then, maybe, one hostage would be all they'd need. Just one person to take with them to ensure the silence of the others until their getaway was complete. The *Inspiration*, minus one, would go on with its sightseeing, knowing that one word leaked out to thwart their escape with the drugs would be the end of their *amigo*. And if—no, not if, *when*—when he and hismen had escaped? What would they do with their hostage then?

He would have to work on that one. In the meantime, he'd told Juan, Phillip would have to go on acting as front man—Stefano had put up his hand to stop his brother's objection. He didn't like it either, Phillip was getting too cocky—he knew it, too—but they'd have to deal with him later. Right now he was the best one to work things out with the captain.

So Phillip and Captain Marzynski were hammering out the routine that would see them through the immediate future. Towing, the captain said, was by far the better way of keeping the boats together. His crew would help the hijackers secure the *Coincidence*. Anika would juggle the cabin assignments somehow to make room for the men. Shipboard routines, they agreed, were to be followed insofar as possible. Except, of course, that the hijackers would be in charge ("*I will be in charge*," was the way Phillip put it), and there would be no communication with the outside world.

"We have to check in every day with our head office in Montréal," the captain said. "We are required to give them our position, and we discuss any problems we might have. It will raise alarms if they don't hear from us."

Damn, Phillip, thought. It would be highly suspicious if the *Inspiration* did not follow protocol. But it opened up a big can of worms, too. He'd monitor the conversation, for sure, but how could he be sure they didn't have some kind of code words to use in an emergency?

"What time do you check in?" he asked.

"Every morning at nine. Nothing will happen now until tomorrow."

"Okay," Phillip said. "Tomorrow morning you call headquarters and check in. You tell them your position. You tell them you're having a little trouble with the electronic systems, that maybe communication will be down for a

while. You've got it covered, your engineer's working on it, but you might not be able to get through for a day or so. Got it? And we'll rattle a wire or two while you're talking. Then we'll disconnect the system.

"But I'm warning you: I will be listening to every word you say. If I hear anything that doesn't sound on the up and up—"



Anika gasped in horror at what she'd done. Her wild reflex reaction could ruin everything.

Polo and Severo had been bringing the last of the hijackers' personal belongings onboard when the man called Phillip sidled up to her. He was such an unpleasant, oily person, she thought. Puffed up, self-important, arrogant. She gave him a perfunctory nod.

"Hey there, Miss Shipboard Director," he said, a smile playing over his lips as if they shared a secret joke. "Have you found beds for all your unexpected guests yet?"

Almost, she told him. Stefano, of course, could stay where he was in the first-aid room. Four of the student cabins had only three occupants on this sailing, so she had reassigned the teachers who shared doubles to those berths. His men could have the doubles. She gave Phillip the cabin numbers, making a great and entirely unnecessary show of consulting her clipboard so she wouldn't have to look at his face. Everyone was taken care of except Phillip himself.

She forced herself to give him a rueful smile. She'd have a place for him squared away shortly, she assured him, trying to use her crispest, most professional voice. She hoped it sounded more convincing to his ears than it did to her own.

Why couldn't the creep have waited just ten more minutes for her to finish the reorganizing? The only other available berth was in the cabin Mac and Charlie shared, but she didn't dare tell Phillip he was to bunk in there until she was positive all traces of Mac had been obliterated and that Charlie had everything he needed to be a credible bosun.

"Well now—maybe I'll just have to bunk in with you," he said.

Yeah, maybe they could turn this into a pleasure cruise, he thought. He could do with some of that, all right.

Anika saw the man's big teeth smirking down at her. She saw his hard eyes appraising her body. She saw his big hand reaching out and noticed the grime under the fingernails as the hand came forward and lightly, teasingly, tugged at the neck of her T-shirt.

And then she saw her own hand, as if disconnected from the rest of her, leaving the clipboard and striking the side of his face with more force than she knew she possessed.

Dear God, what had she done?



Phillip rubbed the side of his face as he waited for Dave to pass the end of the hawser to him. Not only was the little blonde plucky, she packed a mean wallop. He'd been so taken aback by the swiftness and strength of her slap that he'd very nearly returned it with one of his own.

But then he'd stepped back and shrugged, holding up his hands in a gesture of resignation.

"Hey, simmer down," he had told her, keeping his tone light and bantering. "It was only a thought."

A thought that might grow on her, too, with any luck at all. She'd come around; he'd bet on it. A lot of them did, after the first display of protecting their honor. Unless maybe she was sleeping with somebody onboard already. The captain? Good career move, Phillip thought. That could be it, even though he was a lot older. Or what about this guy with the hawser, one of the teachers, right? Yeah, he was closer to Anika's age, and the kind of guy a woman might find attractive.

Dave threw the end of the rope down to the *Coincidence*, then hopped onboard to help Phillip tie it off. All the while he kept up a steady stream of conversation as if his life depended on it.

Which it very well might.

As they tied off the hawser to the Sampson post, Dave could, if he looked very carefully at just the right spot, and squinted slightly, just make out Mac's dim outline in the water, peeking around the bow of the *Inspiration*. Naturally, Dave was *not* squinting at this spot, in fact was looking at it as little as possible, and was trying for all he was worth to make sure no one else was looking at it either.

"So," he shouted to Phillip, "will a boat this big tow all right behind the *Inspiration*?"

“Sure. Your captain says there might be some reduction in speed, maybe a half knot, but that shouldn’t be a problem.”

Mac could hear Dave with no difficulty, but Phillip, unaware of the purpose of the conversation, was not so audible. Mac swam as close to edge of the bow as he could and listened for all he was worth.

The “plan” was now in operation, yet barely more gelled than before. Dave had come to fetch the hawser from the bosun’s locker and the two had had a hurried conference, only two or three minutes, before a couple of Floaties had come down to help carry the heavy rope. Mac had secreted himself behind the sails again; if no one saw him, no one would be able to let anything slip. He knew only that he was to try, somehow, to get himself aboard the *Coincidence* before they started towing. Once onboard ... well, he’d think of something. He had to.

“If you’re not leaving anyone onboard to steer,” Dave was inquiring at the top of his lungs, “will you use the automatic helm?”

“Nah, we won’t need the Autohelm. We’ll just lock the wheel amidships and it should tow pretty easily.”

“How far back will it be?”

“We’ll pay out about two hundred feet of line. That should do.”

“Do you think we should put a secondary line on just in case something happens to the hawser?”

Man, this guy was a talker, Phillip thought. He was just like so many of the sailing guys he had met over the years. Couldn’t get enough of the boats and had to hash out all of the technical aspects of every move they made. Well, that’s probably why he’d signed on for the floating schoolhouse gig. It was the closest a guy living on a teacher’s salary would ever come to owning a yacht. And it sure would beat your ordinary high school classroom.

Phillip let him know that a second line wouldn’t be necessary. The hawser was almost two inches thick, for God’s sake; it would be perfectly adequate as long as it didn’t chafe.

He wondered if the guy kept up the running boat-talk all the time he was with Anika.

Mac knew he had to move quickly. He dived under and swam to the other side of the *Coincidence*. He paddled to the stern, reached around the transom, took a firm hold of the transom ladder, and then waited.

Within fifteen minutes, the lines had been cast off, except the towline, and the fenders taken aboard. As the two boats started to separate, Mac climbed onto the swim ladder and waited. As soon as the towline was fully extended, he crept up and found himself aboard an impressively well-equipped boat.

He moved forward until he reached the bridge. He closed the miniblinds on the windows and surveyed the electronic equipment. The motor controls and systems were not too different from those on the *Inspiration*, he was glad to see. At the chart table, he found a chart with a course already plotted for Easter Island. He’d be able to follow their progress with the GPS.

He prowled through the rest of the boat while enough daylight remained to see his way, making mental notes of where everything was, keeping an eye out for anything that might prove useful. He was beginning to shiver. He found some spare clothes in a drawer in the owner’s cabin and put them on, leaving his own dripping in the shower. The owner was clearly a taller and stouter man than Mac, but it was good to be warm and dry.

The generator had, thankfully, been left on, so the refrigerator was running. Peering in, he spotted a supply of beer—now there was a sight to cheer the soul! Good God, he was famished! He found some bread, slightly stale now, and a bit of cheese, and fixed himself a plate. Balancing a couple of extra beer bottles under his arm, he took his supper to the owner’s cabin and there he sat in the gathering darkness, munching and mulling over his options.

He could, he supposed, cast off in the dark of night and disappear. The *Coincidence* could easily outrun the *Inspiration*, he knew; it could probably go twice as fast. He’d have to hack away at the towline and make it look as though it had chafed through—otherwise the hijackers would know something was up. That would make the timing uncertain. But even if he were to get away unnoticed, then what? Help was a long, long way off. And what would happen to those on the *Inspiration* when the hijackers discovered their boat was gone? He could nae risk it.

Better to keep the boats tethered. But there was the satellite phone ... He could use the satellite phone to tell someone of their plight ... That was a start, at least. They were now a thousand miles away from Easter Island. That ought to give him time enough to think of a plan of some description.

But if, as the Immortal Bard had said, even the best-laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley, what hope could there be for plans as sketchily laid as these?



Kathleen Tutty was unlocking her office door shortly after eight-thirty in the morning when the phone began to ring. “Coming, coming,” she mumbled as she jiggled the key in the lock. It could be stubborn sometimes; every day she thought about getting the building manager to have a look at it, but every morning a pile of papers demanded her attention and the thought disappeared until the next morning’s struggle.

By the time she had reached her desk and lifted the receiver, there was nothing but a dial tone.

She stowed her purse in a side drawer, yawning, and flipped the switch on the coffee pot. She grabbed her cup and was halfway through the door on her way to the ladies room to rinse it out when the phone started up again.

“Hello,” she said. “What? I’m sorry—we seem to have a bad connection.”

She could hardly make out what the man was saying. She was pretty sure it was a man, anyway.

“Mac? Is that you?”

She thought now that she could detect a Scottish accent.

Yes, it was Mac on the *Inspiration*. But wait, no—not on the *Inspiration*. What on earth was he talking about? As the gist of his story became clear, Kathleen felt her legs go weak. She sat down abruptly. Surely this couldn’t be happening. Mac was known for relishing a good laugh, but she could tell from his voice this was no joke. There was no way he’d think this was funny, not as much as he cared about the kids.

The kids.

She felt cold, as if her body temperature was plummeting with the shock. She tried to comprehend what Mac was telling her. The *Inspiration* had been taken over by six armed men. Mac was alone, on the hijackers’ stolen boat, being towed behind the *Inspiration*. No one but Dave Cameron and Captain Marzynski knew he was there. He had found twenty bundles of white powder—most likely cocaine—wrapped in plastic on the sundeck of the boat he was on, the *Coincidence*. He reckoned them to be about fifty pounds each, a thousand pounds, all told. A fortune on the street. The hijackers had practically no alternative but to get rid of all witnesses.

The captain would be checking in with her at nine o’clock as usual, but he would have a gun to his head. She must act as if everything was perfectly normal, give no hint that she knew anything was amiss. Mac would get off the line for now; he was on the satellite phone. But in the meantime she should notify Edward Flynn and the authorities and anyone else she could think of.

“Edward’s on his way to South Africa,” Kathleen said. “I have no way of reaching him until he gets to Johannesburg.”

“It’s all right, lass,” Mac said. He could hear the panic in her voice. He felt much the same way himself, but did his best to sound soothing. “Just leave a message for him to get back to ye as soon as he arrives. And call the police now.”

He gave her the number for the satellite phone and told her to call him back as soon as she could. With that he rang off.

Kathleen sat staring out the window. The sky was a glorious clear blue: it was a early autumn morning. How could her world be upside down when everything else was so ordinary?

She jumped when the telephone rang. She tried to imagine, as she listened to the captain reeling off the ship’s coordinates, what the scene onboard the *Inspiration* must look like—armed thugs with their guns pointed at him as he gave his morning report—but her imagination failed her. Nothing in his voice gave the slightest indication that anything was wrong.

He made no mention of the medical emergency of the day before but did report some minor difficulties with the electronic equipment. Both the satellite phone and the GPS, he said, had been acting up for the past twelve hours.

They were still trying to isolate the problem. Could be the antennae. Nothing serious, he was sure, but she shouldn't be alarmed if she didn't hear from him right on schedule tomorrow.

Feeling numb, she called the Montréal police, although what they would be able to do about a boatload of hostages on the other side of the world she couldn't imagine. Her anxiety grew by the minute as she repeated her outlandish-sounding account half a dozen times to rung after rung of bureaucracy. The idea flitted through her mind that they must be single-handedly trying to eliminate unemployment in the province by hiring battalions of people whose only responsibility was to listen to your story, tell you they couldn't help, and transfer your call to the next new hire.

"What's your address there?" this one was asking. "Okay, sit tight; I'm on my way," he said. "And I'm getting in touch with the RCMP."

Finally! Someone was going to help her—Detective Newton, he'd said he was, of the drug squad.

Fifteen minutes later, two men appeared at the BWA office: Detective Ralph Newton along with Sergeant Jim Oliver of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Montréal had no jurisdiction in a case like this, so Sergeant Oliver would be taking the lead. Kathleen recited the facts as she knew them one more time. The sergeant interrupted now and then to ask a question.

"All right," he said. "First thing to do is call your bosun back—Mr. MacDonald, is it?"

"Ross MacDonald, yes, but nobody ever calls him anything but Mac."

"Get Mac on the line."

Kathleen placed the call, then handed him the phone.

Mac gave him the full story as well as their current coordinates.

"Have you any idea of where the *Coincidence* came from?" Sergeant Oliver asked.

"Aye, the navigational charts are plotted from Costa Rica—Puntarenas. From there they went to Buenaventura, Colombia. They were headed for Easter Island, same as us. And *Coincidence* is not the boat's real name, either. It's an alias. The original name was the *Two Wise*."

As soon as he said the name, he realized it sounded like "Two Eyes" so he spelled it out.

Mac had made good use of the time he'd spent waiting for Kathleen to call back that morning. He was able to give the sergeant a full description of the boat—a Real Ship 65—including the details of the sloppy paint-and-vinyl camouflage, and then he read off the serial number from the registration plate.

"Well done," Sergeant Oliver said. "It's a lucky break for everyone that you're on that boat. But you've no way now of contacting anyone onboard the *Inspiration*?"

No way at all, Mac told him. He'd come across a set of walkietalkies aboard the *Coincidence*, but he hadn't figured out how to get one of the pair over to the other boat.

"Right. Don't do anything that might jeopardize your cover," the Sergeant said.

They asked Mac to call every four hours if possible.

The next step was to try to track down the owner of the stolen boat. Kathleen set up the sergeant and Detective Newton in the spacious side office the Blue Water staff used for meetings and curriculum planning. That would be their center of operations for the time being. It had a large desk to spread out on as well as a computer with a high-speed Internet connection. Kathleen made a fresh pot of coffee for them and went back to her own office to compose a message to leave for Edward Flynn at his hotel in Johannesburg.

Sergeant Oliver gave Detective Newton the task of going on the Internet to try to locate Real Ships, Inc., to determine where and to whom the vessel they knew as the *Coincidence* had been sold. The sergeant meanwhile would consult his superiors at RCMP headquarters.

Within two minutes, Newton had come up with the Web site for the sales office of Ships International in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He dialed the number listed on the site, and was quickly connected to the sales manager, a Mr. Sam Greason.

"I have information on every Real Ship ever manufactured," Mr. Greason said. "The *Coincidence*, you say? Odd, I don't recognize that name. But if you've got the serial number I can tell you anything you need to know."

Newton gave him the number and resigned himself to listening to cloying on-hold music for a minute or two. He held the phone to his ear with his left shoulder while he stirred sugar into his coffee. One packet, two packets, three. Some cream—*pah*, nothing but skim milk here.

"Detective?"

Greason was back on the line, a different tone to his voice now. He was practically barking in Newton's ear.

"May I ask why you are inquiring about this boat?"

"We are investigating a, uh—an incident taking place in the middle of the Pacific Ocean at this time; we have reason to believe the *Coincidence* is involved. What can you tell me about it?"

"It was reported stolen about three weeks ago. Vanished without a trace. It was docked in Puntarenas, down in

Costa Rica. The cleaning staff did a routine maintenance on it one day, and next day it was gone. The local authorities investigated but came up empty. Whoever stole it must have changed the name, too. The real name of that vessel is the *Two Wise*.”

It sounded just like “Two Eyes,” but Sergeant Oliver already knew the correct spelling.



Rob Montgomery could hardly believe his ears. What were the chances, after all, that out of a clear blue October sky a guy he'd worked with over a year ago—a Canadian Mountie, at that—would call him up and hand him the missing piece of the puzzle that was his current case? Yet here on the phone was Sergeant Jim Oliver, the same stalwart, methodical Jim who had been so helpful last year in cracking a vast international drug-smuggling scheme based in Jamaica.

Rob, a fifteen-year veteran of the Washington, D.C. office of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, had been afraid he'd reached a dead end on this one. He shook his head in disbelief as he listened to Jim's account of a “possible drug heist” in Colombia—an account that dovetailed perfectly with the apparently unsolvable heist that his contacts in Cali had enlisted his help on. Everything fit: the timing, the location, the twenty bales of coke. And now, Jim was saying, he knew the location of the cocaine, and, even better, that of the guys who had stolen it.

“If this bosun fellow on the stolen ship is right that the bales are fifty pounds apiece, we're talking about a street value of more than a hundred million dollars—U.S.,” Jim said. “Quite a haul, eh?”

Quite a haul, indeed, and quite a dangerous situation for those hostages. A floating schoolhouse, Jim had said; could there be any worse scenario? And seven of the students were American. Rob took off his glasses and shut his eyes, rubbing the bridge of his nose. It would take everything he had to avert disaster with this one.

Half a minute later, the glasses were back in place and he was all business again.

Jim Oliver was equally amazed that Rob knew the other half of *his* story, the part he knew nothing about. He'd figured that Rob, with his DEA contacts worldwide, would be a good ally; that's why he'd called him, but he sure hadn't expected this. Rob described the hell that had broken out the week before when the guards transporting the cocaine had not reported in on schedule.

“Caused a huge ruckus in Cali, as you can imagine,” he said. “I wouldn't be surprised if a couple of heads are gonna roll on account of it. But the strangest thing was that there was no trace of the trucks or the guards either; it's like they just evaporated. Our best guess here is that the guards themselves staged the heist, but how they disposed of the trucks if they made their getaway on your stolen boat, I don't know. How many hijackers are there, anyway?”

Six, Jim told him, one with a gunshot wound to the leg.

Rob nodded. There had been six guards. That would explain their disappearance, all right, but what the devil had they done with the three trucks?

And if all six had been working together, how the devil had one of them ended up with a bullet hole in his leg?



Dave Cameron stood on deck with his lesson planner in his hand. Leafing through page after page devoted to the history and ecology of Easter Island—Rapa Nui, in the native language—he stopped suddenly and stared intently at page forty-two, a detailed account of the Moai, the famed giant statues, some with long ears, some with short, erected so mysteriously centuries ago by the primitive inhabitants of the island.

Although anyone looking at him would have assumed he was thoroughly engrossed in his studies, he was in fact keeping one eye on the transom of the *Coincidence*, hoping to get a sign from Mac that he was all right. Dave had noticed immediately that the miniblinds on the towed boat had been shut, which Mac surely would have done, but had seen no sign of the bosun. Which of course was what was supposed to happen. The fewer signs of life over there, the better. And yet Dave couldn't shake the feeling that something could be disastrously wrong.

Suppose the hijackers were not being entirely honest with them? Why would anyone *expect* hijackers to be honest? Suppose there were not six hijackers, but seven, and one had stayed behind on the *Coincidence* to guard the cocaine and to thwart any attempt at funny business by the *Inspiration* crew? And, supposing that were the case, would Mac be more useful to them dead or alive?

Dave turned to the next page of his planning book, the one that dealt with Easter Island as an exemplar of ecological disaster, with strong and frightening parallels to the Western world's current dependence on unsustainable fossil fuels. It was one of the lessons he'd been most keen on conveying to his students, a message he had fervently hoped the kids would, in turn, take back to their own communities.

Now, however, he hoped only that they would be returning to those communities at all.

He looked up as he turned another page. Was he imagining it, or had he glimpsed a rapid motion of the miniblinds out of the corner of his eye? He couldn't be sure; probably wishful thinking. Still, he kept his head raised and a distracted expression on his face as he tapped his pen against his book, jotting an occasional incomprehensible squiggle on the page as if for his lecture notes.

There it was again; he was positive this time. A minuscule adjustment to the blinds, a fraction of an inch more open, then quick shut again. And again.

Dave glanced around. He yawned and stretched, and then, seeing no one else nearby, gave a quick thumbs up to Mac.

At least he hoped it was Mac.

Relief surged through his body when he saw a forward hatch open slightly a moment later and a familiar gray-bearded face appear, flashing him a broad grin. Mac returned the thumbs-up gesture. Using hand signals, the two were able to reassure each other that all was under control for the moment, and agreed to try to "talk" again in about three hours.



It took Anika only a moment to understand that Dave's sudden desire to play pinochle with her and the captain meant he had news to impart.

They sat at a table in the mess, dealing cards and having as much of a conversation as they could with Floaties wandering in and out. They had decided that, despite the interruptions, the mess would be a better venue for their conference than retreating to a cabin and looking as if they had something to hide.

“If only there were some way of getting somebody else onto the *Coincidence*,” Anika said. “We’ve got to coordinate with Mac, find out if he’s been able to reach anyone who can help us.”

Captain Marzynski set down his meld—a solid two hundred points—and murmured, “I can think of a way it might be done, but it’s risky.”

He scooped his meld cards back into his hand and led with the nine of diamonds as he outlined his idea. The towline was good and taut, he explained; if they could somehow rig someone up with a harness and carabiner, the towline could act as a zip line, allowing the person to slide down to the other boat.

“And if we tie a second line onto him,” the captain went on, “we can reel him back again after he’s talked with Mac.”

It was a brilliant scheme. Dave and Anika were bursting with questions. They were forced to put them on hold, however, and spend the next hour and a half teaching the rudiments of the game of pinochle to a group of Floaties badly in need of a distraction. Then it was time for lunch.

When they had finished eating, Dave and Anika went out to stroll the deck.

Phillip was on deck, too, smoking a cigarette. Dave detected an change in the man’s expression as they walked past him. Had he overheard something they had said? Dave didn’t see how that was possible. He couldn’t remember seeing Phillip at all that morning. More likely the guy was just wary; two or three people together might be plotting something.

Dave put his arm around Anika’s shoulder and pulled her close to him, nuzzling the top of her head with his chin. There, he thought. That will give us a plausible reason to be together all the time without arousing suspicion.

Phillip flung his cigarette, half smoked, into the ocean and looked away from the couple.

The captain fell into step with them as they made their third lap around the deck. Dave steered them toward the starboard railing, away from Phillip. It was now nearly three hours since he had seen Mac.

How, he asked, could they get someone across the towline without the hijackers knowing? And who would that person be?

Anika had the answer to his second question immediately.

“Pierre Rouleau,” she said, surprising Dave, who had rather assumed that he himself would be the one. But Anika was right. Pierre was a crackerjack rock climber; he had received topnotch training at Caneff. He was by far the best candidate for the task. But was it fair to ask him? How could they ask one of the students under their supervision to put his life in danger?

“His life is in danger in any case,” the captain reminded him, “as is the life of every student, every person, aboard this ship. Pierre is the best chance we have of getting any of us out of this alive.”

All that remained was to figure out how to divert the hijackers’ attention while Pierre, assuming he was willing, transferred to the other boat. Once again, Anika had an answer.

“We could hold a coffee night,” she said. “We can tell Phillip that the kids need something to take their minds off what’s happening. Heaven knows that’s true. We’ll invite the men to come and watch—and we’ll give Phillip the choice of where we stage it, in the mess or on the bow, so he won’t think we’re trying to pull anything over on them.”

A “coffee night” on a BWA boat was much more than just coffee. It included entertainment, usually devised by the students themselves, a sort of talent show. Dave had some reservations about how likely it was that their unwelcome visitors would want to attend a school talent night, but he had no alternative to offer. And as Anika pointed out, the “bad guys” were feeling the effects of stress, too. They had never planned to hijack a boatload of innocent kids, after all; that had been an unintended consequence of other actions. They were probably dreading what they would have to do in the end. They might welcome a distraction, too.

They knew the kids, once persuaded that the coffee night would be a good way to get through a harrowing time, would throw themselves into it. There would be much to-ing and fro-ing, giggling and rehearsing, improvised costuming, and all-in-fun subterfuge. It would be easy for Pierre, with Dave as his accomplice, to get lost in the hubbub for a while.

It was settled, then. Captain Marzynski, deciding it would be wise to fill the doctor in on the plan, while keeping everyone else aboard in the dark, strode off to the first-aid room. Dave hurried to the stern to try to get some sort of message across to Mac. It was Anika’s job to mobilize the students for the evening’s activity.

But first she’d have to clear it with Phillip.



After too many days of no-progress reports, Rob was eager to hear his supervisor's reaction to what he was about to tell her.

After his conversation with Jim Oliver, Rob had immediately called his colleagues with the DEA in Cali. He had asked them to resume their moribund investigation, concentrating this time on searching every stretch of beach for traces of a stolen sixty-foot Real Ship that had put out to sea somewhere along the coast near Buenaventura, with the missing cocaine and hijackers onboard.

Agents Ramirez and Peraza had duly set out again, driving north along the route from Buenaventura. They were pessimistic at first about discovering anything new, but became excited when they turned down the lane leading to the cove and spotted tire tracks.

They had found evidence of a great deal of activity, Rob was telling Elizabeth by phone. At least three vehicles had been involved at the cove: a van, a motor scooter, and a midsize SUV about the size of a Jimmy. There were impressions above the tide line of something heavy being dragged along the sand toward the water. Following the narrow lane back up from the cove to the main road on foot, Ramirez and Peraza noticed that the underbrush had been crushed and branches broken in several places. Across the road, in a ditch near a driveway, barely covered with a layer of leaves, they followed a pile of spent cartridges and shards of broken glass.

The agents went up the driveway, their hands on their weapons, and knocked at the door of a deserted-looking house. No one answered. Circling around behind the dilapidated structure, they came to an equally ramshackle barn in the back yard, and peered through the dirt-smeared window. It contained five vehicles—including a van and a Jimmy. It was easy enough to pry the door open; it practically splintered at Agent Peraza's tug. The other three vehicles were trucks; they were riddled with bullet holes.

And in the back of one, the pickup, was dried blood. A lot of dried blood, as if the truck had been used to transport multiple bleeding bodies.

"But here's the part we haven't been able to piece together yet, Elizabeth," Rob told his supervisor.

As happy as he was to have something solid to report to the Dragon Lady, as her subordinates fondly referred to her, he was frustrated that the pieces of the puzzle still refused to fall into place.

"Jim Oliver says one of the hijackers of the BWA boat took a bullet, but this is a whole lot more than just one injury. There was enough blood in the bed of the pickup to fill a wading pool.

"And if our theory that the guards made off with the coke is correct, who would they need to gun down? They'd clearly been planning the operation for quite a while; the barn's ideal for concealing the trucks, and it's just across the road from this secluded cove where they must have met up with the boat. They drove right past every other week; they'd have had it down to a science. Now, could be somebody came along and surprised them, but there've been no reports of any missing persons in the area. No shoot-outs. Nothing. And where the devil did those other two vehicles come from?"

"So, it looks like your theory needs a little tweaking," Elizabeth said in her fast-clip New York accent.

Elizabeth Talliaferro had worked her way up the ranks of the male-dominated DEA by cultivating a brusque approach.

"Call Sanchez at Buenaventura PD," she said. "Get his forensic guys on the scene with the mutt, and see if anything turns up. And dust the house."



“The mutt” was Oscar, a canine member of the Buenaventura force specially trained to sniff out cadavers. Oscar wasted no time. Within five minutes he was standing, as triumphant as a mountain climber at the summit, over the grave site behind the house. Sanchez’s men began to dig.

In the house, two more officers swept through the rooms, dusting for fingerprints and putting into plastic bags an assortment of items abandoned by the last occupants: a half package of unfiltered Camels, a roll of Tums, an oily comb, and the entire contents of the kitchen waste basket, reeking of rotten eggs.

“Now we’re getting somewhere,” Elizabeth said when Rob called her with the results of the new search. “Call a meeting for ten A.M. tomorrow with someone with some clout from the State Department—Vogler if you can get him; if not, one of his underlings—and our friend Flipper Markman from the Coast Guard. See you then.”



The meeting with Phillip had gone well, to Anika's great relief. He'd been tight-lipped and gruff but had kept his hands to himself and made no mention of their last encounter. He had okayed the coffee night, and said he didn't care where it took place. He would be on the bridge, in any case, keeping watch.

Perfect, Anika thought. She'd been hoping he wouldn't have a preference. It would suit their purposes much better to stage the entertainment in the mess rather than out on the bow, but she had not wanted to seem as if it made any difference. And she greatly preferred gruff to overly friendly.

Now, after the dinner cleanup, the kids and teachers were assembling for the show. As Anika had predicted, the Floaties had thrown themselves into the project. They set out coffee, soft drinks, and Jarred's famous butterscotch chocolate-chip brownies, rigged up an old sail against one wall as a backdrop, and arranged themselves around the mess tables, surrounded by musical instruments, hastily contrived costumes, and an odd assortment of make-do props. A couple of small groups remained out on deck, polishing their acts.

Juan had said he had no interest in kiddie shows and stayed in the first-aid room with Stefano, but Polo, Esteban, and Severo were lined up expectantly along the walls of the mess. They seemed unsure about the propriety of sitting down but gave every indication of looking forward to the entertainment. They were already enjoying the refreshments.

Juan had been reluctant at first to let them go at all. Not a good idea, he had thought, for them to start thinking about these people as people—especially the kids—in light of what they were going to have to do to them soon. He had relented in the end, though, because he could see that the strain was getting to them. Severo especially was getting more and more fretful, and soon would be completely useless if he didn't lighten up *un poquito*. And if being around the *Inspiration's* crew made them too squeamish for what had to be done, well, he and Stefano could take care of it on their own.

Michael and Nancy, declaring themselves devoid of any talent, had volunteered to emcee. "The first act of the evening," Michael announced, "would be none other than" —here Nancy dimmed the lights, Trudy beat a tattoo on a skillet-lid drum with a spoon, and Evan and Chris wielded flashlight "follow spots" across the stage— "all the way from Québec City" —big drum roll—"that incredibly talented rock star, Pierre Rouleau!"

The crowd whistled and cheered and stomped as the spotlights picked out Pierre, in regulation Floatie garb, his hands in pockets, standing alone at center stage.

"I am afraid there's been a little, um—misunderstanding?" Pierre said, a sheepish grin flickering over his face. "What I told them was, my only talent is rock *climbing*."

The crowd erupted in a roar of laughter.

"But," Pierre went on, "this is not something I can very well show you in the middle of the ocean."

Another wave of laughter crested as the image of Pierre demonstrating his rock-climbing prowess on the high seas sank in.

"So instead, I am just going to sing for you a song I learned when I was a little boy at home in Québec. It is called 'Un Canadien Errant'—'A Wandering Canadian.' When you hear how bad I am, you will know why I have to go first. I do not want to come after anyone who really knows how to sing."

Pierre took a deep breath and then quietly began his song. In truth, his voice was not the best, yet he sang with such sweetness and simplicity, a capella, that the audience, hushed now, straining to hear, was nearly moved to tears—especially those who understood the French words.

"Et ma patrie, hélas, je ne la verrai plus," he sang. (Alas, my country, I'll ne'er see thee again.) "Non, mais en expirant, O mon cher Canada! Mon regard languissant vers toi se portera." (When death comes, Oh, my dear

Canada, My languid gaze will turn toward you.)

Pierre sang the final words and the crowd was utterly silent for a moment. They all knew it was all too possible that this handsome, vibrant young man, like the man in the song—and like every one of them onboard—would die, never to see home again.

Dave Cameron started the applause, and the rest soon joined in. The somber mood was dispelled as Pierre took exaggerated bows and the spotlights made wild arcs on the ceiling. Trudy banged away on the pot lid until Nancy walked over, removed it from her hands, and showed her to a seat at a front-row table. Michael, meanwhile, was ushering the next act onto the stage.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Casey Kennedy and Sandy McNeill, from Cape Breton Island, Canada, who are about to bowl you over with their feats of virtue! No, that’s not right! I mean to say, with their virtuoso feet,” he said, pointing at his own outstretched foot, “in a lively performance of traditional Cape Breton step dancing. Accompanying them is Bobby Briley, from the state of North Carolina, a place where they know a thing or two about fiddling around!”

Bobby tipped his hat to the crowd. Then, with a nod to the dancers, he lit into a set of reels. Casey and Sandy’s shoes beat out the rhythm of the dance. They had not brought their hard-soled dance shoes with them, so were improvising with soda-bottle caps attached to their sneakers. The effect was very like the typical percussive sound of this centuries-old style of dancing.

The sound was further amplified by the old (and slightly warped) steel cupboard door Anika had insisted they set down to protect the floor from the bottle caps: every step, every shuffle, reverberated throughout the mess. The crowd was captivated, and began to clap along with the beat—thereby providing even further cover for Pierre and Dave, who slipped down the galley stairs with no one the wiser.

Earlier in the day, Dave had found in the bosun’s locker two carabiners, a harness, and a line strong enough to pull Pierre back from the *Coincidence*. He’d stowed them near the transom, where he had stood trying to convey as best he could to Mac that someone would be crossing over to talk to him at about 2000 hours that night.

Now Dave and Pierre crept through the classroom to avoid being spotted by Phillip on their way to the transom. The night was clear, the sky illuminated by thousands of stars. Pierre donned the harness and Dave attached the small line to the buckle. Pierre easily climbed up and over the transom, clipped the first carabiner to the towline, and then, just to be extra safe, clipped on the second as well. He launched himself away from the ship, using a hand-over-hand technique to propel himself along the taut line.

Dave watched as Mac swiftly unhooked the harness and disappeared below with Pierre. Then he turned and walked through the classroom again to the mess, where he poured himself a cup of coffee and made a point of standing near the hijackers and applauding wildly for Ryan and a girl named Sonia, who had teamed up to produce an epically melodramatic “silent movie.”

He had come in just at the climactic scene in which Sonia, bound to the railroad tracks (portrayed by Ryan’s surfboard, with crossties neatly indicated by duct tape), was thrashing her voluminous scarves about and screaming—silently, of course—at the top of her lungs. Ryan held up a large cardboard sign with “HELP! HELP!” printed on it, just in case there was any question about the nature of her wailing, then flung it aside, and, drawing his cardboard scimitar, arrived at Sonia’s side in the nick of time to save her from the oncoming locomotive—a small suitcase with a flashlight strapped to its end and a sign proclaiming, “CHOO! CHOO!” taped to its side.

Ryan slid the suitcase along with his left foot as he bent to wield his sword against the ropes that bound the damsel in distress. And then he helped her up. Her body swaying as she pulled out from her gown another sign—“MY HERO!” Just then he gave the suitcase a sharp kick. It rolled past the spot where Sonia would have met her Certain End, then fell over with a thud and flew open, revealing Ryan’s soiled laundry.

Polo doubled over with laughter at this, and Esteban and Severo nearly doubled over laughing at Polo.

Dave exaggerated his own laughter as he moseyed past them on his way to the refreshment table again. He picked up two brownies as Michael introduced the next performance—an all-girl barbershop quartet—then stepped into the galley and eased down the stairs once more, making his way back to the transom. He was just finishing one brownie when Mac and Pierre reappeared. He brushed the crumbs off his hands, hauled Pierre back over to the *Inspiration*, helped him remove the harness—noting with elation the walkie-talkie Pierre had with him. Now they’d be able to communicate with Mac whenever they needed to.

Dave put the walkie-talkie in his pocket. He handed the second brownie to Pierre and pushed him toward the classroom. He hid away the carabiners, rope, and harness. He was anxious to know what Pierre and Mac had worked out, but forced himself to walk nonchalantly to his cabin to stash the walkie-talkie out of sight. Then he sidled in to the mess and poured another coffee, nodding in agreement with Mary Wilson about the amazing creativity of the kids.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Pierre sitting at a table to his left, nibbling the brownie and waving his

hand high. Dan was on stage, a towel wrapped swami-style around his head, a black paper moustache stuck on his upper lip, asking for a volunteer from the audience.

“So many victims!” he crowed. “So many kind volunteers, I mean. I cannot decide from among them all. I shall turn the decision over to my lovely assistant here.”

He clapped his hands, and a statuesque young lady emerged from behind a screen, her bare arms undulating, snakelike, to the strains of the eerie Middle Eastern refrain from Evan’s harmonica. She was clad in what had not long before been a sweat suit, transformed now, by a bit of cropping and the application of dangly strips of tin foil, into a harem outfit. Her face was veiled with the head of a mop.

“What do you say, Mademoiselle Melissa? Whom do you choose?”



Rob Montgomery kept his eye on his boss as Coast Guard representative Alasdair “Flipper” Markman outlined his assessment of their options on a flip chart, his pet visual aid. Elizabeth, Rob knew, was not a fan of Markman’s charts at the best of times, and this time none of the options looked good.

The first priority of all three agencies present at this initial meeting—the DEA, the Coast Guard, and the State Department—was, of course, the survival of the students and crew aboard the *Inspiration*. Second was apprehending the hijackers before the drugs could be distributed on U.S. soil.

Two basic strategies were possible, Markman said, flipping to page two of his color-coded chart.

“Number 1 is to simply maintain full surveillance of the two ships,” he said, using his ruler as a pointer. “We have contacted the Air Force,” he continued, flipping to page three, where number 1 was subdivided, in blue marker, into A and B. “They are en route to the area now to do a high-altitude flyover to ascertain the existence and position of the *Inspiration* and the *Coincidence*—or *Two Wise* as it is more properly called. They will take photos,” he said, pointing to 1B, which indicated just that, “so we can more effectively analyze the situation.”

Elizabeth’s right foot, toes down, tapped the carpet. Not a good sign.

Markman flipped to page four and took a sip of water.

“To recap, under number 1, we would keep the ships under surveillance and wait until the drugs leave the vessel, presumably at Easter Island, to apprehend the hijackers.”

Elizabeth’s foot tapping doubled in pace.

“Strategy number 2, on the other hand,” Markman went on, as he turned over another page, “calls for deploying a Coast Guard cutter to the area, and, as soon as we have analyzed the flyover photos, approaching the *Inspiration*, boarding, and apprehending the hijackers before the drugs can be distributed.

“There are three options under strategy 2.”

Markman was hitting his stride now, and Rob winced to see that page six was subdivided into three levels, with green ink joining the red and blue. He pushed his glasses up and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“As you can see in 2A, the first is to have the bosun, in hiding on the *Coincidence*, drop the towline during the night and escape. Then our cutter, the *Serendipity*, currently about a thousand nautical miles east of the hijacked Blue Water Academy vessel, approaches and challenges. A launch party boards and apprehends the hijackers.

“Alternatively—shown here in 2B—if the bosun drops the towline at dawn, the hijackers will see their boat, with a fortune in drugs aboard, floating away. One or more of the hijackers might well attempt to reach the boat in the *Inspiration*’s dinghy to recover the cocaine.

“If we assume, as in 2B:1, that the most likely scenario would be for three of the hijackers to attempt to recover the boat, and three to remain behind—the wounded man, another man to guard him, and a third to keep watch on the bridge—then the doctor could sedate the man with the gunshot wound, and the crew could possibly overpower the other two.

“Now, looking at 2B:2—”

Much more of this and Elizabeth would tap a hole right through the carpet, Rob thought. Maybe he ought to try to—but all at once his cell phone began to vibrate in his pocket, distracting him from plotting ways to derail Markman’s presentation.

Oh, damn, he thought. If there was anything the Dragon Lady hated more than wasting time belaboring the obvious, it was having a meeting interrupted by phone calls. He eased the phone out of his pocket and glanced, unobtrusively, he hoped, at the name and number on the tiny screen.

Jim Oliver.

Jim never made a call that wasn't necessary. And if he had news about what was happening with those kids—and even the teachers were barely more than kids—out in the middle of the ocean, well, the strategies on Markman's tedious charts might be moot anyway.

Rob stood up, held up a hand to stanch the flow of Markman's verbiage, apologized for the interruption, and took the call.



Kathleen Tutty set down the telephone yet again, dumped out her second cup of coffee gone cold, and poured herself a fresh cup. It had begun to seem as though the BWA office had turned into a news clearinghouse, and she herself into a mere conduit of information. Already this morning she had talked to Mac, who had told her the wonderful saga of Pierre's rope descent onto the *Coincidence*.

"Like a lemur he was, scuttlin' doon the towline," was how he described it. "I'd not seen anythin' like it since I was in Madagascar."

That they had managed to get the second walkie-talkie over and now had regular communication between the two boats was a godsend, the first glimmer of hope that a safe resolution might be achievable.

Kathleen had immediately called Edward Flynn, who was on his way back from South Africa, and Jim Oliver, now in Washington, to tell them the news. Jim had in turn called Rob Montgomery, reaching him right in the middle of his meeting.

Within ten minutes, Rob was on the line to Kathleen, outlining the plan that those at the meeting had agreed upon given the change in circumstances, a variation on Flipper Markman's option 2B:1.

Kathleen was to decide on a code word and let Mac know what it was when he called her next. Mac would then wait for Dave to call him on the walkie-talkie (they had agreed that it was too risky for Mac to initiate any calls) and tell him the code word, which Dave would then relay to the captain. When the captain gave Kathleen his routine report, he would listen for the code word. If he heard it, he would know the time was right to put the plan into action.

When the Coast Guard cutter *Serendipity* reached the vicinity, Mac would sever the towline and set the *Coincidence* adrift as soon as night fell, trying to get about fifty miles from the *Inspiration* before dawn. In the morning, the hijackers would realize their boat was gone, stop, and turn around. If all went as expected, they would launch the dinghy, most likely with three men in it, and set out to find the *Coincidence*. The Coast Guard cutter would intercept and apprehend them while the *Inspiration* crew subdued the three men left onboard.

"What we need you to find out is what the injured man's condition is now," Rob said. "That way we can determine whether the doctor can immobilize him easily. We also need to know the size, capacity, and range of the dinghy, and whether there are any weapons—or items that might be used as weapons—on board the *Inspiration*."

"I can give you the specs on the dinghy right now," Kathleen replied, opening the left middle drawer of her file cabinet.

"Let's see ... the *Inspiration* is equipped with a sixteen-foot hard-bottomed Zodiac. It's got a fifty-hp Yamaha motor, and can travel up to about twenty knots. As for weapons, they are strictly banned on all BWA vessels. But there have been occasions, now and then, when someone has brought one aboard anyway. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had one of those scofflaws this time! Anyway, I'll see what I can learn about that and about the injured man and let you know."

Kathleen stood up and stretched her arms over head, allowing a tiny sliver of optimism to penetrate her defenses. She'd been trying to stay calm, stay focused, to do what needed to be done, without dwelling on what was going on in the Pacific. She'd found that the best way to ward off complete despair was, paradoxically, not to feel too optimistic about it either but to erect a wall of non-feeling. Now that there was the beginning of a plan, a concrete course of action, she could feel her wall start to crumble.

She realized that her body had been like a wall, too, held stiff and unyielding to maintain her inner wall. Now she could feel the tension beginning to slip away from her shoulders. She laughed, and then, without warning, was engulfed in a flood of pent-up tears.

She was still hiccupping when the phone rang again.

“Hey, how ye doin’ there, lass?”

Mac. His voice was, as always, such a comforting presence that she burst into tears again.

When she had regained the ability to speak, she filled him in on the strategy that Rob Montgomery had sketched out.

“What about the code word?” she asked when she had finished. “It’s got to be something that won’t call attention to itself when I say it, something that won’t sound suspicious to the hijackers. But it can’t be anything so ordinary that I might say it by accident, either, just in the normal course of conversation. And it has to be something distinctive enough that it couldn’t be easily confused with some other word I might be likely to say.”

“Hmm. Maybe you could say it’s rainin’ cats and dogs in Montréal, just after he tells you what the weather conditions are out here,” Mac said. And then: “Och, no, that’s nae good. If they found out the sun was actually shinin’ brightly there, they’d be on to us in a flash.”

They spent a few minutes bandying about more ideas, rejecting them one by one as too obvious, too silly, too something.

“Got it!” Mac said. “What d’ye think of this one?”

She had to agree it was perfect.



Phillip strode to the first-aid room, opened the door without knocking, and announced to Dr. Williams that it was time for him to stop what he was doing and take a break.

As soon as the doctor had put away his dictation and closed the door behind him, Phillip said, “You’re looking better, Stefano. It’s time we made some plans.”

The little *bastardo* gets cockier every day, Stefano thought. What it’s time for is to remind you who’s the boss here. He looked at the tubes protruding from his arms, hooking him to the upside-down bottles of fluids and medications that flowed through his veins, and knew he was in no shape to drive the lesson home.

“Tell me what it’s like out there,” Stefano said, nodding with his chin to indicate the ship beyond the first-aid room. He struggled to sit upright. Sweat dampened his brow from the effort.

“Pretty much normal. The ship-director broad” —Phillip didn’t mention Anika’s name, or how attractive he found her—“is doing a good job keeping everybody in line. The kids are going to classes and sticking with their work and watch routines. Nobody’s giving us any problem, and there’s no way they could have gotten word out. I’m standing right beside the captain when he calls in his morning report to their headquarters in Canada, and he’s sure not giving anything away. As far as anyone outside knows, it’s business as usual aboard the *Good Ship Lollipop*.”

“*Bueno*.”

“But now we’ve got to decide what to do with them,” Philip said.

He was glad Juan wasn’t there. He knew very well what his opinion would be about how to take care of them. He looked over at Stefano, hopeful that he might already have devised a plan—a plan that didn’t involve killing off everyone on the *Inspiration*. But Stefano’s eyes were closed, his brow wrinkled.

He waited a minute. Stefano said nothing.

“The one thing we know for sure is that the *Coincidence* and the *Inspiration* can’t get to Easter Island at the same time,” Philip said.

Stefano’s face remained impassive, but his right hand lifted slightly in a dismissive gesture, which Phillip chose to interpret as agreement with this patently obvious statement.

“So how about if we disable their boat, wipe out all their communications systems, and just let them drift?” Philip said. “It would be days, maybe even a week or two, before anyone found them.”

And, he thought, at least they’d be alive when they were found. Probably.

“In the meantime we’d go to Easter Island, do our thing, and be long gone before the story ever got out. How many days do we actually need?”

The strength and clarity of Stefano’s response took Phillip by surprise. He hadn’t been sure the man had even heard his words, much less comprehended them.

“Once we get to the island, we need four days, minimum,” Stefano said. “Maybe six, depending on what time of day we get there. My contact, Giorgio, he lives in Hanga Roa, on the west coast. He’s got a factory there. Makes these little statues, plastic, of the big statues—Moai, they’re called. He ships these little plastic Moai statues all over the world. Done it for years. It’s all legit.”

Get on with it, Phillip thought. I don’t need to hear all about your *amigo*’s gewgaw souvenir business. Maybe Stefano wasn’t so clear-headed after all.

“We gonna tie up at a wharf near his place. The first night, we gonna move the bales of coke into his factory. Then it’s gonna take two days to do the conversion.”

“Conversion?”

Stefano and Juan had never been explicit about what was going to happen once they had the cocaine in their

possession, figuring what the hired help didn't know they couldn't be made to tell. Best to keep them in the dark, letting them in on the plan one step at a time as it became necessary.

A smile flitted across Stefano's lips.

"What better way to get our load of coke shipped home than to turn it into a thousand cute little Moai statues, identical to the thousands of cute little plastic statues Giorgio been shipping every month for the last twelve years?"

Holy shit, Phillip thought. It was a brilliant plan. Easter Island was about the last place anybody would think of as a source of illegal drugs to begin with, and to convert the white powder into what would look exactly like the same innocuous merchandise that had been coming out of this Giorgio guy's factory for years—hell, customs wouldn't even give the shipment a second glance.

Stefano's eyes were open now, watching Phillip's reaction with amusement.

"*Bueno*," he continued. "One day to tie up and unload. Two to cast the statues, and one more to package them for shipping to the States."

"So, we'd be flying back on the same plane with the shipment?" Phillip asked.

"No. We'll already be there. As soon as we get the statues packed, we gonna be on the next plane out. Giorgio's gonna wait a coupla days, then send our pretty little statues to his distribution warehouse, consigned to me. All we gotta do is pick them up at the warehouse and then ..."

Stefano smiled again and shrugged. And then. Then they would be home free, divvying up their riches. As long as they could pull off the next few days.

"Okay," Phillip said. "So we'll say four to five days on the island. Plus the time it takes to get there. If we left tomorrow morning, that'd be about four days."

His mind was racing now. Eight or nine days was the very least amount of time they would require. Could they count on the *Inspiration* to go undiscovered for that long? Damn, it was risky.

Stefano was easing himself into a sitting position, pulling himself up by the bed railing. He drew his breath in sharply, grimacing, but when he spoke, his voice was steady and decisive.

"Right. This is what we gonna do. You knock out the engine of this boat and make sure there's no way they can call for help. No satellite phone, no radio, no nothing. Tell Polo and Severo to get the *Coincidence* ready to go. Tell my brother to come here. And get the doctor and that girl—the director—in here, too, and the captain. We're not going alone."

Phillip stared at Stefano.

"The sooner we cut them loose, the better," Stefano went on. "Too close to the island and a boat or a plane could spot them. We gotta do it now, pronto. And the doctor and the girl are gonna be our insurance.

"You tell the captain: Nine days. He don't make a move for nine days, or the doctor and the girl are dead."



“Whatever happens,” Melissa said, so softly that Pierre had to lean even closer to hear her, “whatever happens, I want ...”

“You want ...?” he asked.

He himself wanted only to take her in his arms and tell her about his rendezvous with Mac, tell her that now there was contact with the outside world, that now rescue might be on its way.

But he could not. He had vowed not to let anyone else know. No matter how much he wanted to alleviate Melissa’s anguish, no matter how much he trusted her, he knew that sharing the news, even with no one but her, could put that rescue in jeopardy.

And, of course, even with the encouraging breakthrough in communication, there was no guarantee of their survival. No guarantee at all, just a thin sliver of hope piercing despair.

Following the temporary distraction of the coffee night, the mood aboard the *Inspiration* had gone back to bleak and wary. As the hours dragged on, the waiting itself had begun to seem unbearably heavy; almost worse, Pierre had begun to think, than whatever fate might be in store for them all. What good was it to continue to survive, if survival meant only constant dread of what loomed ahead?

Then suddenly the mood had shifted again and the dull anxiety turned to acute fear. Pierre couldn’t put his finger on exactly when this alteration had occurred, or what had caused it. There had been no announcement, no obvious sign of an imminent culmination to their situation. Yet he felt a distinct undercurrent of building tension, a profound sense that *something* was just about to happen.

Pierre had seen unease in the faces of Anika, the doctor, and the captain as they had emerged from the first-aid room with Phillip earlier in the day. The three had walked right past him with hardly a glance. Anika was ashen and shaky, Dr. Williams was stony-faced, and the captain was standing more erect than usual. Phillip had looked almost as grim and glowering as that other drug guy, the one they called Juan.

Drugs. It was all about drugs—cocaine, according to Mac.

He thought about how many guys at Caneff had been involved with drugs. Most of them just had experimented with pot, but a few were into more serious drugs, and a couple had even been dealing. It would have taken very little, so very little, the way he’d been drifting, for him to have crossed that line himself. He had never been that interested in the drug scene. He regarded it as a waste of time and money, but still ... had he stayed at Caneff, or gotten out and continued to hang out with that crowd, would he have been strong enough to turn down the easy thrill of drugs, to resist their mind-numbing, stress-relieving allure, to risk the scorn of his companions by saying no?

It made him sick to think that he might have helped fuel the demand for illegal drugs—demand that in turn spurred people like Juan to profit from weakness. Or even worse, might he have *become* one of the people like Juan, a user-turned-pusher-turned-drug runner.

He might have become someone who endangered the lives of all of the people he cared about aboard the *Inspiration*—*mon dieu*, the life of Melissa, for whom he would gladly give his own life. *Non*, it wasn’t possible, surely could not be possible—and yet ...

It was too horrible to think about.

“Pierre?”

Melissa’s soft voice brought him back to reality.

“Melissa,” he replied, taking her chin in his hands, searching her face.

“Whatever happens,” Melissa said, “I want you to know how much I love you.”

“It could never be as much as I love you,” he whispered.

He drew her close so she wouldn't see the tears welling up in his eyes.



“Oh, excuse me, Captain, I seem to have the hiccups,” Kathleen said.

This is it, then, Captain Marzynski thought. He’d been expecting the code word, listening for it, ever since Dave had relayed it from Mac, but it still registered as a shock now she’d said it. Hiccups. He gave no indication of its significance.

“Try bending over and drinking a glass of water from the far side of the glass,” he said. “Always works for me.”

Marzynski continued with his report on the *Inspiration*’s coordinates and the weather and noted they were still having some minor problems with the electronic systems.

The minor problems were going to turn major in just a moment. Phillip stood beside him, with Matt and Sam, the first and second engineers, ready to start removing the wiring harnesses from the electronic equipment as soon as his report was finished. The captain hoped it would be only a matter of removing the harnesses; it all had to be done in under two hours, along with disabling the steering hydraulics and getting the *Coincidence* ready to sail—with Elliott Williams and Anika aboard, heaven help them. He could well imagine Phillip simply taking a hammer and smashing everything to smithereens in the interest of saving time.

The anxious tedium of the past couple of days had been replaced with urgent preparations—and a complete change of plans. There’d be no chance now for Mac to cut the *Coincidence* adrift or for the doctor to knock Stefano out. Yesterday afternoon Phillip had appeared at the captain’s office door, demanding that he come to the first-aid room. Anika and Elliott were already there, along with Juan, who had looked even more malevolent than usual. Juan’s scowl had deepened by the minute as Phillip had laid out their scheme of taking off in the *Coincidence* with the two hostages, leaving the *Inspiration* in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with no power and no communications systems.

But why, Anika had wanted to know, did they need *two* hostages? Wasn’t one enough “insurance”? Couldn’t they just take her and leave the doctor, in case any of the kids or staff needed medical help? Phillip had vetoed that, pointing out that Stefano, although considerably better, was not yet out of danger. No way were they going to risk anything happening to him.

How like Anika, the captain had thought, to be thinking about the kids and volunteering to put herself in harm’s way to keep them as safe as possible. He had been on the verge of asking why, in that case, they needed to take Anika, why not just the doctor, when Phillip cut him off.

“And you’re coming as, uh, supplemental insurance,” he had said to Anika.

The captain looked up sharply to see Phillip staring at Anika with eyes that were voracious and predatory.

Lukasz Marzynski had never felt so powerless in his life. The eldest of the eight Marzynski siblings, he had always possessed a natural authority that never veered off into harshness or insensitivity but took command of any situation that confronted him. A fifteen-year veteran with Blue Water Academy, twelve as captain of the *Inspiration*, he’d handled crises of many sorts, always keeping a cool head, earning the respect of students and staff on voyage after voyage.

He had nearly two hundred thousand miles of sailing experience under his belt—about as much as the legendary Captain Cook—but now he felt completely stymied. Anything he did to try to protect Anika would further endanger the students in his care. Yet to allow her to go as a hostage, to leave her in Phillip’s clutches—unthinkable.

She was a strong and resourceful person, true, and Dr. Williams would be with her, which was some comfort. But how could the two of them possibly defend themselves against six criminals? They would have no weapons, other than whatever medications the doctor might have in his bag. And after they had served their purpose as hostages, they would be nothing more than dangerous liabilities to dispense with.

Could Phillip's obvious desire for Anika possibly override the need for eliminating her? Doubtful. Particularly if she somehow managed to ward off his advances. That would only infuriate him. And even if Phillip were disposed to keep her alive, there were the others—especially Juan. He was without doubt the most chilling man Luke had ever met, a man of no conscience or no humanity. A man who could snuff out the life of another human being as though he was swatting a fly.

Luke's gaze had fixed on Juan as Phillip had finished outlining the plan, registering the way Juan's glowering threatened to spill over into violence. There was something there, something in the relationship between the two men ...

Phillip had stopped and was looking expectantly at Luke. Luke's attention had been so focused on Juan he wasn't sure what Phillip had just said. He'd thought for a moment, then, hoping it was not a complete non sequitur, said, "You're expecting the *Inspiration* to get along in the middle of the Pacific Ocean for a week—possibly longer—with no power?"

Phillip, sneering, had given a short laugh.

"Oh, come on, Captain. If Captain Bligh could survive in a twenty-three-foot boat with eighteen men and practically no food for more than six weeks in 1789, I believe you can tough it out on a rig like the *Inspiration* for a few days."

"Very well. But at least leave us the house generator, so we can keep our food supply refrigerated and cook it safely."

"As long as—" Phillip had begun.

"Shut up," Juan had snarled at Phillip. Then, spinning on his heel to face Luke, his face like a thundercloud, he had hissed: "You are in no position to make demands, Captain."

Luke had shot a quick glance at Phillip, who was livid with anger. No question about it. Juan and Phillip were locked in a hostile competition to determine who was to be Stefano's second-in-command. Luke's eyes met the doctor's; it was clear they were thinking along the same lines. Somehow there might be a way to exploit the rivalry between Phillip and Juan, to divide and conquer.

Stefano had held up his hand.

"*Silencio*," he said. "The generator—it's only for the kitchen, right? Phillip, you check it out. Make sure it don't work for communications. If no, okay, they can keep it on, feed the kids. Juanito, I need you here with me."

Stefano's voice had been weak, but his words clear. Within two hours of the captain's morning report—two hours from this minute, Luke thought as he hung up the phone following his report to Kathleen—the *Coincidence* would be on its way, the two hostages aboard, and the *Inspiration* would be cut off from the outside world.

And then?

Luke could see only two rays of hope, both improbable at best. The enmity between Phillip and Juan might provide Anika and the doctor enough leverage to survive. And even though the hijackers' decision to make their escape so soon had knocked the hell out of the original plan, at least he now knew that the Coast Guard cutter was in the area.

Kathleen's "hiccups" had started not a moment too soon.



It's come then, Mac thought, as he kept his eyes trained on the deck of the *Inspiration*. For good or ill, there was no turning back now.

Dave had called him on the walkie-talkie as soon as Anika had alerted him to the hijackers' plan. Mac had immediately tried to call Kathleen in Montréal, but had gotten only the answering machine. Where could the lass have gone at that time of day? He fervently hoped she had received his message not to call the *Coincidence* again. Within an hour or two now, the hijackers would be reboarding, with Anika and Dr. Williams in tow. One accidental call from BWA headquarters would eliminate any chance of their survival.

Trying to quash that horrible thought, Mac had set about eradicating all traces of his presence aboard the *Coincidence*. He doubted the hijackers would notice the small dent he'd made in their food supply, and he had taken careful note of how all of the dishes were stowed before he'd used them. It had been easy to clean them and return them to their rightful places.

He had swept up the few crumbs that had accumulated by his chair and had made up the bed with nautical precision—and immediately remade it a little less precisely, remembering that whoever had slept in it before had been somewhat less inclined to tidiness.

He had wiped the sink in the head with his shirt; then, putting on his own things again, he'd folded up the spare clothes he'd borrowed and put them back in the drawer as he'd found them. He had stuck the walkie-talkie in his rear trouser pocket.

He had also taken one of the two emergency beacons onboard. That was risky, to be sure, but worth it, he believed, because it could prove invaluable back on the *Inspiration*. Even if the hijackers noticed its absence, they'd have no reason to suspect that he had cadged it. They didn't even know of his existence, much less his existence on their boat for the past couple of days.

No, they'd more likely be blaming one another for its disappearance, which might even help the hostages drive a wedge between their captors. The beacon was the sort that activates automatically when it hits the water, so he'd wrapped it tightly in three layers of plastic bags. The bundle sat at his feet now as he watched, waiting for signs of activity on the Zodiac.

The walkie-talkie squawked in his pocket.

"Mac? Dave."

Dave's voice sounded tinny through the little speaker, and his words came in a rush.

"I just saw the captain coming from the galley. Phillip sent him to get all of the bags of sugar from the pantry. They're going to dump them in the hydraulic cylinders to disable both the steering systems, the automatic and the manual. Guess they figured we could replace the oil if they just drained it out, so they're wrecking the whole system."

Damn and blast, Mac thought. There were no spare hydraulic cylinders onboard. That meant the whole system would have to be replaced.

"Phillip's shut down the engine. He and Sam and Matt removed the injectors and tossed them overboard, and Sam's gone to get the spares out of the workshop and throw them over, too. Phillip checked the injectors for the generator, too, but they're from a different manufacturer and can't be used on the engine, so at least he's letting us keep the generator on. Thank God for small favors, eh?"

"Once they finish with the hydraulics, all they have to do is take out the wiring harnesses for the electronics."

Take them out, or more likely smash the equipment to pieces, Mac thought. Time was getting short and desperate criminals were not generally noted for their patience.

“The captain and Anika spent yesterday afternoon scrounging up whatever might be used as weapons. Not much. Some knives, the usual tools—I can hardly see them fending off six bad guys with a hammer and a screwdriver.

“We can’t get to the flare gun on the bridge, but we’ve got the one from the transom and the spare from your locker. I don’t suppose you’ve got a Colt 45 stashed away down there somewhere, have you?”

“No gun at all, I’m afraid. But hang on—I do have an axe that might do you some good. I picked it up in Zambia.”

His mind flashed back to a scene so vivid he’d almost have sworn it was unfolding before his eyes now. His first day at the copper mine in Kalulushi, watching in awe as two sinewy men wielded the heavy axes, swinging them back and forth in a seemingly effortless rhythm. At the instant the honed blades struck the sides of the tree trunks, the men exhaled in unison, a sharp *whuh!* sound. They had reminded him of martial artists, they really had—their motions were so controlled, so adroit. And Caroline was there, watching by his side ...

Och. None of that now. What did they call it, anyway, that axe? The Bemba word for it; he’d known it like the back of his hand in those days. Like the curve of Caroline’s neck. If he’d been smart he’d have written down all of those words at the time to refer to later on, when they were no longer part of his day-to-day surroundings. He’d thought he would remember them forever, of course, and, of course, he hadn’t. Nothing lasts forever.

Not that it made a particle of difference now anyway.

“Mac?”

“Right, Dave, I hear ye.”

“They’re starting to put their things in the Zodiac now, the doctor and Anika and the hijackers. It won’t be long now. Oh damn, Phillip’s taking all of our emergency beacons with him. Gotta go now, Mac. Good luck. I—”

Dave’s voice was replaced by a short crackle of static.

Mac opened a corner of the top layer of plastic encasing the emergency beacon, tucked the walkie-talkie inside, and sealed the plastic tight again.

Within five minutes, he saw the Zodiac start its descent into the water. Clutching the bundle, he eased to the swim platform and lowered himself into the water. As the Zodiac turned toward the starboard side of the *Coincidence*, he dived under and swam to the port side. Mac watched, treading water, as the dinghy swung around the boat and was tied off at the swim platform. A man with jet-black hair and a long pointed nose jumped out first, then crouched on the platform stretching his hands out to someone in the dinghy.

A slightly older version of the man appeared over the edge of the dinghy, with Elliott Williams beside him. That would be Stefano, Mac thought, and the first lad must be his brother. The brother pulled as Elliott pushed, and Stefano landed safely, if awkwardly, on the platform. After a minute’s rest, the other two men hoisted him up on his feet between them and half carried him aboard the boat.

Anika came next, followed by a tall man who grabbed her hand as soon as he was on the platform. She walked stiff and unsmiling beside him. Bringing up the rear were three men of three strikingly different dimensions: one scrawny, one average, one more than a little stout.

What a crew, Mac thought.

He felt the water around him begin to vibrate. The engine was starting up, humming, warming.

The average-sized man and the scrawny man stayed on the platform, waiting by the Zodiac. They lit cigarettes. The tall man who had held Anika’s hand came back and the three conferred, gesturing toward the dinghy.

Right, Mac thought. They’ll be deciding what to do with the dinghy now. Only three options, lads. Tow it, sink it, or let it loose. What’ll it be, then?

He watched as the skinny fellow bent to open the valves to allow the air out of the Zodiac. Ah, good choice, lads. I was hoping you’d go for that option.

With the weight of its motor and its hard bottom, the Zodiac would inevitably sink—but not for some time. As the tall man cast off the lines and the *Coincidence* began to move, Mac darted under water again and swam behind the motor of the Zodiac. He stayed low in the water until the *Coincidence* had traveled a mile or so and then, sliding his plastic-wrapped parcel over the edge, clambered in and shut the valves.

It’ll no’ be a fast ride, he thought, but at least I’ll get there.



Dave peered through his binoculars as the *Coincidence* grew smaller and smaller against the horizon. His arms ached from holding the glasses to his eyes so long, but he couldn’t put them down. He couldn’t yet admit that Mac might not be coming back.

Suddenly he caught sight of the Zodiac, or what was left of it. A half-deflated mass of red rubber, bobbing sadly in the ripples, was slowly making its way toward the *Inspiration*. With something—no, someone—lying inside.

Dave's heart sank. He lowered the binoculars.

Then raised them again as a sudden movement in the little dinghy registered in the corner of his eye.

He refocused the lenses. Thank God. Mac was up and kneeling now, back straight, the proud captain of his derelict vessel, grinning and snapping a military salute.



Kathleen Tutty was kicking herself for being out of the office when Mac had called. There had been no need for her to drive all the way to Dorval to meet Edward Flynn's flight; he had left his car in the long-term lot. No need whatsoever, except for her desperate wish to share the burden of the past few days with someone else. Waiting alone in the office was beginning to be unbearable; most of the usual BWA business was on hold until this crisis was resolved, so there was little to occupy her time.

And, of course, she hadn't expected Mac to be calling at that time of day. But that was no excuse. He might call anytime there was anything new to report. He *had* called. And now it was too late to talk to him, to find out any more details about what exactly was going on.

Still berating herself, she left a message on Flynn's answering machine—poor man wouldn't even have made it home from the airport yet—then picked up the phone to call Rob Montgomery with the little she had gleaned from Mac's brief message.

"So, as far as you know, the bad guys are back on the *Coincidence* now with two hostages, sailing away from the *Inspiration*," Rob said when she was done. "Okay, I'll round everyone up ASAP and we'll see about a revised plan."

Rob was back to her surprisingly soon. He had practically had to sit on Flipper Markman to do so, of course, to restrain him from getting out his infernal flip charts and markers. But the consensus among all those at the hastily assembled meeting was that there were only two options now, in light of the new situation—hardly enough to warrant all of Flipper's color coding. But each option posed its own dangers to the hostages.

The first, Rob told Kathleen, was to have the Coast Guard cutter—the *Serendipity* it was called—that was already on course for the area continue and intercept the *Coincidence* at sea.

"We're all pretty much agreed, given their current position, that the hijackers are going to aim for Easter Island. The Air Force is getting ready to do another flyover ASAP to determine the exact position of the *Coincidence*, and to make sure the *Inspiration* is still afloat."

Kathleen winced. The thought that the *Inspiration* might not be afloat had not entered her mind.

"Of course there's some risk to the hostages in confronting and challenging the *Coincidence* in the water. And we don't know how the hijackers will respond if they see the *Serendipity* approaching them.

"Even so, we're thinking this is less risky than the second option, which is to wait until the hijackers reach their destination and then overtake them once they've docked. For one thing, as soon as they've gotten to Easter Island, the hostages—"

Rob broke off, uncertain of how to put this without unduly alarming Kathleen. Unduly? How the devil could any amount of alarm be considered undue now? Still, he groped for the words to use.

"As long as they're at sea, the hostages are useful, especially the doctor. Even though at last report Stefano was improving and is probably over the worst, he's still getting the intravenous fluids and meds, and there's always a chance something could go wrong. They'll want to have the doctor around as long as possible.

"But once they come ashore, the hostages will become more of a liability than an advantage for the hijackers. They have no idea that the *Inspiration* has been able to get the word out about the whole affair, so they'll have no reason to believe that anyone on Easter Island will be on the lookout for them. If the hostages decided to act up in any way ... Our guess is that they'll decide they're better off if they don't have the hostages with them."

Kathleen let out a small gasp.

"Then, too," Rob went on quickly, "Vogler—he's the State Department guy—he pointed out that if we approach them on Easter Island we'll have to involve the Chilean officials and that might lead to all kinds of jurisdictional problems.

“And, since the *Serendipity* is the only ship in the area, we’re thinking it’s best to keep it as close as possible to the *Inspiration*, just in case they need any help there, rather than sending it all the way to Easter Island.”

Assuming that those on the *Inspiration* were still alive enough to need help, Kathleen thought.

“At any rate,” Rob said, “the Air Force will be flying over and taking photos soon. They’ll try to establish communication somehow with your ship so we can tell them what the plan is. We’ll just have to sit tight until then, right?”

Right.



It was all a matter of balance. Captain Luke Marzynski had logged almost two hundred thousand miles in his sailing career; sailing without a rudder had been one of the first lessons he had learned. On a ship the size of the *Inspiration*, you couldn't fine-tune the adjustments, but it was perfectly possible to sail effectively in the right general direction. It was all a question of balance, of the set of the sails.

"So the first thing is to raise the inner jib and the main staysail," he told Mac. "That'll get us moving in the right direction. Then we'll hoist the mainsail. Just keep moving it in and out, in and out, to find the balance."

"What about the square sails?" Mac asked.

"Right. Easter Island is almost due west, and the prevailing wind is from the east, so we can use the square sails as well. Raise both the upper and lower topsails."

It felt good to be in command again. The past few days had been a severe trial for the captain. He was accustomed to being in charge, to taking whatever action was required to get a job done, and, most of all, to ensuring the safety of anyone in his care. Standing aside while someone else took over his boat, looking on impotently while his crew and his students were imperiled, remaining impassive through the long hours of waiting—all this had taxed him as nothing he had ever experienced.

He watched now as Mac and a crew of Floaties attended to the sails. Thank goodness Mac was safe and back onboard. The man had his share of problems, especially where alcohol was concerned. Luke had known that from the start. There was, lurking just behind his outward joviality, a shadow of tragedy. Mac had never mentioned anything of the sort, and Luke had never inquired, but he felt sure that somewhere in Mac's past lay the key to his occasional lapses of judgment.

Luke had taken a risk in hiring him, but his instincts about him had been right. There was no one more capable—or more kindhearted—than Mac. Edward Flynn had been dubious about signing him on, but Luke had won out over his objections, and on innumerable occasions Mac had proven his worth. And over the course of years of working with the Floaties, Mac had seemed to become more settled, and less inclined to brood—or to drink to excess—although that faint tinge of suppressed melancholy never quite left him.

Now the five sails were up and pulling, and the *Inspiration* gliding along neatly, on course, at about four knots. By making frequent entries in the ship's log and navigational charts, they would be able to estimate their position reasonably well. Luke would try to keep the routine as close to normal as possible, under the circumstances. It wouldn't be easy without Anika to shepherd the kids—and the kids, although for the most part keeping their upper lips stiff, were worried sick about what was going to happen to her and the doctor. But with the help of Dave and the other teachers, and the ever-resourceful Mac, they'd manage.

In the morning, they would activate the emergency beacon that Mac had brought from the *Coincidence*.

At least they were doing *something*.



“What about the doctor and the, uh ... the girl?” Phillip asked Stefano.

Things were looking up now that they were back on the *Coincidence*, no doubt about it. Stefano was stronger. He was still hooked up to the IV pole but was able to walk around on deck for short periods of time. In a few days they’d be handing over the cocaine to Giorgio on Easter Island and hopping a plane back to the States to be there in time to meet his shipment of the Moai statuettes, their ticket to prosperity.

In the meantime, Philip thought—and maybe even afterward, who could say?—he had the lovely Anika all to himself. Hitching up with the *Inspiration* had been a stroke of good luck after all.

“No witnesses,” Stefano said, shaking his head.

It was the reply Phillip had expected. So why did his stomach lurch when he heard it?

He nodded as Stefano ran down the list of reasons why they had to get rid of the hostages. He knew them already, of course; he could have spouted them out just as well himself. Easter Island was a small place. They couldn’t risk attracting any attention. One or both of the hostages might decide to make a break for it once they were ashore. Not that they’d ever be able to escape alive, but they might decide to sacrifice themselves to put the hijackers behind bars.

“We been through too much, come too far,” Stefano said. “We’re not gonna risk throwing it all away now. We got no choice. We gonna have to off them.”

Phillip nodded. It wouldn’t do to have Stefano think he had any reservations about the plan.

“How soon?” he asked.

“A day before we get there. We gonna let nature do the dirty work for us.”

“Nature?”

Stefano took a drag on his cigarette, then, gesturing with the stub at the expanse of sea surrounding them, said, “All we gotta do is make sure we still far enough out they can’t swim to the island.”

In theory, Phillip should have found this idea reassuring. Technically, after all, he wouldn’t be killing Anika. No, he would be watching as she and the doctor were tossed overboard (would they be conscious when this happened? would they struggle?), leaving them to nature’s devices.

Which meant certain death. No one could survive long in these waters. So, instead of a swift, merciful killing, a bullet to the head, say, he’d be subjecting Anika—and the guy, too, the doctor—to a brutal, agonizing end by drowning or exposure or starvation or sharks.

There had to be some way to save her, to save both of them. The guards, okay, he hadn’t felt good about having to kill them either, but at least it was all over and done with quickly; they hadn’t suffered. Besides, it was a dangerous job, being a guard for the cartel. They accepted the risk when they signed on. Occupational hazard. And he hadn’t known them personally, either. They were just nameless, faceless guards, hardly human at all.

Not like Anika.

As soon as his watch was over, he would go and talk to her. She’d see that it was in her best interest—and in her friend the doctor’s best interest—to cooperate with him. He wasn’t asking for much, anyway; a small price to pay for the privilege of continuing to exist. She was a smart girl; she’d see. And then he’d only have to get Stefano—and Juan—to see. That would be a little more difficult, but he’d think of some way of persuading them. The first thing was to make Anika see.



Anika didn't see.

She opened her cabin door a crack in response to Phillip's tap and looked at him warily.

"Open up," he said. "We need to talk."

"About what?" Her voice was flat.

"Your future."

Anika opened the door just wide enough for him to squeeze through sideways.

Phillip seemed to be taking up most of the narrow space in the cabin. Anika wanted to back away, but there was nowhere to go except the bunk, so she held her ground. She could feel his warmth, smell his breath.

She raised her chin and looked him squarely in the eye.

You had to hand it to her, Phillip thought, you really did. She was one plucky little chick. That was one of the things he liked about her, that air of defiance in the face of danger, that brave façade that masked her vulnerability. But he was going to like unmasking the façade even more.

His voice low, he told her of Stefano's plan to abandon her to the ocean. Her eyes grew wider, but she didn't flinch, not even when he told her about the sharks that live in this part of the Pacific.

"I know you don't want that to happen," he concluded. "I don't want it to either."

He took another step toward her.

"What can you do to prevent it?"

"It's what *you* are willing to do to prevent it that counts. Remember, we're not just talking about your life here, but your friend the doctor's as well. I don't think it's asking too much for you to give me a small token of thanks for saving your flesh."

"What sort of token?" Anika asked.

She braced herself for the reply she was certain was coming.

Phillip took a step closer. Flesh in exchange for flesh, that was to be the bargain, just as she had known it would be. He was now so close she couldn't keep his face in focus; his features swam before her like a surreal painting, all leering eyes and greedy mouth. Phillip bent his head down to hers and began to force her lips apart with his tongue.



Stefano would have locked Phillip up along with Anika and the doctor if the little *puñetero* hadn't been needed. If he wasn't too banged up to be useful, that is, after what the girl had done to him. Maybe he should just chuck him overboard.

But his injuries were less serious than they'd first appeared. Stefano and the doctor had nearly collided rushing to her cabin when they'd heard her screams. Phillip was lying doubled over on the floor in a pool of blood, holding his groin and moaning. The girl had sobbed out the story while the doctor cleaned Phillip up and applied a makeshift bandage to his nose, which was never going to look quite the same again.

The *muchacha* had given him a sharp knee in the *cojónes*; then, while he was writhing, had followed up with a straight arm to the nose. He'd be sore for a while, and the broken nose would take some time to heal, but there was no reason Phillip couldn't still pull his weight onboard.

Idiota!

What did he think he was doing, spilling everything to the girl in return for laying her? Now the hostages would have to be kept under guard, locked in the forward cabin, and one man assigned to keeping an eye on them at all times. What a waste. What a loser.

And what would Juan do when he found out?



Air Force pilot Nick Anastapolou had just taken his final photo of the *Coincidence*, now some eighty miles from its last sighting. He was heading back to base when he heard the emergency distress beacon. Abruptly altering course, he homed in on the source of the signal. There it was. Yep, that had to be the *Inspiration*, all right, he was sure of it. He circled overhead and radioed headquarters.

“I’m reducing altitude now in preparation for a close flyby,” he said. “I’ll keep you posted.”



“Heads up, mates!” Mac called.

Pierre and Ryan, rust-busting on the deck, looked up to where the bosun was pointing. They saw nothing. Then their ears picked up a faint whine, which grew gradually louder; they squinted in the direction of the noise, and a spot appeared, grew larger, and finally materialized into an airplane.

An airplane!

Pierre took off at lightning speed to find Melissa, knocking on the classroom doors and alerting everyone he saw along the way to her cabin. Soon the deck was swarming with Floaties and staff, all of them shouting and cheering and waving their arms off.

“I didn’t see any obvious signs of distress onboard,” Nick reported. “Just a slew of people waving at me.”

He reported on photos he had taken.

“They’ve got five sails flying. Must not have any engine power. On course for Easter Island, but going real slow.

“They’re not responding to radio calls. What say we try dropping off a VHF radio on a life raft on the morning run tomorrow? I think they’ll be okay till then.”

Melissa gripped Pierre’s arm as she watched the plane bank, turn, and disappear into the horizon.

Captain Marzynski deactivated the beacon. No point in using it now. The plane must have come in response to the signal; the pilot was very likely alerting the authorities right now. And even if not, the signal would have been picked up on shore via satellite. And of course they could always reactivate it if necessary.



Mac propelled the newly repaired Zodiac as fast as he could out to the bobbing life raft, some three hundred feet away. To the crowd assembled on deck, it seemed to take him an inordinately long time to reach the small bundle; in fact it was a matter of minutes. He leaned over and fished it out of the water, set it in the dinghy beside him, and turned back toward the *Inspiration* to the crowd’s cheers. The plane that had dropped it circled overhead—the same plane that had appeared yesterday in response to the emergency signal.

Classes had been stopped to allow everyone to see what was going on. The air was still, the deck unnaturally quiet, as all hands gathered around, watching as Mac made his way back. Pulling up beside the boat, he heaved the yellow parcel up into Charlie’s waiting hands. Charlie put it down amid the throng of silent spectators. Waiting for Mac to climb back onboard, no one hazarded a guess as to what might be inside—not aloud, at any rate.

Captain Marzynski did the honors, deftly loosening the knots that bound the life raft around its contents. The raft

flopped open, revealing another layer of packaging—black plastic crisscrossed with duct tape.

Melissa thought immediately of Christmas, of the intricately wrapped presents her Uncle Jack infuriated and delighted her with every year. The image brought a fleeting smile to her face; Pierre caught the change in her expression and shot her an inquiring glance. But almost at once the smile vanished, and Melissa had to bite her bottom lip to keep from breaking into sobs at the very real possibility that there would be no more Christmases at home—no more Christmases, period.

Now she could only hope that whatever was inside this mysterious package would turn out to be as wonderful and useful a gift as those Uncle Jack had bestowed upon her. He had an uncanny knack for coming up with exactly the right thing at the right time, whether she knew she needed it or not.

The captain knelt and slit the tape open with a slim pocket-knife. The black plastic fell away. It took just a moment for the crowd to register what the object was. Then an excited murmur began, intensifying by the second until Melissa could barely hear the crackling static over the jubilation.

It seemed the gift giver in the airplane above was every bit as clever as Uncle Jack.



Phillip stood on deck, glowering at the ocean. His nose was swollen and throbbing, its initial redness turning blotchy purple. There wasn't a part of his body, stem to stern, that didn't hurt like hell.

In even worse shape than his body, though, were his spirits. Stefano was pissed as hell at him, and Juan—well, Juan would have finished off the pummeling Anika had started if Stefano hadn't stopped him.

Anika! What was wrong with her anyway? She'd rather be thrown to the sharks than give up her precious frigging maiden-hood? C'mon. What did she think this was, a Victorian novel? Not that he believed for a minute that her maidenhood was intact. A girl like that? In this day and age? Hell, no.

So that meant she'd rather be thrown to the sharks than go to bed with him.

The only reason Juan and Stefano hadn't thrown him to the sharks yesterday was that they needed him on the boat. He could tell by the brothers' whispered conference outside Anika's cabin, where he lay having his nose wrapped up, that it had taken a good deal of persuading for Juan to allow even that much.

It was clear to Phillip that by the time they reached Easter Island, he would no longer be needed for anything. He wouldn't be going ashore any more than the hostages would. And all because that ungrateful little—

His watchman's eye picked up a faint glint on the water far in the distance off the starboard bow. He shaded his eyes and kept the glint in view; little by little it came closer, eventually assuming the outline of a ship.

He shouted out to Esteban, on deck behind him.

"Come here! Now, damn it! Move it!"

Esteban put down the bucket he was holding and ambled over to where Phillip stood watch.

"Take over!" Phillip hissed as he ran to the bridge.

Severo sat at the controls, chewing a wad of gum.

"*Hola*, Felipe, how's the nose?" he snickered as Phillip banged the door open. Phillip shoved him from his chair.

"Get Stefano!" he barked and sat down at the VHF radio.

Within three minutes, Stefano came storming through the door, with Severo trailing behind.

"What you think you're—" Stefano began.

Phillip silenced him with a furious shaking of his head and hands, and pointed to the radio.

The three waited with their ears cocked as the VHF crackled.

After a moment, Stefano began again.

"*Madre de Cristo!* What the hell you—"

Suddenly the signal on the VHF changed. The static intensified, then was replaced by a screech. The screeching faded away and Stefano fell silent as a clear voice emanated from the box on the console.

"This is Captain Ritchie on the Coast Guard cutter *Serendipity*. We are now three miles off your starboard bow. Heave to and prepare to be boarded."

Severo reeled backward against the wall.

"It's all over!" he wailed. "I knew it would end like this! It's no use. We can't run—"

"*Chucha!*" Stefano bellowed at him. "Shut up! We don't know what they want. Maybe it's nothing, maybe just routine, they searching all ships going through here. We don't know."

He nodded at Phillip.

"Tell them to come. Severo, you and Polo go and tie up the girl and the doctor. Make sure they can't make no noise—lots of duct tape over their mouths. Stay with them. Find my brother first. Send him in here. *Vaya!*"

"Captain, we are stopping our engines now," Phillip said as soon as Severo had gone. "Continue your approach."

He turned to Stefano. For a moment the two men simply stared at each other, each trying desperately to hold onto

hope, to quell their rising panic.

"Might be they're only looking for the *Two Wise*," Phillip said slowly. "That wouldn't tie us in with the drugs necessarily. They'll know the boat's stolen, though; the camouflage is only good from the air."

"A random drug check maybe? It's possible?"

"Possible, I guess. Not probable. This isn't exactly a high drug area. But we've got to decide now what to do with the coke. Once they've boarded, for whatever reason, it'll be too late. And there's no way we can outrun them. That cutter can go four times our best speed."

A shadow loomed across the open doorway. Juan. Stefano exchanged glances with his brother. Phillip had never seen Juan look quite so venomous, and all of his anger seemed to be directed at him—though how the hell Juan could pin the blame for *this* on him he couldn't see. But Juan had no head for logic; he'd lash out first and ask questions later. Which method of his imminent death would be the worst: gun-wielding authorities, ravenous sharks, or Juan?

Stalling for time, Phillip said, "Look, why don't I just ask them what's up, why they want to board, anyway? At least that way we'll know what it is we're dealing with."

Stefano grunted his consent, and Juan did nothing to stop him, so Phillip went ahead.

"*Serendipity*? Could you tell us the—uh, the nature of your inquiry? We're in international waters here. Why do you want to come aboard?"

The radio crackled again before the captain's voice came through, calm and brisk.

"*Coincidence*, this is a routine check only. We monitor all ship traffic in this area. We are now launching a boarding party; it will arrive in a few minutes."

Captain's Ritchie's tone was noncommittal; it almost sounded bored. But something about his explanation did not ring true. Why would the U.S. Coast Guard monitor all ships in this part of the world? Did they even have the authority to do so?

The men kept their eyes on the launch as it plowed the water toward them. Phillip's eyes began to ache with the strain.

There were five of them on the launch. Five men in flak jackets. Five men with rifles trained on the *Coincidence*.

Stefano froze for an instant at the sight. Then he whirred into action, reaching into a locker behind him as he shouted out orders in staccato bursts.

"Juanito!"

He withdrew a rifle from the locker and tossed it to Juan.

"Get ready to fire!" he said, grabbing a second weapon for himself.

"You!" he yelled to Phillip. "Put the boat in gear! Go!"

As the boat began to move, Stefano and Juan took aim at the launch, which abruptly changed direction and headed back toward the *Serendipity*. Stefano wheeled around.

"Esteban! The hostages! Bring them here!"

Esteban looked up.

"Now, *muchachote*, now!"

The *Serendipity* was closing in on them, cutting them off. Two crew members stood on the bow, their weapons cocked. As Anika and the doctor reached the bridge, hands bound with rope, mouths taped shut, a shot cracked through the air. Two hundred feet in front of the *Coincidence*, a shell smacked down, sending a spray of water over its hull.

Stefano pushed Elliott and Anika onto the bridge in full view of the cutter.

"You tell them leave us alone or we will shoot them and throw them overboard," he told Philip. "They can't touch us once we get near the island."

"It doesn't matter," Phillip said, shaking his head. "It doesn't matter."

He looked at Stefano, who was wild-eyed, still believing there was a way out.

"The police will be waiting for us on Easter Island," he said in a low voice.

"So? We throw the coke overboard now! No evidence!"

"It's pointless."

The radio crackled to life again.

"This is Captain Ritchie on the *Serendipity*. Don't do anything foolish. It will do you no good, anyway. We know the names of your crew and your hostages. We know your boat is the *Two Wise*, stolen in Costa Rica. We know you killed the six guards in Colombia. We know you have the coke onboard.

"We are prepared to make you one offer, and one offer only: Stop your vessel now, surrender with no harm to the hostages, and we will take you back to the States to stand trial.

"If you reject this offer, we will board by force and turn you over to the Colombian authorities, who will

administer their own brand of justice.”

The captain paused.

“Consider where you’d prefer to be jailed, and whether you prefer to stop on your own or have your vessel rammed.”

Another pause.

“What’s your decision?”

Stefano stood motionless. His face was drained of color, and his eyes were blank.

In Phillip’s mind, jail in Colombia ranked just below death by sharks. He stopped the engines and picked up the microphone.



Dabbing at his chin with olive oil, Dr. Elliott Williams was ruing the day he'd decided to grow a beard. Then again, he could hardly have imagined, as a young resident, that his casual decision to give up shaving in exchange for a few extra minutes of precious sleep every morning would lead to so much misery fourteen years later. He'd surely never dreamed that his practice of medicine was going to involve such tribulations as removing duct-tape residue from his facial hair.

The task had been far simpler for Anika; she'd smeared cleansing lotion over her face, rinsed it off, repeated, and, except for a little redness, was practically as good as new.

He used up the rest of her bottle of lotion but sat there with stubborn bits of glue still clinging tenaciously to his whiskers, while she went off to call Kathleen Tutty in Montréal on the satellite phone. He just hoped olive oil would do the trick before they were to meet Captain Ritchie for lunch.

Anika came back into his cabin, looking more cheerful than she had in a week. She picked up the olive oil tin, shook it, and grinned.

"I hope the cook has another tin of this onboard," she said. "Otherwise you'll have to resort to engine oil."

Elliott rolled his eyes as she sat down beside him. She poured some of the olive oil on a washcloth and rubbed it into his beard.

"Kathleen says everyone on the *Inspiration* is okay. She's already ordered the new hydraulic parts for the steering system and the injectors for the motor. They'll be air freighted to Easter Island within three days. Edward's flying to the island tomorrow to meet us when we get there and to coordinate the repairs. Some of the other damaged equipment may not be so easy to replace."

Elliott wiped his sticky comb on a towel and fingered his beard.

"A little better on this side, anyway," he said as he began jerking the comb through the remaining traces of adhesive on the other cheek. "Assuming the boat can be put back together safely, is it Edward's intention to keep on with the trip?" he asked.

"He doesn't know yet. Kathleen says that's his hope, but there are a bunch of things to be considered before he can make any decision. Obviously, getting the boat up and running safely is the first step. Hard to say at this point how long that might take. It should be relatively easy to fix the engine, but we don't even know exactly what the electronic needs are until we talk to the captain. It may take Kathleen awhile to locate any parts that can't be repaired, so she has to know as soon as possible.

"And apparently, if all goes well and everything *can* be patched up, we'll have to be recertified by Lloyd's. That's a fairly lengthy process at best, and asking them to come out on the spur of the moment to Easter Island to make an inspection—well, who knows?"

"But even if that works out okay—and thankfully we do have a four-day stay-over already planned, and we could extend it by a day or two without much problem—the main concern is the morale of the kids and all of the staff. And that's not to mention the reaction of the parents."

"Of course," Elliott said. "The kids will need a thorough assessment, physical and psychological. We'll have to monitor everyone for signs of post-traumatic stress. Ourselves included."

He felt his beard again and sighed.

"Do you have a pair of scissors?"



In spite of their uncertainty about the situation, once they got to the officers' mess, Anika and Elliott discovered that they were famished. They devoured with equal gusto the steaming lentil soup set before them and Captain Ritchie's account of what had happened on the *Inspiration* during their absence.

"They've been more worried about the two of you than themselves," the captain concluded. "Our plan is to rendezvous with the *Inspiration* tomorrow. We'll take you over on the launch and then tow her to Easter Island."

"Wonderful! But could we talk with Captain Marzynski before then?" Anika asked.

"I'm afraid that's not possible. The VHF the Air Force dropped has a range of only about five miles. There's no way we can communicate with them until we get much closer."

"How long will that take?"

"Well, we're now some four hundred miles away. Cruising at twenty-five knots, that puts us at sixteen hours away."

Anika's heart sank. If they hoped to continue the trip, time was of the essence—and Anika found she was hoping very much indeed that they *would* be able to continue. They'd have to see how the kids were doing, of course, and the teachers. But she had the distinct feeling that most of them would have come through this crisis with no serious scars. Abandoning the voyage now would *not* be in anybody's best interests. She looked across the table at Elliott.

"Is there absolutely no way?" he asked the captain. "The thing is, we've got to find out what parts need to be ordered for the electronic system so our office in Montréal can track them down as soon as possible. The longer we wait, the less chance we'll have of being able to salvage the rest of the trip."

Captain Ritchie nodded.

"There might be one possibility," he said slowly. "If I were to dispatch a helicopter right now, it could be there in a little less than two hours. Then another two hours to get your captain back here ... that would save you eleven hours—well, probably closer to ten and a half hours, when all is said and done."

"Would you do it?" Anika broke in.

"Would it really help that much?"

"That would give our office nearly one more whole day to find the replacement equipment," Elliott said. "That could make all the difference."

"All right. I'll give the order right away."

The captain stood up.

"As soon as you've finished your lunch—would you like seconds?—as soon as you're done, I'll have to ask you to allow one of my officers to debrief each of you individually about the whole incident. It's important to get your statements now while everything's fresh in your minds. They'll be needed in court."



Captain Marzynski thrust his shaving kit and nightclothes into a small satchel, folded his list of the needed electronic parts into quarters, stuck it in his pocket, and hurried to the deck. Mac and Henry were readying the Zodiac. The *Serendipity's* CH46 helicopter was hovering almost directly overhead.

Its pilot had radioed just minutes before, as soon as it was within range of the *Inspiration's* VHF radio, with the news of the captain's transfer to the cutter. They would not be able to lift the captain off the deck directly, he had said.

"We can't take a chance on the lift line getting tangled in your rigging. You'll need to come out in your dinghy about three hundred feet behind the ship. We'll drop down a line with a harness attached and lift you from there.

"It'll be tomorrow before you get back here, so bring whatever you need for the night."

Luke boarded the Zodiac and headed out toward the waiting helicopter, where the flaw in the pilot's plan soon became painfully evident. At about forty-five feet above the water, the helicopter was creating such a fierce downdraft that, try as he might, Luke found it impossible to keep the dinghy centered under it. He maneuvered the small craft out from under the blast of air and looked up.

The pilot's hand emerged from the helicopter in what Luke took to be a "hang on a minute" signal. Then, a moment later, from the other side of the chopper, the flight engineer dropped a guideline. Luke retrieved it and tied it off, enabling the Zodiac to stay in the same position relative to the helicopter.

The lift line and harness dropped down beside him. He caught them, donned the harness, and signalled to the flight engineer to start the lift.



If Anika had thought she could never be any happier than she was at that moment when the helicopter touched down on the deck of the *Serendipity* and Luke Marzynski stepped out, she was mistaken. The following afternoon, as the cutter's launch pulled alongside the *Inspiration's* starboard with herself, the captain, and the doctor onboard, she felt she was going to burst.

There, pressed up against the railing, were the students—*her* students—some cheering, some clapping, some crying—many doing all three at once. And her fellow teachers! Mary stood with her arm around Sharon's shoulders; Sharon had both hands up covering her mouth and was shaking her head in disbelief. Tom Michaels was waving his hand in circles over his head and shouting, "Whooo-ee!" And Dave! Dave was standing, just standing, tall and straight, arms at his sides, his face lit up by a lopsided grin. Anika's heart flip-flopped at the sight.

The whole of the crew was there to greet them, too. Mac and Henry and Charlie, Matt and Sam, Jarred—every last one of them.

"All's weel that ends weel, eh lads?" Mac said, stretching out a hand first to Luke and then Elliott. "As that Other Bard said."

He peered at Elliott's chin.

"Beard's a wee bit shorter since I last saw ye, isn't it?"

He turned to help Anika onto the deck, scooping her up in a bear hug.

"Now then, lass, how ye doin'?" he asked after a moment, holding her at arm's length and searching her face with such sympathy that her intended "I'm doing fine" dissolved into a flood of tears.

He embraced her again, and then suddenly they were all embracing her, passing her down a line of waiting arms, relief and joy riding through the crowd on a wave of euphoria. By the time she reached the end of the line she was limp. She leaned against Dave, wanting only to crawl into her bunk and sleep for a week.

Sleep she did, but hardly for more than a couple of hours—the time it took to ready the *Inspiration* for towing. That was a complex process that involved tying one end of a one-inch line to a tow bar on the launch, the bitter end to the *Inspiration's* capstan, paying out the line as the launch returned to the cutter, attaching the one-inch line to a three-inch hawser, which was then winched over to the *Inspiration*. Anika was refreshed from her nap and ready to tackle the task of evaluating the students and staff to try to gauge their fitness for continuing the journey.

The place to begin, she decided, was with her colleagues. If they weren't up to going on with the trip, there was no point in interviewing the students. If they were, it would be valuable to have their assessments of how the kids were faring before starting the interviews. And the sooner everyone got back to the normal class routine, the better. Although the teachers had done their best to keep the kids on track with their studies, if only to provide enough distraction to ease some of the anxiety, no one had been able to concentrate very well. There was a lot of lost time to make up.

Anika called a group meeting of the teachers in the mess. Dr. Williamson would examine them individually afterward, to check for physical signs of stress.

The teachers were unanimous in their view: If at all possible, continue the voyage. Yes, certainly, the experience had been more frightening than anything any of them had ever been through—“even Dave,” Tom chuckled, “and that's saying a lot!” Yet they had come through it, they felt, with no major psychological damage. In fact, as awful as it had admittedly been (“hugely scary,” in Sharon's words; “like a nightmare,” in Mary's), they all believed that they had emerged not merely unscathed but stronger and more capable than ever.

“And I really think that's true of the kids, too,” Dave said. “They handled the whole thing incredibly well. Sure there was a lot of anxiety all around. How could there *not* be, with gun-wielding bad guys taking over the ship? But I didn't see anybody falling apart over it.”

“I agree,” Sharon said. “And we were lucky. The hijackers pretty much left us alone. As long as we didn't interfere with them, they didn't interfere with us.”

“Right,” Mary said. “It might have been a different story entirely if they hadn't kept their distance—especially that one guy, the really evil-looking one.”

“Juan,” Dave said.

“Juan. He could strike fear into your heart all right,” Mary went on. “But he spent most of his time in the first-aid room with his brother, thank God.”

“Kids are so resilient anyway, aren't they?” Sharon said. “And so inclined to think of themselves as immortal. In that respect, they probably managed better than we did. Now that the danger is over, I'm betting they'll be able to put it all behind them fairly quickly, except as a great adventure to tell their friends back home.”

Tom was nodding his head.

“That's my guess, too. I sure haven't seen any signs of any lingering emotional problems. And as we all know, you've got to be a trouper to be selected as a Floatie in the first place. They are all pluckier than your average kid or they wouldn't be in the program.”

Anika smiled. This was exactly what she had hoped to hear and expected to hear. She would still have to talk to the students herself, naturally, and Elliott would have to check them out, to make absolutely sure they were okay, but there was little doubt in her mind that they would want to continue with their semester at sea. And, of course, if any of them did not feel able to go on, they could be put on a plane for home as soon as they got to Easter Island. If the good weather held out, that should be in just under four days.

“But what we don't know is what the parents' reaction will be,” Mary said, her expression clouding. “It's one thing to be in the middle of a precarious situation yourself—especially when you're young—but quite another to imagine your *child* in danger.”

“And at least you know exactly what's happening when you're part of it,” Tom added. “If you're thousands of miles away and know only that something terrible is going on, your imagination would be going wild. You'd be fearing the worst every minute. The not knowing would drive you crazy.”

“Fortunately,” Anika said, “the parents weren't told anything until the hijackers were in custody. It was a really difficult decision for BWA to make. Kathleen told me her first instinct was to call the parents immediately, but the RCMP advised her not to. Edward was off in South Africa on a recruiting trip, but when she finally reached him, he concurred with the Mounties. They figured that as soon as the parents knew, the media would know, too. That would have undermined the plan to trap the bad guys.”

“They were right, too. Kathleen said she'd hardly hung up the phone after calling all of the parents to let them know what had happened and reassure them that the kids were safe before the media began calling, demanding

interviews. Apparently the phone hasn't stopped ringing since.

"Kathleen was thinking she might have to ask Edward for a raise, as media darling is not in her original job description."

"Ah, I can see just her rising to the challenge," Tom said.

"How did the parents take the news?" Dave asked.

"Quite well, most of them. A couple were upset at being kept in the dark so long, but even they came around eventually. Most seemed genuinely pleased with the way everything was handled. As Kathleen said, the ends pretty well justified the means."

"Very true," Tom said. "The hijackers most likely would not be safely in the brig now if the word had gotten out sooner."

"Hijackers safely in the brig," Anika repeated. "You have no idea how delightful a phrase that is to me! I will never forget the sight of the Coast Guard crew handcuffing those men and leading them away. That horrible, horrible Phillip ..."

Her mouth twisted down at the memory of Phillip. She pulled herself together after a moment.

"You know, I actually went to the brig—no, not to spit in Phillip's face, though that's a tempting thought. No, I wanted in some way to thank the wounded man—Stefano—for keeping the others under control, for not hurting the kids. For not hurting anyone. One of the officers took me down there, but when I looked in and saw Stefano sitting there ..."

Anika shrugged and shook her head.

"I couldn't do it. I couldn't find the words to thank him; I just turned around and walked away."

Sharon's eyes grew wide.

"You mean to tell me you were going to say 'thank you' to the head bad guy?"

"Really, Anika," Dave said. "Don't you think that's carrying our famed Canadian politeness a bit *too* far?"



Moving at just under one knot, with the *Inspiration* in tow, the *Serendipity*'s progress toward the small harbor at Hanga Roa was barely perceptible.

Captain Ritchie scanned the water, looking for a good place for the *Inspiration* to drop anchor. As luck would have it, no docks had been available, but they would need to be as close as possible to town to pick up the parts required to make the repairs.

The cutter inched its way to a suitable spot just outside the docking area.

As soon as Captain Marzynski had given the order to drop anchor and cast free the towline, the *Serendipity* turned and, gradually picking up speed, headed out of the harbor. Captain Ritchie wanted to avoid any chance of getting entangled in a jurisdictional dispute with the Chilean authorities on the island. The sooner the ship got back to international waters, the better, as far as he was concerned.

With what seemed like startling suddenness after their long, drawn-out ordeal, there they were, safely in the lee of Easter Island, the *Serendipity* rapidly disappearing from view, spiriting the hijackers out of their lives and on to whatever justice awaited them once they got to San Diego. It was all over. It was almost more than anyone on the *Inspiration* could take in.

Anchorage off Hanga Roa could be rough. Except for a small shallow basin, used by fishing boats, it was largely unprotected and subject to unpredictable swells. The port captain required that any boat anchored in the harbor have someone onboard at all times.

This suited Captain Marzynski just fine. Edward Flynn would be on his way out to the *Inspiration* in a rented boat with the new injectors as soon as he could make the arrangements, and Luke wanted to get started on the repairs immediately. He, along with the second mate, Henry, and the two engineers, Matt and Sam, would remain onboard; they would very likely have the engine up and running again before the afternoon was over.

He knew the hydraulic parts were waiting for them on the dock, and the electronic equipment was due to arrive on tomorrow morning's flight from Santiago. Chances were good that they could manage all of the repairs themselves; if not, even though the island had no repair facilities, the government did have a small maintenance shop and no doubt would help them out in an emergency. And there were a few local mechanics they could call on as well if necessary.

If all went well, they could just have everything ready for the Lloyd's inspection in four days.

The rest of the staff and the Floaties were free to go ashore. The kids especially were champing at the bit to get off the ship and explore—and to call their parents.



As soon as customs and immigration had cleared them, Mac lowered the Zodiac into the water and began ferrying the Floaties, about ten at a time—Pierre's cabin was in the first group—to shore. How many times now, Mac wondered, had he been to this most remote spot in the world? Och, he'd lost count by now.

He never tired of the place, though. Despite its subtropical climate, there was something about Easter Island that always put him in mind of the islands off the north coast of Scotland. They had the same rocky, treeless, windswept landscape; the same sudden changes in the weather, which could go with scant warning from misty drizzle to brilliant sun to driving rain; the same play of light and shadow against barren cliffs.

And even the Moai, those great mysterious stone statues, were they not, when one came right down to it, the kith and kin of the Standing Stones O' Stenness or the Ring O' Brodgar? Those unearthly monuments on Orkney, though much more ancient, sprang, surely, from the same human needs and desires that had given rise to the Moai. People were pretty much the same the whole world over, weren't they?

"That Man to Man, the worr-uld o'er, Shall brothers be for a' that."

The words of the Immortal Bard had sprung to his lips unbidden. He looked up, feeling a bit silly, to find Dan and Evan and Chris regarding him with astonishment.

But Pierre grinned and, only a little off-key, took up the chorus:

"For a' that, an' a' that, It's comin' yet for a' that, That Man to Man, the world o'er, Shall brothers be for a' that."

Pierre shrugged.

"Caneff," he said. "It was required to learn about Canada's Scots heritage—even for us Québécois."



The students' first order of business once Mac dropped them off at the dock was to call their parents. The reaction of Pierre's mother, Hélène, when he reached her in Québec, was typical. Kathleen Tutty had already talked to her and assured her that everyone on board was safe, yet her maternal radar remained keenly attuned, ready to pick up the slightest sign of stress or trauma in her son's voice.

"But you are *sure* you are all right?" she asked, and asked again. "You are absolutely sure?"

When she was at last convinced that Pierre was *vraiment* unscarred by the experience—that his voice betrayed not the smallest hint of psychological damage—she gave him her blessing to continue the voyage. After all, she told herself, the whole episode had been a fluke, unknown in the entire history of the Blue Water Academy, and to imagine that any such peril would befall the ship again would be to give in to a foolish, irrational anxiety. She'd have liked to give her son a hug before he went on, but ... *C'est la vie*.



Waiting for Melissa's group to be ferried over, Pierre and his cabinmates went first to the "supermercado" near the town center. The shop was so tiny it was a squeeze for all four of them to fit inside, but they had been warned that Hanga Roa was the only place they'd be able to buy water and food to take with them as they explored the island. There were so many interesting things to see and do they hardly knew where to begin.

Dan, an avid photographer, bought a guidebook and read excerpts aloud as they walked to the artisan market near the church. For him, Easter Island was practically the Holy Grail of photographic opportunities, and he wanted to plan his itinerary with an eye toward getting to each site when the light would be at its most advantageous.

"Okay, we're going to Te Pito Kura for sure," he said. "Can't pass up a shot of you guys with your hands on the Navel of the Universe! And it says here that the big stone there, the one that's almost a perfect sphere, is made out of some magnetic rock not found anywhere else on the island."

"And of course we have to see Rano Raraku—that's the main quarry. There are some Moai still attached to the rock—we'd better wait until early tomorrow morning for those; the light's too high overhead now and all of the detail would be lost. There are other Moai lying around waiting to be moved to their *ahus*, those platforms they put them on. They got the red stone—man, look at that color!—for the hats some of the Moai wear—*pukao* they're called—from another quarry at Puna Pau crater. And look at this!"

He stopped in his tracks, his companions reconfiguring themselves around him.

"Look at the size of this thing!" He pointed to a photo of a man standing next to one of the cylindrical topknots.

"If just the *pukao* is that much bigger than a man, imagine how big the whole statue must be! I mean, I know Dave told us some of them are huge—the tallest is almost seventy-two feet and weighs like a hundred and fifty tons—but wow! Maybe I should buy some more film."

Dan continued to flip through the pages as they walked along, punctuating every few steps with another "Wow!"

"Well, *this* is what *I* have to see," Evan said, as he paused in front of a colorful poster advertising a performance by a local group called Matato'a.

The photo showed a group of musicians looking at the same time both exotic and strangely familiar. They stood in typical rock band lineup, surrounded by the usual array of sound and lighting equipment, but more than half of the group was outfitted in traditional Polynesian style—nearly naked but for feathers, grasses, body paint in elaborate

designs, and tattoos. Others wore blue jeans and baseball caps turned backward. Their music, the poster said, was a fusion of ancient Polynesian rhythms and modern latino, rock, pop, reggae, and jazzy, played on instruments ranging from electric keyboard to horse jaw.

Dan's mind began to churn with the possibilities—a low-angle shot at slow speed to capture the awesome power and movement of the performance, then maybe some behind-the-scenes candid, with the wild-looking guys doing something thoroughly modern ...

"As for me," Pierre was saying, "there are rocks to climb and caves to explore and body surfing and—"

"I'm beginning to hope it'll take a couple of weeks to fix the ship or we'll never fit it all in," Chris said.



As Melissa stepped out of the Zodiac, Pierre slipped the shell necklace he'd bought at the market over her head and bent over to kiss her cheek.

"*Torana*," he said, having just learned the rapanui word from the vendor. "It means *bonjour*."

After a brief consultation, the group, with the exception of Nancy, who wanted to wait in Hanga Roa until Michael arrived, decided to rent bicycles and go first to Ana Kakenga, a cave just a short ride from town.

"It's an ancient lava tube," Dan told them. "It splits at the end into two 'windows' that overlook a steep drop down to the ocean. That'll all be silhouetted no matter what time of day we get there, and then by the time we go on up the coast, the sun will be lower down and not so harsh. Perfect."



Nancy gazed at the row of boats at the fisherman's harbor, hoping Dan would give her a picture of it. There was no doubt in her mind he'd have taken one; how could he have resisted the repetition of shape in the ten or twelve little boats tied up at the dock, combined with their contrasting colors—red, yellow, blue, green, and red again—all set off against the azure water?

"I bet you're thinking about Andy again, aren't you?"

Michael's voice came from just behind her left ear, startling her out of her reverie. She was further startled to realize that she had *not* been thinking about Andy—had not, in fact, thought about him in some time.

The realization made her feel slightly guilty. It was exactly what everyone had predicted would happen, and exactly what she had vehemently denied ever could. She had been so certain that she and Andy could weather any amount of separation. But it was not, she understood now, simply a matter of separation. So much had taken place since she had left home. She was a different person now, not at all the same girl she'd been when she had begun the voyage. And Andy? Had he become a different person, too?

And either way, if he had or if he had *not*, would he be right for her now?

She turned and smiled at Michael, and put her hand in his.



At Anakena Bay, Dan rummaged through his camera bag in search of his polarizing filter while the others headed straight for the water. He would need the filter to keep the spectacularly clear deep cerulean sky from looking washed out on film. Anakena was one of two sandy beaches on the island, and Pierre and Melissa could hardly wait to dive in. This spot was the very image of a tropical paradise; but for the *ahu* with six standing Moai beside a grove of palm trees and several more toppled on the ground, they might have been anywhere in Polynesia.

The warm water felt delicious on Melissa's skin. It was as if the serene sea were washing away all the tension that had accumulated in her body over the past days. She thought she had held up fine through all the stress, but as she floated, she could feel layer after layer of anxiety sloughing off and being replaced by a sense of blissful tranquility. She watched Pierre swimming a little farther out, his arms slicing through the water with strong swift strokes, and felt a small well of pure elation bubbling up from deep within her.

Pierre turned and swam toward her. He smiled and began to nudge her, wordlessly, like a playful dolphin, beckoning her to follow him. She laughed and ducked under the water, emerging behind him. Wrapping her legs

around his waist, her arms around his neck, she began to nudge him back, then abruptly pushed herself off. She dived under again, coming to the surface a few feet ahead of him. She flicked her thumb in the water, splashing him on the nose, and began to swim away, grinning at him over her shoulder.

Not to be outdone, Pierre soon overtook her. And so the game continued, the two swimming in tandem, one overtaking the other, oblivious to their companions and the passage of time, as if they were the only people in the whole world.



Red dust filled their nostrils as the Floaties and ship's crew made their way to Orongo late in the afternoon of their last day on the island. All of them, at one time or another during their stay, had already visited this awe-inspiring site, which was perched on a thin ridge with a crater on one side and a heart-clutching thousand-foot drop into the Pacific on the other. Dan had gone two mornings in a row to try to capture the birdman petroglyphs here in the diffused light of the rising sun. Now they were all assembling to watch the sun set against the black basalt cliffs.

Easter Island, they all agreed, was the high point of their travels so far. This was partly because of the amazing nature of the place itself, and partly because of the intense and poignant pleasure they felt in anything and everything since finding themselves still alive after their harrowing experience.

Looking out at the three small islets just offshore, some tried to put into words what they had most enjoyed about their four days here.

For Captain Marzynski, who had set foot on land that afternoon for the first time since they arrived, leaving the boat in Henry's capable hands, it was simply that the repairs had gone off without a hitch. All of the parts had arrived on schedule, all of the equipment was functioning normally, and all of the items on the Lloyd's inspector's list had been checked off as satisfactory.

For Melissa, the best thing was the incredible feeling of connection she felt with Pierre. She'd been attracted to him from the moment she met him, but the hijacking had strengthened their relationship. They had been each other's emotional lifeline throughout the whole awful mess. It was only now, she reflected, that she was even beginning to understand the true meaning of a serious relationship. All this, however, wasn't really the sort of thing she wanted to offer the group as the highlight of her stay on the island.

"Swimming at Anakena Beach," she said.

Then Pierre immediately said the same thing, with an adoring look in her direction.

Dave, sitting between Anika and Mac, said he had been thrilled to learn something new about the long ears versus short ears controversy—to find that, in fact, although the ears of the Moai were of varying sizes, the theory that this was a reflection of a significant social denominator in Rapa Nui culture might well have been based on a mistranslation. He would have gone on at length about the subject but realized in time that this was not the moment to do so.

"What about you, Mac?" he asked instead.

But Mac was lost in his own thoughts. Strange it was, he'd been musing, that he'd been to this isolated island in the middle of an ocean on the other side of the world from his home far more times than he'd ever been to the isles of Scotland. He'd never made it to the Outer Hebrides, and there'd been only the one time to the Isle of Skye in the Inner Hebrides and then to Orkney. That time with Caroline ...

Now then. Best not go down *that* road, he told himself. This is no time to be dredging up old sorrows.

"Mac?"

He became aware that Dave was speaking to him, and the entire group looking at him expectantly.

"What was your favorite thing about Easter Island this trip?"

"Och," he said, blurting out the first thing that entered his mind. "*Pisco.*"

Several of the students became to titter. He was referring to the strong local beverage made from fermented grapes.

"Not bad once you get the taste for it," Mac continued, oblivious to the captain, who was clearing his throat. "Of course I don't recommend drinkin' it straight. I suppose ye could, but I'd definitely no' advise it."

Now Anika was leaning over Dave and shaking her head at Mac.

"No, *piscola's* what ye want, *pisco* and Coke ..."

Suddenly aware of the efforts being made to shut him up, Mac changed tack.

"No, no. Just a wee joke, that, and a silly one. What I liked best this time is what I like best every time, watchin' the young folks gettin' their first peek at this amazin' place. That and bein' alive to see it again myself."

Anika had been about to say that her favorite thing had been scuba diving off Motu Tautara—and that *had* been an extraordinary experience; the marine life was incredible, the water crystal clear. But now, as she watched the sun sinking low on the horizon, creating a dazzling array of pink, coral, and crimson above the sapphire sparkle of the sea, and as she looked around at the bright and eager faces of her students, the easy smiles of her colleagues, she said instead that *this* was her favorite, this moment right now, in this place of magical beauty, shared with all of them, and with the prospect of more fantastic places to come.

“Tahiti, Samoa, New Caledonia, Brisbane, Darwin, Bali ... The names alone are exciting!” she said.

“Aye,” Mac said. Then, raising an imaginary glass in a toast, he added, “And here’s to smooth sailin’ to them all!”

(To be continued.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for Book Clubs

1. One of the major differences between private and public education is class size. Do you feel it is an advantage to be in a class of eight versus a class of twenty?
2. On the ship, teachers are exposed to their students 24/7. How would you feel in this situation if you were a teacher?
3. Are there positives, from a student perspective, to the 24/7 exposure?
4. Do you feel there is an advantage to actually being in a new country to learn their culture as opposed to learning about it from a book?
5. Keeping in mind that the drug involvement is fictional, if you were a parent in this situation, would you want to be advised as the incident develops or after a successful conclusion?
6. If money was of no concern, would you enroll your children in such a program?
7. Discipline is an important part of the program. How would you have handled the students caught drinking in the Galapagos?
8. If your child was onboard the *Inspiration* during an incident like this, would you allow them to continue the program or would you want them to come home?

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