

MARSHA & DANNY JONES THRILLERS



# THE PRIVATEER CLAUSE



# KEN ROSSIGNOL

***The Privateer Clause***  
***Danger lurks on every cruise!***  
***Marsha & Danny Jones Thriller***

***Ken Rossignol***

Second Edition

***Edited by Robert W. Walker***

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***Kenneth C. Rossignol***

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*is dedicated to Donna*

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# Chapter One

The day the *Sea Empress* was brought into port in Hampton Roads for dry-dock, the crew was happy it was late in the evening as the Seven Seas Company would have to pay to put them up in a hotel. This all before being bused to the airport for transfer to their new assignments.

By the time that *Sea Empress* was cut in two, had a new section installed, and was refurbished, 9 months would pass and few of them would return to their old jobs.

The chief engineer, the cranky Scotty O'Neil, would stay with the ship as the company's representative, to examine every facet of the task of ripping apart a 10-year-old cruise ship and adding a new section to let it compete with newer ships by adding amenities and another 1,000 passengers on every voyage.

The long trip from the Atlantic into the Norfolk harbor took the illustrious cruise liner, once the pride of the Seven Seas Company, past the aircraft carriers *USS Reagan* and *USS Nimitz*, one named for the architect of American sea power that defeated the Japanese in WWII, and the other for the U.S. President that restored American dominance in the oceans with a 600 ship Navy 40 years later.

The *Sea Empress* would soon once again be among the top ships of the Seven Seas fleet of cruise ships.

The lengthening and refurbishment of the *Sea Empress* would boast new specialty restaurants, special surfing, golf and skeet shooting ranges adding to many new fitness and fun options for the liner.

But the new rigging of electronics, power and navigational aids were the responsibilities of O'Neil, who was more than concerned about the ability of the Virginia shipyard to do the work that should have been done by the shipyard in Norway, which originally built the beautiful vessel in 1998.

The Seven Seas Company was trying to put as many liners to work as possible since they had perfected the winning formula for sea adventures and were quickly racking up customer loyalty percentages that had been unheard of in the industry. In fact, the customer base for *Sea Empress* was among the best of their fleet of 32 ships.

When the *Sea Empress* was finished, she would be re-christened by the First Lady of the United States, Lydia Bryan, as the Seven Seas Chairman Fred Barton was an old friend and political ally of President John Hanson Bryan, and the new president was clearly trying to do all he

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could to rebuild the industrial base of America, which included re-invigorating the ship building industry—an important part of his plan to achieve his presidential goals.

As the U. S. steel industry began to rebound in 2007, just prior to the near depression of 2008, so had the shipyards, even though they were now increasingly being bought by foreign companies. But the new Bryan Administration was happy to get the jobs and stop the hemorrhaging of the foreign trade deficit. The President, if he could add jobs then he didn't mind who owned the companies as long as Americans were working.

While Chief Engineer O'Neil watched from the bridge, the Norfolk pilot was directing the bridge crew on how to navigate to the dry-dock at Hampton Roads, and the large cruise ship was gently slipping into the waiting grasp of what would become its landing for the next year and a half. The shipyard authorities were eager for the project to start, and an army of men and warehoused materials had been assembled to start work the very next day.

From an engineering standpoint, as the ship was already 962 feet long, the mission to add another 200 feet to the *Sea Empress* was achievable but more ambitious than previous projects to stretch a ship.

Month after month, as the seasons changed and even the skyline in Norfolk and Hampton Roads began to take on a different appearance, the gleaming new *Sea Empress* began to take shape.

Scotty O'Neil was there every day to make sure welding, bolts, steel plating and cables were placed and attached as called for in the blueprints with Scotty keeping a sharp eye for contractor shortcuts.

Scotty caught plenty of shady deals on non-specification materials and stopped them in their tracks, each time causing the shipyard to be penalized under the contract.

As much as the Seven Seas Company loved Scotty, the Virginia Shipyard Ltd hated him. VSL had someone following Scotty around every day, equipped with a direct line to their naval architects, engineers and their attorneys.

After filing his reports to the Seven Seas Company, O'Neil was picked up at the shipyard each day at 7pm for the trip back to his hotel by a special detachment of Black & Perkins Security.

The former Special Forces operatives of Black & Perkins protected the engineer around the clock at a cost of \$1550 an hour for each of the four man guard. The nearly \$2,000,000 cost of security could turn out to be a

very small part of the contracted \$350 million renovation of the *Sea Empress*. But, it could be the most important cost item by ensuring the safety of the man who insured the integrity of the contracted work and kept track of the materials being installed as agreed with no substitutions.

It was about three months into the refurbishment that the huge ship had been cut apart and the new section which had already been built in advance was slid into the gap, and the process of melding it into the center of the ship began.

Scotty was lifted on a cherry picker to see deep into the bowels of the ship. He was lowered by a boom and used scaffolding to climb so he could peer into every detail of how the huge ship was united. Giant bolts, huge plates of steel, welding, and more, using the latest computer assisted design and construction known to the ship building industry, the VSL put to work the expertise that they had gained from construction and repair of Navy vessels to the *Sea Empress*, a project that they hoped would be the first of a rebirth of American shipyard construction.

The project came about at a heavy cost to the taxpayers in the form of tax incentives to VSL.

The firm reaped millions in tax credits for landing the contract with the international cruise line and all of the politicians stood in line to take credit for what the new Bryan Administration had pushed and prodded through a reluctant Democratically controlled Congress.

The left-wing Democrats had yelped for years about tax cuts for business, and now that they were calling the shots, they couldn't find anyone around capable of competing with foreign industry to employ skilled tradesmen. That is except for the businesses that they once pilloried during elections.

While the Democrats had talked a big game of wanting to return high paying jobs to American workers, they didn't like the idea of voting for tax credits for American shipyards.

In short, the Democrats were stuck and the deal was struck.

It was the very first victory of the new Democrat Administration after taking over from George W. Bush. The Democrats did exactly what they had accused the Republicans of doing but no one appeared to have noticed, and the desperation had grown since the stock market had plunged and unemployment had soared. Nowadays, tax incentives to create new jobs suddenly had become Job One.

At the start of the fourth month of the renovation, disaster struck the *Sea Empress* project when Scotty O'Neil found steel plating that was not

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of the strength contracted for had been used in bridging the gap of the new section and the aft portion of the ship.

He stopped the sneaky deal cold, and as a result the penalty to VSL was more than \$5 million, a costly breach of the contract, so it was no surprise that on the following day the security detail for O'Neil was doubled thanks to the shrewd Henry Boston, President of Seven Seas Company.

Henry Boston had risen through the ranks of Seven Seas to the post of president the hard way. He started as an engineer's assistant and worked in the company's ships back in the 1980's when the stockholders first began to bet on the popularity of cruises after the downturn in the industry in the 60's and 70's as jets traveling across the oceans left the slow boats in their jet streams.

But the Seven Seas Company grew and grew, and soon Henry Boston left the mechanical side of the company and landed a position with management, due to his taking courses during his three months off from voyages each year. Since he was used to working seven days a week at sea, he wisely used the compressed off months to fashion a school schedule with the University of Maryland at College Park, not far from his home on Rhode River near Edgewater.

Boston was up early every day and daily spent 14 hours at the campus, and on Saturdays, he had classes from 10am till 6pm. Sundays were for studying, and in two years, he had gained a bachelor's degree and in another year, Boston had racked up a master's degree in business management.

Soon he was rotating around the Seven Seas fleet as a business manager, going from ship to ship, inspecting the purser's office operations and spending every other month at the corporate headquarters in Baltimore.

Boston knew from experience that contractors and vendors routinely cut corners, and that this practice was the enemy of his business, so he was constantly seeking out such intrusions was an important part of risk management.

Boston knew Scotty O'Neil from his days in the engine rooms, and he knew he could rely on the crusty old pro to do his job in protecting the firm's investment in the *Sea Empress* renovation.

After the steel plate switch that O'Neil had caught, Boston flew into Norfolk on the company's Gulfstream, and he was met at the airport by a

Black & Perkins detail that drove him through the high security gates of VSL, so he could meet with Scotty at his office trailer next to the looming Sea Empress.

Scotty had installed cameras throughout the work areas of the vessel and had a bank of monitors in the office with all of them recorded on CD's. If anything moved in the liner, that movement was recorded. Just as Scotty was protected around the clock by two armed guards, so too was the office itself.

Boston wanted O'Neil to bring in a team of engineers to assist him and to monitor even more specialized devices, all for the purpose of keeping tabs on the intricate, behind-the-scenes work of outfitting the Sea Empress.

Seven Seas didn't become the largest fleet of cruise ships in the world by failing to pay attention to details.

Scotty was used to less bloodthirsty tactics of the Norwegian builders, but he reluctantly gave in to Boston's wishes to protect the firm from the vagaries of American labor and the single-minded approach to profit on the part of firms no longer concerned with reputation for quality, but just the bottom line.

The trouble with a team of engineers was dealing with six new egos and bright minds at once. Geniuses who so quickly and easily got away from the focus of getting the job done. At least that's what he thought.

When the squad of ship designers, engineering architects, and computer specialists arrived, Scotty found himself surprisingly impressed. The five men and one woman showed up with six vans full of computer and diagnostic equipment, and they quickly filled the large office trailer that Seven Seas had set up on the dry-dock next to the Sea Empress.

Scotty had the modular office firm bring in another double-wide trailer to be attached to his own trailer with a secure doorway. As a result, Seven Seas now had a dockside inspection facility of more than 5,000 square feet. Along with the extra inspectors, Seven Seas increased the security detail to six more experienced Black & Perkins agents.

Scotty believed it was very unlikely that VSL would fool around with any further material substitutions.

The port security to get into the shipyard was layered as well, with Homeland Security, Norfolk Police, Coast Guard and VSL all participating, but Black & Perkins decided that it was necessary to put together a perimeter around the inspection office and soon an 8-foot chain link fence with razor wire surrounded Scotty O'Neil's now elaborate office.

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When the *Sea Empress* came down the waves, this ship was going to be a showcase for Seven Seas and kick off a new round of competitiveness for the U. S. shipbuilding industry. As a result, Boston vowed that nothing was going to get in the way of the goal.

The security zone which enveloped the office also was wrapped around the entire dry-dock of the *Sea Empress*. This job was going forward despite the number of enemies of the task coming from so many directions.

## ***Chapter Two***

Across the fields of the large waterfront farm which Black & Perkins had bought on Southern Maryland's peninsula known as Newtown Neck, a 350 acre point which had been owned by the Jesuits right on the Potomac River, Oliver Ross had set up his the anti-terrorist training center. Ross had selected this area due to its easy access to the Atlantic, a marina to dock fast attack craft, and its own private airstrip capable of landing any company planes up to the size of a small jet on its 5,000 foot runway.

Several old barns had been converted into offices and dormitories, and soon Black & Perkins had a much better facility than it had previously established in the mountains of Georgia.

B & P could now rehearse rescue scenarios on the Potomac using both surface craft and helicopters in the missions and using the dense forest and sandy beaches to simulate many different scenarios at this tidewater Maryland location.

While the mountain terrain in the company camp in Georgia was good for training exercises for the firm, the new Maryland facility would allow it to become self-sufficient and not have to use commercial ports or airports.

The security firm brought in a 225' patrol craft it purchased from the Coast Guard and kept it moored just offshore.

The ship was fueled and ready to go at any time due to the new challenges brought by the return of piracy on the open seas.

The company had already put a sister ship to the *Resilient*, the *Resolute*, to work in the pirate-laden waters off Africa and two more ships, *Retribution* and *Retaliation*, were being outfitted now in Liverpool.

*Revenge* and *Reprisal* were already finished being equipped with the latest in electronics and armament. They were already positioned in the Caribbean where they could be deployed immediately. The clock was ticking, and the cost for each of the ships was already paid for by one of the firm's best customers. The daily price tag of the vessels was \$25,000, a cheap price in comparison to the steep price being paid to ransom a ship back from the pirates on the coast of Africa.

All of the new patrol craft that Black & Perkins had bought from the Coast Guard were ideal for their purpose and easy to modernize for their new jobs, which were not too different from their original missions. The

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advantage to their purchase was that their power plants were up-to-date, they were fast, and they were available.

Why the government didn't do the same thing Black & Perkins did was likely answerable only by the influence of Sen. Emily Fountain of Oregon, who was able to win the construction contract for new replacement Coast Guard vessels for a Portland based firm.

Shipping companies turned to Black & Perkins after they were frustrated by the lame response of the world's navies to the pirates of Somalia attacking and hijacking hundreds of billions of dollars of ships with precious cargoes.

The pirates were nothing more than a water-borne mafia tolerated by a nation of warlords and anarchists who the world's leaders had failed to deal with in any convincing manner.

A few isolated incidents of courage and bravery on the part of both the British Navy and the Indian Navy had taken place with Pirate mother ships sunk, and all hands lost after the pirates had fired on these navies, who understandably returned fire from their vessels; fire that was on the mark. But those few incidents were bright spots in a sea of mediocrity and ineptitude, along with indifference on the part of major nations.

The U.S. Navy was busy with two wars, international terrorism from Al Qaeda, and fending off budget cuts at home from lefty loonies in Congress who were out to cut the nation's defense spending in half.

But now Black & Perkins, which had successfully engaged terrorists on behalf of governments and businesses for the past 15 years, was now guarding the high seas for their clients.

Slow boats to China may have been a figure of speech, but the operative word of slow still applied to super-tankers filled with oil headed for the customers of wealthy Arab sultans who didn't take kindly to paying out huge sums to pirates.

The Arab nations which depended on their product getting to market were stunned by the numb response of the world's consumer nations, most of whom had extensive naval forces.

History was being repeated, a history rich in Muslim pirates of Africa attacking shipping, holding vessels for ransom and setting up a system of advance tributes to allow shipping to proceed unmolested.

Now, Black & Perkins was being hired by several Arab nations, two dozen steamship companies, and Seven Seas, the largest cruise ship operator.

Seven Seas President Henry Boston had his work cut out for him as he flew from one task to another. He had not taken a day off from work for two years and between the Sea Empress project, the construction of a new class of ship that would sail with 5500 guests each, with the first two underway, and the looming piracy issue haunting his cruise line, the days started early and ended late.

Boston's jet landed at Black & Perkins Newtown Neck just after dark, and Oliver Ross drove to the end of the runway in a black Suburban to meet the firm's new customer.

The president of Black & Perkins had just arrived at the facility to meet Boston.

Kevin Clinton had been a few minutes early, and he was glad to be in the dining room of the large farmhouse as he was able to taste the famous oyster stew made by Aunt Lulu who worked for the Newtown facility.

Lulu was a large black woman who knew how to cook after spending 30 years working for a Southern Maryland restaurant which catered to Navy customers at Lexington Park. She got her new job by answering an ad on the internet that her daughter had spotted. Lulu, like many people her age, had absolutely no knowledge of the internet and didn't use computers, but her daughter, Viola, worked for the FBI in Washington, commuting back and forth on a bus each day from their home in Oraville, a small rural area in historic St. Mary's County.

Viola Curtis called her mother and told her to call a man named Ross to answer an ad for a job as a cook, and within a week, after passing all the background checks, Lulu was working for Black & Perkins, only she didn't know who the firm was or what they did; all she knew was that she had to cook up good food for hungry men and a few women, at least two dozen people a day.

Hot breakfasts, good lunches and ample dinners for people who seemed to really work up an appetite training for something that she really didn't understand, but for what Ross was paying her, she didn't care.

Lulu now had health care covered including full dental while making \$50,000 a year, and she was provided living quarters at the farm, a brand new double-wide home that no one had ever lived in before.

While she couldn't have visitors there, her own home that she shared with her daughter was just 15 minutes away. But with overtime flowing, Lulu rarely went home. She was cooking up a storm, making the most money she had ever seen in her 60 years and was happy. Besides, she

only had to cook for a couple dozen a day when she was used to fixing meals for several hundred.

Hardy chow, is what Ross told her to fix, as she had spent three decades cooking for pilots at Pax River NAS, she knew what they wanted: thick steaks, loads of homemade mashed potatoes, crab cakes, soft crabs, stuffed rockfish, and plenty of steamed shrimp. With Lulu's special oyster stew, any time spent at Newtown Neck was a dream comes true for Black & Perkins team members. Breakfasts featured brains and eggs and grits, creamed chip beef and waffles, along with country sausage and turkey bacon for those on a little more strict diet.

Cold weather practices in boarding ships in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay after low level flights by helicopter from the base on the Potomac to surprise opponents were dangerous, exhilarating, and made for building up a hell of an appetite.

Clinton was sitting at a table in the kitchen of the farmhouse, trying out Lulu's oyster stew.

Lulu took four hours to fix her stew; she would first take a pound of smoked bacon and cook it up until it was brittle. To the bacon, after pouring off excess drippings, she would add a full stalk of chopped celery, two whole chopped Vidalia onions, and two tablespoons of chopped garlic. With two tablespoons of black pepper, a bunch of fresh rosemary and a big dash of thyme, Lulu's oyster stew was beginning to take shape.

After this mixture slowly cooked in a large iron skillet, Lulu had brought from home, she poured it all into a large pot and then poured in a gallon of shucked oysters into the iron skillet, still having the bacon grease, along with a good amount of oyster 'liquor', the oyster fluid in the gallon, and let it thoroughly cook up until the oysters were all much smaller and constricted.

Then, along with a full pound of fake butter, the new low cholesterol kind that she had gotten used to including in her recipes, Lulu added a gallon of skim milk.

This wasn't quite the same way she had cooked all her life, but she was learning to make concessions, but no one minded, due to the seasonings she used. Lulu's oyster stew was raved about and Black & Perkins team members always asked Lulu for a quart of her stew to take with them when they left.

She never disappointed them as she made up her stew nearly every day that she could get shucked oysters from Copsey's Oyster House, as she just wasn't going to shuck them herself. Those days were long gone.

In her younger days, Lulu could shuck out a dozen oysters in two minutes, and she had won first place many times at the national oyster shucking contest. But her hands had been slowed down by the years, and it was too easy to call to the local seafood dealer to order what she needed.

"Aunt Lulu, this is the best stew I have ever had," said Clinton. "Can I get some to take home with me when I leave?"

"Mr. Clinton, I will whip up a batch just for you. Just you tell me the day before and Alice and I will make extra. These folks here at this farm sure do eat a lot. They must get a hard day's work in doing whatever it is that ya'll do here. Now, I know its secret, but its sure good at building up an appetite, reminds me of those Navy boys at Pax River. They were always hungry as starved hounds, too."

"Aunt Lulu, thanks. I will love taking some stew home with me and you are right, when our folks go through a day of training, it's hard work, wears them out for sure, but it absolutely doesn't slow down their appetites any. And hey, keeping everyone here instead of going out to dinner is a lot better, keeps them out of trouble in the town bars and helps them concentrate on their jobs," said Clinton as he dipped out another bowl of oyster stew.

Henry Boston got out of the blue and white Gulfstream corporate jet and walked over to the Suburban while Ross grabbed his bag.

"Sir, Mr. Clinton is waiting for you in the kitchen. Aunt Lulu has been cooking up a storm today, and there are only ten of us here tonight for dinner," said Ross, a strong and barrel-chested ex-cop from Denver.

Ross followed Boston into the large farmhouse which in earlier times had been a country retreat for the religious order from Baltimore. It's conversion into the B & P training center was a natural.

Boston hadn't been anywhere for home-cooked country meals in a long time, as most of his dinners were prepared by chefs in expensive eateries or frozen entrees that he stuck into a microwave at the office.

"Well, Henry, I can see you were able to make it here in time for dinner," said Kevin Clinton. "You are showing up in time for the best doggone cooking of your life."

"I haven't seen you for a long time, Kevin and while I had hoped that we might finish our meal without any interruptions, I can use some home

cooking,” agreed Boston. “Now is Aunt Lulu’s stew really as good as Oliver told me.”

“Judge for yourself, she just carried in a big pot of stew and a platter of fried oysters to the dining room, and we’re ready to sit down to eat,” replied Clinton.

After devouring the oysters as well as a platter of fresh pan-fried rockfish, steamed shrimp, Maryland crab cakes and fresh cooked kale, along with a plate of late fall tomatoes, a full bowl of plump green beans fixed with ham hocks and country ham for seasoning, Clinton, Boston, Oliver and seven B & P trainers awaiting new team members to arrive, cleared the long dining room table and carried the dishes into the kitchen. There Aunt Lulu’s helper Alice was preparing to wash dishes, pots and pans.

“Well Henry, why don’t we go into the parlor for drinks and to talk about your request,” asked Clinton.

“I am now more convinced than ever that it was prudent to meet in person after that great meal. If only we could get our chefs to have a southern fried seafood night on our ships,” said Boston as he laughed. “We would have to widen the doorways.”

“We now have word from our security director, after his meeting with the Homeland Security people, that we can not only expect piracy in the Mediterranean, but in the Caribbean as well,” said Boston. “We are looking real hard at Venezuela at being a safe haven for pirates as well as Somalia. Since Kaddafi cooled his heels and paid the compensation for the Lockerbie bombing and made his deal with the U. S., Libya has turned pretty docile and is no longer any threat.”

“We are prepared to assist you, Henry,” said Clinton. “We have invested in six patrol craft, and our intelligence tells us the same thing—there’s no way that any cruise ships can operate in the area of Somalia, and that things can get pretty dicey in the Med as well.”

“It’s just a matter of time before a fast attack craft comes alongside a cruise ship and takes it over. Our scenarios we have been drilling and practicing for, they call for a complete takeover of a typical cruise ship in less than ten minutes, a ransom demand in fifteen, and wire transfers in an hour in order to free the ship.”

“My God.”

“These hijackings, after the first time, may take place without the passengers even becoming aware.”

"But, Kevin, that first time could not only kill a lot of passengers, it could kill our business and take down our fleet of ships! Can you imagine pirates coming on board a ship, cutting the throats of a dozen passengers while videotaping the carnage, and then posting it on the internet? We couldn't book a passenger for years after such a mess," lamented Boston. "But I want to tell you something, make sure you understand that we are not going to wait until we are attacked. Our customers are our business, but most of them are also our countrymen as well and our foreign customers come to us because we take their safety just as seriously as showing them a good time."

"I totally agree and completely understand."

"Our employees bring their families on our ships, because they know they are treated well and are safe. I don't want a single customer hurt by one of these bastards, I am not going to preside over what happened on the *Achille Lauro* where that guy in the wheel chair from New Jersey was shot and thrown overboard by PLO terrorists. It just isn't happening here on our ships. And we are going to allot the necessary resources to protect our customers and our business."

"Well, Henry, after the events of the last year off the African coast, I thought we were moving in the right direction, to be able to respond to the needs of commercial shipping after the lame response of the world's navies," said Clinton. "I don't blame the military as they all take orders from their nation's leaders, many of them who carry their nuts in a silk purse."

This made Boston laugh heartily.

"But I wonder how we can ramp up to this sea-born challenge more than we have already," said Clinton. "We have these six patrol craft equipped with fast attack helicopters capable of landing a six-man team on a vessel, and our patrol craft also carry eight 31' speed boats. We have RPG's, rockets, torpedoes and machine guns on our ships, and we are forward basing them in the areas where we hope we can make a difference."

"But are you putting them all in the Mediterranean?" asked Boston.

"We had planned on it, but right now two will be in the Med, there are two in the Caribbean, and two more coming as fast as we can send them after being refitted," said Clinton.

"Well, you can give me a contract to sign right now," said Boston, "or just start the billing, but not only do I want the best protection B & P can give my company, but I want you to ramp it up a step and undertake intelligence to hunt these bastards down and eliminate them."

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Clinton was startled and gave Boston a hard look to determine if what he'd just heard was a joke.

Boston looked him dead in the eye and said carefully, "Kevin, it's not good enough to simply ride shotgun on our ships."

"What do you have in mind then?"

"We have to do more. More in the way of *ahhh* preventative care, so to speak."

"I don't have time for riddles, Kevin. Speak plainly."

"We have to go after the cells of these guys and kill the pirates in their lairs. All of the history of piracy along the east coast of the U. S. during the 1700's and the Barbary Coast of Africa in the early 1800's and even now in Somalia shows that the only way to stop them is to kill them."

"That's likely true enough."

"Sir, only hunting them down and killing them stops them," Boston reiterated. "The payments that we see now with commercial shipping only *embolden* these guys, and they are real animals. Can you imagine them getting a cruise ship, and what they would do just for jollies? The PLO was cruel in the Achille Lauro hijacking, but I don't think we have seen anything compared to what today's pirates are willing to do."

"But Henry, we aren't sanctioned by any government to hunt down pirates and kill them," said Clinton, still unsure exactly what Boston was proposing. "To provide screening and defense against the threat of attack is one thing, but to go after these bastards while they are on the sovereign territory of another nation is quite a different thing."

"Well that's what I want you to do," said Boston. "We have talked to CIA and Homeland Security and while they want to take action, they still say that the civilian bosses just wring their hands, make speeches, and put the damper on any real action."

"I know, I know. Going after terrorists is one thing, but these professional pirates seem to have carved out a niche of security for themselves and extreme danger for the rest of the world," interrupted Clinton.

"And besides, the international law of the sea sanctions any effort to eradicate piracy and no one will even know we are doing it, because any publicity on our actions will ignite the fear factor, which would be almost as turbulent on our business as a real attack. The clause we will act under is the *Privateer Clause*. That makes it legal and I have the budget."

“Okay, Henry, we will go find the pirates and kill them in their lairs and in the meantime protect your ships from attack,” said Kevin. “But where in the hell did you dig up this Privateer Clause?”

“Kevin, our young legal guy found it; he’s a bright young attorney, only 36, from someplace called Leonardtown. We met him when we closed on the property for our base on the Potomac. He did the paperwork and solved some serious issues with the closing, so we hired him for our legal staff. It goes back through international law to 1686 in the Caribbean, when pirates were raiding shipping at will and later by an Act of the English Parliament where privateers, who were really pirates themselves, were given clemency by the Jamaican Governor to return to an honest life and leave piracy behind by becoming privateers and hunting down their former fellow pirates,” said Boston. “It was ‘the act for restraining and persuading pirates to return to the honest life’, really those were the exact words, which I don’t think we can hold out to the Somali pirates, but we can sure as hell operate under it. Pardons were required by the English Parliament in 1692 for those who operated as Privateers.”

“That’s it, now its common law and here is a company check for \$10 million as an advance,” said Boston as he pulled an envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Clinton.

“That ought to last about a week,” laughed Clinton. “After it runs out I might return to piracy.”

## *Chapter Three*

The last thing that Luis wanted was trouble, but that's what the short order cook onboard Sea Empress got. Luis had worked for fifteen years on cruise ships since signing up for a job with a manpower agency advertised in a job center in Marigot on the Caribbean island of St. Maarten.

He had been selected for the maiden voyage of the new Sea Empress and was responsible for his unit at poolside on the top deck, with fifteen grill cooks working for him, all serving up steak sandwiches, cheeseburgers, hot dogs, onion rings, fries and cole slaw for sixteen hours a day.

Luis Menendez was born to a French woman of mixed blood, who had a one night stand with a Honduran government official while she worked at a café on St. Maarten in 1974. While his mother worked at a resort on the Dutch side each day, Luis was raised by his grandmother in their small apartment tucked away overtop of a jewelry store that catered to tourists.

The street was just blocks from the Marigot harbor and was wide enough for two-way traffic as long as vehicles didn't partially block the street while pulling up on the curb.

Luis spent his days going to school, running the narrow streets of the old town with his friends, and as he got older, trying to get part-time odd jobs at the Fort Louis Marina.

Luis' persistence impressed an American who kept his sailing yacht at the marina, and soon Luis was earning more money than his mother, and in the process making a mark on life as being his own man, despite a lack of example from his father he had never met.

Luis was a hard worker, a trait that Mel Hathaway, a retired U. S. State Department diplomat treasured since he and his wife, Rose, moved to St. Maarten, bought a villa, and supplemented his retirement with sailing charters on their catamaran, 'Witch Doctor'.

Mel was happy to have Luis work as his mate, and from the time Luis was 13 until he was 18, the boy grew in many ways as Mel and Rose tutored Luis in language, culture and math. The simple education Luis obtained from the local Catholic school on the French side of St. Maarten evolved into the beginnings of a classical college education.

Luis satisfied his mother by graduating from high school at fifteen, thanks to his tutoring from Mel and Rose, while she drove tourists around in a taxi.

Unlike most other families, Luis had no brothers and sisters, and compared to other Caribbean islands which he traveled to with Mel on tourist sailing trips, St. Maarten was paradise. Mel would captain, Rose would often go along as the cook, and Luis was the mate for general care of the guests and performing maintenance on the large catamaran.

St. Kitts, a popular destination, was clearly an island of two worlds, of sad poverty and opulent wealth, while his home island was widely prosperous, with the French and Dutch competitive in many ways as they shared the large island, home to more than 100,000 people, at peace for hundreds of years, but still unwilling to cooperate on sewage, water or electric generating plants.

St. Maarten was bustling with tourists, and at the center of the Caribbean economy, with a healthy agricultural trade, still the attraction of a European settlement made the island different from the banana republic nations. This island, split in half, proved to be two outposts of two different nations, and no native of either nation's part of the island noted to visitors that they were anything but Dutch or French.

In addition to Mel and Rose, Luis picked up an education from the wealthy tourists who paid handsomely for sailing trips from island to island; lessons that would prove to be invaluable for the rest of his life, some of them positive, and one which would haunt him and torture his dreams forever.

On one of the first summer's sailing trips from St Maarten to St. Lucia, Luis was only fifteen when he was introduced to the whims and wickedly wonderful ways of American girls.

A family of four had hired Mel's 65' catamaran for a week-long adventure, stopping at five islands with snorkeling every day, some overnight stays for sightseeing and shopping, and enough fishing to put fresh fish and prawns on the galley dinner table.

On the second night out from St. Maarten, when Mel was standing the night watch as they sailed to their next stop, and Luis was supposed to be asleep when he felt a warm hand pull back the sheets of his bunk. He next felt a soft hand brush against his suddenly stiffened body and reach down to caress him.

As Luis had a habit of sleeping naked, the lithe body of 17-year-old Lisa Cohen from New Jersey felt warm and tantalizing as she began to smother his mouth with her own and began to teach him about making love for the first time in his young life.

Luis had been watching Lisa in her bikini and had even sneaked a peek while she sunbathed topless on the forward deck during that day's trip.

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She didn't weigh more than 110 pounds and sported well developed breasts which constantly drew Luis' gaze and caused him instant arousal.

But he never imagined what was about to happen that night in his bunk, with Lisa away from her parents and her younger brother who were in the guest stateroom.

Her only words were to shush him and to say, "I will show you the way to please me, and then you will be pleased."

Lisa kept her word and after an hour of mutual pleasure, she then brought the handsome young islander to a new level of excitement and exotic delight that ended his teen years and propelled him on to manhood.

Only the dim light of the silvery moon dancing across the blue ocean slightly brightened his cabin enough to take in the beautiful sight of Lisa's face and body as she guided him through hours of lovemaking, an adventure he would always remember as if it were just yesterday.

For three more years, Luis sailed with Mel and Rose, and Mel would simply wink at how much his tall and lean young mate would bring so much pleasure to their guests and tame the many young women who seemed to always need long afternoon naps.

There were times that Luis was just getting off to sleep after an encounter with a beautiful late teenager or older girls when he would be awakened a second time by the girl's mother.

On several occasions, he had two sisters about 20 years old come to his cabin at the same time. His oldest nocturnal visitors were about 65. Luis never turned any girl over 16 or any older woman away, but he drew the line at gay guests. They were on their own, as he wasn't playing on the same team, as his buddies at home would say.

Still, Luis was gracious towards the guys, but firm in his decision.

Mel could tell when the gay guys were lusting for his young mate, but while they paid handsomely for their week-long charter, still he advised Luis that it was okay for him to set his own parameters, that this was a decision he would have to learn to make in life. It was okay for him to keep his cabin door shut and locked at night and simply perform his proper chores during the day if he liked.

Luis would receive generous tips on top of his weekly salary of \$200 and there were times when Mel wondered if Luis would have enough energy to both entertain the women at night and tend to his daytime

duties. But the young mate was sturdy and strong and always able to take care of business, as long as he stayed away from the rum punch.

Luis would lead the guests on snorkeling trips and some of the women had the habit of taking off their bikinis once in the water and swimming nude. The women tied their bikinis to their floating vests and their bare bottoms bobbed like beautiful corks above the water. At the same time, their breasts glided through the water as sunlight would dance off them, and wildly decorated fish would glide by the globes fully at attention.

The women liked to tease Luis on these snorkeling trips, and he would try to direct their attention to the yellow and black striped fish, the pipe coral, and other underwater delights.

But the well-shaped guests added their own profiles to the scenic views available in the aqua blue water in the sparkling coves where Mel chose to set anchor.

Luis was supposed to keep his eye on the guests, and this duty was one he would fulfill to the maximum. He often was recruited to assist in the application of sun block, a duty to which he was always available. Luis' light complexion and even tan were in contrast to his deep blue eyes and his curly black hair, which came from his French side and marked him sharply from most other French islanders on St. Maarten. But his mother, while native islander in ancestry, was herself the offspring of a white French government official and his grandmother, who worked in a jewelry store.

Soon, Luis bought his mother her own taxi and paid for it in cash from his savings from his charter work. Mel and Rose then showed Luis how to buy a condo for his family which was on the market, and they co-signed for his loan.

The retired couple from a suburb of Washington got great joy in helping the islander until a tragic day on a charter of The Witch Doctor changed life for them all.

Two couples from America had chartered The Witch Doctor for a two-week cruise and the first 10 days were uneventful. The guests sunbathed, snorkeled, drank copious amounts of rum and ate what they caught from the sea. At night they played cards and listened to music on their electronic devises.

On three different nights, the women took turns coming to Luis' cabin. Luis didn't like to entertain guests who were onboard with their husbands or boyfriends as he heard many fights and arguments that usually ended in thundering lovemaking. He always worried about being discovered by a jealous husband.

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But he had installed a monitor in the hallway outside the guest rooms, so they could call him if needed during the night, usually for aspirin and a glass of water. The monitor also recorded loud snoring by a husband from a woman's cabin when she slipped beneath his sheets, signaling to him a certain level of safety.

One night not long after a blonde with ample dimensions left his cabin and went on deck while Mel was at the helm on a night crossing to St. Lucia, there were loud voices of anger which quickly brought Luis to his feet.

When Luis came topside, he looked toward the loud cursing to see one of the male guests holding a spear gun on his wife, who had only minutes before left Luis' bunk.

The man was drunk still from hours of partying and accusing her of having an affair with the other male guest on the cruise. A trail of blood was left by the drunken man and the trail led back down to the guest cabins where he had just killed the other man. The sobbing of the dead man's wife wafted from the cabin where the bloody body lay.

Somehow the drunken and enraged husband had reloaded the spear-gun and brought it up to shoot his wife. Mel lunged forward to try to disarm the man, but instead the raging spearman changed his aim to Mel and pulled the trigger, sending the spear through Mel and into the cockpit of the boat.

Mel gurgled blood out of his mouth and the wound in his lungs and slumped to the teak deck.

Gentle Mel was dead.

The woman picked up a flare gun at the helm and fired it at her husband, striking him in the heart and leaving a glare of flames as he toppled over the side and into the sea.

They only found his body, by chance, when fishermen pulled up their nets a few days later. A little nibbled for the wear but with the flare stuck in his heart, this U.S. Congressman had gone out in a blaze of glory, and the condition of his body supported his wife's story.

With Rose staying at home on shore for this trip, Luis had two grief-stricken women and two dead bodies on board. He quickly radioed the St. Lucia patrol boats at the port and one of them was coming alongside in just an hour.

The security officers brought a video camera and filmed the scene that they found and video-taped statements from the two women and Luis.

No charges were brought against the woman who'd killed her husband in an attempt to save any further death after Mel's life had been so callously taken. Officials had also gotten a statement from Luis, and with three people dead, among them the ship's captain, no further fault was found. One thing was certain: The *Witch Doctor's* days of sea charters were ended for now.

Rose sold the vessel at a loss and moved back to the states to live with one of her grown sons in Maryland. If poor Rose, heartbroken over the loss of her 50-year companion, had only obtained a little advice from someone about her best interests she could have kept the boat, Luis believed. He had wanted to take over managing the boat, but he could not dissuade her.

But she never figured the economic possibilities of keeping her and Mel's big Cataman. She never wanted to see The Witch Doctor again.

Luis' work had paid for his mother's home, and his quirky education and exposure to the international media which besieged St. Martin, or the Netherland's name for its half of the island, St. Maarten, made him a much sought after personality, albeit for a week, for the cable news outfits from the U.S. and Europe.

The cable TV news anchors all rented jets and swooped down on the small airport at St. Lucia where The Witch Doctor had been tied up at the security patrol dock right across from the airport. The corporate jets could land at the airport, but oddly enough, could not land when large cruise ships were docking or leaving the piers as the profile of the bigger ships would block the end of the runway as they steamed into the picturesque port.

Cruise lines which had not included St. Lucia on their itineraries were jostling for space at the docks and began to heavily advertise cruises to the island, not mentioning the gory event of weeks earlier, but not having to do so.

The one helicopter at the airport was booked for days in advance and buzzed all over The Witch Doctor with the enterprising owner selling video tape clips at a \$1,000 each, payable in advance by wire to news bureaus all over the world.

Why the international attention to this grisly scene?

The dead man who had been killed by his wife, as he attacked her and Captain Mel, had first killed his friend and fellow guest on The Witch

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Doctor and they were both U.S. Congressmen, one a Democrat from California, the other a Republican from Kentucky.

“We are live via satellite from the Caribbean Island of St. Lucia,” said Continental News anchor Dave Henney. “A lover’s triangle appears to be at the heart of the slaying of two important American lawmakers two days ago, with the wife of one dead congressman still in police custody pending a coroner’s investigation.”

There hadn’t been this kind of attention to a tropical murder since the massacre of the Jones Town followers 30 years ago at a South American church where over 900 people were fed grape Kool Aid laced with poison. At this massacre scene, others who were not members of Jones’ church, including a Congressman who had come to the cult to rescue those Americans who wanted to leave, were shot dead.

The new owner of the Witch Doctor had the vessel released to him by the police 30 days after the murder, and he was chartering visits to the scene of the murder between 2 and 4pm for a mere \$2000 a day. In the late afternoon the new owner was selling tickets to tour the vessel to cruise ship passengers who snapped photos and posed for home videos.

## *Chapter Four*

At Seven Seas Cruise Lines, Luis had worked 10 months out of every year and sent his paycheck to his mother for 12 years until first, his grandmother and then his mother passed away. He kept his condo for his own use for the two months he had off from work each year.

Now he just banked his pay and worked around the clock, waiting on the unappreciative, the overfed, and the bored crowds of patrons who paraded on and off the cruise ships each week.

As long as he lived, Luis would never understand American tourists.

They came, they saw, they ate. Then they did it all over again.

They ate breakfast for five or six hours until they took a brief break to go to the pool deck, at which they ate again at Luis' pool grill, then they went to the lunch buffet, and then when those several lines closed to retool for dinner, they went to the pizza bar, which was open 24 hours. His friend Jose worked at the pizza bar on the Lido deck, sneaking naps between being summoned to pass out slices of pizza.

Luis slept in the cramped crew quarters where bunks were three high in the narrow cabin. He had a locker for his personal belongings, and his pride and joy was the laptop he had saved up to buy last year. It just fit in his locker and the internet access that the company had granted the crew last year was his salvation from a job he found boring and mind-numbing. But in the seven hours he had to sleep, he had conditioned himself to use one hour every day for reading on the internet, emailing friends, and learning more about the world that he was strangely cut off from even though he was constantly traveling.

Prior to having his laptop, his use of a computer was limited to a friend loaning him time to surf the internet.

For Luis each day consisted of confronting the long procession of partying visitors on his ship with their requests for more junk food left him with a stone-faced expression as he filled their orders.

He no longer greeted people with a smile or was pleasant, but he was efficient, didn't allow any waste in his department and kept his food cost down, so the food and beverage director kept him in his position even when the customer relations specialist pointed out that Luis was not outgoing enough.

Luis had a lot to remember and a lot to forget.

The pool deck was amidships and consisted of a kiddies' pool, two whirlpools and one large swimming pool with two shallow ends and a large slide. At one end of the pool complex was a large bar, while the

other end hosted a stage, which was the focal point of daily hairy chest contests, hula-hoop lessons, electric slide dance lessons, and various other stunts that the cruise director and his staff used to keep the passengers entertained.

To the aft end of this deck, the 9<sup>th</sup> of 10 decks, was the spa and exercise rooms. The exercise area spanned from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> deck with a yoga workout room on the top deck.

All along the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> decks, the staff unstrapped the long deck chairs and set them out early each day. The chairs were immediately covered with bags, towels, and other paraphernalia designed to do exactly what conspicuous signs pleaded with the guests not to do; to reserve chairs for those not using them.

Around the perimeter of the 10<sup>th</sup> deck was a walking area which was used all during the course of the day for those who wanted to earn the extra portions and extra meals.

The 4<sup>th</sup> deck, which was the lifeboat staging area, also had a deck which fully wrapped the beautiful ship, but much of this deck was covered, making it a refuge from the tropical sun for those wishing to find a place to read or walkers worried about the rays.

Around both of these decks streamed the long polished teak railings. Shields under the top rail prevented items from blowing overboard or small children from slipping away. These were the decks which were the most reminiscent of the steamship era of luxury liners racing back and forth across the Atlantic.

At noon on the second sea day out of Florida, the *Sea Empress* was not far from its first port, Phillipsburg at St. Maarten.

## *Chapter Five*

The day had been a long one for Marsha and Danny Jones from the time they flew in to Fort Lauderdale from Baltimore, transferred to the cruise line port on a shuttle bus and went through the hour-long process to board the Sea Empress. Several layers of security had them weave up and around and eventually into their ship for an eight day cruise to the Southern Caribbean.

From the time they left their rancher at the edge of St. Leonard Creek near the Patuxent River, to the parking lot at BWI, and then on to their departure gate they thought they'd never make the flight on time. But they did.

As their ship sailed out of the port and took a southern course parallel to the Miami Beach coastline, the November sun rapidly sank and produced a fantastic silhouette of the Florida city.

By the time the sun had sunk behind the long line of condos, hotels and office buildings several miles away, it was time for the Joneses to retire to their cabin to freshen up for the second seating.

A trip through the casino, now open since the ship had passed into international waters, made the Joneses smile while on the way to the dining room, as they found the slots warming up to the challenge of unloading as much money as possible from the willing and the eager players already out in force.

The roulette tables were busy and gaining a crowd of onlookers as three of seven players were winning big, with one player snaring \$1,500 in less than 30 minutes. The bald man in the black turtleneck shirt was as cool as a cucumber as he placed his chips down on as many as 10 blocks at a time. His were \$5 chips, and when he racked up on 35-1 odds, he won new piles of his multi-colored chips nearly every roll. By betting \$50 at a time and winning as much as \$500 on a spin of the wheel, his occasional wipeouts with no winning spaces didn't seem to hurt him.

A blonde woman in a low-cut black cocktail dress drew fascinated stares from the onlookers and appreciation from Ian, the young male dealer. Her choice on attire may have been intentional. But while the dealer may not have given all of his attention to the table, his pit boss and

the many cameras overhead were taking in more than the attractive woman's cleavage.

The passing of passengers going from table to slot machines to being part of the audience at the craps was a constant parade, mostly people dressed in evening attire but with some hardcore casual dressers, not wanting to leave behind their lucky tee shirts, sweaters, hats or gold chains, whatever it was that brought them *luck*. Whatever the amulet, they all had them on tonight.

A tall man who was almost as heavy as he was in height, sat down at the roulette table with the man in the black turtleneck, and began to put his chips on several numbers. The big guy was using \$1 chips, and he was really happy when his number came up and the dealer paid him \$35. But he quickly noted that the player next to him was racking up five times as much when he won.

After the fellow with the \$5 chips won nearly a thousand more, he signaled to the dealer to cash him in, and he took his payoff chips and started for another table.

"Now why would you want to leave now, you're cleaning them out," said the big guy.

Amos Martin smiled and lit a cigar.

"I had to leave some for you to win. Take my lucky stool if you want," said Martin.

"*Nah*, I am doing fine right here. This is better than working for a living," said the man. "Is this your regular job?"

"Nope, I work for the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest railroad in the US, for CSX, I'm a conductor," said Martin.

"I didn't know that they had anyone on a train besides an engineer," replied the man.

"Well they have to have someone be a flag man at crossings and help with the switching of railcars, so that's me. Sometimes I switch them by remote control in the yards. Hell, we just play with trains all day," chuckled Martin. "I am only a gambler on cruise ships."

The dealer kept the game going while the two men chatted, and soon the big guy had won an impressive pile of chips.

"It looks like you left your luck on the table."

"I hope not," said Martin, who then winked at the attractive blonde who was also raking in piles of chips paid to her in neat stacks by the dealer.

Soon the woman was placing five \$1 chips at a time on nearly every number on the table, as if she were decorating cupcakes. Her payoffs grew bigger and bigger, and when her husband wandered over, he took a newfound interest in his wife, or at least her good fortune.

The husband was dressed in a leather vest and blue shirt with gold chains dangling around his neck, leather trimmed blue jeans and cowboy boots. His wife, taller than him, was in evening attire. "Well, lookie here, baby doll, you seem to be having some good luck," said Harvey Epstein.

"And don't you jinx it for me, Harvey," snapped his wife Elaine. "Just count my chips for me. I am too busy keeping track of my system for where to put these sweet little things."

When the crowd around the roulette table began to break the house, the pit boss came over and switched dealers, adding a young fellow that spoke with a Eastern European accent. The new dealer's name tag read Johan, who easily picked up where the other dealer left off, breezily noting the players' chips that they laid on the numbers to mark their bets. When the wheel was spun, Johan the dealer swept his hand over the table, about a foot off the table, as the sign that no more bets could be placed.

Shrieks let out as four of the seven players all won big, and it wasn't hard to understand, as between them they had covered the board. The dealer worked methodically to stack the proper number of winning chips on each player's bet. He first swept the table of all losing bets, and then he covered the winners.

The winners sat in awe as they counted the chips coming their way, and as the excitement built, so did the crowd of onlookers.

It was a winning night for most of the players, and the excitement ran around the table. Somehow the pit boss didn't seem too concerned.

An electronic board at the end of the table displayed the latest 20 winning numbers, and the players would glance up and take note that few of the low numbers were coming up winners, and therefore they would favor the numbers of 10 and above. Don't mess with a winning strategy.

Martin strolled back and forth between two tables, and once in a while he'd join his wife and another couple seated nearby for a drink and to listen to a very talented young man who played a variety of instruments and sang.

Soon Martin got up and went to his favorite roulette table, and Johan cashed his chips and gave him \$100 worth of multi-colored five dollar chips. Martin placed the 20 chips in stacks of five each on 5 numbers and waited for the spin. In one minute, all five of Martin's bets were winners,

and he was paid \$875 for each bet. With a cool \$4375 in winnings he quickly cashed out and went over and bought another round for his wife and his friends.

Amos Martin had just paid for the cruise for his wife and himself, along with spending money, if he didn't make another wager.

Watching the scene around the roulette table was Danny Jones.

Danny, a retired cop, was a homicide detective who now worked as an investigator for Maryland's Special Prosecutor, Melvin J. Topper. Jones loved his job of putting together cases for the prosecutor and his assistants, but he had to use his vacation time or lose it. The boss made him get out of the office and finally go on the cruise that his wife had been dropping hints about taking.

Danny Jones was in his mid-fifties, had been in the Marines as a young man, serving in Viet Nam, and a daily trip to his gym on his way to work kept him in good shape. Keeping track of many of the crooks in Maryland politics kept his mind sharp.

Watching the scene at the roulette table immediately challenged the detective.

Something was wrong but with Danny, just give him a minute and he would figure it out. After all, figuring the scams and cheats was what he did for a living.

Not a frequent gambler, Danny had to follow leading political figures as they used stolen funds to gamble at Atlantic City, thus he began to get a feel for the typical roulette table experience, and what he'd just observed was more than a little unusual. The house pit boss had replaced the dealer, but that was due more to the guy flirting with one of the players.

When Amos Martin had racked up his win, he was just one of several hitting it big, although his bets were more than the others, and therefore he won more.

What bugged the detective was that the same people seemed to be winning, and the same people would lose, no matter what. *Winners and losers, every game needs them*, thought, Danny.

Danny just kept following the play, the bets, and listening to the banter back and forth between the players.

Some blocks on the roulette table covered multiple numbers, some covered all black, while others would pay the bettor who placed their chips on any red number. There was a block which covered the smaller

denominations, another for the middle series of numbers between 1 and 40, and yet another for those in the high range. There was even a block which would pay for zero and another for double zero.

The players were intent, except for Amos Martin, who was able to be nonchalant about it all, almost as if he were a shill for the casino. But he wasn't, as Danny noticed that he kept strolling back and forth to his wife and friends, and he assessed them as the Real McCoy tourists on a cruise.

With the sequins on their dresses, the high hair-dos, the layers of gold necklaces, these women with Amos Martin were showing off the good stuff and the other guy was decked out in a white suit with real alligator shoes and topped off with a white hat making him look a lot like a country version of Humphrey Bogart. If they were all shills they would never be dressed like that.

After about an hour, Danny walked over to the table area and took a seat, was served a drink in short fashion, and then took another look back at the action at the roulette table. The empty chair at the far end where he had been seated to watch the action afforded him a view of the end of the table and the electronic board, which displayed the winning numbers.

Danny saw the wires running from the roulette wheel under the table to the tally board and it hit him. If the wires could carry the winning numbers from the roulette wheel to the display board, it could work in reverse as well.

A camera eye in the display board, such as those which are installed in laptops and computers could signal to an observer where the bets were being placed and instruct the wheel where to stop, or not to stop.

Danny could see now, from his vantage point 20 feet away from the table, how the casino was setting up the players for the next day. Let them win big today, so that they'd come rushing back tomorrow, when they'd all find a big surprise. There was going to be a day of reckoning.

Very few players could cash out and shun the casino for the rest of the cruise, most would be back.

This was one of the chief profit centers and a big part of the reason that the cruise lines worked feverishly with deep discounts to fill every cabin with guests. The same as any casino; only this was a floating casino.

Shore excursions marked up 100 percent, sales tables lining the hallways hawking jewelry, perfume and booze, while photographers stood nearby, capturing every moment for pricey prints. All good hustles but none of them came close to the profits made by the casino for Seven Seas Company.

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Danny thought about warning the gamblers about his conclusion, but he had learned long ago in his police work that when trying to advise those with addictive behavior patterns that they were in for fall was just a waste of time.

Just the thought of trying to convince a guy who had won nearly five grand in a half hour that he was being set up was enough to convince Danny to shrug and turn his thoughts to his wife being in the duty free shop on the ship, and the only way for her to pay was the ship card which was linked to *his* credit card.

By midnight as the piles of the winning players' chips began to mount, their fortunes seemed to decline, not all at once but gradually. Some still hit it big, but overall, the number of big wins lessened. It would be another day before the ill winds of fate would blow across the roulette table.

The second day of the cruise found them south of the Bahamas and passing the large island of Cuba, taking what the Captain called the inside passage due to rough weather. The day was warm but the wind swept through, causing the top deck to be closed. The wind was turbulent enough that it swept the chlorine-filled water out of the swimming pool on the 9<sup>th</sup> deck.

As Danny and Marsha sat down at a breakfast table after going through the omelet station on the Lido deck, Danny's cell phone rang, much to Marsha's amazement.

Danny cast a wary eye to his caller ID and then to his wife and decided to take the call.

'Well Danny, have you thought about my offer,' asked Kevin Clinton. "I trust my compensation package was of interest to you."

"Well, Kevin, you know money isn't everything, and I really enjoy my work," began Danny. "Still, since your offer doesn't involve as much desk work as I have now, I intend to discuss it with my wife this week while we are on this cruise, and I expect to give you an affirmative answer, as long as she is okay with it."

"You mean you are out on a cruise right now," Clinton asked, a tinge of concern in his voice. "I am sorry to disturb you but matters have become much more *ahhh*...serious right now, what ship are you on?"

"The Sea Empress, we just left Florida yesterday, and we're headed to the southern Caribbean, our next stop is St. Martins."

"Danny, keep your phone on and please get back to me as soon as possible," said Clinton. "Black & Perkins really needs you."

"Okay, talk to you later, maybe tonight or in the morning," said Danny and he hung up as his wife cautiously eyed him.

"It's much more money, honey! You'll be able to quit your new job and retire again and just stay home, and I am really tired of all of the political BS in rounding up crooked Maryland politicians, and I would like to get back to real police work, at least on the private side," said Danny.

"But will you have to travel much if you take this new job?" said Marsha. "And I didn't know your phone would work out here."

"Sure, but its lots more money and annual bonuses, I can't say no to this," said Danny. "I make \$75,000 a year now and this new job will pay me \$200,000 plus and with both our retirements, and with paying for Dean's college, we'll finally be able to breathe a little easier. And as for the cell phone working out here, this ship has the latest in cell towers on board, both of our phones work."

Marsha tried her Eggs Benedict, which were delicious, and pondered the future as Danny ate his western omelet.

After a pleasant day of sunning and reading, at least after the wind died down, Danny and Marsha put their books in their bag, picked up their towels from their deck chairs and went back to their stateroom for a glass of wine and a nap. The nap didn't get underway too soon as the wine sparked a romantic interlude on the balcony. Fortunately, theirs was a balcony which didn't afford other guests a view of their lovemaking. With no other ships or islands in sight, their afternoon was delightful. Then they napped.

Dinner was fun in the grand dining room which spanned three floors of the ship and was decorated in a theme from the era of the great ocean liners: polished brass, columns of marble and remarkable chandeliers. The waiters sang and danced and hammed it up when serving their table. Live music entertained the 1100 guests eating at the second seating and the prime rib and lobster were great. Who can't love a cruise?

Danny noted that the two couples from the casino were sitting next to him, and he decided to introduce himself to Amos Martin.

"Hi, I am Danny Jones and this is my wife, Marsha," said Danny as he stopped next to Martin's table on their way out of the dining room.

"Glad to meet you, Danny. Saw you eyeing the roulette table last night. Planning on giving it a try tonight?" asked Martin, who introduced Danny and Marsha to his wife, Lorrie and their friends Clyde and Beulah.

## The Privateer Clause

“Actually, no but I wanted to put a bug in your ear about that,” said Jones, who then gave Martin a summary of what he believed was the real deal on the spinning wheel.

“Holy crap,” said Martin. “You just saved me a bundle, buddy. I was going to try to go back tonight and double my money.”

“You might still be able to do it,” said Jones, shrugging. “I don’t know when they are going to stick to the players, but last night they were just setting the stage for their real show.”

“Well, fore-warned is fore-armed, so I’ll test the waters, and if you’re right and the tables turn on the players in favor of the house, I’ll get out quick,” said Martin.

The next day, Danny Jones was up early and walking the deck for his mile before breakfast. When he got through with his fourth lap around the ship, he stopped and took a seat on a deck chair and pulled out his phone.

“Hello, Kevin, this is Danny Jones. I’ll take the job.”

“Good, Danny, finish your cruise, and I assume you will give Mr. Topper your notice, but we have really pressing matters,” said Clinton.

“I do have some projects that I will have to clean up for Topper, but the detective who works with me is familiar with my cases, so I think the hand-off will go smoothly, and I can just take some extra leave if I have to, so I can do a little bit for you right now, as you sound like something is really urgent.”

“Danny, I didn’t know it was showing,” said Clinton. “When do you get to St. Martins?”

“We should be in the port at Phillipsburg by about 7 am tomorrow,” replied Jones.

“My jet will land about an hour before at the international airport nearby, and I will be waiting for you at the pier,” said Clinton. “I will have Henry Boston of Seven Seas with me. We’ll brief you for about an hour, and then let you get back to your vacation.”

“Holy crap, this must be important,” said Danny, miffed that his vacation was being interrupted but intrigued that such important big wigs would be his greeting party at this interesting island. “I know Marsha is planning on going on a shopping tour so this will work out.”

“Why don’t we just meet on the ship if you have the top CEO of the cruise line with you?” asked Danny, envisioning lunch in the owner’s suite.

"We could, but many of the personnel of the ship know Henry by sight, and we don't want to raise any undue alarm," said Clinton. "And to tell the truth, we don't want to be seen with you."

"Thanks a lot, but I think I can figure this out," said Danny. "I'll see you on the pier; I assume you will have a car arranged?"

"Yep, see you in the morning."

The day was uneventful with Marsha attending a yoga class in the workout room, along with about two dozen other women.

That evening after dinner and the Best of the Beatles review in the theatre, Danny and Marsha went for a stroll through the casino to catch the latest action.

Amos Martin was at his favorite stool at the end of the roulette wheel and was placing his \$5 chips in stacks on his favorite numbers. The players were winning, much like before, with a few new players but the winners from the previous night were all back again.

The spins of the wheel went fast and furious, and one after another, the dealer swept the table of the losing bets and paid off the winners. At first the former winners couldn't believe their luck and simply kept up their bets, and soon exhausted their winnings and dug deep, using their ship cards to buy more chips.

The blonde's husband had taken over for his wife while she was still winning, as she'd gone to a show with a friend. When she returned, she saw that Harvey Epstein had blown all of her money.

Amos saw what was coming and quickly stopped placing bets. He watched as the other winners all became losers. He shook his head and walked away.

Casinos like winners, but they really like losers and tonight there was a new batch of them. But Amos Martin wasn't among them thanks to the warning from the nice guy from Maryland.

## *Chapter Six*

Phillipsburg harbor opened up to the large vessel which steamed into the port under its own power. With bow and side thrusters, the need for tug boats was virtually eliminated except where mandated by labor union contracts.

The Sea Empress slid into the dock which could accommodate two large ships, one on each side. Construction crews were busy completing another long pier which jutted out into the harbor.

The ship docked and within an hour, groups were streaming out to meet shore excursion leaders who held signs on the dock. Marsha joined about a dozen other women who were going to some of the best jewelry stores on the island, under the guidance as well as the protection of their leader. Little did they know that Marsha really didn't need any protection, and God help any street thug who might attempt to prey on her.

The tours, excursions and taxis loaded up and streamed out into town with many heading over to the French town of Marigot.

Danny walked out and down the pier to where the taxis were waiting.

A driver with a sign bearing his name in bold black letters stood near the curb. Danny walked over and identified himself to the driver, who asked Mr. Jones to follow him to the blue Chevy Tahoe.

Inside were Clinton and Boston.

Only 15 minutes had passed when the Tahoe rolled into a private resort on the Dutch side of the island, and minutes later, the three were sitting at a posh club patio on a hilltop overlooking the harbor, being served sandwiches and coffee.

The blue sky over the crystal waters of the Caribbean connected with the sandy beaches and lush green mountaintops dotted with homes and resorts. The troubles of the world seemed far away.

"Danny we have a serious threat to one of our ships," began Boston, "and well...since you're already here in the Caribbean, we can really use your help." Boston sipped at his coffee. "We need to keep this low profile as we don't know which ship is being threatened yet."

"Hold on. You don't know which ship is being threatened?" Danny gave a thought to the Sea Empress.

"The threat came in the way of an email to my private office. It told us to get \$25 million ready to be wired to an account which would be disclosed to us later, and it also said that the money better be ready to go within 60 minutes or one of our ships was going to be in big trouble. The email only disclosed that the ship was in the Caribbean."

"How many ships do you have in the Caribbean?" asked Danny.

"Counting the one you're on, nine right this week," replied Boston. "We can't risk anyone's life or starting a wholesale panic, thus the three of us are the only ones who know about this. The threat came three days ago and we have been on pins and needles since. Sure, it could be a hoax, but we can't take a chance."

"Calling in authorities at one of these islands would be a disaster as word would leak out quickly. Nor can we turn to the FBI as primary authorities as the ship is registered in the Bahamas," said Clinton.

"But since the ship originated at a US port and has a majority of Americans on board, won't that qualify for FBI jurisdiction," asked Danny.

"Be careful what you ask for, my preference is to pay the money and then track the bastards down and kill them," said Boston. "It's the only way to deal with terrorists who are nothing more than modern day pirates."

"Is that legal?" asked Danny.

"Actually, it is. It's legal under international law; it's covered under the *Privateer Clause*," said Boston.

"And what the hell is that?" Danny shrugged.

"The Privateer Clause dates back to the late 1600's and rewarded those who killed pirates and returned to the English governor with their heads. They could keep the pirate ships and were expected to be law-abiding merchants after their duties were carried out."

"So if I were to kill pirates, I could keep their ships or boats rather?" Danny half-joked.

"We don't want their ships, just their heads."

"Wow, first I ever heard of this Privateer Clause, but then again I have been chasing murderers and crooked politicians all my life. This could be interesting; I've never before gone after pirates," said Danny Jones as he took a long look over the harbor to his ship, which glistened from the late morning sun.

"We don't know how much time we have, but I do have the funds ready to wire, I am just waiting for our next instructions," said Boston.

"Holy crap, who is in your office checking your email?" asked Jones.

"I have my email coming directly to my laptop, and I check it every fifteen minutes," said Boston as he opened his laptop for the third time since they'd picked Danny up at the pier.

"What assets do we have to work with," Danny asked Kevin Clinton.

"We have our newly refurbished ex-Coast Guard patrol craft, they are 225 footers and fast with heavy arms and helicopters. They are the Revenge and Reprisal," said Clinton. "They are right here in the Caribbean at St. Martins. They just steamed in overnight from San Juan. We also have a top team en route from our Maryland training center by Gulfstream. They are refueling at Miami and will be here in another hour. We are bringing them in here and our plane will refuel and then can either land at any airfield in the Caribbean, if need be, or will transfer the team to fast attack helicopters on the ships."

"Where are your cruise ships now in the Caribbean?" asked Danny.

"We have them all pinpointed on this map on my laptop," said Boston, turning his computer around to show Danny Jones.

"How will we know which ship the enemy is targeting? Do they have fellow terrorists on board, and even if the money is wired, will they still carry out a plan to harm the passengers or the ship," Danny asked in rapid-fire succession.

"Good questions," said Clinton, "Frankly, we don't from shit. Not yet, but that's what you need to get busy on right now. Henry is having your luggage moved to the owner's cabin, and the suite next door is being set up for part of our team to operate from as an HQ. We figure the Sea Empress is as good as any of nine threatened ships in the Caribbean. For now, it's the one that is most central. Both of the cabins are near the bridge, therefore our communications are easy to tap into, but we still don't want to tip our hand to the bridge staff. At this point, we don't know if the bad guys have one of their own on the ship."

"My wife is going to kill me," Danny flatly said.

"She'll never really know the full extent of the threat if things go well," said Clinton.

"Come on, after her job for the past thirty years? She'll smell this deal out as soon as she gets back from shopping," replied Danny. "First, I guess I can get away with telling her that the luxury suite upgrade was a 'welcome aboard to the new job gift' from you Kevin. But as soon as she figures out there are special ops guys next door to us, I am cooked. I

promised her a cruise to get away from it all, but it looks like trouble has found us.”

“Henry, who do we know that would be a target on any of our nine threatened ships?” asked Danny. “Can we get the passengers manifests right away?”

“I have them already in my laptop. We can see them right now, but we have scanned them on the flight down here, and right here on the Sea Empress alone we have a U. S. Senator, the owner of Atlantic National Bank, and one of the founders of Spirit Software, all of whom I’d call high profile targets,” began Boston. “We also have the granddaughter of Queen Juliana of Netherlands and her family on board.”

Danny gave a thought to all the ‘little people’ who, while not high profile could also die from an explosion at sea.

“The chairman of Portland Ship Yard is in the same suite with Sen. Emily Fountain, who sits on the Armed Services Committee, likely something that they didn’t intend to be publicized, given the fact that the Coast Guard awarded the contract for 24 new patrol craft to that firm,” noted Boston. “Of course, we would like for our passengers to maintain their privacy.”

“Our team will be here at 2pm and will board with their gear in an inconspicuous way and they will be set up within an hour,” said Clinton. “*Reprisal* will only be about three miles away from the Sea Empress and shadow the ship on the rest of the itinerary.”

“Well, its past noon now, and I promised to meet Marsha at some French café at the harbor in Marigot by one; think you fellows can give me a lift over there,” asked Danny.

“Sure, we’ll give you a ride over. We rented this buggy for the day,” said Boston. “Might as well get some use out of it.”

The blue Tahoe pulled up next to the flea market across from the *La Vie en Rose* café and dropped Danny off next to the sidewalk café.

Danny strolled over to where Marsha was sitting at one of a dozen tables outside of the corner eatery and sat down.

“Who was that you were riding with? Were you just hitchhiking or should I wish I hadn’t asked,” said Marsha.

“I can’t fool you, dear. Nor would I want to. It was about the new job,” said Danny.

“I’m afraid I expected this, but remember you are on vacation,” said Marsha.

“I’ll remember. I made it here on time to meet you for lunch, didn’t I?”

Marsha ordered the “Baked Goat Cheese wrapped in Filo Pastry served on a Garden Salad with Apples and Walnuts” the lunch special at the La Vie en Rose, one of Marigot’s most favored French dining spots. Danny spotted “Lobster Lasagna in a Bisque Sauce” on the specials list and ordered that.

As they waited for the food to be served, the busy corner featured most every type of truck and car known to the industrialized world.

“Damn, I didn’t know that they had all this congestion here on an island far away from the crush of the big cities,” said Danny.

“If you would take off and let us travel a little, you’d see a lot more,” replied Marsha.

A loud backfire from a truck loaded with construction material made Danny jump more than a little bit. Marsha took notice his reaction.

“They weren’t shooting at you, dear,” said Marsha.

The Filo pastry in Marsha’s salad was the best she had ever had, light and fluffy and full of flavor. The kind of meal you remember as being so much better than you expected.

As Danny and Marsha ate their lunch, a man peddled his bike past them and turned down the side street, past shops, banks and liquor stores, until he pulled his bike into an alley and locked it.

Luis put his key into the side door of a newer four-story condominium building and went up the stairs to his home for an hour long visit to check and make sure everything was okay. As a senior member and department head of the Sea Empress crew, he was allowed three hours off the ship in his hometown port.

With his grandmother and mother both gone, and only a few cousins as his family, just the memories of the keepsakes of the two women who’d raised him, along with books given him by Mel and Rose, Luis owned few treasures.

Luis picked up his mail from his next door neighbor who took care of things for him and glanced through his bills, sat down, wrote checks and put the envelopes to be mailed in his pocket.

After about an hour, Luis left for the bike trip back to the port as he couldn’t take a chance at being late boarding the ship.

When he rode back past the corner where La Vie en Rose stood, Danny and Marsha were just getting up from their table after lunch and a glass of wine.

Danny noticed the man on the bike and noted that he was the grill manager at the pool deck where he had a couple of great steak sandwiches the day before. He was surprised that the crew was able to leave the ship and act like tourists, but then again, Danny had no way of knowing that St. Martin was home to Luis.

"Did you see that guy on the bike that just went by?" Danny asked Marsha.

"No, where?"

"He's gone now, but he is the supervisor at the grill that had those steak and cheese sandwiches on the pool deck."

"On the ship, you mean."

"Yes, on the ship I mean," said Danny. "I didn't know the crew went sightseeing too. I thought they were busy painting the ship or something."

"Silly, maybe this is where he lives," said Marsha, a lot closer to the truth than she knew.

Luis had a backpack on him when he returned to the ship at the freight gangplank, but he didn't have to pass through security, even though he was supposed to do so. Since he didn't leave in the proper fashion, the ship's computer wouldn't have him off the ship that day. The ship issued identity cards with holograms that recorded all data when used by the crew. But this day, security had been lax.

## Chapter Seven

Luis had stopped at his friend Adolpho's apartment to pick up the backpack just as his friend had asked. He'd been told the contents of the backpack included some choice marijuana, which Adolpho would sell to the passengers. Luis just smiled at the thought of this side business his fellow crewman had set up, knowing the constant desire of passengers for pot and the distress caused when cruise ship passengers were arrested on the islands or coming back through U. S. Customs in Florida where drug dogs patrolled the terminals.

It was easy to figure out who wanted the pot, and the best customers weren't those in their twenties.

It was the 50 to 60 year-old former hippies now plying the waters of the Caribbean armed with Viagra who were always asking the stewards for pot. They wanted good stuff and paid top dollar.

Adolpho, like any other entrepreneur, had figured out how to satisfy market demand. As much as he was a capitalist, he was also a strident Marxist, and Adolpho was able to make good use of the new access to the internet allowed the crew to find out that he had a lot in common with the crazy Al Qaeda. "Blow up stuff and put terror into the hearts of the masses and you win," he would say with bluster but only privately so. *A simple philosophy for the simple minded but heck, he was just a guy trying to make a living and now, thought Adolpho; it was time to make some real money.*

Adolpho had been on the Sea Empress for four years and expanded his contacts with every sailing of the ship.

As an assistant steward and now achieving the job of steward, Adolpho made about \$100 a week in salary and \$300 in tips, which appeared on his paycheck. Most passengers used the direct gratuity option on their ship charge account, and the tips for the week were automatically billed to their credit card with the designation of money going to the steward, the assistant steward, the waiter and the assistant waiter at the dining room. Every time a drink was ordered pool side or in a bar or casino, the tip was automatically added to the check. When room service was ordered, the tip was paid in cash or added to the check.

Adolpho always volunteered for extra room service duty and not only did he get good tips, he was able to ask if he can be of any further service to the passengers.

This extra service question usually got Adolpho in the sack with a single woman at least once a week, but it also kept him selling about 30 twenty-five dollar bags of pot a week.

Small amounts add up and the extra \$750 cash a week made Adolpho feel like he wanted to live a different life than the one he learned over the past ten years as an ocean-going butler.

For the simple fellows from the dozens of countries that the cruise line drew from for its staff, this was a great job, despite all the whining in the international press, and by labor unions, some of whom would love to organize the ships and be in a position to steal from the crew themselves.

They were always working, seven days a week for ten months at a time. While the ship did deduct fees for cleaning and meals, the crew was still able to bank most of their check, and they could usually arrange to depart the ship somewhat close to their home if they lived in the Americas. Even going back to India or Southeast Asia, the home nations of many of the crews, favorable air rates could be arranged due to advance booking, and the airfare home that was charged to their account when first hired. It made it easy for the cruise line to get rid of them if and when they failed to work or broke an important rule.

The difference between how the crew was treated and how the staff worked was tremendous.

The crew had two levels, those who made tips and those who did not. The engine crew, the wipers, plumbers, painters, maintenance crew all lived below decks and rarely saw the sun. They made less money and really had to tow the line, paying bribes to supervisors for favors and decent food.

The tipped staff, waiters and stewards and their assistants, by comparison, had it made. They made good money in tips, sometimes up to \$3,000 a month. They learned courtesy and proper treatment of customers and it paid off. While they also lived in crew quarters, they had a better grade of cabin.

The ship staff, consisting of pursers, entertainers, casino attendants, store clerks, photographers, golf pro, and so forth, all lived well, ate with the passengers and had regular cabins. They too made good money.

But Adolpho, who was born in Guatemala but grew up at St. Martin, was ambitious. At 6'2" in height with wavy black hair and a lean physique, he was constantly groped by the female passengers, and depending on

the point of origin of the passengers, whistled at, ogled at, and pawed at. He was in constant demand for extra services once women, travelling in a group, bragged to their friends about their sexy Latin lover. While he didn't charge, he was often rewarded with cash. He had to tell more than one woman that he didn't take credit cards and not debit either.

The sophisticated travelers knew they couldn't bring their pot with them. Some told him that they'd read on internet cruise reviews it was best and safest to buy it on the ship from the crew. To think he didn't even have to advertise.

Passengers going out on their balconies were often greeted with the wafting puffs of pot from other balconies. The older crowd included many of those who still used pot and enjoyed their wine and room service while younger passengers packed the ship's bars.

Business kept getting good for Adolpho.

*In fact, it was becoming more difficult by the week to stay a Marxist,* thought Adolpho. His Marxist pals disdained all things about Western society, while Adolpho was beginning to really like the things that money bought.

Adolpho began to take most of his time off the ship at Puerto Rico where he learned and earned.

That was where he'd met with Puerto Rican terror groups and learned how to fashion his own package that he had his friend Luis carry aboard the Sea Empress for him from St. Martin's. Poor Luis thought he was simply carrying pot onboard.

The group had been looking for a way to penetrate the crew of one of the cruise ships. Eduardo Gomez was one of those who was still leading FALN, the Puerto Rican terror group which had nineteen of its members convicted of bombings in Chicago and Connecticut, but he'd had his sentence commuted by President Bill Clinton as Clinton left office in 2001. Eduardo Gomez had to apologize and had his travel restricted, and was not allowed to leave Puerto Rico. Gomez hated the restrictions but was glad to get out of prison after 20 years. Now he would make up for all of the injustices he took personally by masterminding another attack on Americans.

Gomez would sit at a bench overlooking the cruise ship terminal where all the rich Americans would disembark and spread out over the island nation with their chatter and search for trinkets. He would simmer at the money which was spent on the cruises and how little made its way

to the poorest of the island. He would argue with his old friends who had done well over the years while he was in prison. It was really difficult recruiting young revolutionaries who shared his ire.

Adolpho had been in a San Juan bar, hanging out on a sidewalk café at the Sheraton right at the cruise line terminal when he met Rosa Gomez.

Rosa worked at the café and by the end of the night, the two were walking into old San Juan, talking and stopping in an all-night Starbucks for a sandwich and a coffee.

The next night, they went out on a real date, but only after meeting her grandfather.

Adolpho and Eduardo became close, and with the older man liking him dating his granddaughter, they soon began playing chess in routine fashion. It was during these hours, while Rosa and her mother fixed dinner, that the conversation between the two men turned to injustice and righting perceived wrongs.

By the end of his two month vacation at San Juan, Adolpho had learned how to rig improvised devices and had a *bun in the oven*, as even though Rosa had not gone to the doctor, she *knew* what was happening.

She wanted to be married and not to have a baby without a Papa around. She began dropping hints to Adolpho.

Adolpho left Rosa's house for his small room that he'd rented for the vacation and decided to walk out over to the old Fort San Juan.

It was only about an hour's walk, and the exercise did him good. He looked out over the Atlantic and sat down on a bench, soaking in the view.

The bright Sunday afternoon with the sun reflecting off of the white caps of the waves in the distance clashed with the sprays of water leaping into the air. Several sailing yachts plied the waters about a mile out while a large cruise ship loomed offshore.

Adolpho knew that it was customary for men to have both families at home and still to live the life of a single guy on board the ship so issues of fidelity didn't bother him, as infidelity was a Latin man's right. What bothered him was being tied down when he was about to make a big score and lift the ties that bound him. He didn't want a new rein on his freedom. Marriage was out. He would be happy to give Rosa money.

He wanted money and to be free from his job on the ship. He really liked Eduardo's plan and his job on the Sea Empress lined him up to deal with the FALN and a big reward.

When Luis brought the package to Adolpho's cabin, he expected his fee and was rewarded with \$50.

"I was hoping you might cut me in for a little more this time, considering I risk my job for you, Adolpho," said Luis.

"You wouldn't do this if you didn't want to, my friend," replied Adolpho. "That is the same rate you always get. This is no time to be greedy."

Luis sized Adolpho up to see if more haggling might get him a raise.

"Okay, man, you can get some more this time. I feel lucky," said Adolpho and handed over another fifty. "Are you happy now?"

"Sure," said Luis. "I have to pay my supervisor half my salary just to get a good cabin and decent food. If I didn't sneak food at the pool grill, I know I would choke on that slop they feed us in the crew mess."

"Don't tell me, I worked for the first 3 and ½ years for the ship paying back my salary advances for airfare and training," said Adolpho. "I spent the rest of my check in the crew bar! And those fat bastards in New York home office make all the money off of the crew. They aren't satisfied with hosing the customers, but they have to get the last dollar out of us too?"

"Hey Adolpho, you are making good money," said Luis. "The company isn't the only one fleecing the passengers. You do pretty well too."

"Si, and I am going to do better than ever. Just you watch," said Adolpho.

Adolpho took his package below to the engine room and tucked it away in the place he had been instructed by Eduardo. He went straight to the correct location and left the package behind a stainless steel tank. Adolpho pushed the package back behind the tank and turned quickly to return to his deck.

Had the ship been under way, he would never have been allowed to enter the engine room, but the engine crew was allowed a lunch break when they were in port, and most of the engine crew was at the crew galley and they would be off for another hour.

As he left the engine room and passed open doors to crew mess quarters, he remembered the long hot years he had spent on this deck, the heat, the steam, and the cramped room he had to share with nine others, and the horrible food.

When crews had complained, tried to join unions and protest their living conditions on one cruise ship, they were arrested and kept in the ship's jail until they reached their homeport, where they were taken to the airport and escorted under guard to their flight, which had already been paid for via payroll deduction. The cruise lines, with the exception of

Seven Seas, were all run this way, and while Adolpho didn't have too much to gripe about with his employer, he was still more of a money man than a Marxist and was ready to make a big score.

## Chapter Eight

Marsha Jones was retired from her job as the personal top Secret Service Agent to the last First Lady, and when the President and his wife left the White House, so did Marsha. She put in her retirement papers sixty days before the Inauguration and used the time to bring her replacement up to speed on all the details of taking over the posting, a job not as challenging as being the head of the detail to the President, but nearly as tough.

As she gazed out over the open seas and soaked up rays of the warm spring sun in the Caribbean, she found herself suddenly missing the constant excitement of the White House.

What she didn't miss was the sudden near assassination of the First Lady nightmare which took over her life just a year earlier.

As she drifted off on the verge of sleep, her memories of that dramatic scene that played out at a Chesapeake Bay resort still kept her on pins and needles.

The First Lady decided to take a motorcade out to the Chesapeake Beach restaurant the *Rod N Reel*, which had been a getaway to residents of Washington since the 1800's. For more than fifty years as many as nine trains a day in the warm months brought visitors to the Bay resort, until the trains quit running in the 1930's, falling victim to the automobile.

Laura Bush had promised to take her daughters out on a fishing expedition to fish for the prize rockfish, a trip her husband had taken two years earlier. Leaving the girls behind while the President took a day off to fish that pleasant spring day didn't go over too well when the TV coverage came in of the President holding up a big rockfish.

Marsha had checked with the advance team the day before and everything about the Rod n Reel was mapped out: the kitchen, restrooms, dining area, ramps and exits all drawn out and put into the computer. The information on the employees, the deliveries and all those who had reservations that day were included along with background checks on the captain and mate of the *Just Fishin'*.

Nothing was ever left to chance; still surprises regularly showed up, calling for instant decisions that most of the time were good calls. But sometimes, things didn't work out too well. Last year was the scariest time of Marsha's career which had spanned twenty-eight years with the Service.

The motorcade had arrived from Washington on time to meet the charter boat at 8am. It was still chilly, about only 50 degrees and the

forecast was for a warm day of 68 degrees. Still it was jacket weather, especially out on the Bay with a breeze.

The drive was extremely familiar as the first twenty miles took them from the White House out Suitland Parkway to Rt. 4 at Andrews Air Force Base. But instead of going to meet Air Force One, the motorcade sped down Rt. 4 into Anne Arundel County and to Calvert where it made a quick turn down Rt. 260 to Chesapeake Beach.

The 52' charter boat was owned by a retired DC police detective who had been a liaison with the White House and who had gotten to know the President. So whenever the President wanted to go fishing, he told his staff to call Joe Palchetti.

Palchetti was as tickled as could be to have the President and his party out for a day on the Bay, and now that the First Lady was coming, it was too much for him. He whispered about the new outing to his wife on his cell phone four days earlier, and she had whispered about it to her hair dresser, who then told the manicurist who does her nails, who then told her boyfriend, who had just arrived in the country several months earlier from the Palestinian area of Gaza.

Abdul Zaroo had come across the Mexican border posing as an illegal and had paid handsomely to be hidden in a Mexican truck which was part of the new system of not inspecting trucks participating in the NAFTA agreement. In addition, inside Abdul's truck squatted ten tons of cocaine and four other illegals.

Abdul had joined a sleeper cell which had been in Takoma Park, a fiercely liberal neighborhood of eclectics' at the northern border of Washington with Maryland.

What Abdul learned from Maria as the two ate dinner that night, had him quickly leaving her apartment to report to his cell leader. Abdul had learned perfect English as well as Spanish and was given a classical education by the old line PLO. After he hooked up with Hamas, he was then sent off to Afghanistan for training with Al Qaeda. Abdul lacked the olive complexion of most Palestinians and could easily pass for being a European, even an American.

His wide range of training had included working at several posts in Israel where he gained experience at several seaports. It wasn't hard for him to show up at Chesapeake Beach with his precisely forged documents and courtesy of the very liberal standards for obtaining a driver's license in Maryland, where he presented himself as Abraham Lincoln Ward.

With a name like that along with his lanky frame and curly dark hair and beard, he quickly gained acceptance along with a chuckle. Keeping his

words to a few and his head down, he was able to transition from stranger to an air of familiarity very quickly as he hosed down the front deck and washed the gunwales of the Just Fishin'.

The regular mate had failed to show up for work the previous day and never answered his phone or a knock at the door from Palchetti. This wasn't the first time that old Derrick had gone off to his brother's house the night before a charter and gotten drunk, not to be seen for several days.

Thus when Ward showed up looking for a job, Joe hired him on the spot. The way Ward worked around the boat for two days, even when the Secret Service showed up for background checks, Palchetti was impressed. He hadn't had a mate this good in years, and for two days in a row, at the beginning of Rockfish season, Ward had earned his pay plus another \$200 a day in tips from very happy customers.

Ward never stopped working, and the Just Fishin' hadn't looked this good in ten years. Joe noticed that Ward anticipated his orders, carried them out smoothly, and waited on the passengers in every way from baiting hooks, reeling in the big ones to scooping the big rockfish with a net so there weren't any last minute line breaks.

Once back at shore, Ward had all of the catch cleaned by the time the passengers got back from the bar on the other side of the parking lot at the Rod n Reel.

When Marsha Jones had decided to work from the command post at the restaurant, which she set up on the second floor in the bingo hall, unused on this day, she viewed her computer screens and monitors. Her assets were deployed, and she was ready for a breathtakingly beautiful day overlooking the Chesapeake.

This day was going to make up for some of those dreary and rainy days in Cleveland, Detroit and Denver, where everyone caught colds and your feet were always cold.

Today it was iced tea and crab cake sandwiches as spring rolled across the deep blue bay on a gorgeous day in April.

As Marsha looked down the list of charter boat captains who kept their vessels at the long charter boat pier which lined Fishing Creek as it wound in from the big bay next to the Rod n Reel, she read the printout on each captain and mate. One after the other was a retired DC or Prince George's County fireman or police officer. Not too much to worry about as many of them were already in the Secret Service data base due to their

work connections. Some of them were not retired and held various security clearances.

What she did notice is that virtually none of the captains were long time watermen, likely due to not being able to afford the \$150,000 boats.

Her eye lingered on the name of the mate on Joe's boat, but given Joe's background as a liaison to the White House for the DC police for the past ten years, Marsha kept on scanning the list.

A Maryland State Police helicopter had landed in the parking lot and was available for immediate evacuation of the FLOTUS as well as her daughters. A Marine chopper was sitting on the ground at Andrews and only a ten minute flight away. Two Maryland Natural Resource boats, a Coast Guard 41' boat, and an Anne Arundel County police boat were all deployed in the area to keep the fishing party safe.

Before 9/11 such a security outlay for the First Lady would have been unusual, but now it was standard operating procedure.

The Anne Arundel police boat had made the hour long run down the Chesapeake Bay from South River without fueling first, and the twin 250's on the 32' boat sucked up the gas. The officers manning the Rhode River radioed to the USSS command that they would gas up and catch up with the rest of the detail.

As the police boat pulled up next to the gas dock, two attendants assisted them with fueling and when they were finished, the two officers walked into the office area to pay the bill with the county gas card.

Maryland's new policy of granting drivers licenses to illegal immigrants had helped them pass security checks and get hired two days earlier by the charter dock manager. Until then, they had been working near Andrews Air Force base as waiters at an Outback restaurant. But the new plan changed things, so now they were working at the fuel dock.

Just as Sgt. Jamie Duckworth signed his name on the gas ticket, a hand reached up over his forehead and pulled back as a slender knife was rammed into his temple, killing him instantly.

Simultaneously, Pfc. Bill McKnight was murdered the same way and their bodies dragged into the back room. Both water cops were stripped of their uniforms and gear and quickly the two attendants closed and locked the door to then man the police boat and motored out the channel to catch up to the rest of the party.

As the two fellow members of Abdul's cell jumped on the police boat in police uniforms, they also juggled a duffle bag containing a hand-held stinger missile which had been supplied from Al Qaeda, who'd gotten it from an Afghan warlord, who'd gotten it from the United States when the

Soviets were the invasion force. There were twenty-three more of such Stinger missiles in the U. S. brought in by a container ship and unloaded at Baltimore. They were now in a self-storage unit in Lothian, a small town about half way between Chesapeake Beach and Andrews Air Force Base.

Twenty-three Stinger missiles protected by a simple Master lock. Make that twenty-two.

While the plans for the stingers always involved Air Force One, the chance for the Hamas cell to go fishing for a good target was too tempting and a good training exercise for the main target.

Ironically, the visit of the President to the same facility had given the cell group the opportunity to create a plan in case he should ever return; they never expected that they would be able to carry out their plan on his wife. But they liked the idea a lot as soon as Abdul brought the information on the fishing trip.

As Marsha Jones looked over the background printouts, she passed them on to a computer science investigation specialist who checked and rechecked fingerprints, facial scans, tattoos, and drivers licenses.

Marsha had just taken a bite out of her crab cake sandwich, which was heaped high with crabmeat and had virtually no breading, when the computer geek girl at her back gasped.

"Mrs. Jones, I think you ought to look at this," said Tamara Blackwell. "I have run the mate on the Just Fishin' several times, and I can't figure out why a thirty-two year-old man would have only had a driver's license for a mere three months. There are no records on him ever having a license here in Maryland or in Florida where he *supposedly* lived prior to three months ago."

Marsha rushed to Tamara's side. "Supposedly?"

"His Florida address didn't check out after I did a redirect. It was okay on the surface, but I kept probing and this doesn't look real good."

Marsha looked at Tamara's notes and her monitor as the young woman wiped her brow. Marsha noticed that she was really sweating and had a look of fear in her eyes where they reflected off the screen.

"This is command," said Marsha sharply on her radio to the two agents on the fishing boat with FLOTUS. "Take the mate on Joe's boat into custody *immediately* and restrain him! Hogtie him and we'll have a police boat come alongside and take him off. You guys can help the ladies with their bait and fish this time, okay?"

"10-4", said Agent Paul DeMarco. After a brief struggle, the mate was indeed hogtied and awaiting transfer. Fortunately, the ear piece radios transmitted the communications only to the Secret Service agents on the fishing boat, so Abdul 'Abe Lincoln Ward' never had a chance.

"This is command to Anne Arundel Police," said Marsha, "please catch up with the Just Fishin' and remove a package and bring him back to command ASAP."

This request from the command startled the two Hamas terrorists who were on the Rhode River. One looked at the other, who was the cell leader and Masoud spoke into the radio, "Roger, Command, we will proceed."

Marsha jerked her head around and yelled at Tamara, "Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"Cops don't say 'Roger', pilots do, cops say '10-4'."

Marsha used her secure radio to call to agents to order a Marine hostage rescue team sent from Andrews and for two agents near the parking lot to board the Maryland State Police helicopter and provide immediate cover for the First Lady. She ordered the Coast Guard and NRP police to cut off the Anne Arundel police boat and isolate it from the FLOTUS charter boat.

Another alert was sent to the Secret Service HQ which would bring out the cavalry.

Masoud and his assistant saw the Coast Guard and two police boats suddenly turn and head for them as they closed in on the Just Fishin'.

Masoud commanded his assistant to unwrap the Stinger.

"We will get but one shot! Allah be Praised, it will hit the target," prayed Masoud.

Just as the Hamas agent raised the Stinger up on his shoulder and took aim, a Secret Service Agent spied him through binoculars, and armed with a more modern version of the missile, took his aim, gained permission to fire, and blew up the Rhode River boat.

Marsha watched all of this from her large window in the bingo hall and on the TV monitors hooked up to the sky cam on the State Police chopper.

"This is as close as it gets, Tammy," said Marsha as the two women hugged and Tammy took a deep breath, holding back tears.

As the flames and dense black smoke spiraled up into the blue sky, the North Beach Volunteer Fire Department fireboat, which had been on standby just off shore, sped to the scene of the burning vessel. Pieces of

fiberglass floating in the Chesapeake were all that was left of the Rhode River above the water line and two true believers were on their way for a rendezvous with 72 virgins...each.

Just as the State Police helicopter hovered over the Just Fishin', a Marine chopper set down in the parking lot with the special hostage rescue team.

"We are okay, the First Lady is a little shaken up, but she says she waited for years for this trip, so she and the girls want to stay out, but we are going to bring them back to shore a few miles north of here at the backup site at Herrington Harbor," said Marsha. "We'll have some work to do here."

The parking lot was cordoned off and police cars were screaming in by the dozen.

Within five minutes the door was broken down to reveal the two dead Anne Arundel policemen at the fuel dock office.

The NRP police boat picked up Abdul who faced a long night of questioning...in Gitmo.

## *Chapter Nine*

As the hot sun began to give her sun-block a challenge, Marsha quickly awakened from her drifting memories to water being dripped onto her legs.

"Hey, that's cold," said Marsha, faking annoyance as she brought her gaze up from her book.

"It isn't like its water torture," said Danny. "It's about lunch time, and I have about six more of those specialties food cafés on this ship that I haven't been to, let's go."

"Do what you want, Danny, but I want another one of those great steak sandwiches over at the grill by the pool," said Marsha. "I am on vacation too, and if I have to be alone on the sun deck while you go visit our neighbors in that suite next door then I can eat what I want on this ship."

"Hey, don't blame getting chubby on me," said Danny.

"Don't worry! I signed up for a yoga exercise group this afternoon."

"Really? When?"

"I walked by the class yesterday on the top deck and passed by the windows and stopped and watched, and it looked like fun, and since I would be on the more slender side of those attending I won't be worrying about how I look."

"Hon, you look as good as ever and while I don't think you actually need to go to yoga to get limber, you are here to have fun," said Danny. "What time is the class?"

"It starts at 3 and runs to 4:30, which'll give me time to get back to the cabin, take a nap, get a shower, and change, and be ready to go to the piano bar before dinner," said Marsha.

"What a hectic life we lead. I don't know how we can make it to all these activities," he replied, smiling.

"Where are you going besides six lunch counters?"

"Well, I am going to shoot skeet, get some golf lessons, and snoop around some of the decks we haven't been to yet," said Danny.

Marsha's exercise class was a little stressful to some of her joints, and she was sure she would be back in shape after a few more days.

The next morning after breakfast in the dining room, Danny went to the adjoining suite for a meeting with his covert team while Marsha had returned to sun on the pool deck.

On the third day out on the ship, Marsha realized that she had enjoyed a steak sandwich each day and gobbled down an order of onion rings as well. It was a good thing she was going to exercise class.

Danny arrived with his water torture over top of her deck chair just while she began thinking maybe she ought to go for a New York Rueben at the deli sandwich bar, or maybe some white pizza, or maybe just another steak sandwich.

“Hey, I am here to join you for steak sandwiches,” said Danny.

“Good, maybe it’s about time you filled me in on your new job,” said Marsha.

“Are you sure you want to know?” asked Danny.

“I know that I don’t want to know, but since whatever this looks a lot more serious I figure I might as well be privy to whatever you all are up to in case I get dragged into this thing.” Marsha sat up, leaned forward, and sighed.

“Okay, it goes like this,” began Danny as he walked with her over to the grill and ordered two steak sandwiches. He then slowly filled her in as they sat down and devoured the steak and cheese with grilled onions.

“This is about as close to the steak and cheese sandwiches we got at that old Eddie Leonard’s Sandwich Shop a block from the White House, boy do I miss those,” said Marsha.

“I don’t get it, you got to eat anything you wanted from the White House kitchen, you got to taste the finest and most elaborately prepared food in the world, but instead, you ran over to Eddie Leonard’s whenever you could, standing in line behind drunk college kids to get waited on.” Danny laughed at the image he’d conjured in his mind.

“Well, dear, just because we could eat at the White House didn’t mean I didn’t crave a steak sandwich,” said Marsha. “Besides, Eddie Leonard’s closed down ten years ago, even Willard Scott is still out there hustling on TV, and I remember hearing him and that guy Ed Walker singing the Eddie Leonard’s jingle along with the commercial. ‘you should try ‘em. For the very best in sandwiches, just buy one. No matter where you are, you’ll find that ...’”

“Hey dear,” said Danny, “I get it; you’re an Eddie Leonard’s fan.”

“When I first started at Treasury, they would send us out to get a bag and bring them back to the Oval Office, and we did that for every President up to Clinton when Hillary put her foot down and said that the President was too fat and anyone caught bringing back a steak and cheese

would be sent to tracking down high school kids counterfeiting twenty dollar bills on their home computers.”

“Hell, the pay was the same, you should have taken the chance,” said Danny.

“Well, clearly the President got what he wanted,” said Marsha.

“I’m hungry, want seconds?” asked Danny.

“Sure, go for it.”

On the second trip to the grill, Marsha noticed Luis.

“Hey, I saw you were able to visit Marigot the other day, do you have any tips on our next stop at St. Kitts,” asked Marsha.

Luis was well skilled at giving good advice to passengers as it helped his ratings with customer service, something he always scored lower than he should and it helped his tips as well. He had the ability, he just needed prodding.

“Yes, madam, stay at the shops close to the ship, the prices are lower but if you decide to walk around the city, stay with a group and don’t step in the gutters, as they are kind of nasty,” said Luis about the open sewers.

“Where are the best prices on jewelry,” asked Marsha as she waited on her sandwich being fixed to her order.

“Madam will find that the stores in the mezzanine at the pier are more honest and are monitored by the ship, so they keep it clean and don’t rip anyone off,” said Luis.

While Marsha went off to her yoga class, Danny made a trip to the command center set up in the luxury suite adjoining his own.

The four room suite was crowded with the team from Black & Perkins and their gear, phones and laptops. Several duffle bags contained special armaments and a stack of Kevlar vests were in a corner along with helmets and life vests. With access to a utility boat used for tendering, this team could be picked up by a helicopter or deployed by water. Danny imagined that they likely even had a submarine.

“Well guys, anything new about the threat?” asked Danny.

The team of five men and one woman who had arrived on board the Sea Empress at St. Martin’s were fresh from the Black & Perkins’s training center, but none of them were rookies. All had experience with ATF, Secret Service, Army Special Ops, or anti-terrorism task force of the U. S. Marshals Service.

Oliver Ross, the training center ops chief was in charge, and two other teams were posted on the Reprisal and Revenge.

“We are ready, Danny,” said Ross as the newest member of their team joined the intense squad as they checked their latest updates on

weather, radar, satellite coverage of the Caribbean, and studied tracking charts of the positions of each cruise ship in the area.

"We are even tracking all of the other cruise ships in the Caribbean just in case the terrorists screw up and go after a ship of one of our client's competitors," said Kevin. "We can always send them a bill later."

"Danny, we found out that your wife is on the ship," commented Oliver Ross.

"Yes, she certainly is."

"She really did a great job last year and our team would really like to meet her and talk shop a little," added Ross.

"Ollie, I filled her in, so she knows the score, but she is pretending like we are really on a pleasure cruise and as long as nothing erupts, she wants to stay in her little fantasy, but I think I can arrange for her to drop by here to meet you all."

"Where is she now," asked Kevin.

"She went to yoga, where about the only challenging thing for her there will be to keep from spraining a muscle," laughed Danny.

## *Chapter Ten*

Marsha walked along the sunny deck to the forward exercise room and spa and entered the small locker room, where she put her bag down and changed into her workout clothes.

The class was about twenty minutes into their routine when Adolpho entered with a bag of his own.

Adolpho, in his perfect English, told the group that their class was over as he locked the door and pulled a gun and a radio out of his bag.

"Ladies, you will all be unharmed as long as you listen closely and do exactly as I say," said Adolpho.

The eighteen women were silent, some looked as though they didn't believe him, while others were panic-stricken. Marsha looked coldly straight at Adolpho taking in everything he said and did, watching for an opportunity. One false move on Adolpho's part and his neck would quickly be broken.

Adolpho sent a text message on his phone to Eduardo, who in turn sent out a text message to Henry Boston's email, telling him to wire the \$25 million to the account specified.

Boston retrieved the message seven minutes later and wired the money as instructed.

"Kevin, I have gotten my message and wired the money, now find the bastards," said Boston.

"Did it say which ship is at risk?" asked Clinton.

"Kevin, it's the ship you are on, the Sea Empress," replied Boston. "We have a second message. They're saying they have eighteen passengers being held hostage in the exercise room, and they have a bomb planted on the ship which is placed in a critical area which will sink the Sea Empress if we fail to send the money."

"My God," said Danny, "Marsha is up there now at a yoga class."

Kevin and the others looked at Danny horror-stricken, but Danny raised both hands in the universal gesture to mean relax, and he said, "Don't worry, you don't have to feel sorry for her, but you can bet that the bad guy in there is living on borrowed time."

Noting Adolpho's name tag, Marsha spoke up. "Adolpho, how about we all calm down a little and talk about what it is that you want. We are just a room full of panicked women and everyone needs to take a deep breath."

"Madame, everyone will be fine, here, as long as you do as you are told," Adolpho assured her. "We have no intention of any harm coming to

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you, and as soon as our instructions are followed, I will be leaving the ship and let you get on with your vacation, no 'worse for the wear' as you Americans say, but with a few extra stories to tell your friends back home."

"How are you planning on leaving," asked Marsha.

"I have a boat on the way to pick me up right now, coming from Prickly Pear Island about five miles from here," said Adolpho.

"What do you want, money?" asked Marsha.

"Yes, Madame, lots of it. And if they don't wire the money within the hour, I am going to detonate a bomb powerful enough to sink this ship." Adolpho's eyes met hers, and she saw only determination staring back at her.

Marsha noted the time on her watch, it was 4:10 pm.

Adolpho's phone received a text message, and he smiled as he read it.

"Ladies, you can thank your ship's owners for saving your lives," said Adolpho, "and I want to tell you that they just made me a very rich man."

Adolpho then used his ship communication radio and spoke in an even manner, "This is a message from FALN. We have command of your ladies yoga class, and we are instructing you to bring the ship to a stop as we have a person who wants to get off. Me."

Kevin Clinton was at the bridge and took the radio microphone from the Captain.

"To whom are we speaking," asked Clinton.

"This is Adolpho, who no longer is a cabin steward but for the next hour will be your captain," said Adolpho, enjoying his temporary promotion.

"I am authorized to inform you that your instructions have been carried out and you should have confirmation on your end at any time," said Clinton.

"Indeed, you are right, and I have already been informed, so our only business left is to bring the ship to a halt so my go-fast boat can meet me and pick me up," said Adolpho.

"Adolpho, I have to ask you to give us information as to the location of the bomb so we can remove it," said Clinton.

"When I am safely away from the ship, I will text message the location to you, but if you fail to allow me to leave, you will not know in time to

find it and disarm it. Don't interfere and you will learn of its location in time."

With that information, three women slumped to the floor in a dead faint as others rushed to assist them and break their falls.

Marsha was calculating how long it would take her to break Adolpho's neck.

Her cell phone rang.

"Yes dear," said Marsha, "class is taking a little longer. Let me ask our new 'instructor' how late we shall be detained. Adolpho, will we be here long? You see, my husband wants to make a reservation for the Italian Restaurant?"

"Lady, we are hijacking your ship, and you are worried about dinner reservations?" asked Adolpho, once again being reminded about how crazy Americans were.

"You just said you have been wired your money, life goes on and I want to go to dinner, but I want time to *dress* properly," said Marsha, sizing up her prey.

She looked over the lanky Latin room steward and figured that he got most of his exercise changing linens and banging the female passengers when he wasn't selling them dope.

Marsha figured he wouldn't get off a single shot or a message when she pounced. She had moved to within six feet of him when she began to quiz him about his plans. Adolpho was packing a 9mm and likely had never used it, as she noted that he had failed to take the safety off. This guy was dead meat. But her mind went to the alleged bomb.

"My goodness, Adolpho, this is just like the movies," said Marsha as she continued to act like an airhead tourist. "Just what kind of bomb do you have on this boat? Is it like they use in those cartoons, a big black ball with a fuse? How can you possibly light the fuse anyway? I rather suspect you'd need a real long fuse to reach the bomb from here."

"Madame, if you must know, that kind of bomb is only in old movies! My operatives are clever men, so my bomb is plastics with a cell phone as a trigger, and not the comedy on your television."

Marsha had left her cell phone on when Danny had called, and it now functioned as an open line, but her mute button kept any voices from coming in from the bridge, allowing Danny and the B & P team to hear everything in the exercise room, including Adolpho's description of his bomb. Marsha kept probing.

"Well Adolpho, I hope that you will simply just take your money and leave and go buy a private island, after all, you have a ship load of people

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here who have paid a fortune to go on vacation, and I don't think you want a bunch of pissed off tourists to deal with," said Marsha. "How would you be able to send a signal to a bomb with a cell phone anyway? You must know that none of our cell phones work too well out here all the time."

"Madame you are asking too many questions! Are you writing a book?" said Adolpho. "I can't be taking my time with you; I am done waiting on you silly women. You had better pray that the ship owners don't fail to allow me to leave, or I will trigger the bomb and believe me, if it goes off where I put it, then it will put a crack in the hull and cause the ship to split in half. This is something that they will regret, to fool with Adolpho. This time, I am going to make some *real* money and live like the rich Americans and Europeans."

"Split in half...the hull? Then you put the bomb near the center of the ship, right below us here?" This question from Marsha sent the ladies into a frenzy of panic now.

"No, no, it is next to the number four engine, so stop the noise! All of you!" Adolpho waved the gun about at them, pleading for silence. Meanwhile, the camera feed from the exercise room was being scanned in the B & P security center, so Adolpho's picture had gone to the Seven Seas employee system, to Interpol, and was emailed to the NSA in Maryland which delivered back a message that facial recognition on a San Juan port camera had caught him with the granddaughter of released FALN terrorist Eduardo Gomez. Ship computers fished out his image as he was handed off a package from Luis who came in the crew gangplank without having his package scanned through the X-ray machine, upon his return from liberty in St. Martin's.

Homeland Security picked up Gomez's info, but Luis and Adolpho were both clean in the government's no fly file.

B & P had a go-fast boat on radar coming in from Prickly Pear Island and heading directly at the ship, which had come to standstill.

Reprisal and Revenge were closing in on the Sea Empress and the Revenge had launched its fast attack chopper.

Henry Boston had an open line to the B & P team on the Sea Empress from his plane which was on the way from St. Martin's to St. Kitts.

The Black & Perkins computers had also tracked Henry Boston's electronic wire to a bank in the Cayman Islands and a team had quickly

descended on that bank from the Revenge helicopter. The team landed on the roof of the bank and quickly seized the communications center and took control of the bank's wire. Nothing would be moving from this bank and the Seven Seas money was on hold. While the Black & Perkins team took the bank from the top, Cayman police rolled up and secured the bank lobby.

While the helicopter team was underway to the Cayman Island bank, two Black & Perkins bomb techs were on the way to the engine room where the ship computer system had turned up an image of Adolpho placing an object on the bulkhead in the engine room the day before. They quickly disarmed the bomb and secured it, took it to aft and sent it overboard.

Now they had a single armed pirate to deal with on the top deck holding seventeen women and Marsha Jones at gunpoint.

Kevin Clinton radioed to the Reprisal to take out the go-fast which was making a beeline for the Sea Empress.

"It's okay if you ask him to heave to, but only ask once, and then let the bastard have it," said Clinton.

The go-fast was now only about a mile from the Sea Empress when it went up in a ball of flame.

"What the hell," said Adolpho, as he starred in amazement, what have these stupid people done? That boat was my ride."

"How terribly rude of them," muttered Marsha in her most innocent voice.

"They can launch a tender for me," said Adolpho. "And one of you ladies will be coming with me."

Adolpho had turned away from the women to see the burning boat, which gave Marsha the opportunity she had been waiting for. She quickly crossed the six feet between them and laid out the gunman with a swift chop to the neck, grabbed his gun and sent a knee into his crotch; she then slammed her other hand down on his neck, breaking it; the loud cracking sound filled the now silent room with the other women staring in awe at Marsha. At the same time Adolpho gurgled a sick sound as he slumped to the floor, dead.

While Black & Perkins had mopped up the pirates of the Caribbean, a team of Secret Service and U. S. Marshals had picked up Eduardo, raided his house and carted off a truck load of evidence. Unless the new Attorney General, who, ironically, was the Clinton Administration Deputy Attorney General who had made the recommendation for a Presidential pardon in 2000, let him loose again, Eduardo Gomez would be in prison

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for the rest of his life. And his granddaughter was going to be raising her baby without a father or husband in sight.

## *Chapter Eleven*

Rosa Gomez had her cell phone in her purse and a key to a safe deposit box in her wallet. She watched the police leave with her grandfather from their apartment over the jewelry store which catered to tourists a block from the cruise ship terminal.

Rosa walked up the hill past the plaza with the statue of Christopher Columbus and walked across the plaza filled with vendors hawking hats, necklaces and homemade shopping bags catering to tourists. Finally, she walked into Banco Rico.

Adolpho had told her that if anything happened to her grandfather that she must assume he had been caught too, and to go to the bank and clean out the safe deposit box.

Rosa sought out a clerk who assisted her, taking her to a room where she was able to open the box in privacy. She quickly took the four large envelopes which were neatly folded and about an inch thick along with a zippered bag which was heavy and put them all into her large purse. She then quietly left the bank.

As she was leaving two police cars rolled up to the front door.

Rosa went to her cousin's home, and as her cousin fixed her lunch, she went out on a back patio and opened her envelopes.

'My dear Rosa, if you are reading this it is very likely that our plan has failed and your grandfather has been arrested. I am sorry that I will not be around to help you with our child; I only hope that you will name him after me if it is a boy. Here is my savings in cash of \$25,000 and a bank account in St. Martins with another \$850,000. As you can see my business with the tourists over the past few years has enabled me to save money, and I want to show you that I take my responsibilities as a father seriously. The police will be around to see you soon, but since you had nothing to do with our plan you should be okay. There is a card here for a lawyer who has an office in Old San Juan and as he is an American citizen, he won't let the authorities push you around. His fee has already been paid. If our baby is a girl please name her after your grandmother.'

The heavy bag contained gold coins worth another \$100,000. Adolpho had been very thrifty, and he'd turned the desire for drugs by American tourists into real gold.

Rosa knew that she could likely do nothing for her grandfather as this new crime of his would put him back in prison for the rest of his life. But

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she was going to raise Adolpho's son to be able to strike back and make up for the fate of his father and her grandfather.

When Rosa opened the last envelope, she found a simple sheet of paper.

On the paper were a phone number and a simple message: call this number and tell Manuel that plan number two must be exercised.

Rosa called the number and Manuel sent a prepared text message that went to Henry Boston's email.

"You have only been successful in eliminating part of our plan, stand by for NEWS: You now pay \$50 million dollars, and you have one hour to wire the money to the enclosed account."

But poor Rosa was now a link in the conspiracy and her fate was sealed. She would be in the same prison with her grandfather and her cousin would be raising her baby. Luckily she had left her envelopes with her cousin Maria.

Boston called Clinton after he received the newest email.

"Damn, now what," said Boston.

"We have a report back just seconds ago from the NSA in Maryland, their video surveillance has picked up hits on Adolpho as well as his girlfriend Rosa. They just picked up her cell phone and tracked it to the user who made the text message to your email with the latest demand," said Clinton. "We can only assume that the threat is real based on the first bomb. We are now checking the ship's computer system for anything else on Adolpho, but there could be *two* operatives on this ship. We have Luis in custody, and we are questioning him now, but there could be someone else, and it's possible Luis just wasn't in on the bomb deal. He swears up and down that h, he thought he was carrying marijuana on the ship for Adolpho. Say's he's been doing it for years."

While Luis was being questioned, agents were going through his condo at Marigot on St. Martins and had found nothing connected with this event.

Since Adolpho had been a cabin steward, he was back and forth from the guest areas of the ship and free to be there while returning to the crew quarters and the crew bar as well. Not very much of the video system was set up in the crew areas and only at the last refurbishing in Norfolk did new digital video get installed in the engine rooms, one of

Scotty's decisions in order to verify the workmanship of the Virginia dry dock firm.

"Holy crap," yelled Boston to Clinton over the phone. "Fox News just showed a video clip of the go-fast boat being blown up by a rocket from the chopper, it was shot by a passenger on the Sea Empress, they don't know what fired the rocket but they know it was close to our cruise ship. This is not good, can we shut down the cell phone service on that ship?"

"Don't be too quick to do that; you'll just have to deal with it. After all, we may need all of the communications we can get on that ship. We've used cells already," said Clinton.

The TV in the war room on the ship was tuned to the Fox News Channel and the boat being blown up was being played over and over.

The stunned women at the yoga class had been taken to the supper club, where their families joined them and were being treated to cocktails. Perhaps the best remedy for the shock of being hijacked for twenty minutes and watching Marsha eliminate their own personal pirate in one of the shortest careers on record for a Caribbean terrorist.

Marsha was brought to the war room next to the bridge while the yoga room was sealed off for examination and Adolpho's body moved to the ship's morgue.

The morgue was located on the lowest level of cabins for crew, just above the engine room and only had room enough for three bodies max. As one elderly passenger had died of a heart attack that morning, Adolpho would have company.

Oliver Ross made sure the morgue was secured, and he had possession of the key when he returned to the task force suite next to the bridge.

Clinton called to Danny and got an update. Danny rushed to the war room upon learning of the latest email demanding a ransom.

"Now how do we find the bomb," said Danny Jones.

"We are scanning all the photos and video in the ship's system and copies of the digital files have been sent to NSA, and they are working on them also," said Clinton. "We are getting all the work from Homeland Security that they would provide if they were running the operation, even the President has been briefed. They have deployed six Navy ships from San Juan.

"Kevin, I am watching Fox News now as they are playing the clip and passengers about this boat being blown up next to my cruise ship. They have a woman on the phone who says she watched a terrorist having his neck broken in yoga class," said Boston. "I am glad we iced this guy, but I

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can't believe this is going to help us book passengers this week. Who broke this asshole's neck?"

"Danny's wife Marsha took him out."

"No kidding?"

"Danny said that's going to cost you extra," said Clinton.

"If we don't find out what this newest threat is, we won't have to worry about any extra fees," said Boston. "We'll be out of business."

"Who searched the body of the dead guy," Danny asked Oliver Ross.

"I just bagged him and slabbed him," said Ross.

"Let's go," said Danny and the two men ran for the morgue.

Upon entering the room, the men ripped open the body bag and began to search the body, pulling away his jumpsuit to reveal a plastic explosive duct taped to his chest.

"Don't bother trying to take it off him, we are going to bury this guy at sea," said Danny.

Ross and Jones quickly rolled the gurney with the dead terrorist down the hall to the boarding door, called to the bridge to have the door unlocked, and in another two minutes gave the gurney, body and all, a hefty shove, pushing it out and watching it splash into the sea.

"Kevin, ask the ship's captain to put the pedal to the medal and get this tub the hell out of here," said Jones as the ship increased speed to about 23 knots. Once the ship was a half mile away from where they'd dumped Adolpho's remains, a big burst of explosives blew Adolpho's body to Kingdom Come. Just what would have happened had he been still lying in the morgue one deck above the engine room and right next to where the ship had been spliced together?

Apprised of the latest situation, Boston, still on his flight in his private jet looked worn out.

"Kevin, we would have lost the Sea Empress if that bomb had gone off in the morgue. It would've split the ship below the water line, and it's hard to say if we could have gotten everyone off alive," said Boston.

"Now I am watching the latest video clip of the body blowing up on Fox News as they have another passenger sending them clips over their cell phones, holy shit, can we cut the cell phone transmissions now?"

"Do we know what triggered the blast," asked Ross.

"It could be it was on a timer and had Adolpho made it off the ship and on his getaway boat, he would simply have turned it off. That was likely his backup plan," said Danny.

Danny and Marsha left the task force war room in the Owners Suite and went back to their adjoining luxury suite, changed and went to the supper club where they and the yoga class women and their families were being treated to the upgrade dining, all tables being served bottles of Dom Perignon with the tab being picked up by Henry Boston. Envelopes with gift certificates good for two week cruises anywhere Seven Seas sailed were also included, good for one year and for up to six guests, all in suites with all shore excursions paid as well as \$500 credit line for each in the casino.

"Do you think we got one of these envelopes by mistake, dear," said Marsha. "After all, I thought this would just be part of the job as you are a Black & Perkins employee now."

"Henry already tried to pry me away from B & P, but I told him no, I am going to just wing it on these easy jobs cruising around the Caribbean," said Danny. "By the way, they put you on the payroll too."

"But I really didn't want another job," said Marsha.

A note in their envelope from Clinton welcomed her as the newest consultant for Black & Perkins with a retainer in the form of a check for a million dollars.

"We are going to have our work cut out for us, with at least one member of the crew, and perhaps Luis, too, involved in a terrorist plot, we need to really review how the Seven Seas Company screens their crews and staffing," said Danny. "This is going to take a lot of work and Kevin can see now that other cruise lines are going to want us doing their security too, after all that footage on Fox News."

"Damn, the days of being able to float any old BS line about what happened in any given situation appears to be over with everyone having cell phone cameras and instant video self-publishing," said Marsha. "I suppose somebody has this stuff on You Tube already."

"We checked earlier in the war room, Adolpho had his pager number set up on his Facebook for passengers to call him for his "services" and on Craigslist he was listed for services to women. This guy was making money all the time, he just got greedy and now, don't say it before me, but he is swimming with the...."

"Don't you dare say that or you'll be wearing this very expensive champagne," said Marsha. "Now get another bottle of that stuff sent to our stateroom and order some caviar. We are going to relax on our

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private veranda under the stars while we unwind on our way to St. Lucia. Tell room service to bring some candles.”

As the passengers all mingled in the nine-story atrium of the Sea Empress, the stories of the day’s events were swapped along with trading of photos and video clips played on cameras in an electronic-like graffiti blitz that went on until the free bars were closed at 2am and the special chocolate lovers buffet ended.

The ship hosted everyone for four hours at the large lounge as soothing tunes were played from the jazz combo and there were some really loaded guests shuffling back to their rooms when it was all over. Cabin stewards were not looking forward to the next morning’s cleaning duties. A special message from the captain was played on the ship’s closed circuit television to each cabin explaining what the excitement was all about, at least a minimal version. The captain didn’t really explain the exploding Adolpho segment in great detail, but after all the free booze and special late night buffet, it didn’t appear anyone cared too much.

It was different the next day when the Sea Empress docked in St. Lucia and network news crews that had flown in overnight from Miami were waiting at the ship terminal.

## *Chapter Twelve*

The picturesque *Port of St. Lucia* was no stranger to the buzz of international media attention as the famous saga of two American congressmen who'd died on the *Witch Doctor* six years earlier had educated the locals on the intricacies of capitalism: renting helicopters, planes, villas, and prostitutes to the media for exorbitant fees. The demand for pot would soar along with the expense accounts of some of the news crews.

As the *Sea Empress* activated its thrusters, which pushed the ship towards the long pier, the distance between the ship and pier decreased.

Within minutes of docking, passengers began streaming off of the ship to meet their tour guides for trips out on catamarans, deep sea fishing boats, a simulated pirate ship, and small tour bus forays of the island and to play golf, and view the colonial era plantations. Shoppers headed off on foot and to hail cabs, and it appeared no one was going to let a little piracy come between them and their vacation. In fact, it appears as if the attempt to blow them all up or sink their ship simply added to the thrill of a being on a cruise.

Go figure.

A lanky blonde woman perhaps twenty-three years old held up a sign that read: "Snorkeling Power Boat Cruise" and a line of passengers began to form behind her with a few people clutching snorkeling equipment. Others, who had never snorkeled before didn't know to bring their own masks and would soon be chomping down on a mouthpiece and blowing their noses into masks worn by tourists from seven continents.

Nathan and Sarah Golden from Atlantic City, New Jersey were on their second cruise and were now experienced enough to bring their own masks, complete with breathing tubes. For about twenty bucks at any sporting goods store, having their own masks might well make the difference between completing their trip in good health and catching some exotic flu or cold bug.

The couple from Jersey were glad to be on their trip after a lifetime of pinching pennies to get both their children through college, with Sarah teaching and Nathan a professor at a community college and working part time as a Rabbi.

The couple engaged in small talk with a couple who were from Pennsylvania. Jay was retired and his wife Nancy was twenty years his junior. The pair both worked in a ski resort all winter and this trip in April matched the one that they took the previous Thanksgiving, except the

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price was lower due to the economic conditions and fuel costs being down.

Jay was an artist and his wife, while younger, had retired as teacher, and their 4 month, 7 day a week long winter jobs gave them the rest of the year to enjoy life.

As regulars in their hometown amateur theatre productions, the couple had gotten over being shy around strangers a long time ago, and as the forty-five passengers from the Sea Empress boarded the large charter boat which would speed them to a sparkling cove about five miles away to snorkel, they soon struck up a conversation with Nathan and Sarah, as well as the very interesting Emily Fountain whom Jay immediately recognized. The Goldenes were very much taken with the charming Senator and soon introductions included Sen. Emily Fountain's boyfriend, who mumbled something about being employed in imports and exports.

After a couple of side trips into coves surrounded with hilltop estates of the rich and famous—names which the captain recited over a megaphone as being the vacation homes of various actresses and entertainers, the guests *oohed* and *aahed* with each new report of a famous or wealthy owner. Expensive yachts were tied up at docks abutting each of the gorgeous homes surrounded with lush landscaping and views stretching across sparkling waters.

The 55-foot charter boat was equipped with seating for nearly sixty people with a large covered but open cabin to give maximum shade from the tropical sun, and a large open area over top of the bridge that attracted sun worshipers.

Several buckets of snorkeling masks were set in the aft portion of the deck with a large box full of flippers next to them. "The masks are," said the captain of the cutter, "in water with a disinfectant, making them perfectly sanitary."

Rabbi Golden asked Sen. Fountain how she was able to leave Washington for this cruise.

"This is my long delayed vacation," said Sen. Fountain. "My friend and I both work long weeks and go months without a day off, so we just decided to expand the Easter recess and go on this vacation."

As Sen. Fountain gave her explanation, Golden twisted his Star of David in an absent-minded way, with the senator's friend looking up at the expensive cottages built into the hillside overlooking the cove.

"There, Emily, that's where we were last year at Sophie's house," said Bill Thurmond, the senator's cabin mate. "We all were here last summer for Sophie's birthday party. She flew in 250 friends for four days of sushi, Caribbean cooking and champagne."

"Wow," said Sarah Golden, "you actually stayed at Sophie Davis's house? That's the big place with all the porticos the guide just pointed out to us, that place must be worth millions."

"It's pretty impressive," said Thurmond. "I would bet you're guessing low."

Nathan zoomed in on the TV star's home and shot a dozen frames with his digital camera.

"What kind of imports do you do," asked Rabbi Golden.

"Actually, we only import some of the materials we need. I run a shipyard," said Thurmond, running his hand across the top of the Senator's back, pulling her close to him.

"You do business with the government and are cruising with the Senator," chuckled Nathan.

"There is nothing wrong with that Rabbi," said Thurmond. "Our personal relationship has nothing to do with her official duties."

"Sure," said Golden as he looked away and rolled his eyes.

The guide told everyone to get ready for snorkeling, as the boat captain pulled into a gorgeous cove. Two other boats were at anchor, their passengers engaged in snorkeling or sunning themselves on a nearby sandy beach.

The new arrivals began to slip into their fins and plop into the crystal clear water. Soon the cries of delight were called out between the paddling and swimming novice divers, all enjoying some of the best views of tropical fish outside of an aquarium.

The guide took extra care to caution his guests not to touch the coral on the bottom, implying that doing so could be toxic and the only cure would be for him having to urinate on their hands.

Now the search for the fancy fish was in full swing and for most of those paddling around by kicking their fins, it was the first time for such an adventure, and they were truly having fun.

Sarah Golden pointed out a school of gold and black striped fish to Emily Fountain, and they both squealed like school girls after they came

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back up to the surface from spotting the exotic sea life. What a sight that would have been for the national press corps.

An hour passed and soon the guide was signaling to the floating masses of sunburned snorkelers to join him in returning to the boat.

Once the last diving guest was back on the boat, the captain started the engines, and the guide started the rum punch cups being passed around as he poured them from a ten gallon drink dispenser.

The laughter got louder, and the line never stopped to pour another drink from the water cooler full of rum punch as the boat sped back up the coast line.

Thurmond was a little unsteady, due to the balancing act of using his sea legs for a trip back to the rum punch. His feet went out from underneath him on the slippery deck, and he came down with a thud on his can, catching his fall with both elbows. None worse for the wear but gaining plenty of attention from Emily and several other women, including Sarah, he toasted the adventure with his newly discovered and increasingly soused friends.

The captain slowed the boat and announced that he was taking the passengers into another cove for sightseeing. This cove had few homes built into the hillsides and proved deeper than the others.

Soon, the boat slowed as the shoreline grew toward them on each side of the vessel.

Suddenly, from both sides small power boats each with three armed men roared out from hiding places under tree limbs tucked away along the shoreline to meet them with guns aimed at the captain.

"You will please stop. We have business with you," said one of the gunmen.

"Holy crap," said Thurmond, reaching into his bag for his phone.

The captain pulled back on the throttle and took the boat out of gear as it slowly drifted.

"We need you all to hand over your wallets, watches, money and jewelry, and you will then be allowed to continue back to your ship," said the lead gunman.

"Do they qualify as pirates too," asked Sarah.

"*Shhh*," said Nathan as he tried to slip his Star of David into his back pocket.

"Sir, I will take that too," said the gunman who was calling the shots, but still spoke politely and with a British accent.

"Not this, it is only a simple religious symbol of no value," said Nathan.

"Ha, I will sell it to a Jewish shopkeeper," said the gunman as he snatched it from the Rabbi.

As the Rabbi pleaded for his family heirloom, he tried to take it back, earning him a blast from the gunman's AK 47.

Nathan Golden was blown over the side of the boat by the violent blast from the gun with his crimson blood spreading across the surface of the still water as the dead Rabbi slowly sank into the blue lagoon.

Sarah and Emily shrieked, and the other passengers were stunned into silence.

The gunmen collected their booty and quickly left leaving the captain and the guide with their jaws dropped and shaking.

The guide began to apologize to the passengers, sobbing.

The captain told everyone to get down on the deck that they were going to make a run for it in case the gunmen returned.

"Port police, this is the *Iguana* heading back to port! We have been robbed and one passenger murdered," said the young captain on his radio, while the passengers huddled on the deck with loud sobs coming from many of them.

Sen. Fountain did her best to comfort Sarah, while Bill Thurmond looked aft to make sure that no other boats were following.

"Do you have any guns on this boat," Thurmond asked the captain.

"Yes, one pistol and a flare gun. Here below the helm," said the young captain who had suddenly aged.

The captain reached down and pulled out a 9mm Glock and jammed it into his waistband. He then handed the flare gun to Thurmond.

### *Chapter Thirteen*

Danny and Marsha had already boarded the ship after walking around the shopping area at the ship terminal, picking up a few items to remember their visit to St. Lucia. Marsha bought Danny a new watch, something he would never spring for himself, depending on the time feature on his cell phone.

Danny bought Marsha a bobble head dancing girl with a grass skirt which she clearly would never have bought for herself.

Just as they plopped down in their lounge chairs on their private balcony, Danny's cell phone rang.

"We have trouble," said Kevin. "Please, please come to the war room."

Marsha looked at Danny and sighed, "Okay, I'm keeping that check so I might as well come with you."

Kevin Clinton sat at a desk with four monitors along with three agents talking on phones.

"We have a helicopter over top of the snorkeling boat flying cover for their return trip here," said Clinton. "Our ships are standing by to escort the Sea Empress out of here as soon as we recover all the passengers from their shore excursions, which the captain said will likely not be until 5:30pm."

"I thought we were in paradise! What the hell is going on?" asked Danny.

"St. Lucia has more of a crime problem than anyone wants to hear about. They have gunmen preying on tourists in those remote boutique hotels and private beaches, last year one tourist was raped and murdered and there have been several armed robberies," said Clinton.

"What is the assessment," asked Marsha.

"We have a rabbi from New Jersey murdered and forty surviving passengers who've been robbed, but no one else was harmed and on this snorkeling excursion, we have a U. S. Senator and her boyfriend, the Chairman of Portland Shipping, the largest ship building company on the West Coast," said Clinton. "This island has seen an increase in drugs and crime, more than many others; in fact the government is so frustrated that they are reinstituting hangings."

The *Iguana* came in fast to the terminal and tied up near the *Sea Empress* even as Clinton and his B & P crew worked in their suite.

The squad of Royal St. Lucian Police was waiting at the boat and officers took a statement from each passenger prior to allowing them to leave the charter boat to board the *Sea Empress*.

While the passengers from the *Iguana* were being processed by the island cops, the B & P team which had been flown in from Maryland, was crossing a channel from the St. Lucia airport to the ship terminal in a 36' foot utility police boat, complete with their gear. They were whisked aboard the *Sea Empress* and taken directly to the B & P suite.

This latest incident was raw meat for the news crews freshly arrived from Miami, and they went to work with a vengeance on the story of the slain New Jersey Rabbi.

Was the killing religious-motivated or was it just a robbery? Will the government act to send in Navy seals to root out the killers? What did Sen. Fountain see, and will she hold a press conference, and exactly who was with the Senator on the snorkeling trip?

Seven Seas officials were also supplementing the crew of the *Sea Empress*, and Henry Boston had arrived to oversee getting his cruise ship back on its trip, and his customers placated after all the turmoil.

"Henry, you won't believe this but these passengers seem to love all of the excitement," said Clinton as the two sat down at a lunch table to brief him on the events of the *Iguana* while the police processed the returning snorkeling party. "Of course they are upset over the murder of the Rabbi, but by and large, few people knew him or had met him, and with everything that happened, we have had veteran cruisers saying that this is the best cruise they have ever been on, and that it's like a murder mystery train that never stops unfolding new acts."

"Jehoshaphat," said Boston. "Who would've imagined they would ever react like that? I suppose now our marketing and entertainment folks will be coming up with special mystery cruises. Well whatever floats our boats will be fine with me, but for now, I want to know we have ended all of the surprises for this week's sailing of the *Sea Empress*."

"Have we let the St. Lucia people know that we have our team here for execution of the Privateer Clause?" asked Boston.

"Yes, they are fueling up the *Iguana* to return to the cove where the attack took place, and we are tracking the cell phones of those who were robbed by the bandits. Hell, we have them in our computer right now and our assault team will soon be paying them a visit—soon! They are only

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about three miles from here, up in the woods from the cove where the attack took place.”

Within an hour the B & P assault team had made contact with the pirates, obtained the valuables stolen, and managed to bring out one live pirate for the St. Lucia government to hang. The rest of the band were dead, killed in the firefight with the assault team who’d tracked them to their lair in a hillside cave via the GPS technology in the stolen cell phones.

As the *Iguana* recovered the Rabbi’s body, his grieving widow was taken to her stateroom where she was comforted by Sen. Fountain and a priest who had been on the cruise.

Sarah Golden sobbed and wailed all the way back on the *Iguana* and now was empty of tears.

“Why did they do that to Nathan,” Sarah asked Emily Fountain. “You saw all he wanted to do was hold onto a medallion which had no real monetary value, it had been his grandfather’s who had survived Auschwitz. Nathan died for that medallion.”

“Dear, we have to deal with what is in front of us now, not that it makes any sense. I am sure that Nathan was a good and compassionate man, and no group of killers can take that memory from you. I assure you that I will seek that our government assures justice will be dealt to those who did this,” said Emily, who at that point didn’t know that justice had already been provided to five of the six bandits.

The police continued to gain evidence from the *Iguana* and the recovered body as well as the stolen booty recovered from the pirates. The Royal St. Lucia police said that with the witness statements, which were videotaped, that the ship could leave with all the passengers and Rabbi Golden’s body would be delivered by their crime lab to the ship in time for sailing. Nathan Golden would be kept in the ship’s morgue for the balance of the cruise and be available for transport to his home upon their return to Florida.

Sarah was horrified to learn it would be a week before she could bury her husband. Sarah called her new friend in her stateroom and pleaded for help.

Sen. Fountain took quick action and called Henry Boston, who had his company jet prepared to fly Sarah and her husband’s body back to New Jersey that day in time for burial the next afternoon in accordance with Jewish religious beliefs.

A Jewish funeral director traveling on the *Sea Empress* for his vacation volunteered his services to the widow, which she accepted with gratitude as there was not a funeral director on the island familiar with Jewish traditions. He quickly was taken to meet the body at the funeral home near the port where he supervised the preparation of the body for transport. With the video tape of the witnesses, the island's chief prosecutor permitted an autopsy to be avoided.

Rabbi Nathan Golden would be buried back home in New Jersey, all within the tenets of his religion, within twenty-four hours of his snorkeling trip

## ***CHAPTER FOURTEEN***

As the Sea Empress steamed out of the harbor from St. Lucia, Marsha asked, "What in the world will we do for some excitement now?" Danny knew she really didn't want an answer. They went silent instead in their lounge chairs on the verandah off their suite, the pair watching the swirling wake of the ship that seemed like a furious sea creature bent on following them.

The warm air and bright sky bathed them with warmth, just the right accompaniment to the white merlot they sipped at. A butler brought them a cheese tray along with crackers, meats and caviar, a perk which suite passengers were treated to aboard the fleet ships.

Danny considered that the question wasn't really a question and didn't need an answer. Besides, there was a certain peril to answering such hypothetical questions.

Given that his wife's life, as well as his, had been fraught with peril as well as adventure, he learned many years ago to not try to predict the next twist and turn in their path.

Wisely, Danny said, "Drinks in the martini bar and the second seating in the Great Gatsby dining room. There's plenty of opportunity for excitement anywhere on this ship, and after dinner, we can head for the roulette table to see if they might let us win, or if they will try to get your paycheck back."

As if on cue, Danny's phone rang.

"I hope you don't mind a call," said Kevin Clinton. "I have to tell you that due to you and Marsha, we have not only been successful in protecting our client, but we have signed up two more cruise lines in the last two hours. You two were terrific and I can't thank you enough."

"Kevin, we were lucky," said Danny with sincere modesty just before he hung up the phone. "If we were on a different ship, things could have been very tragic."

Danny looked out over the water, then turned as he cast his gaze over to his wife and took another sip of his wine.

"You know I met that Rabbi on this cruise one day at breakfast, and I have to say, I sometimes think that God lets people down," said Danny.

“That Rabbi was a kind man and simply wanted to hold on to his family medallion, and that animal with the AK 47 blew him right off the boat. It’s now in the report on the interviews with the other passengers. Why can’t God take better care of his humble and simple people and send a lightning bolt down to take out the jerks?”

As Danny spoke, he walked across the balcony and had picked up a plate of nachos topped with melted cheese.

A sudden burst of wind blew up in front of him, sending the plate of cheese and nachos spreading across the front of his favorite island shirt.

Marsha looked on with amazement as well as amusement.

“Dear, has it ever occurred to you that the Good Lord did intervene and your squad from the Reprisal which tracked the pirates down was his avenging angels?” asked Marsha. “And, by the way, the next time you want to lecture God, you shouldn’t make it so easy for him to respond, judging by your shirt.”

Danny was stunned to see the gooey mess suddenly tossed across his chest, giving a new dimension to his colorful shirt now with gobs of cheese dripping from its palm trees.

The wind died down as quickly as it had blown across the open balcony.

Off the side of the ship a school of dolphins cavorted in the sea, keeping pace with them and putting on a show for the passengers. Danny thought for a second he saw two of the dolphins leapfrog each other.

“Did you see that?” yelled Danny.

“God would want you to see that Danny. Now let’s get dressed for dinner,” said Marsha, with her characteristic faith in the Almighty once again giving her confidence in a world filled with fright and fraud.

After showering and changing into country club casual, the designated dress of the evening, the couple worked their way into the elegant dining room which was decorated in a classic ocean liner style reminiscent of the 1920s with ample use of fine woodwork, paintings, brass and sculptures. Three large chandeliers hung from the ceiling, leaving a feeling of ornate style and class drifting through the passengers. Tuxedoed waiters and waitresses and their assistants tended to their guests, while head waiters in white jackets mixed with the crowd, calling most everyone by name.

“Welcome Mrs. Jones,” said Arturo to Marsha as he pulled the chair out for her to be seated.

“Thank you, Arturo,” said Marsha. “I am thrilled you are still our waiter.

I hope you didn’t miss us too much.”

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“Madame, we did miss you, but I am very happy to know you are such a strong and talented person; you are very brave and saved a lot of lives.”

As Marsha sat down, Danny took his seat but soon they were both puzzled as all around them their fellow diners began to applaud, and as the applause got louder, everyone in the dining room came to their feet with loud roars of ‘hip, hip, hoorah’. Nearby diners took photos of Danny and Marsha and came over to their table to shake their hands with some crying and hugging them and each other. The scene went on for nearly fifteen minutes until the maître d made an announcement, thanking everyone for their fine appreciation of Mr. and Mrs. Jones before adding, “Folks, it’s time to eat!”

The applause abated and a strong rendition of God Bless America was played over the piano with most of the passengers singing it loudly as they continued to stand with another round of applause at the end.

The captain then stood and led everyone in a moment of silence for Rabbi Golden.

After all of that drenching emotion, the passengers took their seats and the staff began to swirl through the dining room in an incredible display of efficiency.

The seamless transition from kitchen to table with appetizers, salads, more wine, more water glasses filled and soon entrees, with extra entrees on the side for those with big appetites, and then on to after dinner drinks and deserts made in heaven.

It was all too much to be sure, but many of the travelers with a goal to enjoy the great food were also committed walkers.

Danny and Marsha could be counted among that group, racking up a mile before every meal except for dinner. An afternoon mile before changing into dinner clothes took care of the evening meal.

A mile took four laps around the top deck of the Sea Empress, while on smaller ships it took six laps to cover the distance, or so they had been told by their steward.

After a stroll, much different from a good walk, on the sun deck, Danny and Marsha paused and sat down on deck chairs near the exercise room, now cleaned and reopened to yoga—the class suddenly so popular as to have a waiting list.

“That was incredible what happened at dinner, Danny,” said Marsha. “I have never had the public thank me before for doing my job.”

"Well, dear, you deserved it; they thought so, and I sure thought so," said Danny.

"It wasn't just for me. It was for you too. You were so brave how you took care of 'Exploding Adolpho'," said Marsha.

"You were the one who took care of him! All I did was give him a burial at sea," quipped Danny.

"These are brutal people. I can't understand why they want to attack the people on this ship," said Marsha, quickly checking herself. "I actually do understand. It's about fanaticism and greed and they are a powerful combination."

As Danny and Marsha strolled into the Casino the gamblers, at least most of them, stopped all the action as the entire room erupted in applause.

Now Danny and Marsha were embarrassed, waving and nodding their heads, repeatedly saying their 'thank yous' as they worked their way through the crowd to the roulette table.

Amos and Lorrie Martin were at their favorite table, playing while their friends Clyde and Beulah watched, all four of them sipping on cocktails.

"You folks sure are a team," said the bald Amos, with his head reflecting the many flashing lights in the casino, "and all this time, I had you pegged as a card shark couple. They had a write up about you in today's little ship newspaper, and everyone is talking about you. People are really impressed and really happy that you put a stop to those pirates, and they appreciate your saving all our lives. I saw a video of that terrorist blowing up after you shoved him off the ship. Saw it on Fox News this morning, it was great! Some passenger filmed it and sent it by email to Fox News in New York."

"Thank you, Amos. You are very kind to say so," said Danny. "Now how about letting me have the purple chips down there, dealer. I feel lucky tonight."

Three hours later, Amos and Danny both cashed in their winnings, with the balances being added to their ship cards. Amos was the big winner for the night with \$7,050 added to his ship card to cash in when he ended the voyage and Danny got a \$4550 credit.

Marsha didn't play but watched Danny and Amos, and with Lorrie, both women cheered on their husbands, even adopting cheerleader chants as the drinks got stronger.

By 2am Marsha and Danny were back in their suite and hit the sack, exhausted.

The Privateer Clause

## ***CHAPTER Fifteen***

Breakfast came early, at least for some. For those who were up late, the morning meal could be enjoyed up until 10am or just skipped. Breakfast on the Sea Empress took many forms. From room service to the buffet with all manner of dishes and custom omelets to the Great Gatsby where Eggs Benedict and bagels with lox reigned supreme. The air swirling around the ship contained scents of Belgian Waffles and Canadian Bacon laced with fresh salt from the sea. Fresh roasted coffee served with smiles reminded every passenger that their happiness was the cornerstone of the day for each staffer and crew member. The people of the Sea Empress brought life to the cruise line's brochures and kept the promises made to the prospective traveler.

Due to the hectic schedule of this trip, the itinerary changed and the ship, rather than her making a stop at St. Thomas, would dock at St. Croix instead. That didn't make Marsha too very happy, as she'd been so intent on shopping in the jewelry stores at Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas.

"I can't believe I have waited all these years to shop at these stores on St. Thomas, and now we are stuck going to another island," said Marsha.

"Dear, with a paycheck like you just picked up, I would say you can afford to hire a plane."

"Hire a plane, me?"

"Yes, and we can be at St. Thomas in 45 minutes after the ship docks at St. Croix," said Danny. "We'll get an air excursion and the shopping trip at the same time."

"Okay, how do we set it up?"

"I'll take care of it. We have planes on retainer, and I suspect Black & Perkins will be happy to have a plane ready for us." Danny then made a call to Clinton.

As the Sea Empress docked, a driver wearing a high hat which looked like he was the Mad Hatter in Alice in Wonderland held up a sign with Danny and Marsha's names on it.

"We have a plane waiting for us at the airport," said Danny, "how far is it?"

"Wow, I read about you two this morning in our St. Croix newspaper," said Fred, their driver. "This is my privilege to drive you, but could you please autograph my newspaper for my son, he is 11 years old and needs heroes."

"Sure, Fred, what is your son's name?" asked Danny.

"Henry," answered Fred.

## The Privateer Clause

Fred then had another cab driver use his camera to take his photo with Marsha and Danny.

The bumpy ride with tilting turns ended after five miles at the St. Croix airport, where they were driven right up to their plane, a twin engine Cessna. But there was no pilot around. Right after their cab let them off, another cab pulled up behind them, depositing two couples who Danny recognized from their ship.

One older fellow who got out the cab looked at Danny and asked, "Are you the fellow who is renting this Cessna?"

"Well ahhh...I thought I was, but apparently our pilot didn't get the message," said Danny.

"My name is Ben Mayflower, and we just got off the Sea Empress down at the dock. We saw you all in the dining room last night, and we sure are glad you were on our ship."

Mayflower introduced his wife, Faustino, and their friends, Vito and April Broccoli.

"We were all set to go shopping at St. Thomas," began Ben.

"However, as you might imagine, since our itinerary's been screwed up with all the excitement with the pirates, and the ship's having lost its scheduled time at the cruise terminal...well, our women are not happy as the best shopping in the Caribbean is at Charlotte Amalie."

"Well, we have a plane and no pilot, and you don't have a plane or a pilot," Danny wryly replied.

"But," said Ben, "I am a pilot! Been flying for thirty-five odd years or so, and I have my flight papers and license with me which one needs in order to charter a rental."

"Let me call my company to see if we can let you fly this plane," said Danny.

After a call and furnishing the Mayflower's documents and all was confirmed that he was indeed a licensed pilot, which including an electronic background and criminal information check, Danny Jones got the okay from Kevin Clinton to let Mayflower fly them to St. Thomas.

The Cessna Conquest was quite a nice plane, explained Mayflower to Danny, and Ben fortunately was licensed for a twin engine plane. Danny recalled on his earlier call to Clinton that the computer check on Mayflower had him holding a multi-engine license in good standing.

"This baby goes nearly 340 miles an hour and can take ten people 1300 miles. Surely, we ought to get our six people the 40 miles and be there in just about 45 minutes," said Ben.

"Danny, I have flown with Ben before, I can tell you he is a very careful pilot, but he doesn't count very well," said Vito.

"What do you mean," asked Danny, fearing that the answer could be complicated.

"Well I was flying with him back from Wilmington, North Carolina, and he asked me to keep track of the rivers and let him know when we had passed over three rivers," chuckled Vito, who's thick black mustache complemented his thick thatch of black hair and olive skin. "So we went over the James River, then the Rappahannock, and then the Potomac, and I told him as we needed to drop in altitude so we could land at a small airport near Pax River NAS," said Vito.

"What! You all are from St. Mary's County?" asked Danny.

"Yeah, that's where we are from, but when I told Ben to get us on the ground before they shot us down over Pax River, I had to argue with him about the rivers we passed. Finally, I showed him the tank farm at Piney Point, and he relented just before they scrambled a fighter to take us out as we approached the secure zone over Pax and the nuclear power plant at Calvert Cliffs."

"So then what?" asked Danny.

"Nothing, we landed on our own accord and didn't get shot down," laughed Vito, much to the chagrin of Mayflower who apparently didn't like this latest retelling of an old story.

"And you're still willing to fly with this guy?" asked Danny.

"I always get the flight insurance," said Vito as Ben cussed and helped them board the plane.

With seating for ten, and with Danny joining Ben in the cockpit, which left just Vito and April, Marsha and Ben's wife, Faustino, in the passenger area, everyone prepared for one of the shortest flights of their lives, all so they could go shopping at St. Thomas.

"Well we certainly have room for our packages in here," said April.

"The packages I wanted to pick up shopping in St. Thomas are not that big," replied Marsha.

"Well, you deserve anything you want," said April. "I only hope you will join us for lunch. I got a tip on this great restaurant right in the middle of the shopping district. Oh, please allow me to buy you lunch."

"How sweet. Of course, I wouldn't turn down such a nice offer to both join you for shopping and to be with you for lunch," said Marsha.

## The Privateer Clause

The Cessna Conquest used very little effort taking off and giving the group a great view of the largest island making up the U. S. Virgin Islands.

As St. Croix began to get smaller below them, the crystal blue sea was peppered with sailboats, fishing vessels, an oil tanker headed for the Hess refinery on the island, and a ferry which had left the port.

Soon there were few boats to notice and the sleek new aircraft was a dream for Ben Mayflower to pilot on their hop to St. Thomas.

Danny called to B & P control on the Sea Empress.

"Did you ever find out what happened to our pilot," asked Danny.

"We have several people out looking for him now, and some FBI agents are also at the airport, this is really a mystery at this point, but how is your flight going?" asked Clinton from HQ command on the Sea Empress.

"I'll tell you for sure when we see if Ben knows how to land this bird," laughed Danny.

Ben watched his instrument panel and talked to the tower at St. Thomas a couple of times, getting his landing instructions.

"Cessna 25589 cleared for landing on runway 10," radioed the St. Thomas Tower.

"Roger," said Ben.

Within two minutes, Ben steered the plane into the approach path for the Cyril E. King Airport. In another four minutes time, the flight was over with the Cessna on the ground and taxiing to a halt just outside of the terminal.

As Ben killed the engines, a small van rolled up next to the plane.

"Mr. Jones, I am from B & P as Mr. Clinton sent me over to take you all anywhere you want to go and to stick with you," said the smiling middle-aged man wearing a blue sport shirt and dark sunglasses.

"Exactly who the hell are you?" said Danny, looking through the man's glasses as if he had seen a ghost.

"You know," said retired Prince George's detective Casey Kelly, Danny's old partner on the vice-homicide squad. He then removed the glasses that had acted as a mask.

"I just got in from the Maryland training center 48 hours ago," said Casey.

"That's plenty of time to learn this island," Danny replied sarcastically, nodding. "I hope they gave you a roadmap! Of all people for me to run into on this island, my old partner! I sure didn't plan on seeing you here".

Danny and Ben helped the passengers out of the Cessna and into the air conditioned van, and off they went to the shopping district.

"So where did Blackbeard hang out when he was here 300 years ago," asked Danny.

"I really don't know," answered Casey. "But you can tell that the real thievery is still taking place every day in some of these shops."

Casey drove the van into town and turned down the main drag of the shopping district, where they let the three women out.

"So Casey, old buddy, have you been here on this island long enough to find the best BBQ and coldest beer?" asked Danny.

"You know the answer to that," said Casey as he pulled up before a bank and nodded to a sidewalk leading past the side of the bank to a small plaza.

"Go back down that walkway and turn right and pick out a table," said Casey. "There's a café back there run by an expatriate from Detroit named Wild Bill."

"Wild Bill? Really?"

"Fellow got tired of shoveling snow and moved here like fifteen years ago and only leaves if invited to by a hurricane."

Danny, Ben, and Vito walked back into the plaza bordered by buildings all painted in different pastels with wrought iron balconies jutting from them. Here they took a table below one balcony.

The three, all wearing island shirts, ordered the locally brewed Caribbean beer and North Carolina style pork BBQ. Casey stayed parked at the end of the sidewalk and stood in front the bank with a radio ear plug in one ear and a bulge under his jacket caused by his Glock.

Kevin Clinton's orders to Casey were clear. With so much publicity on the Black & Perkins team they were to be on guard for adverse actions while on shore.

Danny wanted to walk around the port village, Capitol City of the Virgin Islands, but Casey said no, very firmly.

"I'll drive you all wherever you wish, Danny," said Casey.

"What about the women?" asked Danny.

"You know better than that, Dan; we have a team on them too," replied Casey. "Another van and two guys are shadowing their every stop in a store and are prepared to whisk them back to the airport. Another team is guarding the plane."

## The Privateer Clause

"Has anyone found out what happened to our pilot?" asked Danny.

"Yes, we found him with his throat slit and rolled down a hillside at the edge of the airport," said Casey.

"Crap," said Danny. "Do we know him? Was he a B & P guy?"

"No, he was a retired CIA operative who lives here at St. Thomas and does contract flying for us and for the Agency," said Casey. "There could be external reasons for his hit, or it could all be related to our problems this week."

"Anything else you can tell me?"

"Well, his wallet was taken, so it could be it's a local crime, or made to look like one. The FBI guys are sorting it all out now."

"My God," said Danny. "This is just like paradise here, and it seems like every day there is something else horrible happening. Has news of our pilot's demise make it to the ship yet, or will we catch a break on this one?"

"I think we might have it contained."

"Meaning?"

"They're passing it off as a local news story, and the island folks have little trouble covering up negative crime stories in order to *not* scare away the tourists," said Casey. "Any reporter who wants to break crime stories gets canned and pretty soon he's just waiting tables."

"Judging from the way the passengers on the Sea Empress have reacted to this cruise, I don't think you could frighten them with a nuclear attack," replied Danny, snorting.

After lunching and enjoying a couple of cold ones, Danny, Ben and Vito took a ride to the top of the mountain overlooking the harbor at St. Thomas to enjoy the view. A market at the top provided Vito a chance to make a deal on four island shirts in his size, getting them for \$45 each, about half that of many shops.

While the men went sightseeing and stopped in yet another café, the women enjoyed salad plates in a small but busy tavern in the middle of the shopping district.

Watches, gold chains, and ear rings were acquired after appropriate haggling, and all three women bought floppy hats to ward off the Caribbean sun.

As the women walked down a side street, they came to the U.S. Post Office where a youth band playing steel drums entertained those walking by, the band collecting donations in a large kettle in front of them.

If one discounted a murdered pilot, the day was pleasantly uneventful, and as Marsha and the ladies had no clue about the pilot's bloody demise, it appeared the first uneventful day in the islands. *But then again*, thought Marsha, *the day isn't over yet*.

## *Chapter Sixteen*

Back on the *Sea Empress*, Kevin Clinton had assembled some of his top staffers, all hand-picked from the ranks of law enforcement agencies from across the United States, Canada, Mexico and Britain.

All of them had passed rigorous background checks, and while from a variety of agencies, Black & Perkins had been making good choices.

With a foiled plot to hijack the *Sea Empress*, and to blow up the ship, a murdered Rabbi, a dead pilot, and international news coverage aided by the hi-tech age and passengers will video and email access, every step of the cruise was being broadcast to the delight of those perpetually bored and *to educate those who had arranged for the mayhem*.

Clinton was trying to sort out the coincidences of local crime in the islands from the organized plots of insane radicals.

Violent upheaval spelled the same danger as random treachery, but it was Clinton's job to find ways to fend off any more problems for the *Sea Empress*.

For Clinton to have so much happening but also to have counter-measures work so successfully, it put even more pressure on him to keep up with events and predicting events beyond the here and now.

Seven Seas Chairman Henry Boston was realistic and knew that the odds that a quick response to every threat wouldn't always end with such good results. But with billions of dollars of investments in the cruise line at risk, planning for security had now taken priority over all other concerns.

Security had always been a top ten concern, but now it was in first place.

"We have been lucky this week," said Boston to Clinton as the two met for breakfast on the *Sea Empress* in the Great Gatsby dining room. "Are all of your people as top notch as Marsha and Danny?"

"God help us that they are," said Clinton. "I believe they are, but the proof is in the pudding. Right now we have assets being deployed on all nine Seven Seas ships working out of Miami, Port Everglades, Fort Lauderdale and Tampa."

"We have all of the ships plotted on our maps in our war room, and we're tracking other cruise ships of other lines as well," said Clinton.

The flight back for the three couples from St. Thomas to St. Croix had been uneventful. They had taken naps now in their rooms, changed, and met for martinis at the piano bar in the nine-story atrium prior to dinner at the Great Gatsby.

The next morning, Danny and Marsha decided to skip room service and after four laps around the sun deck went down to the Lido buffet located at the fantail of the ship. Big gleaming presentations of every variety of breakfast dishes, fruits, rolls, and baked goods were being snatched up by a large assortment of passengers.

Danny and Marsha carried their breakfast trays to a table overlooking the wake of the ship as it steamed towards St. Kitts.

"I'm getting confused about our itinerary," said Marsha. "At first I didn't care, and I would face each stop as they came, but now I find myself wondering if we are making new stops or playing catch up?"

"We have one more stop at San Juan, and they have this private island at Haiti, which I am not wild about," said Danny. "And don't forget we tender into a small port at the Dominican Republic, where we ought to just stay on the ship."

"Oh, and why's that?"

He shrugged. "It's kind of rocky there according to our briefing in the war room."

"Could it be any worse than shopping in some areas around Washington," asked Marsha. "Crime rears its ugly head anywhere! We've seen that on this trip."

"But one doesn't expect crime here in the Caribbean," said Danny.

Marsha looked out over the sea and then gazed back at Danny. "Dear, I think that all adds up to three more stops," she said.

"One port stop and two tender stops," added Danny. "You are right."

The war room was reaching high gear, now staffed by ten people all at work at computers set up throughout the luxury suite. No ship crew or staff was allowed in the war room, and Black & Perkins personnel simply took their meals with the rest of the passengers and skipped room service.

There were already two large flat screen TV's in the suite and communications of all sorts filtered into the buzzing nest of operatives.

When Danny and Marsha entered the war room, the pace and intensity was impressive even with Marsha's background in the Secret Service and Danny's crime task force experience.

"Why do I get the feeling that another shoe is going to fall?" asked Marsha.

## The Privateer Clause

"If Kevin is trying to keep anything from you, I don't think it's going to work," said Danny, "But I suspect he isn't about to skip getting your take on any new challenges."

"You aren't going to believe this," said Clinton as he walked in the war room and saw Danny and Marsha. "Have they told you yet?"

"We just a minute ago walked in," replied Danny.

"What now," asked Marsha.

"The *Resolute* has side scanner sonar capability, and she just picked up a submarine near one of our ships, the *Sea Baroness*. The bloody sub's been trailing the ship for a day and a half and the *Resolute* is ready to blow it out of the water," said Clinton. "We are just waiting for confirmation that it isn't a naval vessel of any nation and the DOD is working at tracking it down."

"How big is it," asked Danny.

"It looks like it could be an old model from the 60's. The type that drug dealers have been using, but this one isn't being sent on any mission. It's definitely tracking the *Sea Baroness*, and each time the ship makes a turn, so does the sub."

"How far away is the *Resolute*," asked Danny.

"It's just a quarter mile, and it can close on the sub in minutes and drop depth charges or a torpedo. This sub is just minutes from annihilation," said Clinton. "But so could be the *Sea Baroness*."

"Oh shit," said Danny.

"What capability does the sub have," asked Marsha.

"Just torpedoes, given its size and age," said Clinton, "but make no mistake, it's deadly."

"Do we have a risk assessment," asked Danny.

"Believe me, you don't want to hear it," said Clinton. "I'll tell you anyway. At least 2400 lives are at risk unless we get everyone off the ship and into life boats; even under an emergency evacuation, we may lose dozens in the process."

"Holy crap," said Danny. "What about the U. S. Navy? Where are they?"

"Well the Navy doesn't really give us a rundown of their nearby ships and planes, but I get the feeling that they have their own sub here and the mystery sub is in their gun sights right now. They told us that the *Resolute* may not be needed as soon as they get the word that this sub isn't

Chinese or Russian. It could be from that whack job Perez in Venezuela, but whoever it belongs to, it's about to be vaporized," said Clinton.

"When is the last time a passenger vessel was targeted by a warship, rogue or not?" asked Marsha.

"I'm not sure, but it might have been the Lusitania," said Clinton. "It was sunk by a German U-Boat in 1915 off the coast of Ireland while carrying 1900 passengers and a load of munitions from New York to England. She sank in just eighteen minutes and 1,119 died including 114 Americans. It was one of the fastest ships afloat, able to make 25 knots. The sinking tilted America against the Germans and within two years war was declared on Germany. As the ship was hit by a torpedo a secondary explosion ripped it apart and chaos reigned."

"Isn't shadowing a cruise ship with a sub an act of war?" asked Danny.

"You bet," said Henry Boston as he entered the war room. "Kevin, tell the Navy that if they don't act to take out that sub in five minutes, we are going to do it ourselves. I sure as hell don't have to wait for word from the White House to safeguard our passengers. I am invoking The Privateer Clause again."

## ***Chapter Seventeen***

About fifty feet below the surface of the Caribbean, the FALN hired crew on the old Oberon class submarine sold as surplus by the Australian Royal Navy was on its first mission since being acquired a year earlier.

The sub was first sold to Chile, and then sat at a dock for six months, then was sold to the Czech Republic.

An arms deal with Iran led the ship into Middle Eastern ownership even as it stayed in South America.

A requirement that any Australian-sold sub must be scrapped if the Chilean government no longer wanted it was lost in a bureaucrat's desk in Santiago when a new government came into office.

At the Pentagon, an intelligence officer tasked with tracking *down-the-line* sales of armaments had been out of the office with back surgery, and his replacement was ordered on administrative leave after a conflict with a co-worker on allegations of inappropriate sexual remarks centering on a joke told in the office.

Therefore, nobody in Washington knew a rogue submarine was operating in Caribbean waters, armed to the teeth and financed by the Axis of Terror.

The crew operating the sub came from various backgrounds, all of them terror-connected with the captain an Iranian, several Hezbollah, an aging IRA fugitive and twenty-four Puerto Ricans with FALN, all of whom had served in the U. S. Navy on subs. A special detail of Venezuelan Naval officers had been assigned to the sub by President Juan Perez.

Years of planning had led to this moment, and the bare-bones crew was doing the work that a full crew of 68 had done when the type of vessel was in service for Britain, Canada, and Australia.

The former Otway, a very quiet sub exported by Britain to Australia and several other nations, could carry the very dangerous Tigerfish torpedo. The Iranians had outfitted the sub with twenty-four of them.

Several retired Brazilians who had served on a ship of the same class also were hired to perform key duties, but while they were given signing bonuses, the FALN never planned on giving them their last paychecks.

This newest attack on America was going to equal 9/11 in size and scope with a similar loss of life.

The attack would likely cost most of those on board the targeted cruise ship their lives, Danny and Marsha realized.

How convenient to the cause of the radical Islamists and the nest of terrorists who had joined together on the older sub that Americans were being paraded around the Caribbean on a daily basis and made their work like fishing in a barrel.

The plan of the terrorists was to blow up the *Sea Baroness* as it came into port in San Juan so as to get maximum visibility from land based news helicopters, which would quickly relay its video clips on to international news networks.

The fact that the cruise ship would be blown up close to shore would mean that there might be more people rescued, but the upside was that there would be a huge audience rivaling that of the attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York.

The intention of the orders to the Black & Perkins security vessel *Resolute* had been given to the situation room deep in the bowels of the White House.

Boston's order to invoke the Privateer Clause was the central focus of the meeting of the key figures involved in preparing the American response.

"I don't think we can afford to have a private security firm undertake to save American lives," said Sidney Blumenthal, the President's National Security Advisor.

"We have the *Ticonderoga* a quarter mile from the *Sea Baroness*," said Admiral Buck Mansfield, the Chief of Naval Operations. "We can blow up the rogue submarine fifteen seconds after you give the order. We suspect this old Aussie sub has a harpoon missile too."

The phone rang and on the other end was the President in the Oval Office.

"Yes sir, Mr. President," said Blumenthal, who then gave the President the latest *intel* on the sub. "We shall give you a report as soon as it is destroyed. It won't be long, we have the submarine *Ticonderoga* there ready to fire."

The *Resolute* had a video feed directly into the war room on the *Sea Empress*, and the Black & Perkins staff was watching the ship with the feed being directed straight to the White House situation room.

As the *Ticonderoga* smoked the old Australian sub, a large explosion and plume of smoke ripped the surface of the calm Caribbean just a mile from the *Sea Baroness*.

## The Privateer Clause

The ship continued on its way to its next port with video clips making their way to Fox News from the many passenger correspondents on board the cruise ship, now rivaling the *Sea Empress* for adventure.

“No official confirmation on what exploded near the cruise ship was given by the White House or the Pentagon; no Caribbean country really knew what had taken place,” said World News Network reporter J. B. Davis from New York, on the large TV in the war room aboard the *Sea Empress*.

While the *Resolute* video feed had been secure, the amateur videos from passengers aboard the *Sea Baroness* were sent out like express missiles to news organizations, bringing a world-wide reaction to some sort of threat to a second cruise ship.

The excitement reverberated throughout the *Sea Empress* and nothing else was being discussed wherever passengers gathered.

In Miami, the phone lines to Seven Seas lit up with new bookings. Almost all of the new bookings the day before had been for the firm’s famous *Sea Empress*, but now new bookings were coming in for the *Sea Baroness* as well.

The blast sank in with top leaders in Syria and Iran, while FALN ringleaders in San Juan figured their plan had reached a negative outcome, but there always remained tomorrow.

In an apartment near the cruise ship terminal at San Juan Eduardo, Gomez’s friends were hard at work looking for their next way to strike.

A search for a new sub would be undertaken by their armaments expert, as funds were plentiful from the Iranians and that crazy Perez, both flush with oil money.

A quick search of the internet revealed several old subs for as little as a half million. The next time, they would get a new sub and pack a nuke in a missile and have it ready to fire at a more important target than a cruise ship packed with tourists.

## ***Chapter Eighteen***

Danny and Marsha stopped to sign autographs as they entered the luxurious theatre on the *Sea Empress* for the late night show featuring a risqué comedian.

The show started with an assortment of jokes about sex, marriage, and money which all got great laughs from the aging audience, all of whom clearly related to all of the punch lines.

When the standup comic began to make cracks about the adventure of the *Sea Empress* that week, Danny's antennae began to go up, wishing the guy had stuck to the standard material.

"How many of you here tonight have already gone to the future cruise office to book another cruise on this magnificent and lucky ship?" asked Fred Belaster, the funnyman of Chicago.

More than three quarters of the audience raised their hands and began cheering.

"Well, we have here the original Ship of Fools!" said Fred and the audience cheered even louder.

"Okay, you all saw that movie from the 70's 'The Poseidon Adventure', right? If they turn this tub upside down, how many want their money back?" asked Fred, to a few scattered hands and loud laughter.

"You people want to sign up for the *Ripley's Believe it or Not Cruise*?" asked Fred. "Its seven nights of sitting at the dock and eating sauerkraut while watching cock fights in the dining room!" Another off-color joke about the Ripley's cruise had the crowd laughing so hard some were ready to wet their pants.

Then Fred used some of the old standbys stolen by comics for the last fifty years:

"An old lady was standing at the railing of the cruise ship holding her hat on tight so that it would not blow off in the wind. A gentleman approached her and said: "Pardon me, madam. I do not intend to be forward, but did you know that your dress is blowing up in this high wind?" The lady replied, "Yes, I know, but need both hands to hold onto this hat." The gent said in earnest, "But, madam, you must know that your privates are exposed!" The woman looked down, then back up at the man and replied, "Sir, anything you see down there is 85 years old. I just bought this hat yesterday!"

Marsha looked at Danny and groaned.

"Did you hear the passenger ask her waiter what time is the midnight buffet?" said Fred to the loud guffaws of the audience. "Then she wanted

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to know if we grow the food on board. Then she asked if the ship generates its own electricity. Where do they get these people? It's a good thing they pay for their cruise or we would make them walk the plank."

The audience loved it and since many of them were on their third drink, it was a great show.

"She then asked, 'what time does the 2:00 tour leave?'," said Fred as one woman actually began to bust her side laughing. Fred then added, "Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you criticize them, you're a mile away, and you have their shoes."

"We need to get out of here and go try our luck in the casino dear. I want to see if I can win as much as you did last night," said Marsha.

"Why not? I think I heard all those jokes in Vegas last time we went. These comedians have no shame; they steal worse than lawyers," said Danny. "But remember, the guy in Vegas told us, 'The quickest way to double your money is to fold it in half and put it back in your pocket.'"

"I'll try to remember, but is this the night the casino puts the screws to the players who have been winning," said Marsha.

"I am afraid so; better be careful," said Danny.

After an hour in the casino revealed that they had indeed arrived for the take it all away night conducted by the casino staff, Danny and Marsha decided to leave with only a hundred dollars lost at the roulette table. They stood by for another twenty minutes and watched six other players each lose about \$5,000. Those who lost had all been big winners for several days and now that they were big time gamblers, who faithfully believed that a minor losing streak like this was only temporary, and surely they would win their money back in just a few more spins.

While Luis had been taken into custody after the 'Exploding Adolpho incident' two days earlier, he had been questioned, and then removed from the ship and sent to Guantanamo.

Questioning of the fellow from the Maryland incident the previous year had included waterboarding but now this newest operative, by presidential edict of the new President Bryan, was going to miss out on this fun.

But CIA folks were still creative and had other options.

Luis was no more complicated than what he appeared to be—an innocent dupe—and soon a decision would be made to release him. It

wasn't likely he would get his old job back for violating cruise ship policy on avoiding the proper boarding security, and for smuggling *drugs* on the ship—knowingly.

Adolpho had recruited one more person on board and left him with strict orders to act in case anything happened to him.

Peter Nelson, a Kenyan Muslim, was a cook and had been with Seven Seas for five years. He worked from 7am until 9pm with an hour off each day at 1pm. Peter was used to catching a short nap during his break and kept a vial in his shaving kit to be used if Adolpho did not text him a counter order, or if he learned of the unfortunate demise of Adolpho.

Peter had joined Al-Qaida prior to being employed on the ship, and his training in Yemen had included preparation for his day that had arrived.

As Peter prepared the large baked fish for the Midnight Buffet, he had emptied his vial of rat poison into the crab stuffing mix that filled the four foot long fish which was the centerpiece of the exquisite food table.

The staff was setting up the table, and in a half hour, the passengers who were still sober enough to eat once again or were still awake, would be treated to one of the highlights of the cruise.

The Midnight Buffet was held only one night on each cruise and was likely a spread that most folks would only experience on a ship.

This wasn't the Dagwood sandwich it was the Grand Hotel complete with a chocolate lovers section, caviar, and champagne.

As the staff continued to bring the final hot dishes out to the line, the Black & Perkins staff was hard at work in the war room of the Sea Empress.

Kevin Clinton rubbed his eyes and poured a cup of coffee to stay awake.

"Kevin, we just got in a report from Homeland Security in DC that they have ID'd another operative on the ship here," said Oliver Ross. "We ran him and found he is a cook and facial recognition matched to the ship's video surveillance has him still working this evening in the kitchen putting out the Midnight Buffet which is ready to be served.

"Quick, review all tape from today and see what he has been doing," said Clinton.

A scan of the video from the kitchen showed Peter reaching into his pocket and dumping the contents of a vial into the crab mixture of the stuffing for the big fish.

Within three minutes the fish and Peter were both in custody.

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“Holy crap, does it ever stop,” said Ross as he sat down with a pale color taking over his face.

“We just have to keep at it and never let up,” said Clinton.

The Midnight Buffet went on as scheduled, and after an hour, it was depleted and the passengers this time had nothing to snatch videos of to send to the networks.

After an hour of reviewing the day’s events, Marsha and Danny returned to their room and went out on the balcony with a glass of wine.

Both seemed drained, yet they needed each other to be held close and after a second glass of wine, they were one flesh.

“I’m glad we skipped the Midnight Buffet,” said Danny.

“I didn’t, I ordered a bowl of the chocolate strawberries sent down for our breakfast,” said Marsha.

## *Chapter Nineteen*

The dawn awoke to reveal a scene of incredible beauty as the sun washed across a large cove that the ship had entered off of the coast of the Dominican Republic.

A small vessel was carrying forward tie up lines from the ship to be attached to a massive mooring buoy in the cove. After the crew on the boat attached the bow line from the huge ship, another line was attached from the aft end of the ship.

Soon passengers going ashore in tenders were lined up at the exits on both sides on deck two. The only time most passengers descended to that level was on disembarking, and as each person passed through the exits, they used their ship cards to record a digital record of their leaving, so the ship would know later who they were missing when it was time to leave.

Danny and Marsha had decided to go off on a tender to this port and shop around and take pictures.

The Port of Samana consisted of a simple short dock to which two tender boats could tie up at a time to disgorge their passengers and return to the ship to ferry more passengers.

Three Dominican customs officers stood by to greet arriving passengers who all had their passports ready to show them.

As Danny and Marsha reached the end of the dock and began to look around at the really beautiful shoreline, and the colorful pastels of the Caribbean village buildings all lined up in a newly finished type of appearance, they heard a familiar voice.

"Hey Danny, over here," yelled Vito. "We have a van lined up for a tour; hop in and go with us."

Ben and Faustino Mayflower were standing outside of a white van with a driver at the wheel and a guide holding on the door. April and Vito Broccoli were already inside the van, and Danny and Marsha looked at the guide with suspicion.

Noting the guide's apparent lack of any dental plan and his thin build, he had 'crackhead' written all over him.

The scourge of the United States had run rampant over this poor island nation as well and for regular tourists, such as these two couples, they were joining to not know better was understandable.

Danny pulled the guide aside.

"My brother, make sure there is no funny business."

"Funny business?" he repeated.

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"It's to your advantage to make sure we have no surprises," said Danny as he slipped the guy two twenty dollar bills.

"Yes sir, we will be safe and sound," said the crackhead guide as he noticed the bulge in Danny's waistband under his flowing shirt when Danny pulled his shirt close to him in order to make clear his intentions.

The van left the noise of the motorcycles, taxis, and other vans all arriving to scoop up passengers from the ship for tours and began to take a scenic tour of the area.

As the van traveled through the small village and headed up a hillside, the views out over the harbor and towards the sea were spectacular.

The van traveled up and down several hillsides, revealing an interesting mix of lush tropical foliage and occasional piles of roadside trash and dumps. The van turned off the highway and came up to a dead end, and to turn around, the driver entered a cul-de-sac which led to an all-inclusive resort.

Outside the gate were two guards armed with automatic weapons. The sharp ebony guards bristled to attention when they saw the tourist van, and the crackhead guide laughed at the thought that he had the power to make the professional guards nervous.

Danny and Marsha took that view in and decided that the security being so visible brought to mind why it was needed.

The guide told them they would next take a tour through a barrio.

"Whoa now," said Danny. "I don't know if we need to go there."

"Don't worry Danny, with Marsha along, the characters in the barrio won't be in too much danger," said Ben.

"Who lined up this van," asked Danny as he eyed the crackhead guide.

"Ben did," said Vito, ever the diplomat. "He said we should skip the ship excursion as it would be more expensive, and we can just hire a driver and look who we got."

The van went down a steep hillside with small shops and homes on each side, and all appearing to have been worked over by several hurricanes. On the way, the apparent delivery vehicle for a local lumber yard passed them going the other way. The man driving the vehicle was pedaling as fast as he could with his load balanced behind on a small trailer attached to his bicycle and between his bike and the trailer was a load of new lumber.

The homes along the road were modest and some were cluttered. But they were still standing and while modest, most were clean. The small merchant shops advertised services and goods but were clearly not places that tourists should enter.

As the van swirled around a corner, the guide announced they would drive through an outdoor market place.

As the driver beeped his horn and cussed, the van worked its way through a very busy market where farmers had brought in produce and livestock. Piles of goods and fruits were just inches from the windows of the air conditioned van and it appeared that the people working in the stalls knew that the van would quickly leave as it must do every day.

The guide told his guests that the port liked having a cruise ship come which usually took place about three times a week.

A short time later, the van arrived back to the port and the guide assured the group that the long walk back to the ship would be too hard on them in the Caribbean sun, so he and the driver would wait to drive them when they were done shopping at the official port marketplace.

While the women began to tour the shops in the 'safe' and officially sanctioned stores, the guys made a beeline for the cantina.

The view of the harbor included a rusting fishing fleet of five ships, all about 85' to 100' in length, and all rafted together and held by lines to mooring buoys.

The guide had explained how one of the nation's many governments had constructed the long and unusual bridge to one of the islands which graced the side of the harbor facing the port. The bridge was completely wooded and quite quaint to say the least.

On the seaside of the island was the exclusive all-inclusive resort.

With the Sea Empress looming in the distance, the sun spreading across the sparkling waters, and the spic-and-span port village, their tour through the barrio, and their mountainside trek mixing roadside landfills and great panoramas of the sea all provided the sharp contrasts in life on this island.

The tenders on the ship typically carried about 50 to 70 passengers and as long as the ship was moored in the harbor, a tender was operating back and forth to the ship so that passengers could return at their leisure.

As the Sea Empress awaited the conclusion of the many excursions by power boat, catamaran, and land trips, those who had opted for their own tours at the port began to straggle back to the pier to catch a tender and return to the Sea Empress.

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As they boarded the tender, an Associated News reporter interviewed the passengers about their astounding week cruising the Caribbean with all manner of excitement and danger crossing their path and enriching their journey.

At least for the surprised reporter, that was the way the passengers were telling him about their wild week.

Ned Epstein had expected to find passengers willing to flee to the nearest airport to get away from this ill-fated cruise. Instead, he found that these people were almost gleeful in describing how the pirate's escape boat was blown up by the chopper, how the terrorist, had, complete with a bomb, been launched overboard after he had been iced in the women's yoga class by a former Secret Service agent who had once been in charge of the First Lady's security.

The passengers told the story of the brutal murder of the Rabbi by pirates and every twist and turn in the day.

Ned had expected to hear about shock and panic, but all he heard in the words were excitement and adventure.

The trip from Santo Domingo to the port had taken Epstein twelve hours, and now he was sure the effort was worth it, and he only wished that budget cutbacks didn't keep him from being able to fly back to the city. But he was thankful that he was able to piggyback his story from his laptop off a wireless connection from somewhere in the port area and uplinked by satellite to send his story to New York. He wondered what the New York editors would make of his story of the amazing reaction of the Sea Empress passengers to their wild cruise.

Epstein was a wiry and meticulous guy who could be counted on to hammer out a solid story, and doing it on deadline, and today wouldn't be any different, as long as his editors didn't think he had been drinking. But the abundance of emailed reports from the passengers was more than enough proof of this amazing cruise.

The trip back to his office would be anti-climactic as the news cycle would leave him behind by the time he was able to get back to work. All communications would be cut off as soon as he left Samana. And the Sea Empress had become the international news story of the year, *the gift that kept on giving*, he thought as he told his driver he was ready to return to the city.

As Ned's van went up the steep hill leading out of Samana, suddenly a jeep came careening down the hill loaded with armed soldiers.

The soldiers sped by, heading toward the port while Ned's driver pulled back out into the roadway and continued up the hill. After going over the top of the hill and starting down the other side, they came to a roadblock manned by a half dozen soldiers.

"Halt, said a soldier in English, which wasn't necessary as Ned's driver spoke French and Spanish, but the universal language of a pointed gun was excellent communication on the part of the soldier and the van screeched to a stop.

An officer spotted Ned's press credentials hanging around his neck and trotted over to the stopped van.

"Senor," said the officer. "We must have you wait here for a while, there has been an incident ahead, and we will require you to wait here until it is safe to proceed."

Those were just the words Ned needed to hear to know that his professional side wanted to move ahead to learn what was happening, while his safe side wanted to turn around and head back to Samana.

"How long will the road be closed, Lieutenant," asked Ned.

"We think this could be a problem until tomorrow," answered the young officer. "You can get a room back at the port."

"What's wrong," asked Ned, deciding that he ought to venture some curiosity.

"We have had some shooting, it is very serious, a tourist was kidnapped leaving a resort for a bike ride, and we are now looking for him. The guards heard screams after the guest left the resort," explained the officer. "They tried to tell the American that individual travel on a bike was not advisable, but he wouldn't listen."

The officer became very chatty with the reporter and fancied a news article back in the capital city about himself and his brave soldiers fighting terrorists harming tourists. A really good article might get him promoted by his Colonel, who was wise about the ways of using the media so the officer opened up to Epstein.

"First the man was on his bike, and he had gone about a quarter mile when robbers stopped their truck and pounced on him, trying to load him and his bike onto their truck," said the officer.

"The guards at the gate heard his cries for help, and they pushed their alarm and a truck with armor and six men came screaming out of their guard post area and caught up with the kidnappers," said the young

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officer. "They opened fire and killed two of the kidnappers, but the other two terrorists took off with the tourist, so we are looking for them now."

"Was the tourist hurt," asked Ned.

"We really don't know for sure," answered Lt. Garcia. "We think he might be okay, but there was a trail of blood leading to their truck."

"Let me make sure I have your complete name spelled right," said Ned, knowing he was making the officer happy.

This officer was more helpful than most cops back in the states, thought Ned.

Ned thanked Lt. Garcia and asked his driver to turn around and head for Samana.

At the port, a tourist hotel had a room and after checking in, Ned headed for the cantina next door where half a dozen tourists from the ship in the harbor were eating and downing the famous Caribbean beer.

"Mind if I join you," asked Ned.

"It all depends," answered Danny as he noticed the press credential hanging from Ned's neck. "Are you working, because if you are, we'll have to throw you in the harbor?"

Vito and Ben laughed along with Danny and Ned, when they finally figured that they were just having fun with Danny.

"So have you gotten a good story from the passengers," asked Danny.

"Oh yeah," said Ned. "I wrote it out and sent it by email an hour ago, but there has been a kidnapping of a tourist at a resort about 3 miles from here. Two kidnappers were killed by the guards, but the others got away with the tourist."

Ned took a long look at Danny and said, "Didn't I see your photo in the story online about the Sea Empress?"

"You might have," said Danny. "I tried to keep a low profile on this cruise, but it just didn't work out. These passengers are forever taking pictures."

"You are the security chief for the firm hired to protect the Sea Empress," said Ned, extending his hand. "We aren't all a bunch of communists in the media. You did a great job."

"Just all in a day's pay and we get to have a vacation too," said Danny.

Vito ordered another round of Presidente beer, which was really a great beer, they had discovered.

After introductions and another tray of nachos and cheese were delivered, Danny ordered a new round of Presidentes.

"This is the Dominican National beer," said Ned. "These people drink it like it's going out of style."

Just as the four men were about to toss down another round of beer, two more jeeps with soldiers arrived down the road from the hillside.

The jeeps passed the cantina and roared to a stop at the pier, which was about a half mile from the cantina and where the tenders were loading the passengers to return to Sea Empress.

Danny noted that new development and used his cell phone to call the ship.

Clinton called him back and Danny talked and hung up his phone.

"What's wrong Danny," asked Vito.

"We aren't going anywhere soon. The police have closed the pier and won't allow anyone off the island due to the kidnapping of the tourist," said Danny.

"We all have identification and passports, why won't they let us go back to our ship," said Ben. "Let them tell that crap to my wife, she has big plans for the formal night tonight and needs to do her hair."

"Kevin is calling the American Ambassador in Santo Domingo, and he is sure that when the Defense Minister calls these guys here, they will calm down and let us through customs so we can get all our passengers back on the ship," said Danny.

Danny called Clinton back as he stepped outside to look toward the pier.

"Kevin, with all the assets we have in place here in the area, can we be of any help to the government as they look for these kidnappers?" asked Danny.

"Yes, I have already offered our support to the U. S. Ambassador," said Clinton, "and he said the police would likely be glad to have support services but not direct tactical teams on the ground. They think they need to be the ones doing the shooting and the Ambassador is worried about 'American Mercenaries' stories so we have a chopper from Resolute on the way to aid with aerial surveillance as it has thermal imaging, so they can fly over the wooded areas near the road. Locals have the road sealed off on both ends, and it doesn't look like they are going to get away with the tourist or get any money for his ransom. It also doesn't look real good for the tourist."

Danny hung up with Clinton and walked back into the cantina.

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“Well what do you think of my necklace,” said Faustino to Ben. “We have been shopping for over an hour, and you weren’t even worried about us.”

“So what is with the activity at the pier,” asked Marsha as she held her bags behind her back.

“I’ll trade some information with you about the pier if you’ll tell me what’s in your bag,” said Danny as he craned his neck to get a better look at what his wife was concealing.

“It’s a present for you, hon,” said Marsha. “Now why are there armed guards at the pier? Do they think we are trying to steal their crown jewels from the presidential palace?”

“Nothing so exotic but it might be fun to try,” said Danny. “They have had a tourist, not one of ours, kidnapped down the road, and now they are shutting down the pier, so we have to stay put for the time being.”

“I have to get back to the ship to do my hair for tonight,” said Faustino as Ben nodded and shook his head. Under his breath, he muttered, “God forbid someone’s death inconveniences you.”

“Have you called Kevin?” asked Marsha.

“Yep, he’s already on it and things are in play to assist the police and the army,” said Danny, not revealing much more to tip off the others that they might be sitting in the middle of some sort of internal revolutionary drama.

“Oh, dear,” said April. “I was reading about some strife and some rebel elements here in the last few months ever since we booked our cruise. This could be far more than we know.”

April, a part time college professor who went back to work after retiring as a local school administrator, was more astute than the cruise line, thought Danny. But these Banana Republics always had upheaval, and at times it proved impossible to separate routine kidnappings from revolutions.

## *Chapter Twenty*

A steady stream of tourists began to line up at the pier and instead of two tenders, there were now six deployed to bring back all of the passengers as quickly as possible.

Danny had shepherded his group to the pier, minus Epstein, who was on his own and now had a new story to cover.

The passengers at the pier didn't know what the trouble was, but they were beginning to become upset at not being able to leave.

Many of them turned to Danny and asked him to intervene with the police holding them on the island.

"We have already contacted U. S. authorities, who are working with government channels to reach these soldiers and tell them to let us leave," said Danny, calming one group of passengers.

At that point, another jeep pulled up to the pier, and Danny saw that it was the Lt. Garcia from Epstein's earlier description. Danny was sure that this was the soldier who'd talked to Epstein earlier on seeing Epstein, who had followed the gaggle of passengers back to the pier, spotted the officer and made his way toward him.

"Lt. Garcia, are you going to let these passengers back on their ship?" asked Epstein.

"Yes, we are going to allow all those here to board their tenders," said the officer.

As the tenders loaded up and the last passengers arrived back from shopping and excursions, the relieved passengers waved goodbye to Samana, a beautiful port with a great view and lots of commotion which all added up to a really different twist on shore excursions.

Danny and Marsha made sure they waited for the last tender and told their friends to go ahead of them.

Only twenty three passengers remained to go on the last tender and as they boarded, Marsha and Danny made sure they were the last to jump on the boat to bring up the rear, so to speak.

Just as they joined the other passengers, Lt. Garcia and two of his soldiers also boarded.

Danny and Marsha looked at each other, and then turned steely gazes upon the soldiers.

"Lt. Garcia," said Danny. "This tender isn't coming back to the shore."

"Sir, you will please be our guests, as we are not going to the ship," said Lt. Garcia as one of the soldiers stood next to the helm's mate and

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ordered him to turn the craft over to an island connected to the mainland by a long and unique bridge. It was on this island that the day's events began to unfold when a tourist left there and was kidnapped.

"We are happy to announce that we have undertaken the freedom of our homeland today, and we will be keeping you Americans for exchange for money to fund our rebellion," said Lt. Garcia. "In short, we have taken you as political prisoners."

Danny and Marsha once again exchanged looks. Both were armed and the soldiers certainly didn't expect that they were or knew that they weren't typical tourists.

Danny figured that right now the odds were three to two, and if they allowed the tender to be taken to the island where perhaps more rebel soldiers were located, that the odds against them would become far worse.

Marsha stood and sauntered over to Lt. Garcia. "Now, Lieutenant, will you please explain what we have to do with your politics here?" she asked. "We really need to get back to our ship as we have a very full schedule and have seen about all of your wonderland land that we have time to see."

"Madame," started Garcia, but just then a boom in the distance from the shore followed by two helicopters flying low and firing rockets produced two more loud reports. As the Lieutenant turned to look at the helicopters, Marsha sprang forward and with a quick twist of her arm around Garcia's neck, snapped it and quickly tossed the limp officer overboard. The moment she moved, Danny fired on both of the other two soldiers, making quick work of them with bullets between the eyes on one and catching the other in the temple.

As the shots rang out and all three soldiers were now floating in the harbor, the helm's mate radioed to the ship that they were turning back to the Sea Empress and would quickly be alongside the gangplank.

"I know," said Marsha to Danny, "the Privateer Clause."

"You got it," said Danny who then made his own call to the Black & Perkins war room on the ship. "We are fine, we have all the passengers and three less pirates."

When Danny and Marsha left the war room and entered their own suite, Danny clicked on the news and found that a passenger had caught on video the two helicopters blasting the island and a glimpse of the

tender which had been their escape. Danny watched the TV screen in his cabin while the three bodies were tossed from the tender.

"That's amazing that the people on this ship are able to do a better job at reporting than the networks," said Danny.

All through the ship as Danny and Marsha strolled to the pool and later to dinner and the show, passengers stopped them and thanked them for their quick action to save lives and told them how much they appreciated their actions.

As Danny and Marsha found their newly made shopping pals in the theatre, Vito asked them, "We are stopping tomorrow in Haiti. Do you have any clue what the adventure will be?"

Danny shook his head and said, "Come on, Vito. You know that we haven't; nor could we plan any of this."

"I know, Dan. I am just kidding you, but you couldn't make a lot of people on this ship believe it," said Vito. "These people are having the time of their lives, and if they don't have pirates swarming their ship on their next cruise, they are going to be disappointed."

"Maybe the Seven Seas folks can get Johnny Depp to star in special shows on the ships here in the Caribbean," suggested Ben, laughing now.

"Someone is going to have to figure it all out," said Danny. "Lives have been lost in all of this, and the Rabbi from New Jersey was certainly an innocent."

"Maybe instead of rock climbing walls, they could set up classes in sword fighting, cannon ball logistics with firing of volleys off the stern instead of shooting skeet and climbing riggings in sails," said Ben as he sipped his 'appletini', a vodka martini made with sour apple.

"I'll be sure to pass along your suggestions to the chairman of the cruise line when I see him," said Dan. "Now the show is starting on stage, and I sure as hell hope they don't have any pirate skills."

As if right on cue, a heavy cannon was rolled out on the stage by two men dressed as pirates and a loud boom was followed by a large plume of smoke from the cannon.

A band of actors dressed as British nobility was chased across the stage by two pirates and on went the night to laughter and applause.

## ***Chapter Twenty One***

Danny and Marsha turned in by midnight, and at 6am the next day, Danny was out of the shower, dressed, and taking his first mile-walk of the day on the top deck. Here the sun deck of the Sea Empress was awash in morning sun with the port side of the ship hosting shadows cast by the super structure and her large, sleek funnel.

Danny walked counter-clockwise with several groups of people in front of him and one behind. Walking counter-clockwise were several other groups, many among them hailing other passengers with morning greetings.

*They're a healthy clan of hikers*, thought Danny.

Or, like him, they were not achieving a stellar quality of conditioning at this point in their lives and using the great exercise facilities on the ship was alluring.

The ship began to moor offshore of the nation of Haiti, which shares the large island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic.

The beauty of the poor nation was astounding. Sharp rays of sun bathed the cove of Labadee with crystal brightness. As passengers began to gather near the gangplank doors on the 2<sup>nd</sup> deck in order to load into tenders for the trip to shore, Danny and Marsha watched the mooring process and tenders being launched from their table at the breakfast buffet.

"So, do we go ashore and get tangled up in *another* revolution or stay put and wait for the next pirate attack?" Danny asked, chuckling intermittently through his inquiry.

"Don't even joke, Danny! We deserve one day of peace and quiet on this cruise," answered Marsha.

"I'm beginning to think we are the entertainment, and I guess even as much as I crave excitement...this cruise is relaxation-challenged, at least for us," smirked Danny.

As they lingered over Belgian waffles and a custom made Spanish omelet, they watched a colorful boat loaded with Haitians head for the private island from a village on the shore of the mainland.

"We have imported and approved natives coming to be a part of our day at the beach," said Danny. "I'm told by the officers on the bridge that the cruise line has armed guards on this island, which really isn't an island

at all, but a peninsula, which juts out into the sea. And the thin neck of the point is where fences with razor wire at the top keep the unapproved locals at bay.”

“Great,” said Marsha. “At least we know one border is protected against intruders; too bad they can’t figure this out at home.”

The Sea Empress glided into the large harbor at the private island of Labadee, one of several such Caribbean fantasy islands owned by the various cruise lines. A small boat had come over to the large ship, which was now still in the water, about a mile from the shore, and had taken a bow line in tow over to a mooring buoy.

After securing the bow line, the small harbor master vessel sped to the aft end of the huge cruise ship and picked up the aft lines from crew at an open door and pulled those lines to attach to the mooring buoy about 1500 yards away.

When the liner was secured, passengers were already finishing breakfast and out on the decks taking in the sights of the intriguing and confusing part of the island of Hispaniola known as Haiti.

Voodoo, revolutions, and human suffering with deaths of tens of thousands being commonplace on newscasts must have been about a different place.

The crystal blue waters of the tropical ocean splashed against the shores of the large island and immediately from the beach, the island sprang upwards from the water with large mountain tips touching into the clouds, adding more mystery to this unique land.

A small village squatted at the bottom of one mountain with various structures peeking out from between the lush foliage at different heights along the hillsides. Labadee wasn’t quite an island but a fortified peninsula of land with barbed wire fences and guards keeping the point free and safe for visiting tourists from the ship.

A trio of big tugboats was joined at a commercial dock by smaller craft, and a special landing for tenders from ships that moored in the harbor played host to hundreds of visitors seeking sandy beaches in a paradise.

The boat traveling across from the village was packed with approved vendors to work in the special market that provided passengers with a safe and controlled island market experience.

Long beaches full of lawn chairs awaited the tenders disgorging their lengthy lines of fun-and-sun seekers. Passing by a native band, a special margarita bar, and on the way to the vendor’s stands, trams awaited

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those who were going to take the skyride along the hillsides or go snorkeling.

The beach and swimming beckoned with water so clear that a first time visitor could only marvel that anyone would want to leave this island to risk their lives to travel on a leaky boat for 90 miles just to get to Miami, a city full of huge hotels and sprawling crack markets.

After the first dozen tenders had taken about 500 passengers to shore, Danny and Marsha strolled down to catch a lift to the beach. Just as they came down the last flight of the grand staircase, judiciously avoiding the crowded elevators, they ran into Vito, April, Ben and Faustino who were laughing and shuffling along toward the gangplank and loading area for the tenders.

"I hope you are packing heat, Marsha," said Ben. "They wouldn't let me bring any armaments, so we are going to stick with you. Never knew cruising could be so dangerous and so much fun at the same time."

"They are never going to believe me back home when I tell my faculty what happened on this trip," began Faustino. "It will put others off from taking a cruise, surely; they'll be scared and at times, truthfully, I have to admit I must have lost my senses not to get off this ship and take the first plane back to BWI."

"Dear, you are safe with us, as long as we hang out with Danny and Marsha," Ben assured her.

"Well," said April, "I'm taking a firearms class when I get home. I-I had no idea that the world was fraught with such danger. But knowing that they already have armed guards at this private island, I do feel better and hope that the most dangerous thing we run into might be lunch."

"Me, I brought a good cigar to smoke where I won't get any complaints from any yahoos," chuckled Vito, noting that it was one of his good Cubans with the band taken off.

The group all posed for photos with the vista of the ship moored in the distance, as Danny proclaimed the setting for the photo as a "money shot".

The group trooped down the beach to a setting of lawn chairs shaded by big palm trees. Not far from them stood a cabin which allowed them to select floats to take into the water.

As Danny and Ben led the way into the warm water, their feet were completely visible.

Occasional fish swimming by were amusing until Danny realized that a particularly standout type of fish was a barracuda. While it was small, it was also alone, meaning that without the company of many of its friends, it wasn't especially dangerous.

Danny, Ben, and Vito went over to the island Tiki Bar to get a round of beer, while frozen drinks were being hawked to the women by roving vendors.

As their beers were being served up, Danny's cautious eye surveyed the landscape. The Black & Perkins war room crew was still aboard the Sea Empress and given the strange twist of events over the prior week were forever vigilant.

Danny checked in by cell phone, which for some reason, likely due to the cell tower on the ship, worked.

"Kevin, things seem to be okay here," said Danny. "The only part that bothers me is the boat load of vendors which came across from the village. Can you verify that the ship searches the vendors when they come ashore to be certain that they have no weapons?"

"We'll check to be sure," said Kevin.

"Good, anyone who thinks we don't have a target on us, is crazy," said Danny.

Two minutes later Danny's phone rang.

"We have four men coming over to you on a tender right now. I can't believe this but the cruise line harbor personnel do not always inspect the vendor ferryboat and today, of all days, they didn't do it," said Kevin. "We aren't taking any chances and we will do our own inspection and frisk every one of the vendors and inspect their stalls."

As Danny put his beer down on the bar, he gave a worried look to Ben and Vito.

"What's wrong, Danny?" asked Vito.

"Maybe nothing, but it wouldn't harm anything to get the women to stay away from the vendor stalls right now, until our guys can check them out real good," said Danny. "There are still lots of artists with paintings over this way and a leather shop that they can browse."

Twenty minutes later, a tender had roared across the harbor, and the four men aboard were joined by security officers already on the island. Together they put the vendor stalls in lockdown with guards closing off both ends of the long building which housed them, and next they ordered all of the vendors to stand against one wall to be searched.

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As one of the vendors, a man who had been in a stall which featured hand carved figures of island men in various poses, all of them about two feet high, began to become agitated, the Black & Perkins detail bristled.

The man stood up with one of his statutes and suddenly withdrew a gun from inside the wood carving and began firing.

This terrorist had no training and this day he had no luck.

While he was the only casualty the two shots he had fired were not heard above the music being played by a steel band. The rounds fired by the B & P crew were silenced, and it only took two rounds to stop the threat, neither of them mortal.

The wounded wood carver was hustled away in a utility van back to the commercial dock for transport to an island medical facility and then to jail, all done away from any view of the passengers enjoying their day on the beach.

A systematic inspection of the vendor stalls and picnic area revealed no other problems, so the day continued without any new episodes.

As Danny strolled back to join his friends and Marsha, Ben quizzed him, "Are you going to fill us in?"

"Not this time," said Danny. "Everything is fine now, just a minor bump in the road."

The B & P guards stayed on the island with the passengers until it was time to return to the ship.

## *Chapter Twenty Two*

As a matter of course, Danny and Marsha rode the last tender back to the ship and once back aboard immediately went to the war room.

"Kevin, what's your read on this latest incident, part of a conspiracy or just a lone nut?" asked Danny.

"That's exactly what Henry Boston just asked me," Kevin replied. "We are expanding our threat analysis, and we have run fingerprints, DNA and facial recognition on this wood carver, and we should have results in about ten minutes."

As the intense meeting got underway in the war room, the ship prepared to leave paradise, but this time, there weren't dozens of instant reporters filming a serious threat to the ship.

The passengers just didn't know what had happened. In fact, they didn't know anything took place. For once, the security team on the Sea Empress had caught a break.

Danny and Marsha went to their suite to shower the salt water off them and to change. They had actually enjoyed the rest of the day after the wood carver incident.

Danny dressed quickly and told Marsha he would meet her at the Schooner Bar, which featured a great piano player who could play anything from old favorites to classical.

As he entered the war room, Kevin told him that they had the data back on the island shooter.

"This guy goes back 25 years with the FALN; in fact, he is really Puerto Rican," explained Kevin.

"We keep bumping into these cats," said Jones. "Does anyone know why that clown in the old Bush administration let these guys out on parole?"

"That wasn't Bush, it was Clinton's deputy attorney general, and he has an even bigger job now to make new screw ups," said Kevin.

"The way terrorists go through a revolving door reminds me of the way shoplifters and those stealing cars are treated in Maryland courts, but this is way more serious when these cats are out kidnapping and killing people," said Danny.

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“Just a sign of our times,” said Kevin. “The people in charge of the laws don’t believe in much order. Do you mind if I join you and Marsha for dinner?”

“Sure, boss,” said Danny. “It’s fine as long as you pick up the check. We are going to the supper club and our reservation is for eight.”

“Eight?”

“Yeah and don’t be late.”

The supper club on the Sea Empress was on the sky deck and enjoyed exquisite views over the ocean as the ship sailed to their next port.

The supper club was an optional dining experience with a cover charge of \$30 but worth every penny. As the trio dined on oysters Rockefeller, vichyssoise, braised veal medallions and New York cheesecake samplers, they also enjoyed a cold plate of special spiced prawns.

Danny ordered a bottle of white merlot and half way through their meal, they required another.

“Wow, I guess I’m just like the rest of the people on this ship,” said Danny.”

“How so?” asked Marsha.

“I mean, I can’t believe the things that have happened to us on this cruise. I even went on the internet last night to see if any other ships have had anywhere near the same amount of threats and nothing comes close.”

“There is no doubt that we are considered very special,” said Marsha. “You would think we have a president or a king travelling with us.”

“Well we do have some big wheels of business, Sen. Fountain and a princess, but they still don’t trigger the level of interest in bringing harm to this ship that we have seen take place,” said Kevin. “Frankly, I wonder if we are missing something. Maybe it’s time to revisit the passenger list and the cargo manifest.”

Marsha decided to call it a night early and told Danny to go to the casino with Kevin.

The two walked down the bank of elevators and instead of waiting walked down the grand staircase to the fourth deck which hosted the casino.

“Watch out in here, Kevin. These people don’t have any rules except one,” said Danny. “You lose, they win.”

Kevin and Danny decided to give the roulette table a whirl.

While Kevin and Danny were sending stacks of chips across the table to be placed on the numbers they couldn't themselves reach, and actually having a good run of luck, Marsha decided to go to the security suite to review the passenger list and cargo records.

Marsha entered the perpetually busy security office, which was increasingly less an expensive luxury suite and now all business as more computers, monitors, and scanners had been brought in over the past week at every stop. New staffers had all brought various updates of equipment; some of it the latest that a security contractor for Homeland Security wanted to get directly into the hands of Black & Perkins. With B & P's cutting edge dealings in keeping the Sea Empress safe over the past few days, technology was balanced with human assets in putting up a wall of security in the ultimate test of protecting Americans while letting them enjoy their liberties.

Marsha thought about how tough an assignment that this new job really was, and how different it was from her duties guarding the First Lady.

Instead of watching over one or several protected, she now was part of a team safeguarding about 2500 passengers with another 900 crew, never knowing if yet another crewmember could be part of the threat. Or could a passenger be part of a conspiracy? With an average of nine ships working out of Jacksonville, Port Everglades, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Tampa, Mobile, Galveston and New Orleans, the security for all of the ships involved nine times the number of passengers and crew now needed to be safeguarded. As a result, B & P was bringing on the staff to do the job.

For Marsha, the Sea Empress was priority number one, and so she now focused on the Sea Empress manifest: names and addresses of every single soul on board. Of 900 crew and staffers, only fifty eight were Americans, and they were mainly entertainers and some staffed the pursers office.

"Oliver, can we do a comprehensive check of each U.S. citizen right down to parking tickets," asked Marsha. "We are more likely to have more details available on them from motor vehicle records and credit reports. Let's have everything we can get, it's time to stop responding to threats and start getting ahead of the curve."

When Danny and Kevin decided to leave the casino as winners, it was nearly 2 am when Danny opened the door to his suite to find it empty.

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Going next door to the security suite, he found Marsha still pouring over data looking for clues.

"Got anything good yet," asked Danny. "You look like you're back to work at the White House."

"Not yet, but you can call room service and explain to them how to make an Eddie Leonard's steak and cheese and an order of fries," answered Marsha.

"Make that another order for me, please," said Kevin as he closed the door behind him and joined in the work.

"We have another cruise going out on this ship after we get back in two days to Fort Lauderdale, and it looks like Henry wants us to stick around for a while," said Kevin. "I suspect our business will slow down with the next 8-day cruise to the Southern Caribbean and the ship is leaving full with bookings up for every ship."

"Every ship in every fleet?" asked Marsha.

"Every ship working the Caribbean. It's really crazy but the level of interest in cruising and doing it now has all the ships full, discounting discontinued and cruise directors all putting pirate themes and murder mysteries into their daily schedules, and the ad folks trying to find a safe way to use it for marketing."

"From the sound of it all, it doesn't appear they need to do any marketing," said Marsha.

"Okay, Marsha, you tell our team what you want and what you need," said Kevin. "We have this suite staffed 24 hours now and you can get them started on your ideas and go get some rest."

After another two hours and the late night steak and cheese, just like the old days on Pennsylvania Avenue, Marsha and Danny went back to their suite and left out the sign for a light breakfast to be brought to them at 9:30am.

Danny was working on his first cup of coffee made in the pot in their kitchenette when room service delivered their Eggs Benedict and fresh fruit the following morning.

Danny tipped the waiter five dollars and he left happy.

Danny watched the news for a minute before banging on the bathroom door to tell Marsha that breakfast was served on the balcony.

Marsha popped out of the bathroom wrapped in a luxurious terry cloth robe and yelled. "It just hit me!"

“What hit you?”

“Do you remember that girlfriend of Adolpho, that girl in San Juan, who was the granddaughter of the old mad bomber they let out of prison?”

“Well, sure,” said Danny, “what’s up?”

“We know what happened to Adolpho, and we can account for the whereabouts of her grandfather, but are we sitting tight on Rosa? She can’t be all too happy, and Adolpho might have left her instructions on what to do in case she didn’t hear from him when he got his millions.”

“You got all that from your shower?”

“Well that and my subconscious ramblings, yes.”

“But, sweetie, that would be assuming that Adolpho had plans to keep lil’ Rosa in his new life as a millionaire.” Danny sipped at his coffee.

“Better to assume than to be sorry,” she trumped him.

After making quick work of their breakfast, they were both back at work in the security suite where they were able to begin pinning down every move made by Rosa over the past week.

Phone records, email traffic and motor vehicle computers were employed along with matching up her photo with facial recognition cameras installed at the airports in Puerto Rico, Miami and every airport and port facility in the Caribbean basin.

Oliver Ross called to a contact with the newly enlarged Homeland Security office in San Juan and alerted them to assist in the search for Rosa, and Oliver then called his own B & P team holed up in the Sheraton right at the cruise ship terminal and put them to work tailing Rosa on every move she made.

“Rosa made bail. She amazingly enough put up the \$50,000, and so she is out of jail,” Ross reported to Clinton.

“Maybe this will work in our favor in finding out if there are any more unknown connections,” said Ross. “My guy at Homeland Security says that the U. S. Marshals are tracking all her cell phone calls. Hell, they watched her buy a new pre-paid phone an hour ago.”

Rosa and Maria had gone shopping for new clothes while the two teams of agents had followed their every move in San Juan.

After a daylong venture, the B & P team called in a report to the war room on the Sea Empress, while the U. S. Marshals who were also following them did the same to Homeland Security.

Rosa and Maria went from store to store, buying some jewelry and baby clothes and several pairs of new shoes. “Maria,” said Rosa as they browsed through racks of baby clothes, “I have an appointment at 3pm

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today with this lawyer that Adolpho set me up with. I am scared of what could happen to me for making that phone call. Let's just go to his office and see him now, I can't wait or relax."

As Rosa and Maria made their way to the office of Nodak B. Marshall, they weaved through busy sidewalks where the crowds made it difficult for the two teams of agents to keep up with the ladies, as they scurried along the main roadway of Old San Juan.

They came to a three-story building next to a jewelry store that housed various lawyers' offices.

At the doorway, a sign listed the three lawyers who were located on the first floor, two on the second floor, and one lawyer who had the entire third floor to himself.

The three flights of stairs were not difficult for the two women as they were partially open air with a pale yellow stucco framework, stairs of colorful terra cotta tile and native murals adorning the walls of each landing. Large fans were busily spinning at the ceiling of each landing.

When Rosa and Maria knocked on the door of Nodak B. Marshall, Esq., an older woman came to the door to welcome them into an impressive waiting room.

Instead of the old worn chairs that are the standard furnishings of most San Juan single practitioners, Marshall had a new leather couch and leather easy chairs, an aquarium stocked with colorful Caribbean fish, and a large painting of the harbor at Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas.

"Mr. Marshall will be back soon from lunch," said the greeter. "My name is Norma, and I see you are a little early, so please be at home and let me bring you a cold beverage. We have iced tea, water, or soda pop. Whatever you prefer."

Norma liked to wait on Marshall, and the pleasantly plump woman with blonde hair also liked to see clients coming in the door on Monday if she expected to see her paycheck on Friday.

"I'll take care of the formalities for you, so you can get right to work when Mr. Marshall comes in," said Norma. "The standard retainer is \$2,000."

Rosa stood up and took one of Adolpho's envelopes out of her purse and took the letter out and handed it to Norma.

"My, your fee is already paid," said Norma as she reviewed the letter. "I am sorry; I didn't know you were Adolpho's friend. Just make yourselves comfortable, and I will fix your drinks."

Norma scurried into a side room which functioned as a kitchen.

Only twenty minutes later Nodak B. Marshall, himself, bounded through the doorway.

"Aha, you must be Rosa," said Marshall. "I am sorry for your loss my dear. Adolpho really went out with a bang, didn't he? Please have your friend wait out here, and you and I have a lot to talk about."

Rosa let go of Maria's hand and followed Marshall into his inner office where he closed the door behind them.

"Sit down here while I make a call," said Marshall.

Marshall's large office had one of the best views of Old San Juan from his third floor balcony which stretched out past his desk.

As he dialed, he put his feet up on the desk and sat back to enjoy his phone call, while Norma came in and brought him a Margarita.

"Juan Pedro," boomed Marshall, "how are things in Miami? Are you federal prosecutors so power hungry with prosecuting poor Puerto Ricans that you want to trounce on a simple waitress who had a love affair with a ship's steward? You know damn well this woman had *nothing* to do with this. I can't believe you turds would push around a woman like this. You had her locked up, you asked for a high bail, and you are treating her like she is a terrorist."

"Come on Nodak! You know very well that she is part of the conspiracy, and she will do twenty years," said Juan Pedro from his office in the gleaming Federal Building across from the row of hotels along Miami Beach.

"What crap, you guys are just making yourselves look good for the newspapers and the evening TV news. Have you no shame?" Marshall didn't wait for an answer but barreled on with, "You know damn well the Judge will toss these charges."

"We are out to make it damn difficult every time we uncover a conspiracy like this from those crazies with FALN," said Juan Pedro Batista.

"So do it, but have enough class to back off when you get an innocent person caught in a trap. This poor woman had no idea what she was doing by calling that phone number; she was an unknowing link in a criminal conspiracy, and you know damn well there was no criminal intent and *ipso facto*, there was no crime! So drop these goddamn charges before I fly over there and beat the crap out of you."

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“Nodak, I can’t tell you how refreshing it is to always hear your very gifted and persuasive legal arguments,” said Juan Pedro. “Tell me again what cow path college was it you graduated from?”

“Don’t pull that Ivy League crap on me, Juan. If it wasn’t for all that minority baloney, you would have never made it into Harvard,” bellowed Nodak B. Marshall as he jumped up out of his chair, almost spilling his drink.

“I have been assistant attorney general for Puerto Rico as well as deputy U. S. Attorney in Baltimore and you know damn well I am on top of this, and I will make you look like a rank amateur if we get anywhere near a courtroom, which we might not if I get the Judge to throw this out on motions. In fact, that would be doing you a favor if the press didn’t realize what an ass you are,” said Marshall, taking a deep breath for another blast at his friend.

“Hold on, Nodak,” said Juan Pedro. “I was prepared to drop this charge as soon as I saw it come across my desk. I just wanted to have the opportunity to hear your wonderful voice go full throttle on your legal arguments, and I must say, you didn’t disappoint me.”

“You were?” asked Marshall.

“Well, my friend, I am the one with the big salary sitting here in the high-rise office, with the million dollar view over Miami, cherry picking my cases while you are stuck down in Old San Juan fleecing the poor out of their last buck for worn out legal misadventures.” Juan Pedro laughed. “I told you not to back Hillary—*too soon*, I said. It’s all about being in the right place with the right campaign.”

“Speaking of timing—how long before this goes away for my client then?” asked Marshall.

“I don’t want to do it too fast, as I suspect that Adolpho character left this woman with a nice stash of cash that we’ll never track down, so we might as well drag things out a little bit so you can run your bill up.”

“Don’t let me convince you *too fast*,” whispered Marshall so Rosa couldn’t hear him.

“Just as I suspected, you’re putting on the show for your client. Well go ahead and beat me to a pulp; you have one more minute. For your client’s sake make it good, but then I have to go.”

With that green light, Marshall’s bluster rose to new heights.

"I am telling you right now we will appeal this all the way to the Supreme Court, and then I am going to come up there and kick your ass right down Miami Beach, and after you lose this trial, you'll never be able to run for U. S. Senator in Florida or any other state."

"That's it, Nodak, your time is up and I will fax a copy of the dropped charges to you in thirty days, so as not to interfere with your billing schedule to your client. And hey, Remember me at Christmas! I like that Wild Turkey," droned Juan Pedro. "And you might be a great legal mind, but I found out how your daddy named you, and I for one have great respect for ethnic eccentricity when it comes to naming children. The Blacks do it, the Latinos do it, and you Rednecks sure as hell do it too."

"What do you mean," said Marshall as he walked across the room to his balcony and opening the door, stepped out away from the earshot of his client.

"Your daddy named you after North Dakota Bison! In other words, you were named after a free-range grazing bull buffalo, which certainly seems to fit your personality," laughed Juan Pedro.

"Who the hell told you that crap," said Marshall as he realized his deep dark secret was out for the whole world.

"I have a great research assistant who is not only great in bed, but she is terrific at digging up stuff I need for trials," said Juan Pedro.

"Have you told anyone?" asked Marshall.

"No, my dear friend."

"Oh, good."

"This invaluable info I save for when I really need it," said Juan Pedro.

Marshall took a few minutes to regain his composure after learning that the secret of his entire life was now resting in the hands of his old friend and legal jousting partner.

Marshall walked back into his office from the balcony and told his client that he had more work to do, but he felt that his arguments might be effective with the United States Attorney for Miami, and that he should know more in about a month.

"What should I do now, Mr. Marshall," said Rosa.

"You can go home and spend time with your family," said Marshall, quickly adding, "and my bill has already been paid in advance by Adolpho; you keep your money for you and your child. If you wish to send friends to me for legal help when they need it, I would appreciate that."

Rosa told Marshall that she would and she gathered up her cousin from the waiting room, and together they went out the door to be near some more shopping.

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“Rosa,” said Maria, her voice shaky. “Maybe you should think about leaving here, you can go to the mainland and live, and stay away from all of these crazy people here. I would like to go with you, see...to find a new life for us.”

“I am beginning to think you might be right,” said Rosa. “Let’s stop by that travel agency next to the Sheraton and buy tickets to Miami.”

Within an hour, Rosa was right back in Marshall’s office, and the barrister was immediately on the phone again with Juan Pedro in Miami.

“Come on,” said Marshall. “You mean to say that you won’t let this woman get on an airplane and travel to the states. She is an American citizen, she has her passport in order, and you know damn well you are going to drop the charges against her.”

“There are a lot of your fellow Americans who might think it’s a good idea to keep her in San Juan and to not let her into the states,” said Juan Pedro.

“For Christ’s sake, this is just baloney! Get her off the no-fly list,” said Marshall, “I am begging you.”

“We’ll agree on the condition that she surrenders her passport to my office upon arrival in Miami,” said Juan Pedro. “I will have a marshal there to pick it up at customs. She gets it back when the charges are dropped.”

Marshall went out to his waiting room where he had left Rosa and gave her the good news that in an hour, she would be off the no-fly list and able to travel.

With a fresh round of thanks, Rosa and Maria left to return to buy tickets to Miami.

## *Chapter Twenty Three*

The two days at sea cruising back to Fort Lauderdale were promised to be uneventful, but as everyone on the Sea Empress now understood, anything was possible, and lots of unpredictable excitement was probable.

Danny and Marsha Jones left their suite after a luxurious breakfast and decided to head up early for sun and relaxation on the top deck. Marsha had a throat-wrenching thriller novel by Robert W. Walker with her, while Danny was sporting his MP3 player and brought along a magazine.

Sporting a large floppy hat and sunglasses, Marsha was able to conceal her identity, to an extent. Danny, of course, wasn't about to shy away from his many new-found fans.

After about the fifth passenger stopped to wish them well, an officer stopped over to lend a hand at persuading appreciative well-wishers from disrupting their relaxation.

"Well, you know we could have stayed on our own balcony," said Marsha.

"And miss my fans," chuckled Danny. "Not on your life, sister."

"You are going to miss them for the next week," said Marsha. "I am going to get the vacation you promised me one way or another, and the best way I can think of is to get off this ship before something else happens."

"What do you want to do," asked Danny as he scrawled another autograph for a passenger.

"I have already talked to Kevin, and a company plane is going to fly us to St. Vincent where a private yacht awaits us, and it is ready to take us out for a week for some sailing and fun," said Marsha. "This is a 70' motor sailor with a captain and cook, so we don't have to lift a finger."

"When's all this going to happen?"

"We have a private stateroom, and we will leave land at Kingstown and in a half hour, be taken by van to Chateaubelair harbor after our plane sets down from the flight from Fort Lauderdale."

"Count me in," said Danny. "So what's with this place? From what I have learned in the past couple of weeks, cruise ships are now stopping there at a new terminal. There are nearly three dozen islands in the chain and the island is an independent nation, but part of the British Commonwealth and very pro-western. Its primary economic engine has

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been bananas but more marijuana is being grown in the hills, and its becoming a real problem.”

“Dear, have you been reading National Geographic or some travel brochures,” asked Marsha.

“Hey, our research gal is really good and puts together good risk assessments. Don’t fault me for reading them,” said Danny. “I have been studying every port and stop in the Caribbean; I am tired of being surprised every day.”

Just as promised, the three hour flight from Florida whisked Danny and Marsha to beautiful Saint Vincent about four hours after the Sea Empress had safely docked at Fort Lauderdale.

A van pulled up to the Black & Perkins jet, and the driver quickly grabbed their luggage. Danny and Marsha were soon driving past banana plantations on their way to the north side of the island to Chateaubelair.

The driver, John Hathaway, a nattily dressed Brit, a B&P employee and a retired British Army officer, had a special briefcase for them to add to their luggage.

“What is in here,” asked Danny.

“Mr. Clinton said that you were to be properly protected and ordered this gear for you,” answered Hathaway. “Two Glock 9 mms, a shotgun, and a 30.6 rifle, an emergency radio, GPS and a flare gun. We will have a patrol craft within fifteen minutes of your yacht at all times, and a helicopter standing by at Kingstown.”

“And I thought it might be a picnic lunch,” laughed Danny.

“No sir, the yacht is fully capable of fixing any meal, including a picnic should you wish to take a dingy to a beach.”

“Well, John, I was kidding, but I am glad to know where we can get a box lunch, and glad to know we have great security, but this seems like the security for a visiting head of state.”

“Danny, you both are pretty important to the company, and if certain folks on this island knew you were here, they might be tempted to make a try at you.”

“Gee, we were kinda used to having everyone like us on the ship,” said Marsha in full sarcastic tone.

Ignoring her, Danny said, “Mr. Hathaway, it sounds like you might have people here like back in the states.”

"I have lived here since I retired from the Army in 2001, and I have to tell you we have had several instances of pirates preying on yachting visitors anchoring off remote islands, even right near this harbor," said Hathaway. "By the time the pirates rob and sometimes rape the visitors, and a call for help is made, they are long gone."

"The news of the attacks have had a devastating effect on tourism from cruising yachts, and the boaters have their own network of news, and while the government could always before control adverse publicity by pressuring local media, they can't control the internet, so when local criminals turn to piracy, the boating world knows it in a matter of hours," said Hathaway.

"Their M.O. is to attack an anchored yacht after midnight, rob and pillage for valuables, and leave in the same small power boats they came in, but by the time police on shore are contacted, forget it, as the pirates are back in the hills," continued Hathaway. "It's the ones who don't want to work, the same as criminals everywhere, who find that stealing is easier than working."

"What is the government doing to crack down on the pirates," asked Marsha.

"Well Piracy is pretty important to tourism here, actually," said Hathaway. "The original movie set for Pirates of the Caribbean is still located here at Wallilabou Bay and all the tourists want to see it when they get off their ships. Where the economy is being hurt is with the cruising boaters. They are staying away sad to say; they used to not only shop for provisions but they needed work done on their boats as well, and that trade is drying up as they seek safer ports."

As Danny and Marsha boarded the sailing yacht *Triplet*, they waved as Hathaway drove away.

The Captain gave them a tour and advised them on how to call for the mate to provide them with room service for food and beverages and told them of their itinerary for the next week.

The yacht motored out of the Chateaubelair Bay harbor which had but a dozen vessels at anchor, which the captain pointed out was but ten percent of the number of boats normally anchored there on an average day prior to the last pirate attack.

On the first day of the adventure, Danny and Marsha awoke to the smell of bacon cooking at the crack of dawn. Triplet was at anchor in a cove off of Buccament Bay. A quick dip in the crystal blue Caribbean to wake up and a rinse from a fresh water shower next to the boarding ladder prepared them for breakfast served on the aft deck.

## The Privateer Clause

Steaming Belgian waffles, Eggs Benedict, Canadian bacon and fresh fruit alongside a pot of locally grown coffee were arrayed on a crisp linen table cloth complete with a vase filled with flowers.

"Wow," said Danny. "Did you select the menu?"

"You know better than that," replied Marsha. "If I had, all you'd get would be cold cereal. You have enough flab on you without this meal!"

Danny toasted the chef with fresh squeezed orange juice and decided not to answer, just to eat.

Captain Larry Klear and his wife Clare were retired from government jobs in the U. S. and were living their dream of operating a charter sailing business.

"Folks, we will be sailing to Port Elizabeth on the island of Bequia today, and we'll be there about dinner time," said Captain Larry. "In the morning, you'll take the dinghy to shore, where we have a car and driver who'll give you a tour of the area, even the entire island if you wish. The driver will be recommending several luncheon spots for you to choose from, and he'll have you back to the dinghy dock by 5pm, allowing you enough time to change for our special surprise dinner, Lobster Spaghetti."

Danny drooled and uttered, "Hmmm...sounds delicious."

Clare is down in the galley right now starting her trademark spaghetti sauce."

"We should have gotten off the cruise ship a week earlier," said a very pleased Marsha.

"What and miss all that fun?" asked Danny.

"We saw you all on Fox News and read about what took place on your ship," said Larry. "We promise you all a little slower pace on this voyage."

"I hope so," said Marsha. "By the way, what agency are you two retired from?"

"Well, let's just say it was a company job," said Larry.

"I am really glad to find out that you weren't employees of Agriculture or HUD. We need all the friends we can get," said Danny. "CIA works for me."

Clare popped up from the galley and went to an auxiliary refrigerator to select fresh tomatoes and garlic to chop up for the sauce.

"Don't mind me folks. I get a little messy as the tomatoes splash when I crush them. I just don't like those canned things," said Clare. "Fresh onions and garlic too; only the best for you folks."

Marsha and Danny spent much of the day at Port Elizabeth touring two old cathedrals built in the early 1800's.

Marsha, who had long ago been expert in taking photos as part of her Secret Service work, had let her skills blossom as a photographer, zeroing in on the really unusual designs of St. Mary's Catholic Cathedral which boasted mixtures of Moorish, Roman, and Georgian architecture.

The construction of the old church was of volcanic rock and bricks.

A trip to the oldest botanical gardens in the western hemisphere completed the day's visit, but only after a leisurely lunch at the Portofino Inn off of the Belmont walkway.

"I know Clare is fixing Italian tonight," said Marsha, "But I can't pass this place, they have my favorite, shrimp fra diavola."

With a classic Italian bread and a large antipasto before their pasta served with large shrimp, the two needed to walk through the beautiful gardens just to balance out the first two meals of the day.

A third wonderful meal was promised to them back on Clare's yacht.

The dinghy had been cleaned up by the two young boys who worked at the dock. It now looked even more pristine than when Danny and Marsha had motored to shore. Danny passed each boy a five spot, and they beamed as bright as the sparkling white of the paint on the dinghy.

Dinner was out of this world, as Clare once again had perfect pasta topped with her sauce made from her mother's family Italian recipe.

Clare would start her sauce with tomato puree; add in chopped fresh tomatoes, fresh chopped garlic, fresh onions, green peppers, spring onions, and mushrooms. Adding in fresh rosemary, thyme, marjoram and basil with a small amount of salt and sugar, oregano, black pepper and a sprinkling of red pepper flakes, the concoction would simmer all day with just a stirring once an hour.

With lobster plentiful in the area, broiled and placed on top of the pasta and sauce, the meal was as spectacular to view as to eat.

Once again, the formal table was set on the aft deck with fresh flowers and a hurricane lamp to guide the meal complete with white merlot.

Darkness came and so did Clare's special cheesecake served with gelato, thus completing the meal.

The yacht was anchored about a half mile from shore and the view of Port Elizabeth was as pretty from the *Triplet* as Admiralty Bay was from the town.

## The Privateer Clause

Darkness overtook the yacht, and an anchor light at the top of the mast, along with small lights along the walkways provided enough light to see clearly.

Larry brought up a second bottle of wine for Danny and Marsha who had polished off the first, minus a glass for Larry and Clare, all at the insistence of their guests.

Clare was down in the galley finishing up the dishes, and Larry was checking the weather reports on his laptop which connected via his own satellite, while Danny and Marsha relaxed at their dinner table and lingered over the wine.

The day had been perfect and uneventful, just the ticket after a stressful cruise in the Caribbean on a wonderful ship.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR**

The first sound Danny had heard he thought was coming from Clare's cleaning pots and pans in the galley, so he hadn't reacted. By the time he heard the next sound, he was facing a man holding a long blade to his wife's throat.

"Good evening, folks! We are your friendly Pirates of the Caribbean, just like in the movies, and we are here to relieve you of your valuables and if you resist, your *lives*," said the cocky pirate.

Danny glared at the swarthy man, who was indeed dressed much like a Hollywood pirate with a bandolier of bullets across his chest, a pistol in his left hand and a sword in his right, the steel blade an inch from Marsha's throbbing carotid artery.

Behind the pirate was his assistant, also armed but not quite as confident.

Danny disliked nervousness as much as boldness, as both traits could be deadly.

Larry jumped up from the helm and started to reach for his gun.

"Sit down old man, or I'll cut this woman's throat and shoot you," said the pirate, adding, "My name is Captain Fleet, but you people can just call me Captain. Now, old man, pick up that bread basket and start the ball rolling by putting your wallet and watch in it and pass it to your nice passengers."

Larry obeyed and soon the basket was full of the valuables from the three.

"Is there anyone else on board old man?" asked Fleet.

Larry shook his head no in hopes that the pirate would not bother to check and just leave with his loot.

"Samuel, my assistant will check below for others and for more valuables, while I keep you all entertained," said Fleet.

While the assistant pirate went below, Marsha, Danny and Larry barely breathed and sat quietly.

A thud came from below and Fleet called out to his assistant.

"Samuel, what has become of you?" said the pirate.

One shot rang out from Clare's rifle as she fired from the front hatch of the yacht, nailing the pirate classically between the eyes. His sword fell to the deck along with the bread basket, wallets, jewelry, and cash. Captain Fleet had made his fleet-of-foot run to a sudden death, and now his blood was staining Larry's yacht.

"Wow, Clare, what did you do in the agency," said Marsha.

## The Privateer Clause

"Honey, I was just an analyst, but I went to the firing range to practice once a week for twenty-seven years, and today it paid off," said Clare proudly as she blew the smoke from the tip of her rifle.

"What happened to the other guy?" asked Danny.

"He had a run in with a spear gun. I didn't have enough food for guests," said Clare. "I could hear everything over the intercom from the cockpit, and we are always ready for pirates. I have a real mess to clean up now."

Larry called the nearby B & P patrol boat which was alongside the Triplet in five minutes.

"I am sorry folks but you should go stay at the inn my friends run," said Larry. "It's an old West Indian inn which was converted from a family home about thirty odd years ago. I'll call them now to have a suite ready for you. It will be safe for the night, and we can leave in the morning after I get through with the police. I can tell you right now, that the cops will load up all their unsolved piracy cases on these two, whether they did them or not, and hope to lift the veil of uneasiness from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines that this kind of attack has caused in the past year. But since we are in this nation's waters, we have to be careful to document the attack and give them the bodies, which I suspect they will lay out on the dock as a warning to other would-be pirates."

"Great, then tomorrow, tourists will be sending those photos by email before the day is over," moaned Marsha.

"At least we didn't kill them! Clare beat us to it," said Danny.

"I don't know if you could have gotten that guy or not, with you already putting down three glasses of wine," said Marsha.

"Don't worry, baby, for wrecking my date night, the guy would have paid big time. I'd say being a pirate is a risky business! Hope he had insurance," quipped Danny.

Danny and Marsha packed a small bag for overnight and went to shore with the B & P crew on their escort boat.

"We'll deal with the Royal St. Vincent and Grenadines Police and they'll never know you were here. We'll just clean up and the patrol boat and have you back in the morning," assured Larry.

## ***CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE***

When Danny awoke, like most mornings Marsha had been up for an hour, had made coffee, and had showered and dressed. Her routine was built on a time schedule that she had long ago gotten used to, and these long months of retirement had done nothing to break her from her habits.

Danny walked over to the kitchen in the very comfortable suite on a hillside overlooking Admiralty Bay, got a cup of coffee, and sat down on the balcony at the table where Marsha relaxed.

"Danny, I think we were better off on the ship," said Marsha. "I don't like someone getting the drop on us as we are just plain tourists on a sailboat, at least on the ship we have a security team, some advance warning of threats and good resources."

"Yeah, but the ship doesn't have Larry and Clare," said Danny. "First Clare was a crack cook, and then she was a crack shot. How do you beat that?"

Marsha didn't answer and continued to gaze down over the harbor, noting the police patrol boat leaving the Triplet for shore.

The phone in their suite rang, Danny walked over and picked up the receiver to find Larry on the line.

"It's okay to come back now folks, the police have loaded up the bodies and taken them off, and they've given us our sail orders," said Larry.

"We'll be right out after breakfast," replied Danny.

Marsha had ordered English muffins and a bowl of fresh fruit, no meat and no pancakes.

Danny thought there might be another reason for going back to the Sea Empress, as there he could eat whatever he wanted by simply going from one feeding line to another interspersed by regular attendance at the magnificent dining room. Only his walking prior to each meal and his workouts in the gym saved him from piling on pounds due to his plundering the buffets.

The rest of the week went without any remarkable incidents as they toured the Grenadines.

Danny popped open his laptop and read up on the more than 100,000 inhabitants of the chain of islands. He soon learned there were as many cell phones as people with pockets of poverty and house rentals on one exclusive island which cost as much as a new BMW just for a week's rental.

## The Privateer Clause

Gorgeous and more was the only way to describe this nation which won its independence from Britain in 1979 but kept the Queen as the head of state.

A local parliament and prime minister conducted the affairs of the nation which didn't even have its own American Ambassador. The U. S. Embassy in Grenada represents American interests.

Danny's cell phone rang, and he looked away from his laptop.

"Hey Kevin, this was a great idea. We had a ball. Clare bagged two pirates, and she is a great cook! How do you manage to find the best cooks in the world to work for you, between Clare and Aunt Lulu back in Maryland. I can't wait to find out where you've got another tucked away!"

"Danny, I am really glad you had a good time, and Clare gets a bonus for lobster spaghetti. As for nailing pirates, that's part of her regular compensation," said Kevin Clinton. "You'll find John is right at the dock ready to drive you back to your plane, and instead of coming to Fort Lauderdale, the jet will be flying you straight to Maryland. We have a little problem."

"Do we get a peek at this one in advance or do we wing it?" asked Danny. "Marsha and I were kind of hoping to get back on the Sea Empress."

"There hasn't been a single unusual incident since you and Marsha got off the ship, and some of the passengers are getting tired of all the silly skits with pirate themes. They're asking when you all are coming back," said Clinton.

"I just can't figure it out. I read an article in one of the New York papers which had a big spread, and they were saying that the cruise crowd is plainly bored, and this is the most excitement they have ever had. Still, they get to go duty-free shopping, snorkeling and enjoying the great food on the ships, but with the pirates and all the commotion, it was the best entertainment possible. We have had good luck with new murder mysteries set up as serials in afternoon matinees and midnight shows, going on for three days and nights, and audience participation just like Karaoke. This has been pretty good, but this audience rather misses things being blown up."

"How long do we have to stay in Maryland, and don't tell me Aunt Lulu is on vacation," said Danny.

"She's there and promises to have crab cakes and pan fried perch when you arrive," said Kevin.

"Marsha said she is really getting into this travel routine and wants to know when we get to fly back to meet a ship?" asked Danny.

"Tell Marsha that you'll only be in Maryland for a couple of days, and its back to the Caribbean for you two," said Clinton.

Eight hours later the Black & Perkins jet landed on the runway at the firm's training center at Newtown Neck.

Oliver Ross had returned to the facility a week earlier and had met them with a Jeep at the plane. Thankfully, the cooler evening air took the steam off what'd been a scorcher of an August day.

After a big dinner, just what Kevin had promised, was delivered by Aunt Lulu. After which exercise was needed.

A walk on the beach with a full moon brought a fresh look at the Potomac for them both. The Potomac they had been used to was fifty miles further up the river and crisscrossed with bridges.

The Potomac River, which raced around the DC area, was laced not with fresh breezes and salty air like those that fanned the woods and fields of Newtown Neck, but the starchy and snarky aromas of power, politics, and pollution.

When Marsha and Danny got to their room, they found that their beds had been turned down, the windows opened to catch the soothing night air, and a message that a boat would be ready to take them fishing on the far side of St. Clements Island at 7am as the perch and jumbo spot were biting hard.

B & P contracted with a local charter captain, and at the appointed time, Capt. Jimbo Ridgell was sitting at the dock in his 46-foot six pack, Olivia S., along with his mate, Junior Langley.

Just as the mate began to slip the lines, Ross drove up in the Jeep with Kevin Clinton as his passenger.

"Hold on Captain Ridgell. We have two more coming," said Marsha. "I hope you brought your own lunch, as we don't plan on sharing."

"Yep, Aunt Lulu has a box lunch for both of us, and I can't wait to see what it is," said Clinton.

As the Olivia S. began to come up to plane on the way across Dukehart Channel to the far side of the island, where the great fishing had been for the past two days, Clinton sat down next to Marsha and Danny in the salon.

The captain was above on his fly bridge, and Junior was aft rigging his lines, which allowed them privacy to talk.

## The Privateer Clause

“Danny, we have a sensitive problem. So sensitive in fact, I need this chance to talk without being monitored,” said Clinton. “We have tracked down one of those who were funding the terrorists; same SOB who went after the First Lady when she was on that fishing trip last year.”

“How did you all get involved,” said Marsha. I thought that was strictly Secret Service,” said Marsha, beginning to feel a little burn given as how it was her operation that day that allowed the First Lady to come into danger.

“It was, but our work on uncovering the group in Puerto Rico who went after the Sea Empress found a really crazy connection back here in the states—a money tie to a very high profile relative of an elected official,” said Clinton.

“Who is the bastard?” asked Danny.

“The President’s brother, Leopold Bryan,” said Clinton.

“Crap,” said Marsha.

“We found the connection, and we immediately alerted the FBI and the Secret Service,” said Clinton. “The U.S. Attorney had a federal judge review the evidence we found. The judge signed a search warrant and last night twenty three stinger missiles were found in a storage unit a mile from Andrews Air Force Base, the home of Air Force One.”

“I knew that guy, Leopold Bryan, was going to be a problem. He just seemed too cocky and arrogant for me, but most politicians leave me with that impression,” said Danny.

As the Olivia S pulled up about a mile west of the island, not far from four other charter boats, the mate spread everyone out on the aft deck with a rod. Within minutes, multiple hits were being made and dozens of nice perch and jumbo spot were being hauled into the boat.

## CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

The rest of the day was spent on talking about fish and talking about a character much more slippery than the eels, which made such good bait on the Potomac. The captain had brought a selection of bait, some eels, squid, bloodworms, and grass shrimp. The shrimp had been freshly netted that morning in some patches of grass on nearby St. Patrick's Creek, and not only was the least expensive but the best bait of the day.

With a cooler full of perch and spot for Aunt Lulu to fix for dinner and to stock her freezer, the effort was worthwhile.

But the real menu that day had to deal with a traitor at the highest level of government who had been cooking up a scheme to kill President John Hanson Bryan, his own brother.

"We know of no comparable act of treason in American history," said Clinton as they sat around the dining room table in the big farmhouse. "We have had presidential brothers try to hijack the White House for fast cash like the Billy Beer episode of Jimmy Carter's brother, but there is no memory of anything as diabolical as this."

"We even had the brother-in-law of Bill Clinton trying to cash in on presidential pardons," said Kevin who went on to explain the details.

"There had been a 24<sup>th</sup> stinger missile—the one they tried to kill the First Lady with," said Clinton. "We had the one guy who was sent to Gitmo, and he was water-boarded before all that nonsense in Congress and finally he *got religion* and began to yap."

"You mean he gave it all up there," asked Danny.

"No, but he gave enough up on the Sea Empress that the CIA let us know that they had some Intel that we might be interested in, and we began to work that info," said Clinton. "That guy who blew up when you shoved his gurney out of the morgue and off the ship left a girlfriend. She wasn't involved but he *used* her as a mule, quite unwittingly. There was a computer chip in an envelope that he had left for her that contained a lot of FALN data, including the link to the terror strike against the First Lady and their ultimate plan to take down Air Force One as it was lifting off from Andrews Air Force Base."

"How did the chip get discovered?" asked Danny.

"Believe it or not, it was an honest lawyer, maybe the only one in San Juan, Puerto Rico, a fellow named Nodak B. Marshall," said Kevin. "The girlfriend was being shadowed by our guys and the CIA, so she went to see the lawyer and took him some money, so she could get her charges dumped," said Clinton.

## The Privateer Clause

"She had laid the envelope she got out of her boyfriend's safe deposit box in her lawyer's office while he was on the phone with the U. S. Attorney arguing for her charges to be dropped. He had told the woman, Rosa Gomez, that his fee was already paid, but she was worried about getting her no-fly status lifted, so she and her cousin could go to Miami. She had been well taken care of by Adolfo, and she just stuck the envelope with \$50 g's in it on Marshall's desk while he had his back turned, and he found it after she left."

"Why didn't he just give it back to her later," asked Danny.

"He would have, but our guys had teamed up with the CIA boys and girls at that point. They had all been shadowing the women, and after the two women left, they all paid a courtesy call on Marshall and he volunteered the envelope," said Clinton. "He could have been worried that the money was tied to drug activity, which it definitely was, and was relieved to get rid of it. Most of the money in Puerto Rico, and DC for that matter, has cocaine residue on it. But also in the envelope was the simple small chip with lots of information."

Danny pondered what he had learned and poured a cup of coffee.

"Why would Adolfo have left the computer chip to his girlfriend," asked Danny.

"We think it was really just a case of leaving it with her gave her a chance at using the information to help her in some way, and it was only a matter of her getting the data if he had been killed or imprisoned," said Kevin.

"So when is the shit going to hit the fan in the media about the President's brother being arrested?" asked Danny.

"It isn't! In fact, that is why you are here."

"Really?" asked Marsha.

"You two are going to take him back with you on the jet to Miami, and he and his wife are going to go on board the Sea Empress for a 12-night cruise. Leopold is going to have a special passport, under an assumed name, one that won't allow him to leave the ship until we get a handle on all of this. The feds have a lot of tracking to do to make sure exactly who is involved who might this moment be in custody," said Kevin.

"So we will have the brother of the president of the United States under arrest and in our custody for most of the next two weeks," said Danny. "That oughta be a blast. This sets a new standard for the

treatment of federal prisoners. They are all gonna want to go on a luxury cruise.”

“Just try to keep things a lot calmer on this cruise than you did the last one,” said Kevin.

“Like we had any choice,” said Danny. “Look, we are a private security firm. Why aren’t federal officers taking Leopold into custody? This really isn’t our job.”

“Danny and Marsha, raise your right hands and repeat after me, as United States Marshals, by appointment of the President, do you swear to obey, protect and serve the best interests of the United States, and to defend the Constitution of the United States, so help you God?”

“You have the power to swear us in as US Marshals?” asked Danny.

Clinton flipped out his badge and handed them badges too.

“Well, I guess that answers that question,” said Danny after being sworn in as a police officer for the third time.

“I hope we are on the Black & Perkins pay grade and not being paid Marshal’s salaries,” said Marsha. “I like our current compensation.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll still have your same deal,” said Clinton, “but now you get a badge that doesn’t say retired on it.”

The company jet landed at Fort Lauderdale, and a limousine pulled up and took Marsha and Danny with their guests, traveling under the names of Harriet and Ralph Ostertag.

With an escort, the four were whisked through the side gates and avoided the somewhat tense lines of passengers working their way through security to board.

An officer met them at the entrance to the main foyer on the ship and guided them to the owner’s suite, where both couples would share the huge suite which could easily accommodate up to eight people in private bedrooms but with joint living areas.

“Mr. Ostertag, our orders are to keep you secure on this ship. You are not to take off your sunglasses, or to engage anyone in conversation other than to say hello. Tell folks you just had throat surgery and have to limit your discussions,” said Danny.

“What about me; am I a prisoner here too, but I’ve done nothing, and I don’t know what my husband did,” said Lola Bryan.

“We won’t be filling in any gaps,” said Danny.

## ***CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN***

The rolling swells of the Atlantic were mild as the coastline of Florida disappeared into the brilliant sunset. Lola 'Harriett' decided that since they were being held prisoner on a cruise ship then she was going to live it up to the fullest extent and had paid a visit, accompanied by Marsha, to the shopping area on the ship; there she charged an expensive dinner dress, designer shoes and a matching bag.

Danny and the president's brother were measured for tuxedos, which were delivered within an hour. By 8:30 they were dressed and ready to attend the second seating on the luxurious Sea Empress.

As they wound their way through the dining room, some heads turned and nodded, showing signs of recognition of the famous guests. Danny couldn't figure if the notoriety of the previous cruise had passengers on the lookout for him and Marsha, or if some had spotted the president's brother.

It had been foolhardy for anyone to think that those on a cruise wouldn't be familiar enough with the family of the president to not recognize Leopold Bryan.

One red-headed woman of about fifty, jumped up from her seat as Leopold walked by and said, "Oh my, the president's brother. Whatever are you doing here?"

"Madam, I am simply an actor, and I have done some television commercials because of my lookalike status, but believe me, if I really was the president's brother I would cash in and get some better gigs," said Leopold in sly response as he tilted his dark glasses forward, making eye contact with the lady.

"Come on Ralph, we have to get to our table," said Danny, grabbing him by the elbow and forcing his forward movement, in a discreet way.

The group was seated at a large table, much to Danny's dismay, as it would be more difficult to monitor the chatty Leopold and his smarmy wife.

Two other couples were already at the table and would join them for the rest of the cruise.

The waiter, Philip, from Trinidad, spoke the King's English and served the group with precision, aided by his assistant, Jared, from Czech Republic.

The other couples each ordered a bottle of wine which inspired Leopold to do the same.

Danny and Marsha knew that a glass of wine was appropriate, but more could be problematic if their unpredictable charges became a worry.

As the wine flowed and the talk limbered up, conversation going back and forth around the large table, Leopold showed he was making significant recovery from his throat surgery, as he began to regale the others with tales of Hollywood and the stage.

To a large degree, it wasn't an act, as the erstwhile presidential sibling was in fact an actor and had done off-Broadway for years, plus he had indeed done many low-grade films, most of them with lots of makeup and cast in horror flicks. Since his brother was elected, he was getting better offers for movies and landed a new Broadway show for the coming season.

But the evening wore on without any serious problems, and Danny and Marsha got their charges back to their suite in one piece after the late show in the grand theatre and a visit to the casino. Being the first night of the cruise, the casinos always allow guests to win big and damn if Leopold didn't win more than \$10,000 playing roulette.

Only the knowledge that the pompous ass would lose that much and more the next night as the casino would grind up the previous night's winners, was a comfort to U. S. Marshall Danny Jones.

After making sure that they would be notified if Leopold tried to escape their suite, Danny and Marsha took a nightcap on their balcony.

The moon was full and the sea was brightly lit. Off on the starboard side of Sea Empress was the island nation of Cuba, long and foreboding even at night as the ship would have it off on the southern horizon for several hours.

"How do we get ourselves in such a mess, Danny," asked Marsha, as if she weren't around for the events of the last several weeks.

"Hon, it was your idea to go on a cruise," said Danny, as if that would end the line of questioning.

"Yes, visits to islands, shopping, spending time in the ship's spa, elegant dinners, relaxing and reading books, that was what I had in mind," said Marsha. "What did I get? Pirates, bombs, more pirates, a nutcase Presidential brother, and even a submarine."

"I had forgotten about the sub," said Danny, truly having forgotten. "Is there going to be a test?"

"Don't be a smart ass with me. You know I had in mind a true vacation, and you turned this trip into an adventure film."

## The Privateer Clause

“The pay is pretty good,” said Danny.

Marsha looked at him and laughed. “I guess you’re right. I deposited the check when we were back on the mainland and my accountant said he doesn’t know how much luck he’ll have at saving too much of it from taxes, but he is going to spread the money around between five accounts in case one of the banks gets added to the list of those that are shut down by the FDIC.”

Danny closed the door to their private bedroom and locked it before returning to the balcony where they could have a moonlight romp on the padded lounge chair, or so he thought.

“Not a chance, buddy! We are going to the bed. This hard lounge chair is not going to work,” said Marsha, while throwing cold water on the idea of balcony sex, yet not completely putting out the fire of wine-induced passion.

The next morning was easy as breakfast was served in their suite.

Leopold and “Harriett” came out and joined them on the large balcony that they all shared a much larger one than the individual balconies off of their bedrooms.

Leopold had an ability to project himself that was both comfortable and convincing. For an actor to portray that he was an actor was an easy role to play. The real test for Danny and Marsha was to be able to keep Leopold under control when going out to meals in the main dining room of the ship or to other public areas.

Marsha had herself from the table for a minute to get her phone from her bedroom in the suite and a waiter knocked at the door.

“We have the smoked salmon and bagels for you that we failed to bring you, please excuse our tardiness,” said the waiter as he lifted the cover off the plate and instead of dishing out lox and bagels, he picked up a gun to fire at Leopold, pointing it directly at the President’s brother.

A shot rang out and the waiter, with a new bullet hole in the center of his forehead, slumped to the floor. Marsha actually blew the smoke from the tip of her gun before she lowered it from her shooting stance at the door to the bedroom.

An astonished Danny looked on with amazement at his wife’s coolness, while ‘Harriett’ passed out and Leopold, for the first time in his life was speechless.

It didn’t take long for Leopold to recover from his temporary anxiety.

"Why would anyone try to kill me," shouted Leopold as he rushed to his wife's assistance.

"We don't know yet, Leopold; now shut up and help your wife," said Danny.

Marsha called to the security room while Danny checked the body for any unexploded devices such as Adolpho had worn.

The Reprisal had been shadowing the Sea Empress at a distance of about two miles and quickly began to close the gap after the security office radioed the Black & Perkins vessel.

"Kevin, we have had an incident here on the Sea Empress. A waiter just tried to take out Leopold and Marsha nailed him. There doesn't seem to be any other immediate threats, but we are locking down this deck as a precaution, closing the elevator and doorways to block access to anyone who isn't staying in a room on this deck. As they are all suites, that isn't too many," said Danny.

"Check, we will have a screen done quickly on the passengers. We already have one on the staff and crew," said Clinton. "Our red flag is on a American waiter from Brooklyn, New York. While he is Jewish he has been studying in Israel and Jordan. In fact, he was enrolled in a Muslim college in Saudi Arabia for three years. I don't know what we have with this guy, but his name is Larry Schwartz."

"That's the name on this ID on the dead waiter," said Danny.

"We will run all of his contacts, but while he could be a lone ranger, we have to assume he has an assistant," said Clinton.

"Danny, take a digital image of this guy's face and email it in," said Clinton, "and get his prints and send them too".

The rest of the day was spent in seclusion in their bedrooms while the living area was combed by the Black & Perkins security detail for any missing clues, checked for any new threats, and then restored to its elegant state.

Leopold seemed shaken for the first hour, but as the dinner hour approached, all his former bluster and luster returned, creating his normal pompous mood. Soon he demanded that they would enjoy dinner in the great dining room of Sea Empress.

Schwartz, minus the bagels, was moved to the ship's morgue where he joined an 85-year-old woman who died of a heart attack during her morning constitutional.

Once again the word of a shooting and a dead man began to spread through the joyous passengers as they remarked about why they had booked a cruise on the ship. The excitement was spreading, and the

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internet café was full as passengers sent news flashes to the networks and Drudge. The fun was back on the Sea Empress with a brand new murder attempt and a bad guy collared once more. The butler *tried* to do it. Bring on Col. Mustard!

With the passengers now on full alert for sightings of Danny and Marsha, the well-known face of the President's brother had passengers waving at them.

Leopold, dressed in his tux, walked through the newly restored living room of their suite and knocked on Danny's door.

When Danny answered, Leopold spoke with authority. "Look, I have had nothing to do with any threat against my brother."

"I have nothing to do with any determinations, Leopold, I am just here to assure your safety," said Danny.

"You mean your wife is. I didn't notice you pulling out a gun," said the cocky actor.

Danny just looked at the newly smug and arrogant Leopold, who'd quickly gone from protestations of innocence to lofty indignation. *This guy has to be innocent*, thought Danny. *He isn't that good an actor.*

As Danny dressed for dinner, giving in to Leopold's demand to dine in the luxurious main dining room, the phone rang.

"Danny," said Kevin Clinton, "The FBI Director just called me and they have cleared that numb nuts actor of any involvement. I didn't get many details but they have a Secret Service detail on the way by Gulfstream jet to St. Thomas to meet you. Brother Bryan is getting full protection, so they will meet you at the Crown Bay cruise ship terminal. It's a little ways out of the main harbor area and easier to secure. The passengers on your ship can still get to the rest of the island, as ships dock there every day but we switched your ship with the one that's scheduled to be there."

"Do you have ground transportation for us," asked Danny.

"Sure. Look for the Mad Hatter," said Kevin.

"The Mad Hatter?" asked Danny. "Do we get to meet Little Miss Muffin too?"

"The Mad Hatter is a guy with a big fabric hat. He'll be driving a 12-seater Ford bus with a wooden top; he'll hold up your name on a sign. The Secret Service has already rented an SUV for themselves, and Leopold and his wife, you can follow with your crew."

"Are they going to fly him out of there back to the states," asked Danny.

"This cat ain't a prisoner and he is unpredictable, if he is having a good time on the ship, you may not be able to get rid of him, so play it by ear," said Kevin.

"So who does the Mad Hatter work for?" asked Danny.

"Langley," said Clinton. "But he is always happy to give us a hand when we need it."

"Great, a CIA agent, Secret Service agents, with Marsha and me acting as U. S. Marshalls. We'll all be running around trying to protect a lousy actor on an island in the Caribbean. Can you tell me what is going to happen next, and who in the hell that waiter was working for in trying to kill Leopold?"

"No, we are working on it," said Kevin. "Just remember, this is the President's brother, and he is cleared, in fact, no one even knew of the really damning evidence that Justice thought they had, and it all blew up in their collective face. I would love to find out what it was the important thing to remember now is that someone has been trying to kill the president's brother, and I don't think it was someone who paid too much for a Broadway show."

## ***CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT***

As the *Sea Empress* glided into the Crown Bay terminal just outside of Charlotte Amalie, the main port of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, the excitement had built from the time that passengers began tuning into the newscasts in their cabins.

All of the networks had been tipped off by the passengers on the ship, and one had even grabbed a photo of the gurney moving the dead waiter in a body bag to the ship's morgue. Photos of Leopold and Lola, along with some of Danny and Marsha in the dining room were being rotated across the TV screens along with video shots of the *Sea Empress* from earlier events in the Caribbean.

All of the talk about booking murder mystery cruises was hitting full bore and the reservations for the cruise line were reaching overload status. While a national recession of unprecedented proportions was running roughshod over the nation and spreading around the world, you almost couldn't get a cabin on any ship in the Caribbean.

Not only were people filling the ships, but oddly enough, they were in a good mood. The notorious cheapskates and hard to please cranky old broads were now dancing along on excursions and easy to please in the dining rooms. Even the staff and crew of the ships were amazed. Give these folks some blood curdling excitement, pirates being shot dead and their boats blown up, and they couldn't get to the cruise terminals in the east coast of the United States fast enough.

Seven Seas moved three of its Alaska ships to Norfolk, Baltimore and even Philadelphia. These ships were sailing full and there was a waiting list.

Cruise lines weren't really wishing for any trouble elsewhere as calmer heads knew how lucky the industry had been now that Black & Perkins was on the job in the Caribbean. It could easily have been a far different story, and back at Seven Seas headquarters, Henry Boston knew this fact better than anyone.

"Danny, I've been in touch with Kevin and the FBI Director, and I just wanted to call and thank you and Marsha for your work. You need to know I have sent you an Owner's Circle card for both of you which will allow you complimentary passage in owner's suites on any of our ships, and they have no expiration date," said Boston.

“Well, Henry, after being back and forth over the Caribbean the past couple of months, I can’t tell you how much we could use a real vacation from all this sun and fun,” laughed Danny. “But thanks, I hope we can get a really peaceful cruise sometime, but for now we’re docking at St. Thomas where we’re stuck chasing a couple of crazy tourists around while they go shopping.”

Boston and Jones said goodbye and hung up.

Within ten minutes, Marsha and Danny were going down the gangplank with four Black & Perkins agents behind Leopold and Lola. On the dock Secret Service agents, who still looked like agents even on a Caribbean island, awaited the party.

A black SUV was pulled up on the long pier, where the agents quickly hustled Lola and Leopold into the Suburban.

Danny spotted the Mad Hatter and the six of them piled in.

As they were about to pull away, Danny heard a familiar voice.

“Hey Danny, wait for us,” said Vito as wife April, Ben Mayflower and Faustino scrambled into the Ford bus behind him.

“I didn’t know you all were back on the ship,” said Danny. “Didn’t you get enough excitement before?”

“We have been on three previous cruises, and trust me, they were nice but nothing compares to a ‘Murder Mystery’ on the Sea Empress,” said Vito, “and now you’ve done it again and you even have the President’s brother! We saw him on Broadway in ‘Chicago’. He’s a scream.”

“No, it was ‘All that Jazz’”, said Faustino.

“Who cares, we loved the show whatever it was. So where are we going, Danny old boy?” asked Ben as the Mad Hatter sped away, trying to catch up with the Secret Service.

“Vito,” said Danny. “You folks just hopped on the wrong bus, unless of course you like mysteries,” laughed Danny. “Hang on, we really don’t know what the hell is going on at this point, except Leopold is taking Lola shopping with the ten grand he won at roulette—same ten Lola is out to spend entirely.”

An escort from the Virgin Island police appeared as they pulled away from the terminal.

A GMC Trailblazer with two cops were inside, and had all their lights flashing, and the Secret Service agents had borrowed portable flashing lights for their Suburban from the island cops. The Mad Hatter had to make do with his flashing headlights, and his heavy hand on the horn. The

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three miles between Crown Bay and downtown were covered quickly, noisily and to the delight of Vito and his pals.

“Thanks for letting us hop on this ride,” said Ben.

“It’s the least I can do is to keep a good pilot like you available for a quick getaway,” said Danny.

“Anytime, I have all my cards up to date with the FAA , I can fly just about anything you can steal, which I suspect is just about anything,” said Ben.

The transition from the new cruise ship terminal near the end of the island where the refinery and oil storage tanks were located was far different from the old port and Colonial Era town of Charlotte Amalie.

From the newly constructed mall-like Crown Bay, the drive took the group through a mix of old and new commercial and shipping oriented businesses, docks, marinas, and shipyards with all manner of boats in various stages of repair, decay alongside once sleek yachts of great opulence now relegated to decadence. The side by side lifestyle of glamour and glaring poverty was as persistent as the green hillsides studded with lush homes all with stunning views on many of the islands.

The Mad Hatter, a black native of the island, had been working for the agency since he’d gotten out of college, and now at the age of 42, his thin build and short stature always worked to his advantage. No one ever thought, ahead of time, that he was anything to fear or suspect. A most unlikely CIA agent, The Mad Hatter had posed as a taxi driver in Africa, New York, Madrid, and Hong Kong. It was a cover that was versatile in just about any society where blacks were accepted. With a credit card from American Express, the Mad Hatter was able to fly around the world and was quickly in business anywhere in under an hour.

All he needed was his hat and a set of wheels.

The pale green Ford bus, the peeled, chipped wooden roof showing her age, came to a stop behind the black Suburban in front of a jewelry store, everyone hopped out.

The enthusiasm of the four friends that Danny and Marsha had made on their previous trip to St. Thomas when Ben flew the company plane from St. Croix, reminded Danny of the entire unpredictable journey. This old Colonial Era town, which had been home to pirates and pillaging navies for centuries, had Danny’s nerves pulled taut.

After about a dozen jewelry stores were under their belt, the group opted to take lunch at Mabel's, a well-known grill on a back street.

Ben, Danny and Vito decided to go to a quiet café in a courtyard just off the main square. Danny had been worn out from the shopping. The Secret Service detail were experienced, said Marsha who was glad to be with a couple of them, who were old friends, and Danny thought it was time to take a breather.

At a table under a green umbrella emblazoned with a beer company logo, the three ordered Coronas and sandwiches from a waiter from Jim's Island Café.

A fried conch sandwich tempted Vito who also decided to order a good old cheeseburger as a backup in case the conch was a little too *conchy*.

The little plaza behind a row of front street shops and a bank was a refuge from the busy town, teeming with tourists from the ships and, oddly, traffic congestion which would be typical in any American city.

Ben and Vito took advantage of their cell phones working on the island like at home, due to its being an American territory, and while they waited for their sandwiches and a second round of beer, Danny, always on alert, looked around the area and checked in with Kevin Clinton. Danny would stop at two beers.

The waiter, an American from Detroit but with a local accent, had an odd tattoo on his arm, just above his wrist. Danny had seen it—a black spider—somewhere before, and as the waiter was serving Vito, Danny snapped a quick photo in a touristy way, as if they were just old buddies on a cruise, drinking beer while their wives were shopping.

The digital image of the tattoo was quickly sent to Black & Perkins and on to the Secret Service training center at Greenbelt, just outside of Washington, where they had a state of the art lab.

Danny didn't like spiders or anyone who did.

As the three finished their sandwiches, Marsha called to let Danny know that Leopold's new publicist had lined up a press conference at the Territorial Legislature building down by the harbor at 3pm, not long before they had to be back on the ship, and that, by the way, Leopold and Lola were going to be finishing the cruise, that the Secret Service were determined to get them off of the island. After all, this guy was the President's brother and had been shot at, and they still didn't know why. But he had clout and what he wanted, he would get.

At that point, the Mad Hatter appeared from the noonday shadows with a cup of coffee in hand.

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“Hay Mon,” said the Hatter in a fake Bahamian accent. “Are yo’ ready fo’ yo’ tour?”

Danny laughed, “Sure Fred, take us for the five dollar tour. I can’t believe you actually had me give you my autograph the first time we were here.”

Fred laughed.

“I really meant it; my kid loved getting your autograph,” said Fred.

“Your kid is in college,” said Danny.

“Yeah and he wants to be on the job somewhere when he gets through,” said Fred as he adjusted his oversized hat. “Let’s go people.”

The three piled in the Ford bus while the Mad Hatter put up chains on each side of the bus to keep others from hopping into empty seats. Dangling from the chains a sign read: **Out-of-service-private-tour.**

They slowly worked their way through the port city to a road leading to Blackbeard’s Castle, stopped at the reconstruction of a famous bar which had burned down the prior winter, and pulled into another bar. Here Vito and Ben got a beer and went into an adjacent shirt stall to browse amid at a massive display of island shirts.

After an hour, the Mad Hatter drove them back to the harbor area where the Legislature Building was located right on the shoreline. A row of cannons left over from distant days when the harbor was protected by the old relics, still stood guard.

As they waited in traffic to turn into the parking lot, Danny noticed a guy wearing a black shirt with a fire department logo on the back of the shirt. Sporting red and white bloomer style shorts and red baseball cap turned backwards, the fellow was posing his kids on the front bumper of a fire truck sitting in an open bay of the fire station.

The Mad Hatter finally caught a break in the unbelievable traffic and turned quickly into the government capital building parking lot.

The green pastel building with the red tile roof had once been a high school, but in the fifties a new school was built, and the building was now the seat of government.

A fountain stood in the center of the parking lot, surrounded by a pool with native island stones set in the cement as decoration.

Danny met with a security guard who showed him the security detail office with its single video camera, which really didn’t do any good since it was trained on the back door alone. Danny imagined it a back door which

had been the exit of many a criminal operation geared at government employees stealing from the taxpayers.

## *Chapter Twenty Nine*

"Hey, can you guys make another stop here?" said Lola as the Secret Service agent screeched to a halt as Leopold's wife called out.

"Oh no," said Marsha. "You have already spent all of his casino winnings."

"I have his credit cards, and they told us in the call from Washington that there has been a payment made into our account to make up for Leopold's not being able to make any money in the last week, while we were being held prisoner on this ship," explained Lola.

"A Prisoner?" said Marsha. "Traveling first class, shopping on the taxpayers and eating in a five star dining room?" exclaimed Marsha to Lola.

"Don't fret my sweet," said Leopold. "I just talked to my agent, who has signed a deal with the cruise line and I will be joining the theatre company at tonight's show and work for the next six months, just doing 4 shows a week while we travel in splendor, all of our expenses paid and with a handsome fee for my acting services. We, my dear, have hit the jackpot, my how our fortunes have changed."

"Give me both your credit cards," said Lola. "I have some more shopping to do. In fact, leave me here at these stores while you go to your press conference. I hate those boring things anyway."

"Can we handle being split up," asked the senior agent of Marsha.

"Look guys, I can handle Lola," said Marsha. "It'll be just us girls going shopping; I have a little I want to do myself. You guys take Leopold and go down to the Legislature Building."

The black Suburban which had been illegally parked along the curb in front of a jewelry store, loaded up with the four agents and Leopold, the new star of Seven Seas Cruise Lines rep, and they were off to the actors world-wide press conference three blocks away.

As the Suburban pulled into the parking lot, the young father who had been posing his two boys for photos on the front bumper of the fire truck across the street noticed the TV cameras and flurry of excitement as Leopold arrived.

'Stormy' Hale had also gotten off the Sea Empress that morning and was giving his kids a self-guided tour of the town, while his wife and her mother shopped.

The family was from a small town in Maryland where he was chief of the fire department and had been really pleased to find the equipment of the St. Thomas station to be sitting in front of their bays, making picture taking easy.

Hale and his sons, Chad and Jeremy, made the press conference their next stop.

In addition, on her first really exciting assignment since starting to work at the Island News was Wendy Geopolis, just a year out of the Navy, where she had worked at the public affairs office, mainly to keep her out of trouble.

Wendy was a bundle of energy and didn't slow down for hard work, and with her good looks, she found that guys always wanted to be cooperative.

Her editor used her regularly as bait to get cops talkative about murders and corruption cases, both of which were plentiful in the Virgin Islands.

Wendy knew she was being used for her looks by the newspaper, but she found the attention from all the cops to be a hell of a lot better than getting tickets from them. She wasn't out of work as was happening to some of her friends who wished they had stayed in the Navy and were quickly trying to get back into the service as the economy didn't hold much hope for new journalism positions.

With jet black curls ringing her cute face, Wendy's slim figure, high voice and ample breasts made her an attention piece anywhere. But she prided herself on not only her virtue, but her intellect and being dangled as bait was okay even if she was an old-fashioned girl and was stuck on her boyfriend in her hometown of Friendship, Maryland. He was going to medical school at Johns Hopkins and had little time for day to day romance, while she was starting her career in journalism in the worst period of the economy possible.

But Wendy had grown up watching every Lois Lane depiction she could find, and from that first version of Superman's love, she decided that was the life she wanted.

Leopold's agent had hired a local attorney at St. Thomas to ride herd on Leopold and to protect him from the press, and more importantly to protect Sydney Wellstone's growing fees.

Daniel Crapper, retired from a lucrative practice of law in Baltimore, had found St. Thomas to be of his liking, and so here he was. He dabbled in law affecting the territorial government and liability issues. When it

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came to Virgin Island employees, the government was constantly in litigation, thus Crapper soon found himself with a full time practice.

The agents found a gaggle of about three dozen reporters, TV camera operators, and interested bystanders when they pulled into the parking lot.

Crapper, red faced from a skin condition and red nosed from a wine condition, met the Suburban and introduced himself to Leopold as Wellstone's attorney, and therefore, as Leopold's attorney.

"How much are you costing me?" asked Leopold.

"Not enough," laughed Crapper.

"Come this way, Mr. Bryan," said Crapper. "I have borrowed the back of a pickup truck as a stage for you to hold the press conference where the microphones are already set up."

The entourage walked over to the Toyota pickup, and Leopold clambered up, stepping on a milk crate to make the upper elevation.

A reporter with a Miami TV station who'd flown in just in time, on assignment for another story, a multiple murder, asked the first question.

"Leopold, is this attempt on your life resurrecting what had become a dying career on the stage, on that'd relegated you to B movies with Dracula?" asked Miguel Juan Paulo.

"Well, I'll take a shot in the dark and guess that it was divine intervention," laughed Leopold, "but I can tell you this! My agent has just signed a six month exclusive engagement at a fat salary with the biggest cruise line in the world."

"Leopold, why were you on this ship when this happened? Who would want to kill you?" asked Paulo.

"You would have to ask him, but to my good luck, a U. S. Marshal nailed him, and dead men tell no tales," said Leopold.

Danny, listening to the questions from the security office, where he had rigged up several supplemental cameras on equipment brought over from the Sea Empress, just groaned at Leopold's corny responses.

"Is this attempt to kill you related to your being the brother of the President of the United States?" asked Wendy as she stuck her hand up in the air.

Before Leopold could answer and Wendy's hand was still reaching above her head, a shot rang out from the harbor. A bullet intended for Leopold instead pounded into Wendy's wrist.

The gaping wound had severed an artery and blood was spewing over the parking lot and nearby reporters.

Hale had ducked and covered his sons, and only being ten feet from Wendy, he saw the threat to her life.

While the assassin sped away in a small speedboat, Wendy's wound was critical.

Hale loudly told his boys to stay still and as he leaped to Wendy's side, he ripped off his tee shirt and made a tourniquet out of it, wrapping it around the reporter's arm to stop the flow of blood gushing out of her injured wrist.

Two Secret Service agents hustled Leopold off the pickup and back in the Suburban while the other two ran to the harbor. Armed with machine guns, the SS men jumped aboard a U. S. Coast Guard patrol vessel which had been kept on alert, and they now pursued the runabout ripping across the harbor.

Danny radioed to a Coast Guard helicopter, and soon the runabout was trapped between the patrol boat and the chopper.

Ordered to stop, the assassin did the honorable thing and blew himself up.

Tourists around the harbor and on the three cruise ships which were at the docks were all able to see this latest adventure.

The TV cameras at the Legislature Building parking lot had captured it all: the surprised look on Leopold's face, the bloody mess around Wendy, the fleeing gunman on the speedboat which had been tied up to the bulkhead, the pursuit by sea and air as well as the vivid explosion.

A Colonial Era brigantine, carrying ship passengers on an excursion designed to give them the "pirate" experience, was a mere 200 yards from the climax, so that when the boat blew up, the appreciative tourists all applauded and cheered.

The Coast Guard released a video of the scene from the chopper before the Secret Service could stop them, and within an hour, all of the day's events were rushing across the screens of every network.

Bookings for all of the cruise lines went through the roof and executives began to rethink plans to cut back on new ship orders that they had been considering due to the lousy economy.

The Coast Guard sorted through the floating debris and recovered the intact body of the assassin. He was quickly bagged, tagged, and removed to a waiting plane, along with the dead waiter who had tried to kill Leopold on the ship.

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"Where are they taking our collection of would-be killers," asked Danny over the phone to Kevin Clinton. Safely back on board the Sea Empress, which prepared to get underway, Danny and the others were joined by four Secret Service agents, but not the Mad Hatter,

"They both are on their way to the morgue at Quantico, and Danny, does a tattoo of a spider on the wrists of both of these guys mean anything to you?"

"No, except for the fact that the waiter who served us at the café at St. Thomas had a spider tattoo on his wrist. Took a picture of him on my cell phone, as it just struck me as odd, and I am a little old for coincidences."

"Email that photo to me ASAP," said Clinton.

"At this point in time, please tell me our security has been beefed up," said Danny.

"You are being escorted by Coast Guard as long as you are near U. S. territories and there will be a detachment of an Aegis cruiser, two destroyers and a submarine within four miles of you indefinitely. The Resolute and Reliance are also escorting you, within a mile, one stem and one stern," Clinton assured him.

"It amazes me that so many people would pay so much money to ride around on this tub in the Caribbean as nothing more than bait for terrorists and pirates who want to hurt anything American," said Danny.

"It's not too much riskier than the Washington Beltway," said Clinton. "Certainly the food is better. We have a new hero today, too," added Kevin Clinton.

"I saw the news clip of that guy rushing to the reporter's side," said Danny. "I hear he is from our ship. They're saying he's a volunteer fire chief back in Maryland."

"Oh, yeah," said Clinton. "It's all over the evening news. There're news crews at his firehouse back home and interviews with his son's teachers. That guy clearly saved her life. She was losing blood quickly."

"I guess the company ought to thank him, don't you think, Kevin?" asked Danny.

"Well, we can't expect that cheapskate Leopold to do anything. What do you want to do?" said Clinton.

"Ask Henry for a gift certificate for a cruise for him and his family. At this point, I would say he will be spending the rest of the cruise being yakked at by his fellow passengers and won't get any peace and quiet."

"What's his name? I will ask Henry to have the Captain personally deliver a gift certificate," said Clinton.

"Stormy Hale, a real solid guy, who has been in the fire service for fifteen years, according to the news that's on right now."

"Okay, we'll get it done; meanwhile, buy him a drink on me!" said Kevin.

"What about the reporter who was shot?" asked Danny.

"Hells bells, Leopold's agent and his St. Thomas lawyer are already sinking their teeth into her. Wendy something is going on live by satellite from her hospital room with *Fox and Friends* tomorrow morning," said Clinton.

"Can't you get her that honest lawyer with the funny name in San Juan?" asked Danny.

"I'll put a call into him. His name is Nodak B. Marshall. I feel sorry for the girl to have to deal with Leopold's people," said Kevin. "I understand that guy Crapper is a big time shyster from Baltimore."

"Give the Mad Hatter the number. He's still in St. Thomas, and he will go see her tonight," said Danny.

The *Sea Empress* cleared the harbor at St. Thomas, and as they continued on their journey to other islands, they picked up their steely friends, whose profiles loomed in the distance, but to the passengers, they appeared to be other freighters and such, but they were too far away to be identified as warships.

It was formal night and Danny managed to sneak in a nap in their suite as Marsha began to try on the new jewelry and dresses she had bought in port on the shopping spree with Lola.

While Lola had been making the merchants of Charlotte Amalie happy, Marsha had made up for ten years of frugality. She spent \$25,000 on a necklace and matching earrings, bought Danny a new \$350 watch and five dresses—for herself, not Danny, who liked the dresses as with Marsha anxious to try each on ensured him of at least ten additional minutes of naptime, which he decidedly needed.

The Mad Hatter had rushed back to pick up Lola and Marsha after the press conference gunfire, and the women had just about filled his bus with their duty-free purchases.

The grand atrium of the *Sea Empress* was nine stories high, and the notes of the classical piano and combo playing backup were delighting the

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couples who glided across the marble dance floor, while others sat around the luxurious cocktail lounge, sipping martinis and waiting for the second seating.

The dance lessons in the morning helped some passengers but weren't needed by others.

With two left feet, Danny didn't often try any fancy steps, but the appearance of his wife in her new frocks and glittering jewelry changed his mind and had him step up to the plate.

"Just let me lead, dear," said Marsha as they did a pretty decent job of following the other couples around the dance floor.

Some of those dancing had obviously been to lots of dance classes, and those who were completely untalented or untrained, mercifully stayed seated. The result was a show right out of the movies, all the right moves, truly wonderful music, and a great prelude to a peaceful meal on the most adventuresome cruise ship in history packed with passengers just bursting with hope and expectation of mayhem and other assorted fun.

## *Chapter Thirty*

The FBI morgue at Quantico was unlike any other in the nation. The analysis, intelligence, and crime lab all came together in a perfect union and since 9/11, a great effort had been made to get all of America's intelligence and law enforcement agencies to work together. While there were limited successes in many areas, forensic pathology was beginning to pay off. Thus cooperation between agencies became less grudgingly provided.

The two dead assassins were given complete autopsies and intense scrutiny. The spider tattoos were initially believed be some sort of gang marking, but soon a new and cryptic theory was being followed based on the wicked tattoo.

The spider matched the spider on the waiter in St. Thomas. As a result, the Mad Hatter, along with a contingent of local cops, paid a visit to Jenny's Island Café only to find out that the waiter had left in a hurry after the gunman fired at Leopold.

Two down and one missing as the spider's web became more complicated to investigators.

Included in the loop was Kevin Clinton, as a U. S. Marshal as well as CEO of Black & Perkins and guardian of the President's brother, he didn't take too kindly to two attempts on Leopold's life in a week—*on his watch*.

A piece of shrapnel from the boat engine had killed the shooter when he blew up his own boat running from the Coast Guard at St. Thomas, while Marsha's deadly aim had dispatched the first spider-tattoo bearer. There was nothing else remarkable about either, and now a full lab analysis of their body fluids, skin, and clothing were being conducted in hopes of learning more about both.

Both men appeared in their early thirties, and both were Americans, one of Lebanese descent, the other Jewish. Both had become radicalized by Islamic sects.

Clinton had accumulated quite a bit of information about Schwartz, the dead waiter, but the information was just starting to trickle in on the guy who shot at Leopold and tried to do a suicide on his go-fast.

*What is motivating these people for a cause which seemed so remote from the world?* Danny wondered.

Kevin Clinton was standing in the FBI lab at Quantico looking at the autopsy data when Henry Boston rang him on his cell phone.

"Kevin, will our luck hold out while we work to get a handle on who is behind all of this mayhem?" asked Boston. "I have to tell you I am tickled

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at the good work you all are doing, but I am worried that one of these fanatics is going to get past you and do some real damage to lives and our ships.”

“Well, Henry, I can tell you we have a lead we are following, and you will soon learn on the news that all security access points at every travel terminal and border crossing will now include an inspection of the forearms and wrists of all persons. We have a spider tattoo we are looking for and hopefully a computer scan of existing video which is being done from tapes at all airports will help us pinpoint those involved in this terror plot.”

“Well, Kevin, just keep me informed,” said Boston as he hung up the phone.

The back stage of the main theatre on the Sea Empress was bustling as the cast prepared for their presentation of *Pirates of the Caribbean* with Leopold playing the lead as Jack Sparrow.

Faustino Mayflower had been lucky enough to be tapped to do two vocal numbers due to the untimely failure of a member of the troupe to return to the ship at St. Thomas. No one seemed to know where she went, and Faustino’s shopping trip with Lola and Marsha let slip her acting and opera work back home in Maryland. Leopold had quickly suggested to the producer to cast her to fill in the spot in the production.

What had already been a feature with real flair took on new importance with the latest attempt to kill Leopold.

As the cruise director introduced the show, he was careful to trip on the right laugh lines.

“Without wishing our new lead actor to ‘break a leg’ or anything else, I invite you to welcome Leopold Bryan in the role of Captain Jack Sparrow,” said the tuxedoed host, followed by a standing ovation.

Faustino’s two numbers brought down the house, while Leopold’s pirate captain brought a return to the old bloodthirsty type of pirate captain rather than the almost gay Depp characterization. When Leopold threatened to cut off a head, his meaning came through, and even if it was still a light-hearted production, the nearly two hour show was met with resounding and thundering applause, and the cast took four bows before the audience would quit clapping.

Faustino was in her element, so she collected Ben and April and Vito and they all went to a cast party in Leopold's suite where, of course, they ran into Marsha and Danny again.

With butlers coming to and fro with platters of caviar, shrimp, and delicious cheeses, the party lasted until 2am. The really hardcore of the crowd, including Vito and Ben and their wives then made a trip to the casino, which was now on a 'clean out the passengers night' and by 4am, the party was over and collectively they had dropped \$1,000. For Vito and Ben and their wives, it was a princely sum. Leopold had been warned by Danny to stay out of the casino after the third night of the cruise, so all he lost that day was Lola's shopping trip in St. Thomas.

With Leopold's new contract with the cruise line and his book deal, an appearance via satellite with the Leno show, more deals and offers were hitting his agent's desk hourly.

Upon hearing of what took place the previous night, Danny made a call to Kevin Clinton, who then called Boston.

A gift certificate for a 12-day cruise was delivered to each of the cabins of Vito and April as well as to Ben and Faustino, along with a note thanking them for assisting Danny and Marsha at various times along with an appreciation from Henry Boston for Faustino filling in at the theatre.

Vito was pulled aside by Danny at lunch that day.

"Please don't talk about what I told you, but stay out of the casino after the third day of any cruise," said Danny.

"Gotcha," said Vito. "I'll make sure everyone understands."

Faustino looked at their gift certificate for a thousand dollars signed by the Chairman of the Board of the cruise line and shook her head.

"How could he have known I was playing a part in the show," asked Faustino.

"Danny has connections, now let's stay out of the casino or simply watch others, but no more gambling," said Ben.

"I'll go back to playing the nickel slot machines," said Faustino.

Faustino, April, and Marsha decided to join Lola at an art auction the next evening after a day at sea.

They had skipped a port due to a security problem of some sort, and since the ship declared double lobster tail night to make up for it, as well as half price on excursions the next day, the mood was still cheerful.

The first rule of thumb at an art auction is for the auctioneers to have those attending sign up for an auction bid number linked to their credit card; the second rule is to get them drunk.

## The Privateer Clause

Much like a Goose Unlimited banquet, but the only charity involved at the art auction is the international art gallery who is the contractor with the cruise line.

Major pieces of art were interspersed with reasonably priced art with reserves which would allow the average passenger to have a \$500 painting they could purchase, but the opportunity to blow thousands on a painting was also available.

Faustino skipped signing up to bid, as did Marsha.

That left April and Lola and as they giggled, the champagne, free of course, flowed. The hor d'oures were good too.

While Lola was immersed in the land of milk and honey, due to her husband's newfound fame as a potential dead man, April was used to scarfing up the free champagne and actually failing to win any bid. It was a science to be sure, but April pulled it off and left only with a building hangover.

As the auctioneer attempted to get the crowd to buy an 'authentic' painting of George Washington by Da Vinci, Marsha just shook her head.

Just by luck, Marsha noticed a painting of a lighthouse on an island that looked remarkably like Smith Island in the Chesapeake.

She got up and inspected it and went over to get a bidding number.

After another 45 minutes, the lighthouse painting came up and for only \$145 Marsha walked away with her painting. She skipped the offer for insurance or shipping and said she would carry it off the ship herself.

Marsha had correctly noted the name of the artist and knew his signature. Her good eye and experience in a fraud scam involving counterfeiters some years ago had brought her a lasting familiarity with Theodore Wolfe. The value of the painting she had bought was in the tens of thousands of dollars, but Marsha would never have paid that much nor would she sell it.

She had a Wolfe original and she was going to keep it.

The auctioneer, sensing that the audience was getting a bit tipsy, began to speak with a loftier and condescending manner.

He began to push a painting of a clown by Picasso. A farm equipment dealer from Des Moines bought it for his wife who was thrilled at being able to take some really classy art home for only \$35,000. It would be some time before the tractor dealer would find out that the value of the painting was only about \$4,000, but he would never tell his wife. And

therefore, there would never be a complaint to the cruise line or the art auction company.

The next piece came with a guarantee from the auctioneer that anyone could buy the painting and take it home to any gallery and sell it for 20 percent more.

Just as April started to bid on a set of three Dali paintings, Marsha stepped in and snatched her bidding ticket and stuffed it in her purse.

"We need to talk, and we need to leave here, now," said Marsha.

April gulped and the group left, even Lola.

"Hey, you make us leave but you bought a nice picture," said a wobbly April.

"Girls, let's all go chill out by taking a sauna and a massage," said Marsha. "If you are going to get your money's worth, that is the place. Let them pamper you. All you're going to get at the art auction is 'taken'," said Marsha.

"They ought to be ashamed of themselves, but it's always a matter of buyer beware, and not a heck of a lot different from the casino," said Marsha.

Marsha showed them a flyer which a passenger had made of various lawsuits and complaints against the art gallery conducting the auction.

As the women left, the young art teacher from Arizona who had smelled fraud, and had gone to the internet café and looked up the advertised Dali and Picasso pieces, passed out a flyer she had made to those at the art auction.

The next day, the teacher was booted off the ship.

"I don't blame the ship for tossing that nutcase off," said Ben as the group ate breakfast and the buzz of the teacher's exposure of the art gallery began to be passed around the ship.

"Why in the world would you say that," asked his wife.

"Faustino," said Ben. "The operative word here is auction; you don't have to bid, you don't have to believe their hype about value or anything else. This is a free market and people have a right to be dumb."

"I agree," said Vito. "It's all a case of buyer beware. What if you get loaded on free champagne and buy a painting—or a time share for that matter—that you no longer find attractive once you get home to only learn you've been made a fool of? When you find you could have bought it elsewhere for less money? Too bad, don't be a fool in the first place, and it would be a lot cheaper for those who buy art to go spend some money on some internet time and Google the art to find value."

## The Privateer Clause

“Don’t you think that when the art gallery realizes that it sold an original Wolfe Chesapeake painting to me for \$145 they will be sick,” said Marsha. “I never thought that counterfeit case would ever work to my advantage.”

April, now sober and realizing how close she came to being cleaned out with the art auction, had a different take. “That young teacher lost the rest of her cruise for simply trying to warn others about a fraud taking place,” said April. “How is that fair?”

“It’s all a matter of buyer beware, but the cruise line gives us a low rate for the cruise with the expectation that people will buy art, drink booze, and lose at gambling, and when we get to a port, we will take an overpriced excursion where they will get a commission if we buy it through them, on their website or on the ship,” said Ben.

Marsha asked if anyone knew the young teacher’s name, and Ben said It’s on her flyer! That’s how the ship tracked her down.”

An hour later, Marsha made a call directly to Henry Boston, who made arrangements to find the teacher who was still stuck at the port and the ship hadn’t left yet. In an hour, she was located and invited back on board.

Marsha made a second call to Henry.

“Thanks again, Henry, that kid was just trying to be a do-gooder like my Danny, and I saw her at the gangplank and told her to keep a low profile or next time they would probably make her walk the plank. She is on the ship with her mother and her aunt, and they were all crazy with worry, and she’s got no spider tattoo, so you really did the right thing, and I thank you,” said Marsha.

“I sent her a gift certificate too, and I am ordering a review of the practices of the art gallery. We need to have our customers always feel they are being treated fairly,” said Boston.

“Does that mean you are going to tell them they blew it by selling the Wolfe lighthouse to me so cheapky?” asked Marsha.

“If they get sellers remorse, I’ll let you know, but you bought it fair and square,” said Henry.

## *Chapter Thirty One*

The last time Danny and Marsha had come to Samana in the Dominican Republic, they had gotten in the center of an attempted coup and kidnapping.

The tenders once again took passengers to shore after the large ship moored out in the harbor, due to the lack of a terminal.

Three tenders worked at transporting those ashore who wished to take the limited shopping or sightseeing while several large boats picked up passengers for water sports activities, snorkeling trips, and catamaran sailings along the beautiful coastline.

"I was thinking about going snorkeling today. Do you want to hop on the cat that is going to be here in about thirty odd minutes?" asked Danny.

The day before, which had great shopping while in port at St. Lucia, was partly spent dealing with the teacher, so Danny and Marsha spent the rest of the day relaxing and reading at the pool.

Getting off the ship again for more of the same shopping or even for less quality shopping had little appeal for Marsha.

"Okay, just you, me, and thirty of our friends hopping on a boat for an intimate sailing cruise along the coast of the Dominican Republic," said Marsha. "I don't see any gunboats or helicopters, there are no tanks driving down the shoreline, so what in the world could go wrong?"

"That's a loaded question, and I won't go near it," said Danny. "You know as well as I do that we haven't yet been attacked by barracuda, a school of angry sharks, or a killer whale."

"Well that's comforting! Tell me, what do we need on this trip?" asked Marsha.

"Just your bathing suit, wear it, some sun screen, and that's about it; they supply the fins and masks," said Danny.

"I always have my own mask," said Marsha, "I brought one for you too. I am not going to stick that thing in my mouth that hundreds of others have had in theirs."

They walked down to the second deck where a door was opened to the outside, a stair case and platform allowed those exiting to either board a tender for transport to shore, and on the other side of ship, to board those leaving on excursions.

The morning was clear as a bell, and the weather was perfect.

This day was going to be fun with no adventure other than meeting tropical fish up close. Marsha had grabbed a small bag of goldfish to

## The Privateer Clause

crumple up to attract fish, something the ship tour guide had suggested made the fish dependent on people, but Marsha felt deprived from never having had time to have an aquarium so this was her day to see pretty fish.

As Danny and Marsha boarded the Catamaran, Danny noticed the tattoo on the wrist of the captain. It was the same spider.

“Just a minute, Marsha. I forgot something,” said Danny as he scrambled back on the ship. “Hold this boat, I’ll be back in 5 minutes.”

Danny quickly called the security room and several B & P agents along with the Secret Service were at the gangplank and quickly overpowered the captain of the catamaran.

“What the heck happened?” asked Marsha.

“Look at the tattoo on his wrist,” said Danny.

“Get these people back on the ship right away,” said Danny.

The Secret Service agents grabbed the sailboat captain and hog tied him while one of the tender skippers put a line on the sailboat and quickly towed it away from the Sea Empress.

Once the sailboat was about a mile away, the tender unhooked the catamaran and sped away from it just in time before it went up in a blast of shattered fiberglass and wood and dense black smoke.

Another boat blowing up within sight of the hundreds of passengers on the *Sea Empress* led to a rousing cheer and more cell phone photos and great video for those who were on the top deck, earlier capturing the beauty of the paradise which had been unfolding before them since first light.

“Exactly what is there about this ship, anyway,” said Marsha. “And how did you know the skipper of the sailboat had his boat wired?”

“The waiter on the ship who took the shot at Leopold, the guy who shot at him in St. Thomas and the waiter who served us lunch at that café in Charlotte Amalie all had the same tattoo. We have been circulating it to all the customs and TSA officers,” said Danny, adding, “We still don’t know who this group is, but they sure are clumsy killers!”

A tender took the B & P agents out to sift through any debris left after the catamaran had blown up. An intact ice cooler was fished out of the ocean by a Dominican patrol boat.

“Hey Pete,” said Danny over the radio to the Black & Perkins crew checking through the flotsam, “bring me that cooler, please.”

The Dominican officers relented and turned over the cooler to the security team, and Danny began inspecting the contents.

## ***Chapter Thirty Two***

"I can't believe that no one was killed in that explosion on the catamaran," said Marsha.

"Not exactly correct, dear. There was a crewman down inside the catamaran, and his body was fished out of the water after it bobbed to the top," said Danny.

"Let me guess, he has a spider tattoo also," said Marsha.

The Sea Empress finally boarded its last passengers after a delay at the terminal at Locust Point in Baltimore.

The ship had been repositioned from Fort Lauderdale for the fall and winter, and the ship had packed vacationers in from around the Mid-Atlantic States and many from all over the country as the recession prompted great deals from the cruise lines.

The large ship engaged its thrusters and pushed away from the dock without the aid of tugs. It steered out into the late fall night with the lights of downtown Baltimore standing out along the port side. The sudden change into darkness along the long shoreline of Locust Point ended in an area without lights.

That darkened point is home to the historic Fort McHenry, which on the night of September 13th in 1814 was lit up by a barrage of British bombardment that culminated in a poem written by a Maryland lawyer who was on a British ship. The lawyer was attempting to negotiate the release of a friend taken prisoner as the British left Washington, D.C. after setting fire to the Capitol.

That poem, later put to lyrics became the national anthem after the defenders of the Fort prevailed, and a British shore invasion was repelled.

As Danny looked out from the railings of the promenade deck, imagining what the bombs bursting in air over the fort's defenders must have looked like, he wondered if any ships leaving the terminal ever played the tune as it passed the old fort.

"What are you doing, dear?" said Marsha. "Our martinis have arrived; come on back inside. It's chilly out here."

"You don't need to convince me. I half expected this rain to turn to snow before we left," said Danny.

## The Privateer Clause

As passengers passed into the dining rooms, they were all offered alcohol based disinfectant for their hands as the cruise industry attempted to do everything they could to stop the spread of viruses and food borne illnesses.

Almost everyone was happy to take the protection against illness and joviality was the rule, with one bald man smiling and spreading the liquid over his pate with both hands.

Danny and Marsha were not surprised to see April and Vito sitting at their table, next to Faustino and Ben.

Joining them was Kevin Clinton and for the first time. His wife had flown in from where she had been visiting her family in Colorado.

The eight had a table which would have had an impressive view had it not been nearly the onset of winter with the sunset at 5pm.

The first night of the cruise was returning the happy collection of fast friends to St. Thomas.

The threats to the company and the industry in general continued, and new dangers were constantly being evaluated.

"We decided that there might be a lull in activity now as Christmas approaches," said Kevin.

"Yeah, like the terrorists are all out doing their Christmas shopping," said Danny.

"Or hanging their stockings with fear that St. Nicholas might soon be blown up at a mall," said Ben.

"Gee, guys, take a break. We've been doing well so far," said April.

"Look, you all ought to know that we have been amazingly lucky in the past year," said Kevin. "We have faced at least a dozen major threats, and some of them had the possible consequence of losing thousands of lives at a time, equaling 9/11 in a death toll."

"What are you guys expecting next," asked Ben. "At least if you don't mind confiding in us, we won't tell anyone."

"Actually, Ben, it's really an open book as to what we will face in the Caribbean or around the world," said Kevin, adding, "We are really just out to find as much about the groups who would like to make our ships targets of their hatred for America, and to inflict both human and financial damage. We have been tracing leads that Homeland Security gave us for the last couple of years, but finally when all hell broke loose on this ship, they decided to include us. That's when they made key members of our

firm Deputy U. S. Marshals. We needed to get a handle on the dozens of new ways that the crazed Islamic radicals were going after us. So here we are with a dozen of the Homeland Security people on this ship with us, we had so many there was not enough space; we had to convert one of the little used children's game rooms into our security office, and we share it with the G-men."

As the discussion went on, April and Faustino were silent, quite a change for them, as they soaked up every word of the status of the war raging against civilian American targets floating around the Caribbean sea.

Next to the group was a table with a man about forty years of age, his wife, and an older couple.

Danny had noticed the younger man and the older gentleman, now nattily attired in evening jackets, earlier that day at the Palm Springs Café on the after deck.

A brief conversation revealed that the man was a doctor at Johns Hopkins, who with his family was accompanying his elderly aunt and uncle on their first cruise.

Just as on the open air deck and now at the ship's two story dining room, the middle aged man was tenderly caring for every need of his aunt and uncle.

The older man was completely bald and able to get around on his own, but hooked up to a portable oxygen machine. The aunt was about eighty but in remarkably good shape.

The doctor had been smoking a cigar the previous day, and even though he was in an area which allowed smoking, he was kind enough to inquire if his cigar was bothering Marsha and Danny. The cigar wasn't bothering them and Danny thanked him for his concern.

As the two men sat on the after deck, Marsha read her book. Danny soon found himself listening in on the conversation between the old man and the doctor.

The uncle very matter-of-factly related his life of traveling the world, working to explore for oil and described how oil companies drill for oil deposits by testing and extracting bore samples.

Once again, earlier that day, the doctor was noticed by Danny.

At the pool deck, Danny spotted the fine young doctor waiting on his uncle. Waiters were buzzing around the old man and his nephew, who was putting away a bucket of Beck's beer.

But the doctor was up and down almost every minute, grabbing towels, moving chairs around, and greeting passengers he had been meeting since leaving Baltimore.

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Now at dinner, the doctor was animated in conversation but not jumping around the way he did at the pool.

Jim, their waiter from Thailand, was adept and efficient, delivering the details of their choices of meals in a sing-song manner.

The doctor noticed Danny and came over to the table.

"Pardon me for the intrusion into your dinner," said the Doctor. "But you look very familiar, and I was wondering where I had met you before."

"I am Danny Jones, this is my wife Marsha, our friends are April, Vito, Ben, Faustino, alongside Kevin and his wife Nancy."

"Aren't you and your wife the private security firm agents who provide security for this ship?" asked the doctor, who introduced himself as Dr. Jerome Kapiloff.

"Dr. Kapiloff, it is true, your right. That's our job, but what we were really good at was being retired until this guy here put us back to work. Until then we were just trying to enjoy our cruise."

"We would like you to be our guests for after dinner drinks in our suite," said Dr. Kapiloff. "My aunt and uncle are on their first cruise, and since they put me through medical school, I finally talked them into letting me do something nice for them, after all these years, and we have the Royal Suite. It's really big and great, we have a butler and enough space for a big family, but it's just the four of us, so we would love it if you would allow us to host you for a party."

"We are too old to go to parties, but how about a night cap," said Danny. "Won't we keep your children awake?"

"No, our kids are in a cabin next to us with their nanny," said Jerome.

"Speak for yourself, Danny," protested Vito. "We can party until dawn, Doc."

"Then it's a date!" said Dr. Kapiloff. "We shall ask our butler to prepare snacks for guests."

### ***Chapter Thirty Three***

"I have to confess that I wanted to ask you a question about these islands," said Jerome once he got Danny aside on the balcony of the suite, while the party got underway.

"Sure, what can I tell you?" asked Danny.

"I have a friend who says it's possible to make good money on quick investments, you see, and by damn, the money is tops, plus it stays offshore, and there are no taxes," said Jerome, adding, "I could use an investment. The cost of malpractice insurance takes the first \$150,000 of what I earn a year, and I am wondering how I'll ever be able to save for college for my kids."

"Jerome, there are investments, and then there is trouble," said Danny. "Since most investments right now are in trouble, maybe the best place for your money is in a federally insured savings account. True, you won't make anything, but you won't lose it either."

"My friend has been knocking down good money, and I lost so much in my retirement account and the stock market in the past year, I can't believe it," said Jerome. "This pal, he flew down to one of these islands with some cash stuffed in his luggage and met a guy at his hotel about a year ago, and he says he has been making a fifty percent profit on his money!"

"Your friend sounds like he may be into more trouble than he can ever handle," said Danny. "First of all, he is likely dealing with a drug dealer. They are just hooking him, and later on they'll reel him in. In the meantime, the Feds will come calling when they spot his money."

"Oh, I don't think that's the case at—"

"All of these so-called 'offshore' places are being cracked by the Feds out to find people who are cheating on taxes, and they'll make your pal very sorry; that is, if the drug gangs don't put him to work in whatever they want him to do. Once you get involved, they never, ever let you walk away. Surely, you've seen the *Sopranos* TV show."

"That's just HBO. How do you know so much about this stuff," asked Jerome.

"It's simple! My wife went shopping on our last trip to the islands, and while she was checking out the jewelry stores, she was rubbing elbows with some of the biggest drug dealers in America."

"You're kidding, Danny!"

"No, no kidding. Marsha was picking up all the latest from them. They all have big mouths, and love to show off their glitter," said Danny.

## The Privateer Clause

"She just soaks it all up."

"Well, we are supposed to be in St. Thomas in two days, and I have an appointment at a hotel bar with an investment broker," said Jerome.

"Have you put up a dime with these folks?" asked Danny.

"No."

"Then don't. Don't keep the appointment, but I can arrange for someone else to keep it for you. Do they know your real name or what you look like?" asked Danny.

"No, I was told to wear a blue island shirt and sit at the bar, and to tell the bartender I was looking for Raul."

"That's it?" asked Danny.

"Yes."

"And based on that introduction, how much were you going to give them?"

"Fifty grand," said Jerome.

"I hope you are a smarter doctor than you are an investor," said Danny. "Do you have that money in your stateroom?"

"Sure, it's in my safe in my room," said Jerome.

"Well, when you get to St. Thomas, I want you to go straight to a bank and ask them to wire it into your account at home. There will be some questions asked, but all you have to do is say that you had intended to let your wife go on a mad shopping spree but changed your mind. No harm, no foul, except don't tell your wife."

"The time will come one day when you might thank me, but in the meantime, remember that there is no easy way to make money, but please, surely you want to stay the hell away from the bad guys. Dealing with the regular crooked bankers and lawyers is bad enough," insisted Danny.

Two days later, as the ship pulled into Charlotte Amalie, Jerome and his family enjoyed coffee on their balcony.

Within a half hour, Jerome was off the ship.

Danny watched from a bar at the end of the pier as Jerome walked out and hailed a taxi. Danny got his own taxi and followed him to a nearby Sheraton Hotel rather than taking Danny's advice to 'get thee to a bank'. Instead, the fool doctor sauntered into the precise hotel bar that he'd promised he would skip.

Danny's contact, a local FBI agent, was keeping the date and approached Jerome, who was wearing a blue island shirt.

The FBI agent nodded to Danny and both watched as the deal went down.

At least the doctor led them to the contact, which was more valuable to the Feds than learning about how stupid and greedy the doctor actually was.

*Desperate days lead gullible folks to try anything to make money,* thought Danny.

When Jerome saw Danny the next day at breakfast, he nervously, even jerkily nodded and kept walking, shouting out a greeting and that he was late to meet his wife.

This late fall itinerary of the *Sea Empress* was bringing a special joy to its passengers as they had left behind the cold and dreary winter at home and were living the life of tropical splendor, just weeks before Christmas.

Reports of blizzards sweeping the Midwest and ice storms on the East Coast warmed the hearts of those on the cruise.

After he had breakfast while waiting for Kevin for their morning briefing, Danny watched the weather channel wrap up on one of the TV monitors in the security room

As the young doctor walked by Danny's table again, Danny reached out and grabbed him by the arm.

"Doc," said Danny. "I have a package here for you."

The doctor was startled to be grabbed by Danny, but he took the large envelope and peered inside.

"It's your money, Doc, and you can thank your government for being here to help you. You didn't lose a cent by your greedy mistake, not this time. You can go do the same thing again, of course, but there won't be anyone around to get your money back! Fortunately, this time there was."

The young doctor looked at Danny, and then looked back in the envelope at his money and dumbly asked, "You mean this is my money back?"

"Yep, this time you were lucky. now go put your money in your safe," said Danny. "And don't play with those people anymore. You could get hurt real bad."

The *Sea Empress* pulled into the terminal at St. Croix the next day and the lineup of tour buses awaited the passengers heading for all sorts of adventures.

## ***Chapter Thirty Four***

A tour bus loaded up thirty four passengers from the *Sea Empress* bound for a snorkeling trip near Buck Island.

The National Park Service had been given responsibility for protecting the reef and its environs from those who would strip the reef of coral and kill all the fish.

"The islands are nearly depleted of fish as islanders had pretty much decimated the spawning grounds," said Captain Irving Prentice.

The passengers had alighted from their bus and scooted down a pier to the tour boat, taken off their shoes and boarded the boat, which quickly left the dock headed out across the bay to Buck Island.

Capt. Prentice was always happy to instruct his passengers on life-saving details of the trip, the part of staying with the group and not venturing off. Most folks listened.

"I want you all to have a good time, but please keep the boat in sight. The current is strong here and it's important that we stay close to the boat," said the captain.

In short order all the passengers but one were in the water with the two crewmembers leading them, while one passenger stayed on the 55-foot tour boat with the captain.

Last minute, when they found there was room, Danny and Marsha had joined the tour group. Marsha had insisted that they get away and have some fun.

Danny marveled at the tropical fish in the water as they swam over reefs of coral of all colors and shapes when Danny noticed a curious discoloration of the water near the tour boat and wondered if a fuel line had ruptured.

As he swam to the stern of the boat to investigate, he saw that a small power boat was tied up to the bow and there were two men on board with the one woman who stayed behind.

Captain Prentice wasn't visible at the helm, but perhaps he had gone below.

"Hey, where is the captain," yelled Danny from his bobbing position in the water.

"He went down below," answered a tall thin black man.

"He is making the rum punch," said the second man.

Danny turned back and put his mask on and swam down the side of boat toward the small ski boat. There he saw the body of the captain with a small anchor and chain wrapped around his neck.

Sticking out of the captain's chest was a large knife.

Danny swam over to the dead man and pulled the knife from the man, with more blood spilling out as the blade exited.

Concealing the knife in his vest, Danny then circled around the bow and came back around the boat on the other side. As he circled, he spotted Marsha and when he caught her eye, he made the slit throat signal, an international sign of trouble, then he pointed to the boat.

Marsha nodded and followed Danny to the boarding ladder at the stern of the boat. Both of them boarded the boat, removed their fins and masks, and sat down next to their small bag containing their sun block, security radio, guns and other stuff concealed under towels in their bag.

The two intruders were chatting with each other at the helm and volunteered that Captain Prentice would be right up from the galley with the punch in just a minute.

They were shucking and jiving as they laughed and contemplated the robbery about to take place before speeding off in their fast boat.

Danny reached in his bag got his gun and handed her gun to Marsha.

Marsha stuck her gun in her fanny pack with the zipper left open while Danny put his in the rear of his swim suit with his shirt hanging over it.

With both approaching the intruders from opposite sides of the boat the pirates never had a chance.

The taller of the two men spotted Danny coming for him and pulled a machete. He never got to swing it as Marsha dropped him. The shorter man also swung around with a large knife, and he was dropped by Danny's gun.

Both men slammed to the deck and lay in pools of bright red blood flowing from their wounds as the fatal shots had hit their marks.

Danny blew the warning blast on the boat's air horn for everyone to return to the boat, as the captain had instructed before they went into the water, while Marsha radioed for help to the ship.

A Coast Guard helicopter, based at St. Croix, and a patrol vessel were on the scene in just twenty minutes. The Coast Guard removed the bodies of the two intruders and placed them in their ski boat and one of the Coast Guard personnel took the helm of the boat and returned the passengers back to the dock to meet their bus.

## The Privateer Clause

The snorkel party allowed plenty of space between themselves and the blood that'd discolored the white deck.

On the way back to the dock, Danny and Marsha sat in silence and watched the shaken tourists coming to grips with the reality of terror, unexpected and stark, in a way that no one had been prepared for.

The sunny and tropical paradise was as much plagued by pirates and killers now as it was 400 years earlier.

A dozen police vehicles were at the dock to escort the tour bus carrying the *Sea Empress* passengers back to their ship.

One of the passengers seemed to recover fairly rapidly from the shock long enough to ask the tour bus driver if there would be refunds for the abbreviated snorkel trip.

Clearly a master of public relations, the tour bus driver answered with, "Surely you must know that there will be a surcharge for the entertainment. All those people were simply actors."

The passenger looked at him and turned to his wife, then said, "Naah..that wasn't any act, that was *real* blood."

"Aw shut up Ralph, they killed the captain. That was no act and now you want to get a refund? That poor man lost his life! What the hell is wrong with you?"

After the passengers were all loaded on the tour bus, the police escorted the bus back to the cruise ship terminal on the other side of the large island. All told, there were some sixteen law enforcement vehicles in the motorcade while the Coast Guard helicopter flew above them.

The police went out ahead of the convoy and stopped traffic at the several intersections in shopping areas, never allowing the procession to come to a halt.

When the bus and its escorts got back to the terminal, the bus driver drove directly to the gangplank.

Sea Empress passengers who had been shopping at the flea market and nearby stores were being herded back to the ship by police as well.

Once again, the emails were being sent out from passengers who were on the cusp of the first draft of history, and by the time Danny and Marsha got to their suite, the TV was sending out a special alert with photos of the Coast Guard helicopter, the bodies of the pirates being transferred from the snorkel boat, and the recovery of the captain's body.

At least half a dozen photos came from various passengers who were on the snorkel boat.

“We have new footage directly from the Sea Empress passengers with exclusive reports of a fresh attack on the ill-fated cruise ship by pirates in the Caribbean,” said the news anchor on Fox News.

CNN had picked up the story as well, and they too ran with the photos from St. Croix.

“We will have live coverage of the Sea Empress at St. Croix after the break,” promised CNN.

The ship wasn’t to sail until 5pm and couldn’t do so until it retrieved all its passengers and it was only 1pm.

Danny and Marsha changed their clothes and went to the security room.

With Leopold still on board doing his show to a packed house, the Secret Service was still on hand.

The phone in Kevin Clinton’s pocket buzzed with Seven Seas Chairman Henry Boston calling the security firm chief.

“Another one?” said Boston.

“Yep, no one on the ship was hurt but we did lose a snorkel boat captain and his mate—the two murdered by the terrorists,” said Clinton.

News crews had been following the ship as the news story that kept on giving, so they had set up cameras and caught the police caravan escorting the tour bus back to the terminal, then showed the police out in jeeps and golf carts trying to round up Sea Empress passengers.

Passengers didn’t like to have their port day cut short, and so they were arguing with the cops.

“It’s just another day in paradise for this cruise ship which seems to have a big target painted on the side,” said one TV reporter.

“We have a report of two dead pirates and one dead snorkel boat captain,” said another.

Clinton turned down the volume to the TV and told Boston, “Danny and Marsha stopped another attack; I don’t know that we will continue to have our luck hold out. I am really starting to get worried.”

“What else can we do?” asked Boston. “I will provide any additional security for our operations that you deem necessary.”

“Well, our best assets so far have been our people. I would like to add some more among the passengers and the staff on each ship,” said Clinton.

“How fast can you get them?” asked Boston.

## ***Chapter Thirty Five***

Black & Perkins letters advertising for retired law enforcement personnel went out to several hundred who had applied for jobs and had already advanced through background checks and final interviews.

Only those with top secret government clearances were considered and within forty-eight hours there were eighteen new trainees reporting to the B & P training facility on the Potomac.

The company paid handsomely and hired the best available people in the world. A Black & Perkins agent started at \$150,000 annually, making those selected very prompt on showing up for work.

Kevin Clinton had left St. Croix on the company jet and four hours later landed at the firm's private air strip in Maryland. He wanted to personally participate in the training of this new set of B & P agents.

Of the eighteen, six came from Secret Service, four from ATF, and the other eight were retired local and state police from around the nation. All were in excellent physical shape, had crystal clean backgrounds and only one was Muslim.

Rahid Abrams, whose mother was Jewish and father was Saudi, was born in New Jersey and was therefore a natural born American. Raised in the Northern Virginia suburbs as his parents worked in the Washington area, Rahid was raised as a Muslim but he was no militant Jihadist, as most of his family considered America their home and wanted nothing to do with anyone who wanted to destroy it.

After retiring from the Virginia State Police, Rahid knew that at the age of forty-one that he could find a new career, especially with his understanding of Arabic.

Of the group, special talents in forensics, investigations, computer crimes, and currency counterfeiting were all important, and three had worked in gang intelligence, dealing with the violent MS 13 and other gangs. All had specialized training of some sort in dealing with Mexican drug cartels and U.S. drug gangs.

All in all, the group waiting for Kevin Clinton on the snowy night in the cold two days after Christmas were about as talented as was possible.

With nine ships in the Caribbean owned by Seven Seas, Clinton knew that these classes of anti-terror operatives were just a starting point, and that the six-man crew on board the *Sea Empress* needed a break.

The firm had two of its destroyers and its air crews fully staffed to supplement the *Sea Empress* crew, but it was time to assign a security detail on each ship, as well-staffed as the ship's complement of photographers.

Rahid was the last of the new trainees to meet with Clinton, after the third day. Clinton had decided to take his time and only interview six agents a day, with some taking a mere forty-five minutes, while others up to ninety minutes.

"Rahid, in looking at your file, I see you have an interesting religious background and ethnicity," said Clinton.

"Yep, it's been a real thrill to be me," laughed Rahid.

"Why do you have your mother's last name instead of your father's?" asked Kevin.

"You obviously have not met my mother," said Rahid as both men laughed.

"My dad's family had a furniture store. In fact, there were four stores in my dad's family from Northern Virginia to New Jersey," said Rahid. "My mother met my dad at college and pretty soon I was born. We moved to the DC area when Mom got a job teaching in the District, and my father bought his uncle's store in Springfield, Virginia, and I went to high school there; went to George Mason, and then got hired with the State Police. Believe me, I am glad my last name was Abrams as it would have been more trouble to use Ramanni," finished Rahid.

"We really have a need for your language skills as well as your law enforcement background," said Clinton.

"Yeah, I have been following your adventures in the Caribbean, and since I have never been on a cruise, I applied for this job but somehow my wife thinks she should be able come along, like I am really going to be on the ship as a passenger," laughed Rahid.

"Is your wife law enforcement too," asked Clinton.

"No, but she is nosy as hell! Does that count?" asked Rahid.

"We actually need some married couples," said Clinton.

"My wife is a jazz pianist on the side, and her day job is as a teacher. She would love to take a year off from school, our kids are grown," said Rahid.

"We can get her a job as an entertainer on a ship; it would be perfect and you can go along as her doting husband who doesn't want her to get out from under his supervision," said Clinton. "The ship can also use her for their enrichment programs."

"Are you serious?" said Rahid.

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Assured that he was, Rahid called his wife and told her to arrange for a substitute, to get packed, and that they were leaving in a week for the Caribbean on a ship out of Baltimore.

As a Virginia State Trooper, Rahid Abrams had worked the I-95 corridor for his entire career, first as a road trooper passing out speeding tickets, next as a road patrol supervisor, with four troopers working with him on a shift, and finally as a drug interdiction specialist.

In the years Trooper Abrams was pounding the interstate, he had nailed dozens of drug dealers and his arrests resulted in the capture of hundreds of pounds of various drugs.

His linguistic abilities also had proven valuable over and over again as the Muslim population grew in America.

Rahid and Julie Abrams showed up in a rented car in Baltimore and boarded the *Sea Empress*. With eight suitcases, they needed a porter to help them get boarded and even with security clearances, the procedures bogged down to low speed.

Finally, just when Rahid thought they were carrying the incognito role a little too far, a guest relations staffer approached them, and she introduced herself.

Quickly Rahid and Julie were spirited past the long counters of check in agents and were told their baggage would be taken to their stateroom.

As they boarded *Sea Empress*, Rahid and Julie were shown to a special suite on the Vista Deck. Fresh flowers, a fruit bowl, and a bottle of chilled champagne awaited them.

## *Chapter Thirty Six*

It took two days for Rahid to learn his way around the ship while Julie was busy all the time, playing for dance classes in the morning, entertaining in the lounges in the evening, and reading by the pool during the afternoon.

The itinerary of the ship placed them at St. Thomas on the fourth day out of Baltimore and after three sea days, they both began to yearn for the sight of paradise, wide beaches, and the chance to snorkel.

Getting off the ship at Havensight and taking a taxi to town along with Marsha and Danny as their guides, the women were giddy with excitement at touring the Charlotte Amalie jewelry district.

"We are going to get some conch fritters and a couple of brews," said Danny as the two women slipped into the first store on the block.

Danny and Rahid walked down a block to the harbor front and into a courtyard leading to what Danny said was a neat café. It was located behind a bank which was in the row of offices and stores across from the harbor and along the main drag of Charlotte Amalie. They pulled up a chair in the outdoor café located in the back of Jen's Café and gave their order for lunch to the bartender.

While the waiter turned and walked toward the back door of the kitchen, a familiar voice got their attention.

"My good man, hello! May I join you?" asked Leopold Bryan.

"Sure, Leopold," said Danny. "I didn't hear you arrive. Are you traveling incognito? I mean to say there are no sirens heralding your arrival."

"Just look over your shoulder and you will see my shadows are forever lurking," said Leopold.

A glance to the other end of the plaza confirmed that Leopold had not given the slip to his security detail.

"Leopold, meet my friend Rahid. He is on this trip with us, and his wife is our new jazz pianist, and since he is retired, he is along for the ride," said Danny.

"My guess is he is a cop," said Leopold, not falling for the fictitious explanation.

"Yep," said Rahid, "but not anymore. I am just a jealous husband so if you get any ideas of getting fresh with my old lady, you know now that your health will be in jeopardy."

"Well I had the pleasure of meeting your lovely wife, Julie, yesterday in the Grand Mariner's Lounge, and I invited her to join our musical

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production,” said Leopold. “And it is with deep gratitude that I can now say that she accepted my invitation.”

“Rahid, not only is Leopold the star of our entertainment review on the ship, but he is also a favorite target of our enemies due to being related to a high government official,” said Danny.

Rahid just laughed at the introduction.

“Danny, I know who Leopold is, and I have to tell you, sir, you have been one of my favorite actors, since I saw you on Broadway in *King Lear*,” said Rahid to Leopold. “I thought that your portrayal of the King was the best I have seen, and you look like you really were bamboozled by your two sinister daughters. They were good too. They were truly believable.”

“Ah, *King Lear*! It was a great run, perhaps Shakespeare’s best, but poor *King Lear* was too young to retire, a fate faced by so many others these days,” said Leopold. “I myself have no daughter to whom to leave my kingdom, but I dare not retire or no one would be charitable enough to remember me as you just did.”

“Sir, I am looking forward to your show tonight, and I am sure you will pack the house,” said Rahid.

“It helps a little when you have a captive audience, and they have prepaid,” laughed Leopold.

“Well, guys, you all can talk theatre a little bit more, but I want to go over and say hello to your Secret Service detail,” said Danny.

Danny spoke with the two agents who were stationed at the south end of the courtyard. Two other Secret Service agents took up a position at the other end, while a fifth agent was inside the café and yet another was at the wheel of the parked Suburban, which had been stored on the ship and was unloaded today just as at other ports when Leopold decided he wanted to go sightseeing. Danny learned that Mrs. Bryan had stayed on the ship in her suite, and an agent was with her there.

Danny left the agents by the arched entry way to the courtyard and walked out to the street.

The pickup trucks outfitted with open air passenger seating clogged the streets as drivers looked for customers from the three ships in port today.

Right across the street from Danny was the Mad Hatter, with a “not for hire” sign in his front window.

Fred, the Mad Hatter, had another agent with him, sitting on the right passenger side of the front seat of the tourist taxi.

Danny strolled over to the taxi and learned from Fred that there were new threats coming in by the hour from NSA interceptions of “chatter” from the bad guys. In particular, the Spider guys didn’t like it that they had lost three of their operatives.

“What is odd,” said Fred, “is that none of us have ever heard of these guys before. We know nothing of their organization, nor do we have any idea of what is behind them. There’s only one thing we know for sure.”

“Which is?”

“They want to kill Americans and damage as much as they can of the nation’s economy.”

“Well, that isn’t exactly a short list of jerks,” said Danny.

“What is really worrying many of us in the Agency is that the many times we have been lucky in stopping them from carrying out their attacks as it will only make them more determined,” said Fred. “When will our luck run out?”

“Nobody wants to think about that,” replied Danny. “We just have to keep trying to stay ahead of them.”

Danny told Fred to keep from running over any tourists and said that he had to get back to ‘King Lear’ and Rahid before the President’s brother had signed up Rahid to be his personal security guard.

Danny and Rahid walked up a block past the Emancipation Plaza and Post Office and started down the Jewelry Store Row, which actually was several blocks long.

As they peered into doorways looking for their wives, Danny finally heard his cell phone, answered it, and was told by Marsha to hurry down to the corner, and that they were inside Island Royal Jewels.

Marsha had once again treated herself to new diamond earrings, while Julie had purchased a necklace with a diamond pendant in the shape of a crescent.

Rahid looked at the beautiful selection and then at the price. He slumped into a nearby chair, half in a display of false shock and the other half of the act, truly shocked and not an act.

“I guess I ought to find out if I can get overtime in this gig,” Rahid said to Danny.

“This is why they give the husbands booze in these shops, to cushion the blow of the bill or to revive them,” said Danny as he asked the proprietor to set them both up with a cold beer.

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The four of them soon were out on the sidewalk and looking for a taxi back to the Sea Empress.

The Mad Hatter slipped up to the curb and asked, "You want taxi to ship?"

The trip back was only ten minutes, and soon they were boarding and in another five minutes Danny and Marsha were off to the Security Suite, as they now referred to the intel-office. Julie and Rahid went off to their room.

"Dear, did you know that the President's brother is on this ship, and he invited me to join his show," said Julie.

"Yep, I ran into him today while Danny and I were having lunch," said Rahid. "I admitted to him that I really admired his work in King Lear. I think he took the compliment to heart."

"Well, when you tell someone that you liked their work, they are lucky," said Julie.

"Well the old coot did a good job. I hope he still has the touch. Guess we'll see tomorrow night when the show is on. Do you think I can sit in on rehearsal?" asked Rahid.

"I might be able to get you past the security guards," chuckled Julie.

## *Chapter Thirty Seven*

"It's Showtime," the cruise director belted out to the thundering applause of the audience eager to be entertained.

The crowd of well-dressed and trimmed out middle to upper aged vacationers were ready for a thrill with many of them sipping on martinis and nursing frothy concoctions.

On deck 12 in the intel office, the emails streamed in urgent notes along with encrypted streaming messages from the NSA office in Greenbelt.

Eight decks below in the large theatre that filled three decks, Leopold's show was bringing down the house.

Danny and Marsha had seen the show more than once and opted out for the evening as the ship worked its way down the perimeter of Leeward Islands for yet another stop at Antigua.

Danny was a little leery of the next day's itinerary, due to the murder of a tourist who'd wandered off with a beach masseuse, likely hoping to get laid but ending up with her throat cut.

The number of women who chose to get it on with islander men all through the Caribbean was legendary with it occasionally *not* working out so well. Sometimes it turned out like the girl who disappeared in Aruba. But most of the time, the downside was being knocked around a little along with being robbed.

Murder was different. It was unnerving and a grim reminder to women on a vacation of the brutal world that wasn't considered in the hype of the cruise line's brochures and glitzy TV ads.

Antigua was a beautiful island and self-governing was as dicey here as anywhere in the Caribbean or Darkest Africa. It appeared, to Danny, that the worse traits of Colonial Era masters had been adopted by the chosen new indigenous leaders.

*The Colonial Era governors must have had a few good aspects*, Danny thought. "At least one must have conjured up some character riding on his horse through sugar plantations only to stop to offer his canteen of water to a sweating worker in the fields," he sarcastically told himself.

*Sure.*

Maybe in some simple minded movie.

Nope, the lessons learned by the servants who later became the new leaders of Caribbean island nations were ones of indulgence, capricious sex, and corruption. *At least the unwashed were paying attention*, thought Danny. And they sure weren't slow learners.

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Danny surveyed the array of video screens to the public rooms on the ship and began to scan them while a couple of the guys on duty took a break and went out to get pizza.

The dancing on the stage in the theatre was clear in the digital image being played out on the 22-foot monitor.

The Grand Magellan cocktail lounge on the forward upper deck was rocking and rolling with an early crowd of partiers, rather unusual Danny thought, but with the crowd of 200 EMS workers from Maryland who were on the cruise at a special rate, they had apparently decided to skip dinner and go wander in the ample buffet before heading off to party.

Danny turned up the volume to listen to the legendary Chubby Checker's "Twist" as the emergency workers did a major unwinding in a twisted way.

Danny turned to a series of monitors which were hooked into the ship's own security system, not a part of the hyper security cameras.

The ship's system was designed to record for future protection of the cruise line when intoxicated passengers decided to go rail-walking.

It was usually a very boring watch as few folks decided to exit this life by way of feeding themselves to sharks. While most of the passengers on the cruise were over fifty, many even over seventy, the EMS technicians, medics, ambulance drivers, and others members of volunteer and career emergency services took advantage of a special 25% discount on the cruise and enjoyed a really fun winter break.

The unwinding had been going on for several days, and the dance contest that night with passengers teaming up with various members of the complement of officers of the ship, was over with by 1am, and the crowd emptied out and headed back to their cabins, looking forward to a romp in the hay and snorkeling at gorgeous beaches on Antigua the next day.

Danny left the security station, walked the short distance to their luxury suite and turned in as Marsha emitted a low snoring sound from her side of the bed.

## ***Chapter Thirty Eight***

The port of St. John, Antigua was bright and sunny as the sun began to rise over the hilltop to the east. A weather-beaten St. John's Cathedral, 160 years old, perched on a hillside and dominated the vista of the port, which was teeming with shops and pricey jewelry stores along the waterfront.

The twin spires of the old church were once lampooned as looking like a couple of pepper pots and the church had now fallen on hard times with millions needed for repairs.

The *Sea Empress* slid into the large cruise ship terminal, which could dock four monster ships at the same time while the tour operators, police, and other security details began to prep for the thousands of passengers which would soon alight for a day of shopping, fun, and sun.

The goal for the shore side authorities on Antigua was the same as throughout the Caribbean: to receive the tourists with smiles and help them spend their money, and for everyone to return to their ships with pleasant memories and lots of photos and merchandise purchased from island vendors.

The ships began to maneuver to their dockages, and by 8:30am, the long piers would soon be covered with people. But at 8:15am, a loud cracking sound soon dominated every activity at the port.

Soon the noise gave way to crumbling noises. The bells in the Cathedral tower began to sound and a few more loud sounds emitted from power transformers which were exploding.

Danny and Marsha were on the way to the security room when the ship began to rock with waves that suddenly began to ripple out from land.

Nothing could move the large cruise ship in the protected waters of the port. Danny and Marsha sprinted the last few yards to the security office.

"What the hell is going on," asked Danny, who, seeing Kevin Clinton already in the security room, felt reassured.

"It's anyone's guess at this point, but it seems like an earthquake has just hit the town," said Clinton.

Quickly as cameras on the exterior of the ship began to pan the port, signs of explosions and other mayhem appeared on the video screens.

"There are several fires breaking out on shore," reported the duty officer. "We have advance teams of security already on shore, and we are calling them for reports in their zones."

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“Alert the captain to shut down disembarkation and that he needs to abort the visit to this island and get out to sea,” said Danny.

“Danny, this wasn’t an earthquake, the explosions and fires in the town were bombs set off, and the bridge and our radar units show a plane heading directly at our ship,” said Clinton.

“My God, a kamikaze pilot heading at us, what can shoot it down?” asked Danny.

“The *Resolute* is right behind us and is equipped with an Aegis missile and sidewinders,” said Kevin. “Let’s hope that they get a shot.”

The huge cruise ship had quickly cast off its lines and was fast moving away from the pier and rushing to clear the harbor where open seas could allow it some flexibility to try to out maneuver attackers from either air or sea.

As the ship cleared the outer buoys of the harbor, the drone of a low-flying private plane pierced the morning air, and as the plane came out of the east, it mixed in with the bright rays of the sun, at times becoming lost in the brilliant beams.

“We have a small aircraft at 3 o’clock,” said the security chief to Clinton.

A hastily arranged machine gun nest composed of both Secret Service agents on board to protect the President’s brother and Black & Perkins agents had assembled on the helicopter pad and as the plane approached, the captain ordered the gunners to open fire.

A sidewinder missile flew past the single engine plane and missed, hitting a freighter anchored in the harbor.

As the plane grew closer, the machine gun crew began to splatter the plane with bullets but failed to down the craft.

In another twenty seconds, the plane blasted into the aft end of the ship, setting off a loud and deadly explosion. Clearly laden with explosives, the flying bomb blew out a large section of the aft section, causing a crater of smoking and burning debris covering five decks but all fortunately above the water line.

As crew members of the ship manned fire stations on board *Sea Empress*, the *Resolute* quickly closed the gap between them and large fire hoses from the destroyer were trained on the fire on the fantail of the *Sea Empress*.

As the disembarkation at Antigua had just begun, only a few passengers had been left ashore to face the dangers of the outbreak of violence on the island, but that proved a mixed blessing. While few of the EMS personnel from Maryland had gotten off and were available to aid those injured in the attack; there were also more passengers and crew on the ship to suffer death and injury.

The Captain was able to make announcements on the public address system to the crew and passengers, asking all crew to take assigned firefighting stations, and for all passengers to move to forward positions on the lifeboat decks, there to don lifejackets and await instructions.

"We have a special request for all emergency medical technicians to report to the lobby to assist with those who are injured," said the captain.

Passengers who said they were also doctors or nurses were told by the crew that they had to report to the lifeboat stations, and these confrontations resulted in several altercations as doctors attempted to assist the injured.

Crew members rushed to the medical storeroom and brought boxes of supplies to the lobby while the EMS workers, dressed in shorts and island shirts, began to assess what was available to use to assist the injured carried into the lobby on stretchers.

The large lobby which was at the lowest floor in a nine-story atrium began to fill with dozens of injured and screaming passengers, many of whom had been playing bingo in the theatre in the lower decks, and those who had been enjoying a morning breakfast and coffee on the open air café deck where the plane made a direct hit before exploding.

As Danny looked around the lobby and surveyed the casualties, he made a call to Kevin Clinton, who'd remained in the security room.

"We appear to have about 125 to 150 injured people here," said Danny Jones. "There are at least fifty dead, and there could easily be more of both."

"The ship didn't sustain any damage to its propulsion or major systems, and we have the fires out at this time," said Clinton. "We can get underway with the *Resolute* riding shotgun and dock at St. Thomas to get the injured off the ship and into hospitals. We have an aircraft carrier group heading our way, and they can fly off the most critical to their operating room on board the *Kitty Hawk*."

"Are there any other aircraft inbound," asked Danny. "I don't think we could take another hit right now, at this point, we'll make it but wow, and this place is a mess from decks three right up to nine. It hit on nine at the café and blew right down, wiping out suites, and then sending fire into the

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main theatre. It appears the bingo crowd was small, but had it hit during a show, it would have been really bad.”

“We have company showing up on our radar, another bogey coming from the island heading straight for us,” said Clinton.

“I’ll be right up,” said Danny.

Even though the elevators were still working here in the atrium, Danny flew up the grand staircase, taking two steps at a time. Meeting up with the agents at the helipad on the bow, Danny called Clinton back on his radio.

“How much time do we have?” he asked.

“The Kitty Hawk says we have about ten minutes. They are launching a squadron and should be here by that time. They’re about twenty miles from us,” replied Clinton.

“We have got to be able to shoot this plane down! What’s the biggest gun we have on this ship?” asked Danny.

“Believe it or not, we have a Stinger missile and one of our guys was trained on it when he was a Navy Seal,” said Clinton. “He has it and will be at the top sundeck in just a minute.”

“The captain is getting the *Sea Empress* underway now that the fire is out, and we are building a full power zigzag course with the Resolute following us, heading away from the direction of the threat,” said Kevin.

The flow of injured being brought to the lobby began to slow as Millie Kapneck, an ambulance EMT from Westminster, Maryland treated yet another burn victim, an 87-year-old woman with both legs suffering second degree burns.

“Don’t worry dear. We’ll have you patched up and back playing bingo in no time,” said Millie.

“I hope the fire didn’t ruin my cards. I had just gotten Bingo,” said the woman, smiling for a second before again writhing in pain.

Millie looked around and saw that there were about as many patients as there were EMS personnel working on them, which sure wasn’t a good ratio.

“This is the Captain speaking: would all those medical professionals on board please report to the lobby. If you are a passenger and reported to the life boat decks as instructed, we have a desperate need for your assistance at this time.”

After the booming announcement, about two dozen doctors and nurses left their life jackets behind and reported to the lobby.

"We tried to come here before," said the young doctor, "but they kept herding us to the lifeboat decks."

"I am an ER doctor, who needs me the most," yelled the doc as he ran over to Millie.

"Right here doc," said Millie, "her blood pressure is falling along with her heart rate".

As Dr. Kapiloff worked on the old woman, he called out for various equipment to be brought to him, most of which the ship didn't have on board.

After a tedious thirty minutes of frenetic work, the young doctor walked away.

"She's gone," said the doctor to Millie. "Who's next?"

As the dozens of injured were being treated, several of the EMT personnel began the process of prioritizing those who were hurt.

A system of triage was quickly assembled so the more seriously injured could be taken on gurneys to the helicopter pad to be flown to the nearby *Kitty Hawk* where its operating room stood prepared for those who were in the worst condition.

As more of the injured continued to be carried to the makeshift emergency room in the ship's lobby, a few had been removed, some to the morgue and others to the helipad.

The contrast of the luxury ship being turned into a floating war zone was everywhere, from doctors wearing shorts to nurses still in swimming suits and pool attire.

Along with the bingo lady, another dozen passengers died from their injuries in there in the lobby.

Photos and video from camera phones were emailed to news operations and soon images were being flashed around the world with networks reporting on "the ill-fated cruise ship which has been under attack for months now has taken a direct hit from an aircraft".

## ***Chapter Thirty Nine***

"We have 66 dead and 171 injured," reported Clinton to Henry Boston.

"Oh my dear God!" he moaned and softly added, "My plane will land at St. Thomas in two hours; we are diverting two ships to St. Thomas to assist in removing all the passengers from the *Sea Empress*."

"I have to go right now," said Clinton. "We have another threat from the air."

As Clinton rushed up to the top sun deck where Rahid Abrams was armed with the Stinger, the threatening aircraft was closing on the ship; it apparently had taken off from a small airstrip on St. Kitts. It appeared to be a small plane heading straight for the *Sea Empress*.

Danny looked at Rahid and wondered if this American Muslim was going to use the stinger on the U. S. jet fighters closing in on the *Sea Empress* from over the bow of the ship or the small plane now about a half mile off the stern.

As Danny and the other agents waited for the fighter jets to launch missiles at the plane, Rahid ended the worry in Danny's mind, pulling the trigger, sending the Stinger blasting through the air at the plane, making impact, and causing a huge explosion in the air a mere hundred yards from the ship.

"I forgot to say 'pull'" laughed Rahid as he lowered the Stinger. "This is more fun than a shotgun."

Danny looked at Rahid and was glad his doubt was resolved in the accurate and deadly hit on the plane, which they could see had been a single engine Cessna before the missile had done its job.

The fighters swooped low over the cruise ship and tilted their wings, with the leader radioing to the Black & Perkins team, "Good hunting".

"We will provide air cover for the balance of your trip," said the pilot.

Danny called Clinton and reported that the threat was taken out by Rahid.

"Frankly, I was worried that he might turn and shoot the Stinger at one of our jets," said Danny. "I wish I hadn't doubted him, but he never knew what fears were running through my mind; thank God he was once a Navy Seal."

"I have another Stinger in my bag of tricks," said Clinton, adding, "Now let's get these people to St. Thomas. We still have to extract forty passengers and our advance security team from Antigua."

As the *Sea Empress* made its way to St. Thomas, going at 21 knots, the firefighting team on the ship made sure there was to be no rekindling of the fire. Unfortunately, the death toll kept rising as each cabin was searched. Now seventy souls had perished in the most deadly attack on Americans since 9/11.

In just under ten hours, the ship had traveled from Antigua to St. Thomas

"Who was the attack focused on?" asked Clinton as he and Danny stood at the rail watching the passengers disembark at the Crown Bay terminal. "Was it the ship itself or another attack on Leopold?"

"Who knows?" said Danny. "It could have been just an attack on Americans in general, like all the rest of the attacks."

Henry Boston walked up to the two men.

"You guys look like you need a nice vacation," said Boston.

"That's what I was trying to do when I met you the first time," replied Danny.

"We have the *Sea Urchin* and the *Sea Villa* ready to come into port as soon as we move this ship out of the way to the freight terminal," said Boston. "Everyone will board those ships to be taken to San Juan and flights home. Those who don't take us up on complimentary cruises on the other ships, as we had about fifty cabins available on each ship."

"From our past experience, you'll fill every cabin," said Clinton.

"We already have had lots of cancellations all across the board after the first clips hit the TV news and the internet," said Boston. "But we have had bookings go through the roof from hundreds of people using online that replaces the cancellations as fast as the computers can make the adjustments. I really can't figure out what makes people tick."

"The real question is 'when will the U. S. Government hit back hard at these terrorists?'" said Danny.

"I don't think we'll have to wait long to find the answer to that question," said Henry Boston, adding, "We should have the *Sea Empress* back in service in four months. We're going to make a few revisions to the cabins by adding dozens more balconies, but the basic ship can be repaired quickly at Hamburg; it takes too long at Norfolk."

As the *Sea Empress* maneuvered away from the dock, after discharging all its passengers, the injured had been removed first, both by

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helicopter and by ambulance, then waiting sister ships slid into port and began to load passengers.

In Washington at the White House, the Bryan Administration was besieged by reporters quizzing the President's press secretary with questions about what the government was going to do to retaliate for this latest attack on Americans.

"First, we have not pinned down who planned and carried out this attack, second, the President has ordered specific counter measures to be enacted the moment we know, and frankly, I can tell you that those who planned this deadly attack on civilians will be given justice," said Press Secretary Jason Wright.

"Was this attack aimed at the President's brother once again?" asked a reporter.

"We have no way of knowing that, but we do know that this is the latest in a series of attacks and plots made against a ship carrying nearly two thousand Americans, and the United States is prepared to respond to those who carried out these attacks," said the press secretary for the President.

## CHAPTER FORTY

The *Sea Villa* and the *Sea Urchin* left St. Thomas with the bulk of the passengers from the *Sea Empress*, as about 300 opted to fly home from St. Thomas airport, while the balance couldn't be budged from their new accommodations on the other ships.

With only about 400 passengers able to have new rooms on their own, lots of folks took in others as 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> occupants of their cabins.

The excitement of the day's events culminated in a photo and video sharing, using the ships resources to play the images on the movie screen in the theatre of the *Sea Urchin*.

*A little macabre perhaps, thought Danny, but what the hell else were they supposed to talk about, with so many of them witnessing such mayhem and death.*

The family members of those who were killed were the majority of the passengers who stayed behind in St. Thomas in order to arrange with the cruise company to transport their loved ones home.

About a dozen bodies were being taken back to Miami by the two sister ships to the *Sea Empress*.

The Maryland EMT's were happy to unwind in the Navigator Club on the *Sea Urchin*. They were used to making the most of their free time after sudden calls to duty, and this night was to be no exception.

Danny and Marsha sat in the lounge watching the rescue folks in the dance contest do a conga line and have martinis flow down through a giant ice sculpture, catching the drinks in a glass held at the bottom.

"We took on extra agents at St. Thomas. Now each ship has a dozen people on board, not including Leopold's detail," said Danny. "I thought he would have left after the last attack, but you have to give the guy credit."

Just as the words left Danny's lips, Leopold walked up to them.

"You are taking a well-deserved break, I see," said Leopold. "Well I hope you and your lady be my guests for dinner tomorrow. I have a special table and menu in my suite, and Lola and I would love to entertain you."

"As long as I don't have to go to your show," said Danny. "I honestly thought you would have ducked out in the last port."

"No sir," said Leopold sternly. "I have a contract, and I never run out on a contract, and I will now appear here on the grand stage of the *Sea Urchin*. A deal is a deal."

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"I admire your continuing to perform while under fire, Leopold," said Marsha. "Some might not question your wanting to run for the safety of Broadway after being shot at, having attacks on your ship coming from the sea and the air and as well as your steward—in your suite."

"Madame, all of these events are typical in the life of an actor, even a good actor," said Leopold. "I have to admit that I do long for the days of a few catcalls and boos, but nonetheless, as my agent says, 'there is nothing like some publicity, even bad publicity, to help at contract time'. I thought I would grow old in poverty, but I can see now I'll be working for quite a while. But before I get on the next ship after this gig on the Sea Urchin, I'll be doing a USO tour to entertain troops in the Mideast, on ships and at bases."

"How very patriotic of you," commented Danny.

"Not at all. I am happy to do my part."

Marsha and Danny wished Leopold a good night and took a walk on the top sun deck before retiring.

"I didn't know the old guy had it in him to do a USO tour," said Marsha.

"You're right, at first I had him pegged at being good for the plot on the President, and now he's off to star in a USO show for those soldiers on their third tours in Afghanistan," said Danny. "I guess your having saved his life was a good thing."

## ***Chapter Forty-One***

A bomb threat at the Port of Miami sent the arrivals of the *Sea Urchin* and the *Sea Villa* to Port Everglades at Fort Lauderdale.

The two ships turned into the deep channel from the Atlantic Ocean at about 6am, and soon were in reverse, slipping quietly down the long channel adjoining several long terminals in the huge complex that made the Port Everglades one of the world's largest and busiest with more than three million passengers a year.

This was a point of concern for Danny and Clinton as extra Black & Perkins agents had been flown in to meet the ships, along with a dozen different agencies from the FBI, U. S. Marshals and the Secret Service.

The docks where the *Sea Urchin* and *Sea Villa* docking were triple layered with scanners, bomb dogs and uniformed officers.

*For those hapless passengers trying to smuggle in illegal drugs in their luggage, this wasn't going to be their day*, thought Clinton, who said, "Danny, I know that you all think you need a vacation from this cruising for the last six months, but I have to tell you, we need you badly."

"Well you have that jinxed ship limping off to Germany to be repaired," said Jones. "Don't you think these terrorists will lay off for a while?"

"My point exactly."

"How do you mean?"

"If you and Marsha will go back to sea with the *Sea Urchin*, it ought to be a quiet ride," said Clinton. "We made a big deal of the fact that Leopold is taking a military jet from Fort Lauderdale, for his USO tour and that ought to take some of the heat off you all so you can get a rest."

"Somehow, I get the feeling you are pulling my leg," said Danny.

"We have the owner's suite for you. We have set up the security room on the same deck, and we have sixteen people on board to guard the ship," said Clinton. "And Henry Boston sent this envelope to you."

"I'll take that," said Marsha as she snapped up the letter.

"You don't have to do that; there is one for each of you, Marsha."

"I'll take them both, and we'll take this trip out today on the *Sea Urchin*," said Marsha, stuffing the letters in her pocketbook. "After everything that has happened, I got cheated out of my peaceful cruise to the Caribbean, and I am willing to bet that the excitement is over. At any rate, it beats going back to the traffic on the Beltway in DC and even with the nutcases here...well, they don't hold a candle to the whack jobs at home, on the highways, and running the nation."

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“Apparently, all of the EMS personnel on board the *Sea Empress* agree with you, so they’re taking Henry Boston up on his offer for a free cruise, leaving today on the *Sea Urchin*,” said Clinton.

The three walked into the Schooner Lounge and watched on the large flat screen TV as Leopold waved to the press and TV cameras at the airport while he waved just before walking up the stairs to a military transport on his way overseas.

This time, nobody shot at him.

“What’s next?” asked Danny.

“Well, you can stay out here on the *Sea Urchin* as long as you like, we sent our maintenance crew at the training base in Maryland over to your house, and they will be keeping things in shape for you. We installed security operations at your place, and you can check in by your web connection or phone any time to watch your grass grow, and Henry has a new mega-ship coming into service in two months. We figure might it’s possible it may become a mega-target,” said Clinton. “How about resting up on the *Sea Urchin* for two months, and then setting sail in Germany as the new ship, the *Sea Myrrh*, is launched?”

“Does anyone know that’s the name of the new ship?” asked Marsha.

“Nope, it’s a real big secret, if you don’t mind,” said Clinton.

“Kevin, I can keep a secret, and it’s about time we got some happiness and laughter in our lives,” said Marsha. “I am looking forward to that ship, but do you realize that we have been at sea for six months, except for that little restful vacation at St. Grenadines when the pirates boarded our sloop while we ate dinner.”

“Maybe you can use the time on the ship to write a book,” said Danny.

“No one would ever believe it,” said Marsha.

“Well, we will have to go shopping in St. Thomas for clothes,” said Marsha.

Danny looked up at the big screen TV which was carrying a news flash which showed clips of the damaged *Sea Empress* on the way under its own power across the Atlantic.

“They have a crew of 85 on board and Henry told me he’s decided to retire the *Sea Empress* from the fleet, and once it’s in dry-dock to completely rehab it and put it into service in their German fleet,” said

Clinton. "The *Sea Empress* will return to the Caribbean next year but with a new look and a new name."

"Well, it will always be my favorite ship," said Danny. "But what I would like to know is when this President is going to rain some hell down on whoever is behind all these attacks. There're seventy passengers dead and over a hundred and fifty who injured. It's time to make them pay."

"Mrs. Jones we have a phone call for you on the bridge, and it's quite urgent," said a B & P agent over the handheld radio sitting next to Marsha in the lounge.

"Take a message," said Marsha, "I am on a break."

"It's the White House calling, Mrs. Jones, but I'll be glad to tell them to call back."

"This is a fine way to treat a retired Secret Service Agent," said Marsha.

"Don't forget that you are still a U. S. Marshal and the President is technically your boss," said Clinton.

"Dadgum it," said Marsha, as she picked up the radio. "I thought I had left all that important stuff behind."

"Tell him to hang on for a minute, and I'll be right there," said Marsha.

A phone was handed to Marsha as she opened the door to the bridge.

The ship's bow was cutting through the waves as the *Sea Urchin* headed down the coast of Florida with the vivid orange glow of the setting sun silhouetting the skyline of Miami.

"Yes, Mr. President," said Marsha. "Your brother was never any problem sir, and Lola was a treat. In fact, I loved shopping with her, and I even became a fan of Leopold's acting. Wow, I am really pleased to learn he will be starring in a new show on the *Sea Myrrh*, in only two months, great. Please tell Leopold that things are pretty boring here without him and make sure you tell him to remember to duck, but I guess he is used to being on a battlefield. Thank you sir for calling; now I have a martini to get back to before we have to dress for dinner."

"Who was it," asked Danny.

"The boss himself."

"Not an underling?"

"No, it was him! Listen, I have good news and bad news. Which do you want first?"

"Does it make a difference?" asked Danny.

"Well, perhaps not, since at any rate," began Marsha, "Leopold will be back in two months and join us on the *Sea Myrrh*. He's starring in a huge new Broadway show on that big new ship."

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“What’s the bad news?” asked Danny.

“The President and the First Lady are going to come spend a week cruising with us when Leopold gets here to launch the maiden voyage of the new ship.”

“Holy crap,” said Danny. “Talk about a bull’s eye.”

Marsha shrugged and said, “It was something about showing the world that our ships are safe, and that we won’t be intimidated by these thugs. The president also said he was resurrecting the Privateer Clause and is going to reward every ship master who blows away a pirate or terrorist.”

“So Leopold and the President both coming to cruise with us is the bad news, well at least we got some good news too. Maybe I should look into buying my own fast attack craft, something like a catamaran with lots of power,” said Danny.

“I think you will be having all the boat you can handle with the new Sea Myrrh,” said Clinton.

“Kevin, did I sign my contract in blood?”

“Kevin, pay him no mind,” suggested Marsha. “I looked inside the envelope. Henry Boston’s company was very generous; we will take the new cruise.”

“How much was it, dear?” asked Danny.

“Don’t worry, you aren’t going to blow it on some damn fool boat,” said Marsha. “We just picked up another million dollar bonus, and we can cruise for free, get paid and have the nicest suite on the ship, and you think I am going to be your galley maid on some small boat?”

“Like she said, Kevin,” said Danny, “we’ll take the job.”

“Good, I have the company plane bringing my wife to meet us in St. Thomas, and there are some friends of yours on this cruise too.”

“Oh, really?” asked Marsha.

“Yes, April and Vito & Faustino and Ben. They’ll meet us for dinner tonight,” said Kevin. “Perhaps this time we’ll just have nothing but fun in the sun, explore sandy beaches, and consume copious amounts of Caribbean rum, and feast.”

The End...for now....



# Return of the Sea Empress

## Chapter 1

The long and cramped flight from Philadelphia to Rome was delayed by bad weather. Danny and Marsha Jones had seats in coach among fidgeting passengers attempting to get some shut-eye on the overnight flight.

They were supposed to take a connection from Baltimore Washington International to Philadelphia, but a big storm system tied up all flights. Danny and Marsha felt lucky when US Air put them in a car to make it to Philly on time.

An attractive flight attendant remarked that, had they been waiting for a domestic flight, they would have had an overnight stay in the terminal instead of a trip by limo to another airport. "They take good care of you on international flights," Sally Ann Dumka said as she flicked a lock of hair off of her forehead. "That's where the airline makes their best profit, so they treat you like royalty."

Upon arriving in Rome three days early so they could get in some sight-seeing, the couple rode to their hotel in a Black & Perkins car. The driver, Tom Walsh, had been a New York City detective until retiring in 1997. He then provided protection for Merrill Lynch executives, until the great implosion on Wall Street.

"It's really great to meet you both," Walsh said. "After reading about your adventures on the Sea Empress, I decided I'd had it with boring executive work in New York City and that it was time to go where the action is."

"Be careful what you wish for," Danny said. "I understand you will be joining our team on the Sea Empress as a threat analyst."

"Yep, I can't wait! My wife arrived with me last week, and we've visited all the museums and restaurants anyone can in a week. She'll cruise with us back to the states," Tom said.

"Tom, please join us for dinner tonight," Marsha said. "We'll be stuck on that ship for months, and I would love to take in a few sights and eat out where no one is shooting at us."

"That's fine with me. I know my wife will be anxious to meet you," Tom said.

At eight o'clock that evening - a little late to be eating dinner, as far as Marsha was concerned - Tom pulled up to their hotel in a car. Danny and Marsha were waiting at the door.

The car took them to a side street a block from the Plaza of the Republic. Tom had heard about a restaurant from staff members in the B & P office in Rome. The group entered Giovanni's through a green doorway and walked down several steps to a foyer which led to two dining rooms, both below street level. The large rooms were packed with tables. Paintings and shelves adorned with small sculptures and bottles of wine lined the walls. Marsha, who understood Italian, was able to pick up conversations from nearby tables.

"This is a local favorite," Marsha said. "The couple next to us says they hope more tourists don't discover it."

"We've been here twice in the last week, and it's the best little dinner spot we've found in Rome," Tom said. "We've had full dinners and two carafes of wine, and never had a bill go over fifty Euros."

"We had an uneventful flight," Marsha said. "It was really nice to have a boring start to the trip."

"Well, dear, the British did intercept a dozen package bombs going to Chicago by way of Brussels," Danny said. "The Brits found that the packages originated in Yemen and they stopped

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them cold at Heathrow. Our intelligence guys won't say what tipped them off, but it appears that the Israelis broke the code used by Islamic radicals." Marsha suspected that her husband knew a lot more than he was telling. She would do her own research when she got back to the hotel, as Danny knew she would.

Danny knew he had said enough, and didn't bring any other details to the dinner table. He saw no sense in scaring the wife of the new guy.

Danny ordered the homemade spinach ravioli, while Marsha decided on linguini with clam sauce. Tom and Joyce both had lasagna. They followed the waiter's recommendation of the house red wine.

Tom's conversation at dinner revealed that he'd had a career rich with the proper background for a B & P operative, and that he was well suited for the Seven Seas Company security team.

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Danny and Marsha toured Vatican City for three days, along with some of the other historic highlights of Rome. They were soon ready to return to the newly-refurbished queen of the seas, the Sea Empress.

The Mercedes van arrived at the cruise terminal with Tom and Joyce. A hotel bellman loaded the bags Marsha had brought with them; she had sent their other bags directly to the ship. Joyce had found packing for three months to be fairly easy, given the laundry service on the ship.

As the van turned into the port at Civettichia, about forty-five miles from Rome, the ship came into view.

The results of the second refurbishment in two years for the multi-million dollar vessel were stunning. Not a bit of the damage inflicted to the aft end of the ship was visible, and the improvements included a row of aft balcony staterooms going up eight decks.

Danny and Marsha were shown to their suite. Tom and Joyce began to tour the ship, which would leave port for the Mediterranean prior to the trans-Atlantic crossing.

Seven Seas CEO Henry Boston had turned the Sea Empress into the flagship of the Seven Seas Company, including all of the latest technology available into every aspect of the sailing experience. Passengers could order tours, wine, room service, or movies on large flat screens in their staterooms, or watch shows and activities they missed while busy in the casino, pool, or spa. A Remembrance Chapel was dedicated to those seventy souls who had died in the attack off Antigua. Their names were listed on a plaque.

After Antigua, the ship's return to the fleet was not only a high priority for the company, but also for the United States president, whose brother had been on the ship when it was attacked.

Actor Leopold Bryan was back for the inaugural cruise of the refurbished ship. He felt the terrorists needed to be shown that the United States was not going to bow to those who wished to break the nation and hurt its people. Leopold had transformed from a Broadway and B movie has-been to a top-dollar performer able to command a high tab for an appearance, plus his choice of movie roles. For the next three months, he was booked as the star of the ship's production of the musical Chicago.

One month after Queen Elizabeth had christened Cunard Lines' Queen Elizabeth at Southampton, President John Hanson Bryan

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was going to be on hand to rededicate the Sea Empress when she arrived in Fort Lauderdale.

“We’ve had everyone on the passenger list and all of the crew and staff scrutinized by our best teams and the Secret Service,” Black & Perkins president Kevin Clinton said on the phone to Danny. “You will find their report in your suite.”

“I wasn’t expecting a vacation,” Danny said. “I’m anxious to get to work. When will you get here? I know you wouldn’t miss this show.”

“I’ll meet you in the Canary Islands and finish the crossing with you,” Clinton said.

## Chapter 2

Days later, a van pulled up in front of the Manhattan Café in Tenerife as Danny and Marsha enjoyed a cheese tray and a round of Dorados, a local beer. Clinton got out of the van, and the driver continued on to the ship with his luggage.

“I understand you had a tough time in Barcelona,” Clinton said, joining them at their table. “With the president meeting the King of Spain and the Pope at the Royal Palace in Seville the day

after the cathedral dedication, it looks like security forces really got a workout.”

“It was nice for us to be on the sidelines,” Danny said. “We made sure our folks got as close as they could to the tourist sites and safely back to the ship, but I have to admit it got a little dicey with that grandmother.”

Every security officer’s worst nightmare took place in Barcelona when a five-foot, two-inch grandmother, a rotund woman of about sixty, showed up for the cathedral ceremonies and the Pope’s arrival.

The sidewalks across from the cathedral entrance were closed, but the balconies over them had been rented out for large sums of money. Spanish security officials didn’t want to cross swords with the owners of the building, who profited from selling choice views of the Pope.

The grandmother, packed with explosives around her ample waist, was intended to be a surprise for the Pontiff.

Just as the woman was about to enter one of the apartment balconies, an alert Spanish police officer decided to pat her down. Her indignant cries failed to stop him, and the cop had only a split second to grab the first wire he saw, defusing the belt of bombs before she could pull the trigger wire.

The woman was wrestled to the ground, stripped of all her clothing, wrapped in a tarp, and hustled out to a loading dock behind the building, screaming, “Allah is great!” all the way.

As she had never made it into the apartment overlooking the cathedral, there was never any interruption to the ceremonies.

“Well, I have to let you in on a little secret,” Clinton said. “Just after we leave this port, we will take on a new group of passengers.”

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“Are we stopping at one of the other Canary Islands?” Danny asked.

“Nope,” Kevin said. “Leopold’s brother is going to arrive by barge. The president left Barcelona and took a decoy flight to the USS New York. The New York has shadowed the Sea Empress since she left Cadiz, and is about three miles from us now. The world thinks the president flew back to Andrews Air Force Base and is at Camp David for vacation, but he is enjoying a holiday at sea.”

“Wow, how are we going to sneak him aboard? We can’t let the passengers know he is here, they’ll broadcast to the world that the president is on a cruise,” said Danny.

“The White House has it all planned,” said Kevin. “As deputized U.S. Marshals, we are an important part of the president’s security.

“We have had a story formulated to conform to the White House plans. The ship had a row of suites on the top deck that have been vacant since leaving Rome. That is where the president and his family and security teams will be housed,” Kevin said. “We have brought a set of White House staff to serve the president and he will be included in the Aqua class. All of the aides, Secret Service, and staff will be dressed in typical passenger garb. The president intends to masquerade as a regular passenger. The electronics on the ship will be under the control of the National Security Agency, so communications will all be one way – open coming in and restricted going out. Once a ship leaves the port of call and turns on its sea system, phone reception and internet access are usually hit and miss, anyway.”

“You mean to say that no one will be able to call out or send email or videos or photos from the ship?” Danny asked.

“Yep.”

“Wow, we are going to have a bunch of pissed off people – especially the Republicans.”

“The brains in the White House anticipated that,” Kevin said, “And the president is going to meet with the passengers in two gatherings in the theatre, according to their seating times for dinner, to apologize for impacting their cruise. The Seven Seas Company is going to offer each passenger fifty percent off their next cruise, and all passengers who wish will be able to get a complimentary photo with the president on Wednesday. How does all that sound?”

“Well, most everyone will like it. The Republicans can use the photos on their dart boards, and the Democrats can frame the picture in their living rooms. Everyone wins,” Danny said.

“As a retired Secret Service agent, enjoying fine parmesan cheese in the Canary Islands, at a curiously named café on my third bottle of Dorado, may I venture an opinion?” Marsha asked.

“Sure, Marsha. You know that the president, Henry Boston, and I all value your opinion,” Kevin said, curious.

“Who came up with this cheesy plan?” Marsha asked. “We are going to keep the lid on a presidential visit simply by asking 4,000 passengers and crew to keep it secret?”

“You don’t think it will work?” Danny asked.

“Come on, guys. The president had one damn secret trip on my watch, when he went to Iraq at Thanksgiving to see the troops,” Marsha said. “That was a miracle and we only had to trust six reporters. Of course, that may have been more difficult than trusting four thousand passengers and crew, so perhaps this

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plan does have a chance. The press really thinks the president is at Camp David?”

“Yep, they are camped out in Maryland with satellite trucks. Tell me how to make this plan work,” Clinton said. “We leave port in an hour and its time to get to the ship.”

“Okay, I’ll meet you in our security office on board,” Marsha said. “Come, dear, we can share Clinton’s van. As much as I would like the extra walk, we have a few things to check out on the ship.”

In the security office, which contained navigational charts showing the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to Fort Lauderdale, there was a direct video link to the White House situation room and another to the Joint Chiefs at the Pentagon. Seven military and Secret Service staffers were already in the office when Marsha and Danny entered.

The most innovative vacation ever attempted by the leader of the free world was underway, and the Sea Empress was the backdrop.

## Chapter 3

The Sea Empress sounded blasts to signal its departure from Tenerife in the Canary Islands. The ship pulled away from the harbor entrance, the pilot boat came alongside the starboard side, and without the ship losing any speed, the pilot crossed from the boarding platform on the deck 2 over to the bow of the pilot boat, which then took the pilot back to the terminal.

As the Sea Empress glided out of the busy port, a Fred Olsen ocean-going ferry swept in. With passengers from among the more than seven hundred thousand inhabitants on the chain of islands, the ferry made trips several times daily.

The passengers, glad to leave the chilly Mediterranean, were making the most of the wonderful November weather. When the cruise had departed Rome, it was only fifty degrees; their stop in Livorno found the typical bad weather common for that region – rainy and gusty. Most of the passengers had stayed on the ship rather than take tours to Florence or Pisa.

When the Sea Empress stopped at Cannes, the second stop in the ship's itinerary, the weather had made a big improvement. By the time they got to Barcelona, a typical day saw crisp mornings and warm afternoons – great weather for touring the landmarks of Spain.

The Sea Empress, along with about two dozen other large cruise ships, would make the Atlantic crossing from mid-October through the first part of December. During the winter, the Caribbean market was flush with vacationers wishing to leave the cold and snow of North America.

The ship settled into a steady pace as sundown approached, while passengers enjoyed the view off the port side of the large ship.

The next island which came into view was as foreboding as Tenerife was attractive. If the near side of the island was inhabited, it didn't show. All that was visible to the ship's passengers were a series of mountain peaks which closely

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resembled the island used in the filming of the original King Kong movie from the 1930s.

The Sea Empress continued on, and passed a much more welcoming island, with lights illuminating a village spreading up the side of the hill overlooking a harbor.

As the Canaries, Spanish territories, were probably best remembered for a tragic collision on the runway between two 747s in the 1980s, the plan of the day on the Sea Empress instead focused on the island chain as being home to the tallest mountain peak in Spain.

While the passengers shared their experiences and rested their weary bones from walking tours of landmarks, wineries and museums on Tenerife, the Black & Perkins team sat down with the presidential security teams.

It was going to be one of the most difficult tasks the private security firm would face. For the presidential protection group, on the other hand, it was just another trip. In fact, the Secret Service agents began to count up the advantages.

They had a captured audience, pre-screening access to every passenger, and security screenings and metal detectors comparable to those at an airport for anyone boarding the ship. The heightened security settings had detected many bottles of wine being brought aboard, and the security staff had orders to let them through, in the interest of keeping the passengers happy. The usual process was to keep any alcohol brought aboard to be returned to the passengers the night before they disembarked. Some lines carried their policies out to the letter, while others had liberal or no enforcement.

As the security teams met to go over preliminary data, they shared information about the passengers.

The lineup included retired teachers, local government officials, a husband and wife who both worked for the IRS in Chicago, and a Florida EMT and her husband. One passenger was a Wall Street banker standing trial for securities fraud, who had been given permission by a judge to attend his daughter's wedding in Rome. He was safely back on the ship and headed to the states for trial.

A union leader on the lam after embezzling a quarter of a million dollars in Washington, D.C. was on board. She would be allowed to enjoy the rest of the cruise, but would be escorted off the ship by police in Fort Lauderdale.

A member of Congress was on vacation with his wife and, remarkably, had paid for his vacation himself. He was a conservative Republican from Maryland, and had just won reelection after first being elected two years earlier.

The list went on and on. It would take hours for the team to group them by interest and risk.

After they devoured a tray of sandwiches and pizza, the group came up with a short list of a dozen persons of interest.

A Saudi national traveling with a student visa was accompanying his parents on the Atlantic crossing. His background check revealed he had spent time in Yemen and Somalia. His father worked with a Saudi company and had an apartment in New York City. Since he was only twenty-two, Mohammed Hussein hadn't left much of a trail for Homeland Security to follow. Hussein was at the top of the danger list on board the Sea Empress. He would be at the head of the class once he arrived in the U. S., as well.

The next person of interest was a former college professor who had ties to the Weather Underground. Dr. James Rosen, a

## The Privateer Clause

professor emeritus at St. John's College, Maryland, had been part of a group that set off bombs in downtown D.C., the Pentagon, and a police station in Baltimore in 1973. Dr. Rosen was initially charged, but prosecutors dropped those charges because they didn't have enough evidence to convict him. James Rosen had been lucky – his six co-conspirators were sent to prison for twenty-five years. He spent the next thirty-five years on the public payroll teaching English, and all of his contacts were being scrutinized to see if he still had friends like he did back in the early seventies.

"We can continue to go down this list, but how about the security of the ship itself?" Danny asked.

"There was a full underwater sweep by an Israeli dive team employed by the cruise line," Clinton answered. "Before we left the port, a Navy seal team did a thorough second sweep of the underside of the ship, and then swept the harbor with a mini sub to make sure there were no underwater bad guys waiting for security to finish."

"We have the aircraft carrier USS George H. W. Bush following us about seven miles away – just out of sight over the horizon, but in position to control the area for five hundred miles," said Admiral Huey Watson, the lead representative for the Commander of the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Fleet. "In addition, there are four submarines shadowing our transit. Included with the carrier is an amphib with a detachment of eight hundred marines and six helicopters ready to respond to anything. The USS New York has another eight hundred Marines and half a dozen helicopters."

At this point the communications liaison officer, Lt. Cmdr. Tom Ridgeley, reported to the security office on the Sea Empress

that the USS New York had launched the admiral's barge with the president onboard, and they should pull alongside in about fifteen minutes. The *Sea Empress* would not slow down and the transfer of the presidential party would take about five minutes.

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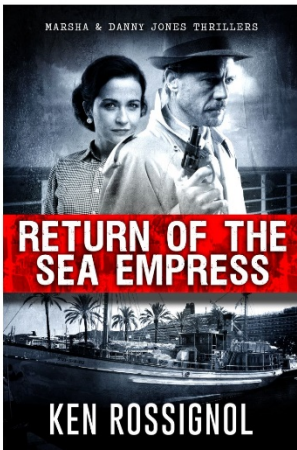
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## ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

Ken Rossignol makes it clear that cruising has never been more dangerous as the heroes in *The Privateer Clause* work to stop killers at every port as Americans and other passengers on the *Sea Empress* cruise the Caribbean.

Rossignol tells the story of Danny and Marsha Jones, the husband and wife detective team, who work to make sure those cruising on the *Sea Empress* have the time of their lives. As a result, bookings are through the roof, with danger lurking at every port. Careful research and the imagination of a veteran reporter and editor combine to bring realism to the itinerary of the *Sea Empress*.

### ***What happens to law officers after they retire?***

In *The Privateer Clause*, Rossignol makes sure that the chief characters, Marsha and Danny Jones, never get a moment's rest. While buffets and rum drinks threaten to add waist to the rotund travelers, the husband and wife security force laid waste to bad guys who are out to spoil everyone's trip.

Marsha is a retired Secret Service agent who finds that retirement isn't all it's cracked up to be, and she is eager to get back to work. Danny never planned on retiring or going on a cruise. Rossignol shows that the passengers are the new media and are instant reporters as they use their cell phones, digital cameras, and all other new electronic communications to take all the latest acts of piracy against cruise ships to the world news outlets in minutes.

While the recession ravages the economy, taking a cruise has never been a better bargain, but given the terror cells operating around the world, a cruise has never been more dangerous. Will the author ever be allowed to board a cruise ship again? Will he be tossed onto the 'No Float' list? Only The Shadow knows for sure and while danger lurks at every moment, the author makes sure that no one on the *Sea Empress* is bored.

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The Privateer Clause



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