



B. G. PRESTON

FOUR RETIRED GUYS...
THE PUGET SOUND...
A BOATLOAD OF TROUBLE.

**BLUE WATER
BEDLAM**

Blue Water Bedlam

**Four Retired Guys
...a Newish Yacht
...a Boatload of Trouble**

Barry Sanders, writing as:

B. G. Preston

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

Complete work is available in paperback and e-book format through most leading resellers.

Blue Water Bedlam

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Acknowledgments

For Sandra, thank you for your patience and support as I spent many hours in my study working on this book. I can now come out and actually communicate a bit.

To “the Rohnert Park Guys” ...the idea for this story indirectly came from you. Somebody owes me a coffee.

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Murphy's Law...

*"Anything that can go wrong...
will go wrong."*

Modern version

Begin Sample Chapters

1: Four Guys Walk Into a Bar

The day began normally; it just didn't stay that way.

By the end of the day, the anticipation of a new adventure—and some added excitement—was foremost on my mind. It was just that little bit about a murder that put an unfortunate twist to it all.

Thursday morning. I was last of our little group to enter the coffee bar. The other three were already there. McDuck's Coffee Bar was across from a large marina in our little Puget Sound town of Anacortes, Washington. The owner, Mac—with no apparent last name—was a friend. Otherwise, we probably would not have gone there. McDuck's was a mashup of an old Denney's, with a hint of a greasy donut shop, combined with the aroma of last year's burnt coffee.

One great thing about McDuck's was the view of the marina where we could watch the yachts and fishing boats

come and go. Starbucks, located down the road in a strip mall, didn't have this view. They just had better, well, almost everything. Just not the view.

McDuck's, off-putting atmosphere and all, was now our regular Thursday morning haunt. We had tried other places, but none of them had the no-one-cares-what-we-do-or-say-there ambiance, so McDuck's was it. We were all retired and our routine had somehow evolved into getting together once a week.

Coming to McDuck's was also the one and only regular thing on our schedules. By the way, the term "regular," for a group of retirees, takes on a whole variety of meanings, but we won't go there.

Two retired cops, a retired firefighter and a retired marketing guy, me. Every Thursday morning we came into the bar...the coffee bar. Real bars had little interest anymore. The three other guys knew each other from their previous careers. I was the interloper, having only joined the group through the good fortune of Scott's and my wives knowing each other.

"Hey, Frank, I have great news!" Charlie gleefully called out as I strolled by the booth, a large four-person booth near the front window. This one window was kept clean...by us. The other windows were coated a light brown. We liked the view, but knew waiting for Mac to clean the windows was probably futile, so we kept this one relatively clean.

"Can't wait to hear," I replied while focusing on my upcoming order, and not on him. "Tell me more right after I get my coffee plus some of those brown things."

"McBeignets!" Scott, the tall, retired cop from Everett, exclaimed in reference to my "brown thing" comment.

"Is that what they are? I'll be damned. Couldn't quite tell by looking at them," I answered, stating an overused joke among us. I went up to Mac, as he stood there with his huge belly pushing out against his stained apron, while giving me his usual impatient look.

Another great thing about this place was the McBeignet. Mac had invented and made them himself. These were the brown things I was referring to. McBeignets are sort of a mix of a New Orleans beignet, a croissant, plus something else I couldn't identify. In appearance, they are lumpy, a bit orange-brown in color and totally unappealing. The thing is, they are absolutely delicious. I had had beignets when visiting New Orleans a few years back, but Mac's morphed version of croissant-thingy-beignet outdid them.

"You ought to patent these things or something," I said to Mac for the hundredth time as I stood across from him at the cluttered counter to place my order.

You used to be able to get table service in McDuck's. Not anymore. Mac took a lesson from Starbucks...don't go to where the customer is sitting, have the customer come to you, and then double the price. It worked. Almost, anyway.

The minimal number of customers was a sure indicator that Starbucks was winning the popularity contest.

With one hand grasping a hot mug of coffee, I headed toward the group who were sitting at our usual booth, an old Formica table showing years of wear, along with the bench seats that had long since lost any semblance of comfort.

I had ordered a Duzy-size coffee. Mac had figured if Starbucks could name all sizes of their drinks in words meaning large or big—Vente, Grande, Tall—so could he. Mac said Duzy was Polish for large. I'd never looked it up to confirm, having just taken him at his word for it. In my other hand, I had a small plastic basket with a dozen McBeignets. I only needed three for me. The rest, I knew, would quickly be consumed by the others at the booth.

I sat on the lumpy, in-need-of-repair vinyl bench seat next to Dawn. She was our fourth guy. Dawn was a retired police detective and, like Scott, had served in Everett, a town an hour south of us. Despite her shape being a bit different from the rest of us, she was definitely one of the guys. Any attempts to treat her any differently from the rest of us typically went south. The built-like-guys guys had long ago stopped being careful about the nature of our jokes around her. She could fire back verbal missiles equal to or better than anything we could come up with.

So, the four of us sat there, about to hear more of Charlie's announcement. Our little group consisted of: Dawn, our divorced, female retired detective; Scott, the semi-balding, married and retired cop from Everett; me, a retired married, marketing guy, previously from Ohio; and our fourth member, Charlie, was a retired fireman who had been a widower for over a year. The other notable fact about Charlie was that he was a lotto winner. According to Charlie, per the good graces of the Washington State Lottery, he was now about thirty million, after taxes, richer.

We all liked Charlie.

2: I Bought a Boat

“So, what’s this great news, Charlie? Or, do you prefer to drag it out like you usually do?” I said as I blew on my hot coffee, waiting for it to cool down. Mac always brewed his coffee way too hot, and Charlie rarely came to a point in his stories.

“He has been squirmy just waiting for us all to get here so he can tell us,” Dawn said in assessment of our friend, who sat across the worn table.

“Can it be any greater than when you won the lottery?” Scott asked him. He was the only one of the group who had been openly envious of Charlie’s good fortune. Charlie had been great to us. A few months back he had taken me, Scott, Dawn, and Scott’s and my wives on a cruise to Alaska. He had also purchased new cars for each of us.

Like I said, we all liked Charlie.

“I know!” Dawn announced. “I can tell by the look on his face. My ex, the skunk-bastard, used to have that same look right after he would get lucky with some twenty-something coed.” Dawn’s husband had been an instructor at

a community college. Late in the game, Dawn had learned he had a special, up-close-and-personal way of tutoring the young coeds. As a former detective, she openly kicked herself for not noticing the signs. She looked Charlie over and firmly pronounced, "You got lucky, yourself. Didn't you?"

I looked over at Charlie. As much as I liked him as a friend, and enjoyed his quick but goofy wit, I couldn't imagine him ever getting lucky. At least, not in that way. He'd probably been a handsome guy once. Now, though, Charlie was simply dumpy. Not necessarily fat, just rumpled, haggard and unkempt looking. Ever since his wife had died, he had stopped giving much attention to his own personal care and feeding and it showed. "Nah, it has to be something else," I teased. "No respectable female would have you." I had to be careful with teasing Charlie. While we all took playful jabs at one another, we did occasionally overdo it, especially with Charlie. More than once we had bruised his ego. Still, that didn't slow us down much.

Now, he sat there looking at us with a big grin on his face. Without saying anything, he reached into a bag that was sitting on the cracked-vinyl seat beside him. Ever so slowly, and with a bit of fanfare on his part, Charlie pulled out a hat. It was a white cloth hat with a shiny black bill. The front was adorned with a bit of gold braid sporting some sort of emblem on it. He placed it on his head, enabling us to

see what the emblem was. A symbol of a gold-on-black crest with the word "Captain" embossed below it.

"What the hell is that?" Scott growled. "Looks like some sort of pretend captain's cap or something!"

"Play nice, Scott," Dawn pretended to scold him, and then took her own turn to play with Charlie. "It looks more like the hat a tour guide would wear at *Sea World*," she twisted Scott's comments even further.

"Really, Charlie, what is this?" I asked.

"It is a captain's cap. I bought a boat, and I'm the captain!" He exclaimed proudly as he reached down into the bag, bringing out three more similar caps. He handed one to each of us. They all had the title of "Co-Captain" embossed on them.

"Whoa!" Dawn exclaimed. "First, what the hell is this about a boat, and second, what is with this co-captain thing? There is no such title in boating that I know of!"

"There isn't?" Charlie looked bewildered.

"Skip the hats for now," I interrupted. "What's this about a boat?"

Before answering our questions, he looked down at one of the caps he had put before us. Charlie was obviously smarting from learning there was no such title as co-captain. "I had those hats made special for you guys. That sucks! You'd have thought the guy at the hat store would have said something."

"Enough about the damn hats, Charlie," Dawn interjected. "Like Frank said, what's this about a boat?"

Charlie, happy to turn the conversation away from the mislabeled hats, gleefully looked at the three of us. "My cousin, a couple times removed, had owned it. He died a few months after getting it new, so his wife wanted to get rid of it. She said the boat had been bad luck for them. Given the way he died, she is probably right. Anyway, I looked into it, and talked to the guys down at the ship's store." He referenced the large place along the far side of the marina from where we sat. "They said it was a real bargain. So I bought it!"

We all sat there, staring at Charlie. We didn't know what to say. I munched on a McBeignet while I mulled this over.

"So," Charlie went back to the topic of the hats, "if there aren't co-captains, what do you call the guys who help the captain? I want for you all to be part of my crew."

"We're your crew now?" I taunted playfully, taking care to not spit out my coffee as I gasped in surprise.

"Hush, play nice," Dawn said as she nudged me.

"I don't know, Charlie," Scott joined in as he tried to answer Charlie's question about the actual titles for a co-captain. "I think they are called First Mate or something similar."

"There is no way in hell I will be First Mate to Charlie or any of you guys!" Dawn exclaimed.

"It's just a boat-crew title, not a late-night activity! Get a grip, already!" Scott retorted, then quickly turned away from the likely death-stare Dawn was so good at giving with her deep blue eyes.

"Hey, Charlie?" I asked, waiting to ensure I had his attention. "You get seasick, remember? Hell, when we were all on that Alaska cruise, you hurled your guts out. A lot."

"He did, didn't he," Scott laughed.

"Well, my new boat is supposed to have a stabilizer thing so it won't rock much."

"And, you don't think the big-ass cruise ship we were on wasn't stable? It was probably way more solid on the water than your little boat ever will ever be!" I added, still not believing what I was hearing from Charlie.

Dawn, giving Scott and I a look only a woman knows how to do, finally got us to stop taking verbal jabs at him. It was time to hear about Charlie's boat.

3: Trixie's Destiny

Charlie, thoroughly deflated, just sat silently for a bit. I felt horrible. Well, maybe not horrible, but I knew we had gone too far. Here he was, beaming with pride about his new boat, while all we could do was ridicule him.

It actually had been rather fun.

"Tell us about your boat, Charlie," Dawn encouraged him. "We really want to know."

"No you don't. You just want to be shits," he complained.

"We do...want to know about your boat, that is," I added trying to absolve the guilt I had from ridiculing him.

"You're still shits," he responded, but I could tell from the gleam in his eye that he was a bit appeased.

"Like you don't throw verbal bombs at us whenever we give you an opening," Scott exclaimed. "Tell us about your stupid boat already!"

"Right after I finish my coffee," he replied, a bit petulant, trying to punish us by holding back on further information as he slowly sipped at his half-finished coffee. His was a

Veliki size. I had yet to look up the term to find out what language for large Veliki is.

Finally, after several minutes, he stood from the booth and started toward the door. "Well, instead of telling you about my boat, how about if I show you?" He nodded toward the neighboring marina. "It's over there."

"Do we have to wear these stupid hats?" Scott exclaimed as he followed along. This comment was soon followed by a slap to the back of his head from Dawn. "Sum bitch! Cut that out," Scott complained. This wasn't his first back-of-the-head slap from her. She loved to play like the character Gibbs on *NCIS*, who frequently gave these little slaps to another of the characters in the show. We had all been on the receiving end of these jabs from her. None of us dared to return the favor.

It was drizzling. It's often drizzling around here, so this didn't stop us from heading outside and over to the marina entrance a short, but wet, walk across a parking lot. Living just about anywhere in the Puget Sound, you quickly became accustomed to gray skies with lots of drizzle and rain. It was either get used to the wet climate or pack up your stuff and move to Phoenix or Florida. My wife and I had retired from Ohio, anxious to leave the depressingly gray winters there. Somehow we ended up in the Puget Sound. Far prettier than Ohio, but no improvement in the gray sky thing.

Charlie, wearing his new captain's cap with the rest of us wearing our co-captain's caps, strolled toward the entrance to the marina. The main gate was locked as usual. This didn't stop Charlie. He proudly leaned down to the keypad, entered the combination, and then swung open the chain-link metal gate.

"Ah, it would seem that he now is in possession of the secret code," I stated the obvious.

"Does your little boat at least have a bathroom? I really, really have to pee!" Dawn declared.

"They are called heads, not bathrooms," Charlie self-importantly explained. Now that he was a boat owner, I could see he was primed and ready to regale us with his knowledge of boating. If my guess was correct, that knowledge was close to zero. More than the rest of us, maybe, but that wasn't saying much. Actually, I probably knew more than they did as I had read quite a bit on the topic. No practical knowledge, just a lot of wishful thinking and online brochure browsing.

"Why didn't you go before we left McDuck's Coffee Bar?" Scott complained.

"Like I knew our impetuous friend here," she nodded toward Charlie, "was going to suddenly dart out the door. A little warning would be nice."

The Cap Sante Marina is one of the largest boating facilities on Fidalgo Island. This particular marina is huge, and

home to hundreds of boats. As we strolled up one long, fifteen-foot wide, floating concrete pad, we passed numerous boats in their slips on either side of us. Many of the boats were beautiful sailboats ranging anywhere from thirty to fifty feet in length. Intermixed with the sailboats with their towering masts, were powerboats of all sizes and shapes. I had often fantasized about having a boat and docking it here. My wife had other opinions on the subject, so...no boat.

Charlie's boat was apparently one of these along the dock we were on. Some were bright and new. Others were old and decrepit. Who knew what it was Charlie had bought into. He paused for a moment; I assumed from his stance that the thirty-two foot Sea Ray express yacht to our right might be his. It wasn't. Charlie had only paused to make sure we were keeping up.

"Where the hell is your little boat, Charlie?" Scott complained. "Couldn't you have parked the damn thing closer?"

"There isn't room for it closer in."

"Isn't room for it?" Dawn asked. "Charlie, my friend, just exactly what did you buy?"

"You'll see," he said with a touch of humor in his voice. Charlie was having fun toying with us.

We walked past several more boat slips. Finally, Charlie stopped, turned toward us, and looked toward his left. I looked in that direction and saw an old ketch, about fifty

foot long, which was probably in its prime when Nixon was President. What had once been a fun vessel for a sailing adventure was now little more than a rest stop for sea gulls to poop onto. There was loads of the stuff on the boat.

"Charlie, you didn't!" Dawn exclaimed as she looked down on the wreck of a boat. "And, you can't possibly expect us to get in that thing, can you?"

He waited patiently for us to wind down while giving us a broad grin. He had been full of them today. I was glad to see him so happy. Since his wife, Glenda, had died, his spirits seemed to have largely gone, so if a crappy sailboat was what it was going to take to cheer him up, then so be it. I still wasn't sure how I felt about stepping aboard the horrible, seagull-poop-encrusted thing.

"You do know you have lots of money and can do better, right?" Scott announced as he looked with disdain at the boat just as a pair of seagulls landed in the aft cockpit, only to unleash a white gloppy mess of bird poop. A cockpit is the open area near the rear of a sailboat where people sit, steer the boat or just relax. In this case, it was also a place for layer upon layer of seagull crap to mound up.

"Yes, I can. I can do much better. Ta da!" He made a show of turning to face the end of the pier where a large white-hulled boat sat along the t-shaped end, blocking our view of the harbor with its seawall beyond.

"Where?" I asked, not tuning into what Charlie was trying to show us. "All I see is a big-ass yacht that some guy with more money than he knows what to do with would buy." Then it hit me. That description fit Charlie.

"That would be me. The guy with the big-ass yacht and more money than he knows what to do with," Charlie responded gleefully.

"Holy crap!" Scott proclaimed as he walked toward the large yacht, his mouth practically hanging open in amazement. "This is yours?"

"Yep," Charlie said simply.

"It's freaking huge. Beautiful, but super big!" Dawn added, trying to push back her shoulder-length, ash-gray hair as the damp sea breeze blew it around.

"You bought this?" I asked, not believing what I was seeing.

Before us was a beautiful, new looking, Grand Banks motor yacht. This type of yacht was not the sleek Italian boat of my fantasies, but it was incredible nonetheless. It was a practical-looking vessel, designed for long-range cruising at decent speeds, and built more for comfort and stability than speed or showmanship. I had studied the Grand Bank's website back when I dreamed of having a yacht. As a result, I knew a little about them. This one was part of their Aleutian line and was designed for distance and ease of handling.

"It is a sixty-five footer," Charlie proudly announced. "Like I said earlier, I got it for a great price. Her name is *Trixie's Destiny*."

"*Trixie's Destiny*?" Scott asked, "What the hell kind of name is that, and who was Trixie? Sounds like a stripper."

Charlie chuckled. "It seems his wife was also a bit curious about the name. From what I hear, she never found out who Trixie was until he, Roger Amund, died. Turns out Trixie was a dog Roger had when he was a kid."

"He named his shiny new boat after his dog and not his wife!" Dawn laughed.

"*Trixie's Destiny*," I repeated the name, not knowing what else to say, as I tried to absorb all I was seeing and hearing.

"Charlie," Dawn said in disbelief, "you don't know the first thing about handling or maintaining a yacht like this!"

"Does it have a captain? A real captain, I mean?" Scott asked.

"Just me. There had been one back when Roger Amund owned it, but he disappeared around the time Roger died."

"Charlie...you really, truly need a captain, a skipper or whatever you want to call it, and probably a crew. You can't handle this yourself!" Dawn stressed.

"I know that!" he responded defensively. "But, I don't want to have a yacht just to have someone I don't know

drive me around in it. What fun would that be? I want to be the captain and drive it, damn it!"

"Holy mother of all things sane," Scott chuckled. "Charlie, my friend, you really, really, need someone to help you with this big-ass boat. You can't do it yourself!"

Charlie just looked at us while sporting another of his big goofy grins. "That's where the three of you come in."

4: Floating Crime Scene

We stood there on the dock in the light drizzle, with the sound of seagulls squawking and the scent of fresh rain mixed with salty air, as we looked toward the beautiful yacht. It spanned almost the entire width of the t-end of the dock, far outsizing other boats near us. The yacht sported a gleaming white hull with a matching white cabin superstructure. The top deck, the fly bridge, had a hardtop cover. I could also see it held a sizeable tender to the aft. It was absolutely beautiful. Practical, and somewhat squared off in design, but beautiful.

“At least you bought an American boat,” Scott stated, seeing the name *Grand Banks* on the side of the cabin structure. Scott, we all had learned, had a real hang-up about buying American.

“Yep,” Charlie responded.

“They aren’t American made. This boat was made in Malaysia.” I responded, dashing Scott’s assessment.

“It isn’t?” Scott responded aghast.

"It isn't?" Charlie added at the same time. "But the Grand Banks are in this country, right?"

"Forget where it was made, Charlie," Dawn said, putting a stop to this line of discussion. "I have just one little, bitty question, seeing how you don't even know where your boat was made: Have you even taken a ride on it?"

He looked a bit sheepish. "Nah. The water was rough the day I looked at it, so we weren't able to go out. They, the boat sales guys, said it rides nice, and I should like it and all."

The three of us just stared at our friend, absolutely stunned.

Charlie stepped up to the boat, scratching his head for a moment. "When they showed it to me, we stepped through a little opening near the back port side of the boat. It's here somewhere."

"That is the starboard side, Charlie," I laughed. I couldn't help myself. For the whole week of our group's cruise to Alaska, Charlie was frequently lost while on board and never had been confident about which side of the ship was port or which one was starboard. For me, remembering it was easy. The word "Starboard" is longer than the word "Port" and it just so happens that "Starboard" is on the right side of a boat when facing forward. Both words are the longer of the pair. Starboard vs. Port. Right vs. Left. It had

made sense to me, but my little bit of logic often got blank stares when I tried to explain it.

"Well, crap!" Charlie mumbled in embarrassment.

I decided not to put Charlie down again; he seemed to be taking our jabs a bit hard. At least, I wouldn't rip on him for another two or three minutes. Charlie just gave us too many great opportunities to, well, playfully react.

I often thought of Charlie as our group's goofy genius: absolutely brilliant in some ways, and totally clueless in others.

Charlie fumbled around for a bit along the side of the boat looking for an entrance, and finally giving up. He went to the aft end where he was able to step down from the dock onto a small swim platform, and then up a set of sea stairs into the cockpit, the rear seating area of the boat.

We followed cautiously along until we were all standing in the covered back area of the boat where we were out of the wet air. Charlie fiddled in his coat pockets, perhaps looking for keys.

"You sure you own this thing?" Scott questioned, the retired cop in him coming out. "Wouldn't want to have the real owner come up with a shotgun or anything." He then nodded toward a man who was standing halfway down the dock, examining us through a pair of binoculars. "Like the guy down there."

"I am the real owner, damn it!"

Dawn, pacing around as she watched Charlie fumble for the keys, loudly complained. "I don't care who owns the freaking boat. Just let me in so I can find a bathroom-head-potty or whatever the hell you want to call it!" She glared at Charlie, "I...HAVE...TO...PEE!"

"Oh, I forgot," Charlie said apologetically as he finally found the correct key, inserting it into the lock.

"Well, trust me, I didn't!" Dawn complained as she pushed past Charlie, darting into the interior of the boat. It was dark due to the gray skies and no lights on inside. "I know there is a john in here somewhere!" She frantically looked around.

"There isn't one on this floor," Charlie called out to her. "Go down the stairs near the front, over by the driver's seat."

I couldn't restrain myself. "On this floor?" I repeated what Charlie had said, ignoring my resolve to play nice with him for a while. "And... 'by the driver's seat'?" I laughed out loud. "Charlie, you have got to be shitting me!"

"Why, what's wrong?" He sounded wounded once again.

I turned and looked at Scott who was struggling to keep from bursting out laughing. "Charlie, floors are called decks on boats."

"Oh," Charlie responded sheepishly.

"And, oh mighty Captain, the 'driver's seat'? Really? Even I know they aren't called that!"

"Then, what's it called?"

"Hell if I know. I just know there is nothing called a 'driver's seat' on a yacht. It's probably called the captain's chair, or helm, or something."

"You know, you guys can totally suck the fun out of things," Charlie responded morosely.

We entered the interior of the spacious yacht. It was beautiful. Warm wood, leather couches and teak flooring. While I tend to prefer a more light-and-airy Italian-style yacht, I had to admit this traditional styling was nearly perfect, although a bit dark inside. The decor totally fit the Puget Sound with its Northwest woodsy flavor. I wouldn't have picked it out for the Caribbean, but around here, in this pine tree, snow-capped mountain existence, it worked.

"Wow!" Scott whistled softly as he stepped further into the yacht and looked around. "Charlie, I have to admit it. I am totally, one-hundred percent impressed."

"Me too," I added, both in sincerity, and wanting to build up Charlie's morale a bit. A person could live here in style. I reached down to examine one high-gloss wood cabinet as Charlie explained there was a large flat-panel TV hidden in it. We moved further into the yacht, heading toward the front that was partially open to view. I could see

the galley was up a couple of steps, near the raised pilothouse.

Dawn came back up from the lower deck to join us. "Hey, Charlie, did you know there is blood down there in the bathroom?"

Charlie openly cringed. "Yep. That's where the murder happened."

"Murder!" the three of us exclaimed.

"What the hell, Charlie!" I added.

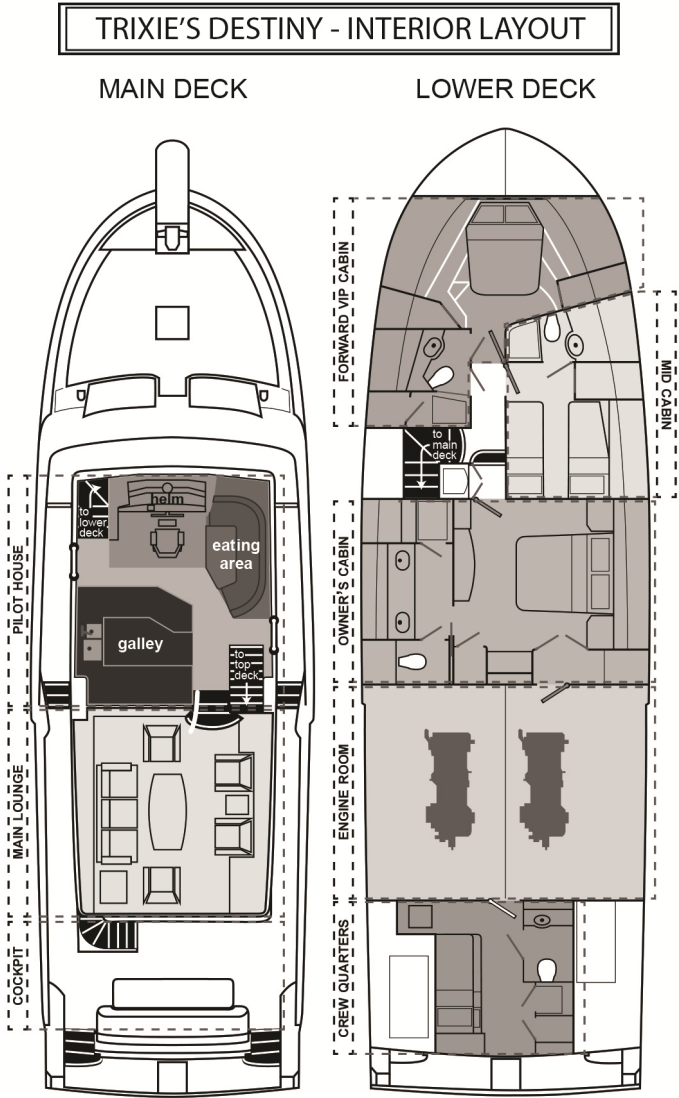
"Didn't I tell you?"

"You said the owner, some guy named Roger, died and his wife thought the boat was bad luck so she sold it cheap. You said nothing about any murder," I reminded him.

"Oh," he looked downward. "That's why she wanted to get rid of it. Someone murdered her husband on this boat over in Port Townsend. Happened a few months ago. It was in the news and all."

"So, we are standing in the middle of a freaking floating crime scene?" Dawn was incredulous.

"Yep. Kinda interesting, huh?"



5: Blood Spatter

We were on a boat where a murder had occurred, seemingly, recently. Maybe to Dawn and Scott, the retired cops in the group, standing in the midst of a murder scene might seem normal. To me, a guy who had devoted the last decade of his career to conducting sales training and crafting clever Power Point presentations, this definitely wasn't an average daily occurrence.

"Show us," Scott nearly demanded. The whole event had turned from playful to deadly serious in a heartbeat. My friend Scott seemed to stand a bit taller, his demeanor no longer that of a laid-back jokester. I was now seeing Scott for what he had been for decades...a professional policeman.

"It's dark down there," Dawn said. "I couldn't find a light switch. If it hadn't been for a bit of light coming through a small window, I wouldn't have seen it."

"Porthole," I corrected.

"Really?" she responded dryly, "We're talking about murder, and you're worried what I call a stupid window?"

She gave me one of those withering looks women are so good at.

I reminded myself to stop correcting the others on the terms they were using. It is a good way to lose friends.

"I didn't see it until I was done," Dawn clarified. "Probably a good thing. The point is, there wasn't much light, but there was enough for me to see blood spatter. Trust me; I know blood spatter when I see it."

I trusted her on this. As a former police detective, I knew Dawn Rollins had seen more than her share of horrible things. Enough that she had finally reached her limit, and had taken an early retirement. She was the youngest of our foursome, I think. Dawn never told her age, and we didn't dare ask. I would guess she was in her late fifties...a well-preserved fifty-something who could still turn heads. The rest of us are a good decade older.

Scott looked around and found a light switch. It didn't work. No lights came on. "Charlie, dammit, how do you turn the power for this damn boat on?"

Once again, Charlie looked sheepish. More-and-more we were learning how little Charlie knew about this grand purchase of his. "I don't know. I'm sorry," he replied, again defensively.

I think we had gone a long way toward denting our new captain's ego today. "Let's go see if we can figure it out, Charlie," I prompted, leading him up to the helm where we

gazed at an intimidating array of switches and gauges. Finally, off to one side, I saw a red covered switch with the simple label of, "Master."

Nudging Charlie, I pointed out the switch. I was darned if I was going to flip it on. If someone was going to blow up the boat by activating a switch, I didn't want it to be me.

The switch worked. Charlie first had to unlock it with a small key, but it worked. My guess was the master power was kept under lock so an intruder could not easily turn on and steal the expensive yacht.

With the switch turned on, a number of discretely hidden LED lights came on. It was enough to give a soft glow throughout. Glancing down the stairs to the lower deck, I could see some lights were even on down there now.

With the lights on, Scott darted down the stairs. Dawn was close behind, directing Scott to the head she had used. The door was still open. Scott flipped on an overhead light in the small room, enabling the two of them to look in and examine the scene. "Charlie," Scott called over his shoulder. "It isn't bad, but Dawn is right. There is some blood here."

"I know. I know. I should have had it cleaned before showing *Trixie* to you," he bemoaned. "It's the only place though. I looked and didn't find anywhere else onboard with blood. The police did too, or so I was told. They didn't find any more. Just this one area."

"This will need to be cleaned. By a specialist. You don't fool around with blood."

"I actually have a clean-up crew scheduled to come in soon. Monday, I think."

With this pronouncement, they returned up the stairs and back into the pilothouse where we found an adjacent booth-like dining table on the starboard side. This was handy as the helm, dining area and galley formed a functional triangle in the raised pilothouse section of the main deck.

Scott stepped over to a door next to the booth, opening it to let the fresh, cool, salty air come in. He then joined the rest of us as we sat at the dining table booth and pondered the situation.

"One big-ass boat. One murder scene with everything in place except for the yellow crime-scene tape, a missing former captain, and one green, seasick-prone, new captain. Have I missed anything?" Dawn summarized for us.

"That about sums it up," I chuckled. "By the way, *Trixie's Destiny* is an odd name for a boat. Is that really what you want as a name for your shiny newish yacht?"

"Isn't it bad luck to change the name on a boat? Excuse me, yacht?" Scott asked.

"This boat-yacht has had its quota of bad luck already," Dawn added. "I don't think changing the name will make it any worse."

I had to laugh. A few years back I had looked this up, and did learn of some sort of ritual one could do. I forget the details, only loosely remembering what had to be done. "I think you can change a boat's name without generating bad luck with some sort of unique ceremony. It's something like having to do a special chant while naked and dancing backward in a circle."

This got a loud laugh out of Dawn and Scott. Charlie just looked bewildered...again.

"Guys," Dawn laughed, "if you want do some sort of mojo-changing, backward-dancing, naked chant, I'll be glad to bang on a drum or something, but you can count me out of the rest of it!"

"I think I'll just keep the name. I sort of like it," Charlie said with a note of uncertainty in his voice. "You're right that I don't know much about how to steer this boat of mine, but I do know enough to get a bit of training. I've hired someone to come up here next week from Seattle who will provide some hands-on training."

"You'll need it," Scott stated.

"We all need it. Plus, I learned the insurance company won't insure my yacht until I—we—have completed the training," Charlie added. "I want you all to join me. I need my co-captains."

"Don't you need some sort of license to pilot a boat like this?" Dawn asked.

I knew the answer, but was curious to see if Charlie did as well. I was pleased to see he did.

"Oddly, no. You need a license if you are going to get paid for the work, but not if you are going to just drive your own boat. Kinda interesting. Like I said, I need training to keep the insurance company off my back."

"You need training just so you won't bump into stuff with this big boat!" Scott added derisively.

"We will all learn how to not 'bump into stuff', as you put it," Charlie responded simply. "If you are in with me, that is. I want to take long trips in it, maybe even up to Alaska, and I need you with me."

It didn't take me more than a moment to think about it. I was in. Right after I retired, my wife, Francine, and I had done the usual new-retiree thing of traveling to far-flung places, and then we had sold our house and moved out here to be closer to our daughter, Emily, where we now had a "lifestyle home" with a view toward Fidalgo Bay. With little more to do now, other than stare out at the view, I was bored stiff. Yes, I was in on Charlie's new venture. I would be one of his co-captains.

"Count me in," I told Charlie and the others.

"Oh, what the hell," Dawn added. "The worst we can do is drown."

"Or get captured by pirates," Scott added.

"There are no pirates in the Puget Sound," Charlie added confidently.

"Tell that to the first guy who comes up to this shiny boat of yours with a gun in hand," Scott responded stiffly. "Oh, what the hell, I'm in too. Or, I will be once I clear it with the missus." He was referring to his wife, Sally. Despite Scott's career in law enforcement, Sally was clearly the ruler of the family.

Charlie like to tell Scott that his wife had him by the balls and wasn't about to let go. Whenever Charlie said this, Scott could only cringe at the unfortunate truth.

I had no doubt that an interesting, and heated, discussion between the two was likely to ensue.

"So, we're all in?" Charlie asked, hopefully. "We're all about to be the proud crew of *Trixie's Destiny*!"

End Sample Chapters

The complete work is available in print and online
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