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## **BUOY 13**

*To Eric, The King of Gardiners Bay*

## CHAPTER 1

### Tora Kasan

I heard car doors slam in front of our house. Ignoring it, I settled back with the morning paper when the doorbell rang. I hobbled on crutches across the living room floor and peeked through the window. Parked outside was a full-sized black Mercedes, definitely the first of its kind to grace the curb in front of our humble Cape Cod in Queens.

Unfastening the chain safety lock, I opened the door. On the stoop stood a stately woman dressed in black leather. She was looking back toward the Mercedes where an imposing dark-haired man, wearing a long wool coat, stood with his arms folded high on his chest. I had no idea who this woman was, or what she wanted. In one arm she clutched a colorful tote bag. “Cain Rippinger?” she asked me.

I felt a burst of frigid winter air. “That’d be me,” I said, immediately thinking she was a fine looking woman, but a little worn.

She adjusted the tote in her arms, and stuck out her leather-gloved hand. “I have something for you...I’m Tora Kasan.”

*Tora Kasan?* Never met her but I knew the name. She was Ragnar Kasan’s widow. Ragnar owned Jumapili lodge in Tanzania. It was on the Serengeti where I’d been vacationing. He was murdered, shot dead while we were hunting Cape buffalo. It wasn’t a hunting accident, no one from our party had pulled the trigger, but the shot caused an old bull to charge. It drove me into the dirt shattering my leg. Who killed Ragnar and why remained a mystery.

I shifted my weight to one crutch and stuck out my hand. She grabbed it firmly. “By all means, please come in Ms. Kasan,” I said. “Would your friend care to come in?”

“Oh,” she said, with a slight nod toward outside. “Ray’s a hardy type. He’s fine...I can’t be long. I have business waiting in Manhattan.”

I glanced at Ray. He was watching every move. I leaned on one crutch and from my forehead shot him a two-finger salute. No response. Happily, I shut the door.

“How’s the leg?” she asked, lingering in my mother’s tiny lobby. “A crushed femur isn’t a delicate matter.”

“No, it isn’t,” I replied. “However I count my blessings.”

“Indeed,” she said. “Most people mauled by a Cape buffalo don’t make it.” She looked into the living room. “Live alone?”

“No,” I said. “I grew up in this house. It’s my mother’s. She’s out shopping.”

Tora seemed restless.

“Here,” I said, rearranging myself on my crutches as I meandered around her toward the kitchen. “Please have a seat.”

“Oh, time prevents me from lingering too long,” she responded, as she struggled to pull something from her tote. It was an attractive tote, red and blue with white sailboats sewn onto each side. She freed a polished mahogany box and handed it to me. “My husband, Ragnar, wanted you to have this.”

Instantly I relived Ragnar’s killing—the moment he was shot—the charging animal, all I saw was black. Then the pain. I leaned on my good leg and clumsily accepted the beautiful box. “Mind if I open it?” I asked.

“No...please do.”

I snapped the brass locks and opened the lid. Bedded within the green velvet and polished trim sat a custom-engraved Smith and Wesson .50-caliber Magnum handgun, one of the most powerful handguns on earth.

I lifted the piece from its cradle. Due to its recoil, I knew super-magnums weren’t for typical sportsmen. It was a serious weapon designed for serious encounters—of the deadly kind.

“My husband had this gun engraved for you before you ever set foot on the African continent,” she said, as she removed her gloves. “I also have one for Mr. Broberg. How can I reach him?”

I hefted the piece, marveling at fifteen inches of glistening scrollwork and intricate design. “It’s gorgeous...Broberg?” I replied, while staring at the piece. “He’s a tough cat to get a hold of but I can give you his number.”

“Oh, I’d prefer not to call,” she insisted.

“I could get it to him, if you wish.”

She shook her head quickly. “Ragnar wouldn’t approve. No...I have to see Mr. Broberg in person.”

I thought for a moment. “Let me call him and arrange something for today.”

“I can’t. However I will leave you my number...but before I leave, I must tell you that my husband—” her voice broke, making her swallow. “Ragnar thought much of you. I understand you once saved him from a crocodile.” With her voice, she said one thing, but I read something else in her eyes.

“Oh...” I replied, trying to show humility. “I just shot and hoped for the best. I would have wrestled the reptile with my bare hands if it meant saving a life.”

Tora looked at me. “You’re a rarity, Mr. Rippinger.” Her eyes sparkled.

I smiled and went back to the gun.

“He had it engraved in Italy,” she continued. “It was late in coming otherwise, my husband would have presented it to you before...” she paused and tried to contain herself.

“Before...now.”

Concerning Ragnar's death, I offered my condolences. Tora thanked me and tried to remain strong. "He was shot in cold blood," she asserted. "They've recovered the bullet."

"That's what I heard," I replied quietly. "A thirty caliber?"

"Yes...that sounds right...something shot from an obsolete British military rifle." She leaned on a kitchen chair for support. "Currently the authorities are trying to link the bullet to potential suspects, namely poachers. Consequently, the killer may never be found."

None of this was news to me. Hank Barlow, Jumapili's Lodge Manager, had kept me abreast through the investigation. Still, I made sport of churning every detail, from every possible angle. It helped me assemble a more complete profile of what transpired. Perhaps once my leg healed I might return to Africa and join in the investigation, if it wasn't solved by then.

Tora straightened up. "I must leave," she said, motioning toward the front door.

"Excuse me," I said, laying down the gun and rising from the table. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Why, sure," she said, as she pulled her leather gloves back on.

"Do you have a gun permit?"

"Permit, schmermit." In a huff, she looked away. "I carry what I carry."

"Well...New York law will nail you if you don't possess a gun permit and have handguns like these hanging around."

"Mr. Rippinger," she began, sounding like an old schoolmarm. Obviously she was agitated by my question. "Let me tell you something. Screw them!" She collected herself and quietly spoke. "I know people. Let them try to nail me."

"Please don't think me ungracious or unappreciative. I'm just trying to protect you."

"My dear man, do not mistake my kindness for weakness." Then she clutched my hand. She had one heck of a grip. She lightened up. "I'm not angry with you. I'm long over losing Ragnar. Someone's responsible for this." She turned abruptly and made for the front door. Scrambling for my crutches, I hopped behind in pursuit.

"Let me get that," I said, seeing her turn the brass doorknob.

She backed off and waited. Once there, I opened the front door. She looked at the Mercedes and then turned to me. "By the way...when you're healed and able to get about, come visit me in the Hamptons. We have a nice place on the water. Ragnar would have liked that." With a serious gaze, she looked beyond me to the worn carpeting. "Its peaceful there...walk the beach, do some swimming, maybe a little fishing. Relax. Escape the rat race."

"The Hamptons?" I said. "Hasn't there been some arson going on out there?"

"Oh yes. I'd say that someone has it in for the commercial fishermen...twice it's happened. Valentine's Day and again on Saint Paddy's."

I looked down at her fine leather-riding boots. "Holiday terror...what a deal," I replied. She stood quietly and peered at the winter sky. I watched steam puff out of the idling Mercedes tailpipe and muttered, "The Hamptons, huh?" Feeling a bit uneasy about it, my therapy was going well and by Memorial Day, two months away, the doctor said I should be off the crutches.

She shoved her hand into her coat pocket. "Here's my number," she said, handing me a light green business card.

"Never been east of Mineola, but sure," I said, taking the card. It was a Southern Cross card, the company Ragnar ran. "I think I might like that."

"Splendid." She cracked the storm door wide open. "I'll email you directions. May is delightful...it's a summer place, you know."

I had no idea what a summer place was, but I knew that we were losing a lot of heat through the open door.

"And that..." she nodded back to the house. "We don't need guns in the Hamptons. Don't bother bringing one."

I remembered the proud piece sitting on the kitchen table. I always traveled with a gun. It was habitual.

"It would be nice to get away from the smell of gunpowder," I joked as I looked her in the eyes. I didn't think she believed me.

"Keep me posted," she said with authority as she walked onto the stoop. Still holding the door, she said, "You must meet Ray. I just have him for the day. He's Vice President of Security for Southern Cross. He's in charge of investigating Ragnar's murder."

Together, as we sauntered down the cracked, and in some places icy, concrete walkway toward the street, I recalled being interviewed once by someone other than Ray regarding Ragnar's death. After all, as close as I was to Ragnar, the bullet could just as easily been intended for me.

Before she got into the car, she slapped another pocket of her long leather coat and pulled out a decorative silver box. From it, she pulled a cigarette and a lighter. Peeking at Ray, she said, "Excuse me. I've got to have one of these." She pulled the cig to her lips and lit it with a gold lighter. "I'm looking at a trip to mid-town and then three hours more back to the Hamptons, if we're lucky. Too long without a good smoke."

She waved for Ray to come out of the car.

I looked at her lighter. "Is that a Dunhill?"

"It is."

"Ah...James Bond," I said, as Ray approached us.

"Very observant," she replied, after taking a long deep drag.

"Back in Africa, Hank Barlow also had one," I said.

She shot me a crazy look. “Barlow? I should know...I gave that to him.”

I thought for a moment and looked at Ray. His jet-black hair overshadowed his large nose. “Hank said his father gave it to him,” I said to Tora.

“His father. Huh!” she exclaimed. She tapped the ashes off the tip of her butt. “He lied.”

Short of words, I decided to drop the subject. She wasn’t through. “I gave it to him years ago, while on the Serengeti.” She exhaled sharply and made a disturbed face. “Barlow...figures.” She looked at Ray. “This here is Ray Constellioni. Not only does he work for Southern Cross, he’s a dandy chauffeur.”

He shook my hand and said, “I’ve heard your name, nice to meet you.”

I was freezing but I had to ask, “Anything new regarding Ragnar’s death?”

He tightened his lips and shook his head. “No leads. They’re running ballistics on the bullet they found in the tree he was standing next to. Work backwards from there.”

“Based on how the Cape was shot, it had to have been a smaller caliber,” I said.

He agreed. “Hopefully we’ll know more soon.”

Tora finished her cigarette and crushed the burnt stub against the rear tire. “Ready?” she said, as she got into the car. Ray and I shook hands again and he left for the driver’s seat. She put the window down. “I’ll expect you mid-May,” she said. Then she put the window up and didn’t look back. The Mercedes sped off, bound for somewhere in the Big Apple.

## CHAPTER 2

### Broberg

I tried Dick Broberg's number. As usual, there was no answer so I left another mundane message. Never knowing when he'd return my call, or just phone in out of the blue claiming he never got my message, I waited for his response. Then, a few weeks later, he stopped by with a box of bakery donuts. He was always good for a dozen. He knew my mom liked them. So did he.

"So chief," he began, settling into a kitchen seat. "How goes the healing?"

"Five weeks," I replied. "Then it's goodbye crutches."

"Then what?" he asked. "Another camping trip? You and me?"

"Not yet," I said. "Besides, I don't need another Allagash adventure."

Hearing Broberg's voice, Mom walked down the stairs and into the kitchen. After a few hugs, she made a pot of coffee.

"What's that?" Broberg asked, seeing the big Smith and Wesson in the open case sitting on a table under the dining room window. He rose and went over to check it out. "What the—" he said, as he hovered over it. "Mind if I?" he asked, with boyish enthusiasm.

"Go right ahead," I said.

Broberg hoisted the big iron and took aim out the window. Then he popped the cylinder and tried the ejector. He punched the cylinder back into the frame and took aim again. "Sweet!" he exclaimed, as he studied the engraving. "Fifty caliber...my, oh, my."

"Like it?" I asked.

"Love it! It's beautiful. Where'd you get it and how much?"

"Free."

His head popped up as though launched on a coiled spring. "Free...?"

"Yeah, and the best part is..." I waited.

"Go on..."

"You can have one too."

He shot me a disbelieving look and re-aimed at the gun. "Yeah right," he joked. "This thing's gotta be worth ten grand." He aimed the hog leg at an imaginary target. "And...it's all pimped-out...I dig it. I'd like to yank this thing out on some of the creeps hustling Flatbush Avenue." He aimed again and howled at his own statement. "Hey, I got a new ride. Check it out, got a raise."

I made my way to the living room window. "A yellow Corvette...nice."

“Oh yeah,” he said, “but it’s not as pimped out as this sweetheart.”

“It was a gift,” I said.

“This was a gift?”

“From Ragnar Kasan.”

He dropped the gun like a dead weight along the side of his leg. “No way.”

“His wife, Tora, dropped it off about three weeks ago. I tried to call to tell you but as usual, you didn’t answer. I left a message.”

“Never got it,” he replied, shaking his head. He brought the gun up again and aimed it at my neighbor’s bedroom window.

“She said Ragnar commissioned to have two guns dolled up for us once he found out we had recovered his diamonds.”

“Before you went to Africa?”

I nodded. “She has an identical piece for you.”

Broberg studied the business end of the Smith and blew imaginary smoke away from the hole. Then he shook his head slowly and looked at me. “Wow. We don’t get many thank-yous like that at the bureau.” Then he laughed. “Is she licensed to carry?”

“I have no idea...I didn’t push it.”

He shook his head again. “Where is she at...the Upper West Side?”

“The Hamptons.”

“The Hamptons—” he repeated, as he placed the piece back into its presentation case. “Never been there. It’s way out east, right? Past Freeport...take the Sunrise Highway?”

“I guess. It’s Oz to me, but it would be worth the ride just to claim your gift.”

“Definitely. When?”

Feeling my chest tighten, I took a seat at the kitchen table. “She’s invited me out to her place to recuperate. So I suppose anytime, though I might need more time here before venturing on any long rides.” Mom came over and placed her hand on my shoulder.

“Well,” Broberg began. “I’m up for a bunch of time off. I wouldn’t mind exploring that place and seeing what all the fuss is about. Been hearing about it for years.”

I went for a donut. “Yeah...I’ve sure heard a lot, too,” I said. “Probably burn through cash real quick.”

Broberg shrugged. “Maybe, but hey...I hear the fishing’s dynamite out there. Bluefish, bass...even shark.”

He read my mind.

During recuperation, I rarely left home. Slowly rebuilding my body, working out with weights, doing calisthenics, and taking short walks, my leg was coming along nicely. Slowing down also

gave me more opportunities to communicate periodically with Madeline, my lost love that was supposedly working on her master's thesis in Glacier National Park. Still engrossed in predator research, she texted that she planned to visit me that summer. I didn't believe any of it.

I also considered my future. I had three opportunities on the table. I could return to the Department of Interior as a U.S. Marshal, work for Broberg's boss at the FBI, or accept a regional position in security for Southern Cross, the owner of Jumapili Lodge and various diamond and gem mines scattered across the southern hemisphere. Of the group, I preferred Southern Cross for the bonus potential, but the spiritual encounters I had experienced in Maine and Africa were nagging at me like hot poker. I had to figure out what was stalking me and why. Meanwhile, since Tora's visit, someone had gone on a killing rampage in the Hamptons.

On April Fools Day, a lobsterman had been murdered, his head and parts of his body stuffed into his own lobster trap and thrown back in to Block Island Sound. Then, three weeks later on Earth Day, a surf fisherman was shot along a remote stretch of the Atlantic in Montauk.

Then, a third shooting occurred on Mother's Day, a week before I was thinking of leaving for Tora's place. It was another lobsterman shot in the waters south of a place called Great Gull Island. Working alone at night, he was found alive by another lobsterman, but died while waiting for a Coast Guard helicopter.

It was nightly news, the Hamptonites screaming for someone to salvage the summer. All the heavies were involved—Homeland Security, the Coast Guard, the FBI, state and local enforcement agencies and the law enforcement arm of the National Marine Fisheries Service, otherwise known as NMFS, the lot of them crawling all over Long Island's South Fork searching for clues. Thankfully I hadn't heard from my boss, Michael Righetti, assistant director of investigations in the U.S. Marshal's D.C. office. I told him my leg wouldn't be healed until Labor Day.

Two weeks later I was walking strong, free of crutches. Hearing less about the investigation into Ragnar's death helped clear my mind, and that was a good thing. My mind was on Long Island's white sand and green frothy surf. It was time to consider Tora's offer. I emailed her and told her it was time to visit. Almost immediately, she emailed directions back to me including a short list of what to bring. She wrote that I should drive out early on a weekday and reiterated that guns weren't welcome in her home, but that Mr. Broberg was. She didn't know there was little difference.

But how ironic, I thought. Here she was sitting on Ragnar's incredible personal arsenal, the one he bragged about, plus warding over Broberg's engraved Smith and Wesson magnum, and she's anti-gun.

I did some beachwear shopping and packed according to her directions. Then, before closing my suitcase, I threw in four boxes of .45 ACP ammunition and my Sig P220.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **Springs**

In mid-May I loaded up and climbed behind the wheel of my newly purchased, but used, blue Toyota pickup. The time had come to head “out east,” to the Hamptons. Still a bit stiff, I followed my GPS into the blinding sun, enduring the pounding of Suffolk County’s concrete roadway joints that slapped at the bottom of my tires all the way to Hampton Bays.

Coming out of the Pine Barrens, I hit an enormous traffic backup. Idling away, creeping for mile upon mile, the snarl continued without end. Occasionally an emergency vehicle would pass by, its lights blinking as it traveled along the shoulder. About an hour later, I could see far enough over traffic that the police had barricaded the highway, just before a bridge. A sign in the distance read Shinnecock Canal.

Foot by foot, the line of traffic snaked ahead until it was my time to be inspected. I dropped my window, flashed by badge and shot the trooper a big “Howdy”.

“Here to jump in, huh?” he asked without making eye contact. He reviewed my credentials.

“Ah...yeah. Whatever it takes,” I replied, thinking the checkpoint must be related to the recent rash of killings and arson.

He indicated I could proceed so I laid it down, turned on whatever local radio I could find and enjoyed the smoother asphalt of Southampton’s vineyard country. Both FM and AM radio bands proved worthless so I turned them off.

When I merged onto Montauk Highway, things slowed dramatically. After a bagel and coffee, I entered the historic town of East Hampton. Passing an attractive pond, I crept with traffic down a gorgeous tree-lined portion of the highway through downtown.

East Hampton was more beautiful than I’d imagined, a place for the wealthy and well heeled. Keeping my eyes peeled for a weathered cedar-shake windmill, I found it and veered left

off Montauk Highway and “b'low” the railroad bridge, as she so eloquently put it. I continued and at a second fork, stayed right. One dead-end on the water and fifteen minutes later, I found King’s Point Road. Turning left, I ended up at a private marina. The gate was up so I pulled in. A guy on a golf cart hurried over. Long-faced and tan, he didn’t look too happy. I guessed he didn’t recognize me.

Before he could open his mouth I turned around, drove back down the same road and found the right black mailbox on a wooden post bearing her address. Pulling in among a lush collection of foliage and flowers, the yellow pea gravel crunched under my tires as I pulled up behind a red Porsche 911. I got out of the pickup and immediately felt the wind. In front of me was a fenced and healthy garden.

In an African-inspired summer dress, bold in orange, olive and purple tribal patterns, she opened and closed a sliding glass door, waved and walked down a weathered gray wooden flight of stairs to meet me. “It’s about time,” Tora said, followed with a hug. “Welcome to our *castaway* beach home.”

“Nice ride,” I said, admiring the car in her driveway.

“Nothing fancy for out here, but it’s a nice little car for a girl. I need a larger automatic so...I’ll probably sell it. Ragnar loved it. Said it made the drive to the store much more pleasurable.”

Immediately a big fluffy orange and white cat slid out from some shrubs and greeted me. “She likes you,” Tora said, her exotic costume blending in well in her windswept and sandy environ. “That’s a good sign.”

We walked up the stairs and onto a rear deck. She opened a sliding door and led me across the well-appointed living room to the other side of the house. She pointed at the front set of sliding doors. “Out there is Gardiners Bay. Something to drink?”

I scanned the blue expanse of Gardiners Bay. “Water would be fine.”

Envisioning a beach house on the Atlantic, I was surprised to see a calm body of water as large as the bay. Her deck, her setting above the bay was a glorious cliff-side perch. It was grander than I could have ever imagined.

“Beautiful isn’t it?” she asked.

I nodded.

Hearing the clink of glasses, I noticed she was pouring two glasses of white wine. I wondered whom the other glass was for. Ambling over, she handed me a glass and said, “Let’s go out and enjoy the bay with some quality vino...I like it best that way.”

She led me down a gravel path toward another deck perched over a cliff. “How was the drive?”

Smelling the salty air mixed with something strange, my senses became overloaded, not allowing me to fully absorb everything at once. “I hit a checkpoint before the Shinnecock Bridge.”

She sipped her wine, looked at the water and brought her hand up over her eyebrows. “We all fought against it but were usurped by the know-it-alls. For about a week they’ve had checkpoints at Shinnecock and Sag Harbor. Sorry I didn’t mention that before you left.”

I tried the wine. Though it was still morning, somehow she was right. It tasted fantastic while overlooking the bay. I watched the seagulls fly above and listened to them caw, one chasing the other. “Looks like they might be preparing a checkpoint just after the windmill,” I said.

“Ai yai,” she said, shaking her head. “It’s too much already. They want to checkpoint everywhere, Bridgehampton, Springs, and at Hither Hills State Park. They’ll have us all tangled up.”

She reached into her pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. “Cain, I’m scared.” She looked back over her shoulder at nothing. “There’s no peace. Nobody knows what’s going on,” she said, pinching a cigarette from the box. “Let’s see...fires...east of here except the fire at Three Mile Harbor.” She stopped and looked at me. “That’s just a few miles west of here,” she said, placing the cig in her mouth and lifting her lighter. “Then there was the murder, the poor lobsterman that got killed on the other side of Gardiners.”

“Is that Gardiners Island?” I asked, nodding to the east at a long strip of land.

She lit the fag, spoiling whatever scent I’d been enjoying wafting off the bay. She pointed, with the cigarette butt between her fingers, toward a large body of land across the water. “Yeah, all private. Then someone shot the man surf fishing east of here, at Montauk. And last week...you heard?”

“It’s all over the news.”

“Now, another lobsterman went down.”

“Where?”

“Again on Block Island Sound, over on the other side of Gardiners, closer to Connecticut.” She puffed her cigarette. “Yeah...that’s Gardiners. See the Manor House and the windmill?”

Feeling the wine, I noticed them both.

“When its still, the waters glassy calm early in the morning, I love the sound of motorboats on the bay. Seeing the sailboats, sometimes schools of porpoises, seagulls...”

She went back to her cigarette.

“How could things go wrong here?” I asked. “What’s the argument?”

“Rights,” she said, smoke pouring from her nostrils. “Who gets the lobsters, who gets the fish, downtown it’s who gets the parking space.”

“They haven’t started shooting up East Hampton yet.”

“It’s not the house or the scenery that makes a place,” she said.

“What is it?” I noticed a swimming raft anchored off her beach. It was all so...perfect. “But this place...I don’t understand the violence.”

“What is it?” Under her breath she laughed. “Places are only as beautiful as the people who live there, how they treat others what they give back, never forget that.” She coughed and pounded her chest. Another drag. “So, how’s the leg?”

“Like it never happened,” I replied meandering through Tora’s collection of wooden Adirondack chairs. I chose a light green one and stretched out. Cigarette stains everywhere, even a few crushed butts. How could such an attractive and smart woman like her become addicted to nicotine?

“Come on...I don’t fool easy,” she said, puffing out through her curled lips. “You’ll need therapy.”

I sipped my wine and smiled at her. “What do you recommend?”

“Walk the beach and search for Indian paint pots.”

“Paint pots? What do they look like?”

She placed the cigarette in her lips and with both hands formed a rough rectangle. “Oh, they’re so big, smallish dark red rocks with a hole...a cavity. Wet your finger and stick it in. Slosh it around and then paint the back of your other hand.”

“And the Indians used them?”

“I don’t know about that for sure, but it’s fun...and see if you can find the big mica rock. It’s black, white and shiny.”

“That way?” I asked, pointing down the beach toward Gardiners Island.

She nodded in the opposite direction. “Best to start down at the public beach. Go through the gate and visit the marina. The channel connects Gardiners Bay with Hog Creek. The beach is on the other side”

I looked down the beach and saw a line of rocks leading into the water. “So, I’ll come out near those rocks.”

She nodded. “The jetty, yeah...use this place, but I have to warn you. We’ve got a lot of crabby people living out here. Some think they own all the way to Rhode Island. They don’t. Try to stay within the seaweed line.”

“Marking high tide?”

“You got it.”

Then I heard it. From across the bay, the thumping or powerful rotors. Looking to my left, I saw a chopper coming right at us.

“Momma Louise,” she said. “Here comes another one.”

The chopper was flying low, awfully low, then just before reaching the beach, in front of us, it banked hard toward Gardiners Island and continued around the bend, out of sight.

“Helicopters buzzing the beaches...they were supposed to stop that nonsense,” she said, flicking ashes onto the shiny green leaves of poison ivy surrounding her deck. She pointed to some land left of us. “Too many commercial flights coming in, mainly from over there.”

“Is that Connecticut?” I asked pointing in the direction where the helicopter seemed to originate.

“Shelter Island, dear. Across the bay, about five miles, is the North Fork. Beyond those sailboats out there...the ones way out, way in the distance past them is the Connecticut shore.”

The lands and water were beautifully arranged. Gardiners Bay stretched out in front of us, a saltwater nirvana with islands surrounding us on each side and all styles of boats to watch, and a beach to enjoy. How could violence and hate penetrate such beauty? I was aching to get involved, to join the forces already mobilized to solve and prevent another occurrence. But I was on sabbatical — besides my expertise was in the wilderness, not in some plush resort teeming with salt water.

“Let’s go in,” she said, leaving the deck. She rubbed her cigarette in the sand. “It’s just that the constant aerial surveillance...the pounding noise, it’s really rubbing salt into the wound around here, and it’s not just them. All I see are Coast Guard ships and the town police boat. Everyone’s bivouacking the Hamptons except the French Foreign Legion and maybe they’re here too. It’s driving me to the brink. I’d love to see them close the airport down, kaput. End of story.”

“Aren’t they justified?”

“Look honey, this aerial assault has been going on for years. Now? Sure, I guess they’re justified.” She looked back over the bay and paused. “Five incidents. We have an arsonist and a serial killer on the loose.”

We walked into her house. This time, I looked around. “I collect crystals from all over the world,” she said, waving her hand around the room. “Ragnar would often surprise me with them. Here are a few.” She led me to a glass-faced cabinet under a stairway. “They create positive energy.”

Meandering past the crystals toward a chart of the bay, I studied it while Tora disappeared. Noting the lay of the sea, I was able to grasp Gardiners and Shelter Island. Then I saw Connecticut. Noting depths and how shallow the bay was, I wondered if Gardiners could ever become unnavigable.

Within five minutes she was back, hair combed and chipper.

“Is tourism down?” I asked.

“They say it is but I don’t see it. The place is jam packed every day. Weekends? Forget it. Some more wine?”

“No thanks,” I replied, studying the nautical chart.

She moseyed to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. “If you need a landline phone, we keep one for emergencies. It’s over there.”

Her antique orange rotary phone reminded me of the bat phone.

“And here,” she said, pointing to a large black and stainless steel machine, “is Ragnar’s famous million dollar coffee machine, shipped in from Italy. It’ll make anything you want... a four-shot Grande Americano? No problem.”

She and Ragnar had been living the dream. I had to ask. “How’d you find this place?”

She rinsed her hands off and wiped them on a dishrag. “I’ve been coming here so long, I could fall asleep at the wheel and my car would know how to get me here.”

“How far back?”

She poured herself another glass of wine and offered me some. I declined. Then she said, “We used to rent out here every summer. The trip was never good, but gradually it got worse.”

“How so?”

“Too much time. Traffic. Weekenders, it was murder... how about some coffee?”

“Sounds good,” I said.

“Latte?”

“Sure.”

“Flavor?”

“Ah...caramel.”

As she put the concoction together, she continued. “So, we vacationed out here for years. Long before the money and crowds. Before the Sunrise extension. Stayed in some cramped cabins on Montauk Highway. My mother was a girl scout. She told us wonderful stories about her time at Camp Blue Bay. It’s on the other side of Hog Creek. Almost two hundred acres.”

“Two hundred acres in the Hamptons?”

“Yeah...can you believe it? On the water, too.”

“Must be valuable.”

To the sound of the machine making great sucking sounds, she fiddled around the sink area, wiping up something. “The same people who control Gardiners are after it. Been so for years.” She began coughing and filled a glass with water. “Where was I?”

“Scout camp.”

“Yeah...Blue Bay. So, every year, she’d drag us to the old girl scout camp to walk around. Maybe sit in on a campfire, cook marshmallows and on the way home, stop at Tabors and bring some seafood home. Gradually, I fell in love with the area, the bay, and the history. Later, when

it became apparent that Ragnar needed a peaceful place to come home to, we thought of Springs.”

“What a location.”

“Whipped cream?” she asked, prepping my latte.

“No thanks. Straight is great.”

She smiled and sat on a couch. “Like I was saying, this place has its drawbacks. Great for socializing, holds its value, and the view is incomparable. Still, the bank’s eroding, we lose beach every year, the neighbors are somewhat flaky and we might need a seawall. I used to hold dinner parties. No more. Parking’s too tough.”

I looked around at the mounted deep-sea billfish, fine art, and nautical antiques. “I love your place.”

She reclined slightly. “It was a dump when we bought it. But the location! We bought it, tore the place down, and sunk a fortune into what it is today. I used to work for a book publisher, copywriting, editing, and finally as an independent agent. Once the digital thing took off, traditional publishing lost its soul. I wasn’t about to change. I just quit and came here. I’ll never leave, besides, you can’t do it again like we did.”

“Don’t tell me,” I said, working on my latte. “Regulations.”

“Some washed up celebrity down towards Fireplace...she needs to rebuild the bluff in front of her place. It’s eroding, washing into the bay. Soon her deck’s going to drop onto the beach.”

“Can’t she afford to fix it?”

“She’s been denied permits. I know another couple. They’ve been trying to upgrade her restaurant irrigation system. The government is requiring an...environmental impact study...no...not a study. A statement.”

“Whoa...an EIS?”

“Let me tell you, buster. And to think Springs isn’t even considered truly *The Hamptons*.”

My latte nearly finished, I was thinking about another. “I’ve seen the same monstrosity out west. Too many permits and too much cost.”

“Don’t get me wrong, Cain,” she said. “I see the Hampton’s as a symbol of what life can be for those who dream, and work hard, and strive to squeeze the most out of their God-given talent.”

“It doesn’t take talent to spend and borrow your way into everything you want,” I said. “You don’t think that a place can get too rich?”

“Too rich? Hah! Where’d you read that baloney,” she said, sitting up. She went for another cigarette and lit it with her gold lighter. “Wealth isn’t evil, it’s greed...the lust for more.” She took a long drag, exhaled and knocked off some ashes into a seashell. “I’m not particularly

religious but I believe we're tasked with giving freely to those without. That's what Ragnar and I did for years, and what I'll continue doing."

Tora was getting hot. It was time to change the subject. "You ever see a crime spree like the one going on now?"

"Never, except in Manhattan."

"Any ideas?"

"They're calling him '*Calendar Man*'. The law recommends that everyone have a buddy when fishing or beachcombing."

"Even here?"

She shrugged and gave a pained look. "I don't listen to them."

"What about the latest lobsterman?"

"Shot. Another New Yorker, too. He was still alive when they found him. According to the paper, he said he saw a flash and that was it. Gone."

"So, he was shot at night?"

"On the water."

*Calendar Man*, I thought. The killer, or killers seem to hit only on holidays, but they missed one. "What about Easter?" I asked. "Did anything happen?"

She held her cigarette between two fingers and waved it in the air, ashes dropping, smoke swirling and dissipating into the salty air. "Nothing."

"Why not, do you think?"

She got up and refilled her glass with water. "Let's not wish for things we don't want."

"Yeah...sure, but could it be that whoever it is doesn't consider Easter a holiday?"

She returned and sat down. "Very interesting observation, Mr. Rippinger. So you're saying that the criminals might not celebrate the resurrection. That right?"

"Possibly, but I wasn't thinking that deep."

"Okay," she said. "A non-Christian."

"That's what I'm thinking."

## CHAPTER 4

### Learning More

Tora said she needed a rest so I unpacked my luggage and decided to explore.

Walking the same road I'd driven earlier that day, I headed for the marina. After stopping at the boat ramp I visited a small, but adequate, floating dock. There wasn't a boat over twenty-six feet. No fuel depot, no bait shack, not even a Coke machine, just a sweet, low-keyed, mom and pop operation. With an eye peeled for the guy on a golf cart, I left the floating dock and sauntered along the blackened pier. Surveying the backwaters of Hog Creek, I walked the pier to the channel leading out to Gardiners Bay. Engulfed in the strong smell of creosote and the cries from squabbling seagulls battling overhead, I watched a sailboat leave the marina. Everybody on board waved at me as the boat entered the open water of Gardiners Bay. How could anything go wrong at this place?

I came upon the modest rock jetty I'd seen from Tora's deck. It reached out a hundred feet into the bay. Off to its right side was the public beach. To the sound of lightly crashing waves angling in to tickle the shore, a few sunbathers were lying on towels, some reading and other absorbing rays. Beyond the beach was a line of what looked like precast concrete foundations. A low-budget jetty, I assumed, they were ugly enough to corrupt the beach's appearance. Clueless as to where Tora's beach was, I looked beyond the concrete piers, toward Gardiners Island, and saw a bulkhead protecting a point of land. The dark timbered wall marked the limit of what I could see of the beach.

Panning the bay, the view remained stupendous as land, sea and sky blended into one colossal blue and green tapestry. Distant lands framed the bay, each exhibiting bold imposing yellow and brown banks lined with trees. Across the bay there was more land, and beyond through a gap I could see Connecticut. Having studied the chart on Tora's wall, the line delineating the north fork of Long Island from the Connecticut coast had become clear, though it mattered little. As I surveyed these great distances, I was only able to decipher landforms in two dimensions, and even that faded to a dark outline. Yearning for more, I was denied views of harbors and bays hidden within the shoreline, and I couldn't imagine what the bottom must have looked like as it plummeted away.

While standing at the foot of the jetty, a second boat made its way through the channel. I followed it as it powered up and sped away, destined for the deeper water. As it curved on course for Plum Island, I caught the image of an attractive, raven-haired woman fishing off the end of the jetty. She wasn't there before. *How'd she pass me and get to the end of the jetty?*

She wore tan shorts, her pink top loose and fluttering lightly in the breeze, with her long dark hair corralled in a ponytail. She turned toward me while still extending the tip of her pole

out and over the jetty. I thought I saw her smile. That was all I needed. I processed her friendly gesture as an invitation to mingle.

Making my way toward her slowly, boulder by boulder, I became excited, eagerly anticipating my first encounter with a Hamptons princess. Careful not to slip or land awkwardly while jumping from point to point, I scrutinized each foothold realizing that one unfortunate step could catapult me into the drink, or worse, make me crash down onto the razor sharp barnacle-laden rocks below.

About a third of the way to her, I looked up and she was gone. I scanned the jetty and the beach. Then I turned back and surveyed the channel. I could only see salt grass, sand, and a few older women. The dark-haired beauty had vanished. Perturbed, I left the jetty and headed for the beach. Scooting over a sandy bluff to see the parking area, I spent another ten minutes searching. Nothing.

Dismayed and haunted at the same time, I began walking the waterline toward Tora's place. With Indian paint pots and the mysterious mica rock on my mind, I staying within the high tide mark with no idea how I was supposed to find anything without encroaching on someone's hallowed beach. Figuring I could talk my way out of any altercation, I left the tide line and proceeded over a mound of washed-up seaweed and on to the beach. Catching the eyes of a few people who suddenly appeared on top of the cliff above me, I waved at them. They returned the favor.

Making my way down the beach, I reached the protruding bulkhead. It was a sorry looking thing, slowly collapsing back into the bay. I decided to turn back, abandoning any thoughts of finding paint pots or the mica rock. Remembering how Tora's deck was positioned above the beach, I took a chance and climbed what I thought might have been her weather-beaten staircase. Fortunately, it was. Walking up to the house and through a sliding door, I smelled fish.

"Hey," she said, from the kitchen, pots simmering and shaking. "Ericson, my local fishing guy came by with some fresh bluefish and bass. I hope you like seafood."

"Love it," I said, as I felt my sunburned and salty face begin to tighten. "Recreational or commercial?"

"Both...make sure you shake the sand off your shoes," she said, as she bent down and placed a pan covered with aluminum foil into the oven. She closed the oven door and wiped her hands. "Ericson? His peers jokingly refer to him as a 'know-it-all'. A title unfairly bestowed by supposed comrades who are probably less competent or flat-out envious."

"People can be like that."

"Sure can. Say...around here you knew you made it as a fisherman when you walk into Harbor Bait and Tackle and old Rusty teased you a bit before asking where to hook some fatboys."

“Fatboys?”

“Big striped bass. Incidentally, he said he’d take you and Ray fishing tomorrow night if you’d like. So how was the walk?”

“Ah...yeah, wonderful,” I replied, reticent to mention the woman on the jetty. “No paint pots or mica rock.”

“Dinner in half an hour.”

“Should I coordinate with Ericson? Maybe give him a call?”

She messed around over the oven. “Al Ericson is the least unhappy man I know. Don’t worry about it...he’ll pick you up.”

“Can I run to town and get anything?” I hoped she’d decline.

“Nothing honey...you just stay here and relax.”

By then the sun was hanging low in the western sky. I left for the deck overlooking the bay and sat down. Almost immediately I felt insects getting in my ears and hair. Trying to swat them, I gave up and went back to the house. “What’s out there?” I asked, scratching at my scalp.

She laughed. “You found the gnats. Terrible aren’t they? They come out this time of the day. That’s why we eat inside.”

After a fabulous meal, I left for my room and showered. After changing clothes and getting some rest time, I sat at a desk and pulled a book on navigation from a nearby shelf. Fascinated, I must have read for an hour when I heard a light tap on the lacquered pine door. “Cain, I go to bed early. Care to chat a bit before I turn in?”

I slapped the book closed and got up.

“I’ll be on the deck,” she said, before I fully opened the door. “The gnats should be gone.” As she walked down the hall she said, “Wine’s on the counter, beer’s in the fridge, and liquor is on the sideboard next to the staircase.”

Eager to imbibe, I made my way to the kitchen. From the refrigerator, I grabbed a local microbrew. Finding a can opener on the counter, I popped the cap and filled a glass.

Outside, I followed a line of small lights illuminating the sandy path to the deck. I pulled up a chair next to her and began to enjoy the beer.

“What did you choose?” she asked.

“Lager,” I replied, secretly toasting the sky. Off to the west, remnants of yellowish-orange light, thrown from the sun, began fading to twilight.

“After Scotch and bourbon,” she said, “Ragnar preferred Stout.”

A light wind was picking up off the bay, recoating my face with layers of salt. Watching lights move across the bay, the humming of marine engines more prominent at night, I was taken at how effectively nightfall on the water cloaks movement on the bay, running lights withstanding.

“Let’s orient you, shall we?” she said. “From here, we used to see three lighthouses. Now there’s only two.” She pointed straight across the bay. “That’s Plum Gut, used to be a red light. Unfortunately, back in the seventies, they changed it to white and to the right of it, there used to be a white light on the western edge of Plum Island. Alas, it’s now gone. Way off to the right, off the north tip of Gardiners, that big bright light is from the lighthouse on Little Gull Island.”

In total enjoyment of this rare and special scene, the beer tasted better than usual. And as we sat, I couldn’t resist the notion that Tora was bothered. That she had something on her mind. Crossing her legs, she slowly said, “Cain.” Then she looked away before returning to face me. “You’re the only one I haven’t spoken to regarding my husband’s death.” She paused. “What happened?”

I worked to collect thoughts I’d tried hard to forget. Weighing my response I replied, “I remember Ragnar was scoping a Cape buffalo that he wanted me to take. We both had our rifles up, ready to fire. I didn’t hear him chamber a round, but I was ready. Then he said something funny, probably trying to put me at ease.”

“What was it?”

“I don’t remember.”

She inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly, as though impatient.

“After that—chaos.” I stopped speaking and tried to recollect that time. The details. Peering across the bay, a white light caught my attention. I began to follow it.

“That’s all?”

I shook my head. “No,” I replied, still watching the distant light. “I saw Ragnar drop his rifle, fly backwards into a tree and then hit the ground. I never heard a shot go off.”

She took a long drag and tapped off the ashes. “That’s what I’ve read. So...nobody fired a gun.”

“Not that I heard.”

“But a bullet seared the back of the buffalo sending it into a rage, right?”

“That’s when it charged.”

She crossed her legs, bouncing one off the other. “So then, this bright...I don’t know...flash...that everybody claims they saw occurred after the shooting.”

“When the buffalo was trying to grind me into the dirt—yeah.”

“Excuse me,” she said, as she left for the house. “Want anything?”

“Some coffee, if it’s made.” I polished off the lager.

Five minutes later she returned, draped in a sweater with a glass of wine. “Be careful,” she said, handing me a mug of coffee. “It’s hot.”

I took a sip of the coffee, feeling its warmth in my hands.

She adjusted her aluminum folding chair and said, “We used to sit like this night after night. Ragnar showering me with stories of the mine and Jumapili. I liked those best. The other locations he worked didn’t have the same grandeur as Africa, nor were they as unpredictable.”

“Ragnar was passionate about the diamond mine.”

“That and eating. He took me to many fine restaurants...had to be top quality, Michelin Starred. And he adored all things British, traditional and accurate, though not necessarily in that order—”

We sat in silence, looking up at the heavens and finding shooting stars. The wind was picking up and a chill was beginning to set in. Then she drained her wine. “Ragnar’s black Ace comb.” She lit another cigarette and inhaled. The orange glowing tip hanging in the air, at odds with the nautical reds, greens and white lights scattered across the bay. “I always smelled his comb.” She faced me as though she had exposed herself and was curious to my reaction. “It was his head...his dander...it reminded me of him.” She stopped, leaned forward and gazed back at me. Her face blank, her lips steady. “Then one day I picked it up and the big end broke off. It just dropped to the floor.” She shook her head. “I smelled it and the odor was gone.”

“It didn’t smell anymore?”

“What was that all about?” She sat back and continued to stare at me, her silhouette backed by the sleek blackness of Gardiners Island. “What was I to take from that?”

Her eyes pierced the dark, raking mine, still searching for an answer, any clue that might explain the meaning behind Ragnar’s broken comb.

She looked across the bay. “...That Ragnar was...perhaps telling me something? That maybe I should go on with my life?” She took a long drag and exhaled. “Some things are better left unknown.”

For a while, we sat in silence.

I watched the red and white lights of a large boat pass by in the dark. “Wonder where that boat’s heading?” I wanted to loosen the mood, turn her on to something else.

“Sag Harbor.”

I followed it until it disappeared around a bend, imagining being on board, turning the wheel, reading charts, and being enamored with the smells and sounds associated with salt-water seamanship. Ever enchanted by the eternal banquet of moving lights, lighthouses and starry skies, I became immersed in it all, listening to the symphony of waves crashing on the shore, an occasional foghorn, and the tear of shifting wind across my ears. Then as I watched the orange tip of her cigarette swing back and forth in the night, I heard her say, “Isn’t that odd?”

She surprised me. “Isn’t what odd?”

“A boat,” she said, “just lingering.” She swung her hand forward toward the bay, a lit cigarette clamped in her fingers. “There.”

“That one?” I asked, referring to a boat bumbling offshore in the dark while feeling ridiculous, as it was the only boat near shore.

The wind had changed, sending smoke from her cigarette back into my face. Angling for cleaner air, I glanced at the boat seeing only a white light. The red and green navigational lights, I reasoned, were hidden, allowing me only to see the stern.

“It only happens at night,” she said. “If it isn’t too foggy, I see the same boat. I swear, sometimes they turn the running lights off. Happens quite often. They must anchor there at night...near the rock.”

“There’s a rock out there?”

“Lionhead Rock, yeah...near the buoy.”

The rock looked to be a quarter mile or more offshore.

We watched the boat float in place. “Maybe they’re night diving. Spearing fish around the rock?” Then the engine kicked in.

“It never stays long and it always appears, suddenly.”

On that second, the boat motored hard, away from shore, speeding northward toward the middle of the bay.

“I watch it always trying to figure out where it goes, but I either lose sight of it or lose interest.” She zipped up her sweatshirt. “I’m cold. Think I’ll go in.” She bundled herself tightly in her sweater. “When can I expect Mr. Broberg to visit for his gift?”

“Dick said he’d be out in a few weeks. He mentioned early June.” I looked at her. “By the way, I’ve been offered a position in security with Southern Cross.”

“Ray hasn’t mentioned it.”

“Have you any thoughts on that?”

“A recent offer?” she asked.

“Ray Constellioni called last week. He said there’s a position for head of security at the diamond mine in the Congo. African management asked him to contact me.”

She pondered for a minute. “Ray’s heading out here again to pick me up. He has to take me into Manhattan.” She became quiet. I waited for her response. “It isn’t like the old days, Cain. Back then, people solved problems and moved on. Today, problems linger...get worse. Now it’s the Ebola thing.” She stood and leaned on the wooden deck hand rail. “I know people who’ve cancelled going to Africa because they can’t get insurance. It’s a shame.” She crushed the tip of her cigarette against a rock on the handrail.

“So, I take that as a thumbs down.”

“I’m not going to beleaguer the point, but I...I had a premonition that someday, Ragnar wouldn’t come home.” Standing straight up and stretching, she peered across the bay. “I’d quietly been preparing. I’d prefer to not wait for your day.” She pulled her sweater tight around

herself. "I'm going in. By the way, be sure to fold your chair up and place it on the grass behind the deck."

"Anywhere?"

She walked toward the house. "Things out here have a tendency to blow away."

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Ray Constellioni**

I awoke to the drone of a motorboat creeping across the bay. Getting out of bed, I walked through the living room to the sliding glass door and watched a low-slung older fishing boat making waves. Between the boat and shore were a large rock and the black buoy. I noticed it was low tide, or I should say...my nose reminded me. To be sure, I looked again. The rock was huge. Why hadn't I noticed it before? Hungry for a hot cup of coffee, I entered the kitchen. On the multi-colored granite counter was a plate. On it rested a serrated knife and a bag of assorted bagels. A note was taped to the bag. It read, 'Cream cheese in the fridge. Scallion/ garden. Coffee ready'. *Just another day in the Hamptons.*

After breakfast, with coffee in hand, I made for the deck. Picking a folding chair up from where I left it the evening before, I unfolded it and sat down. *Great, nice and wet.* Feeling a bit foolish and wet to prove it, I stared again at the rock wondering how I could have missed it yesterday, but more so, what a boat could be doing near it at night. Just then, I heard the metal sliding door slam behind me. It was Tora.

"How'd you sleep?" she asked, pulling up a folding chair. She laid a beach towel on the damp seat and sat down.

After discussing some minor details, I said, "The rock and buoy, I hadn't noticed them before."

She repositioned her chair. "The tide was in then. Lionhead is increasingly going under with the tide. On strong tides, sometimes we don't even see it at low tide." She leaned forward, squinted toward the rock and wrinkled up her nose. "An *unsinkable* boat tore its bottom on it not long ago. Fortunately, the boat stayed afloat. They need to mark it. It's a menace."

“Must be huge underneath.”

“But the buoy is another thing. It’s always there.” She raked me with disbelieving eyes. “What kind of a law enforcement guy are you, not noticing your surroundings?”

She had me. Before I could respond she cut in. “You say you missed it?”

Sitting in wetness was beginning to irritate me. I looked at the buoy. “Totally,” I replied. Then I focused closer, noticing something in white on the side of the buoy. “What’s that white mark?”

“Seagull dung.”

“On the side?”

She squinted at the buoy. “Oh...that’s a number. All buoys have them.”

“Okay...what is it?”

“Thirteen,” she said. “The big unlucky.”

From there Tora told me stories about Ragnar’s swimming exploits out to the Buoy 13, Lionhead Rock, and beyond. Reliving her past, I felt the presence of her husband. Then I heard the sliding door open and close. “Ah,” she said, craning to see. “It’s Ray.” She rose from her chair. “You must have left early.”

“I did,” he said, stepping on to the deck and reaching out to shake my hand. “Traffic was okay but I hit a couple of checkpoints. Any news on the killers?”

“None,” she replied, as she shifted her chair off to the side to make room for him.

As Ray grabbed a folding chair from the lawn, she left for the house and said, “Don’t sit until I get you a towel.”

Ray had buried his Italian red-tinted sunglasses into his thick dark hair, making it resemble a windowed observatory protruding over an evil forest.

However, in person, the big guy seemed more amiable, more relaxed, than when we had met in Queens. Since then, we’d spoken over the phone about my possible employment with Southern Cross. If he really wanted me to work in mine security in the Congo, I expected him to be more amiable.

Tora returned with a towel and a cup of black coffee. Stepping up onto the deck, she handed both to Ray. He laid the towel on his chair and set his coffee on the deck rail. “Uh-oh,” he said, with a snicker, looking down at me. “Bet you’ve got a wet bottom.” Though I was sitting very uncomfortably, I didn’t respond. “Ah well,” Ray said, “soon it will be time for the bathing suits. Then we get wet again.”

“Al Ericson is planning on taking both of you out fishing tonight,” Tora said. She looked at Ray. “Are you ready for that?”

“Yes sir,” he said. “Got everything I need.”

Hearing her house phone go off, Tora left.

Ray slurped his coffee down and asked, "You want to go back to Africa?"

Africa was highest on my list but I wasn't excited about the compensation package I'd been offered. "Possibly," I replied, watching a large craft negotiate Plum Gut. "I still have to sort out things with the Marshal's Service."

"Understood," he said. "How are you liking this place?"

"Never seen anything like it."

"Yeah, it's pretty amazing, except for the killings."

"This...these types of situations are ripe for me. I'd like to get involved but I'd be way out of order."

He leaned forward and looked at me. "Any hunches?"

"I've thought about it, but I have to believe the answer is going to lie with the agencies involved. It's just not our jurisdiction and it's certainly not my time."

That evening, after another wonderful fish dinner, Tora took a walk down the beach while Ray and I waited for Ericson. Getting restless, I saw a fantastic looking chess set sitting on a corner table next to the leather couch that Ray was sitting on. I'd seen the set earlier but had waited for the right time to check it out. I picked up one of the black queens. "Must be ebony."

Ray rubbed his hands. "Chess! Do you play?"

I placed the queen back on the board. "Occasionally."

He sat up and cleared a large picture book off the coffee table. Then he placed the board on it and positioned the white pieces in front of me. "The only thing I like better than coin collecting is playing chess."

"Collect coins?"

"I'm a big numismatic nut. Been collecting for years...your move."

At that moment, I wasn't particularly interested in thinking too hard, let alone getting my britches whacked by a potential future boss.

"C'mon," Ray said. "Ragnar and I used to play all the time. He loved it."

I looked at my watch hoping that Ericson would arrive, like now. After retrieving a kitchen chair, I sat across from him and moved a pawn forward. "So, we're surrounded with mysteries."

"How so?" he asked, countering with a knight.

"Ragnar and now the murders out here." I moved a knight opposite his.

I watched him painfully scrutinize the board. With a quick glance to the kitchen he seemed to look for Tora, though she wasn't in the house. "Well," he drawled, his face glued to the board, "with poachers and such, I fear we may never know, but..." he paused to move a pawn. "Things have settled down some."

"At the diamond mine?" I asked, moving my pawn adjacent to his.

“Since Ragnar’s shooting, I can’t explain it. The locals are still buzzing over the ah...supernatural stuff that went on.” He stopped, gazed at me, and furrowed his brow. Then he snatched my pawn. “But in the Congo?” He arched his eyebrows again and softly fingered the top of a knight. “It’s all quieted down. Stabilized.”

I threatened him with a bishop. “You attribute it to getting rid of those rabble rousers?”

“We think so, at least for now. We need guys like you to help us keep the vermin out.” He brought a second knight into play.

“Have you replaced the weapons that were stolen?”

“We didn’t lose much...some old British Enfields. Must have been seventy years old and a few French rifles, but yeah, we’re replacing everything with para-military weaponry. Most off the black market.”

As bait, I brought my queen out diagonally to the edge of the board. He ignored me and advanced a knight deeper into my territory. “You think they’re dealing with one or more culprits out here?”

Splitting my brain between chess and answering him, I positioned a second bishop to take one of his knights. “I...think they’re dealing with a psychopath.”

“Not two, huh?”

I shook my head.

“Why?”

I thought for a moment. “The trail is too clean. More than one person triples the chances for leaving evidence.”

He moved his knight. “I don’t know, Cain. I think there’s more than one, maybe even a syndicate.”

## CHAPTER 6

### The Race

Before I could respond, I heard footsteps on the stairway leading up to the rear deck. “Must be Ericson,” I said, thankfully. With a knight, I took one of his knights. He wasn’t pleased. There was a knock on the door.

“Come in,” Ray shouted, as he positioned a bishop in line with my king.

I blocked him with a pawn and stood to greet Ericson.

“Pleased to meet ya,” he said, as we shook hands. “Looks like you’re ready to go.” Then he sniffed the air. “Smells like Tora’s been frying bass.”

“Do I need to bring anything?” I asked.

He made a confused face. “Just a strong back and a willingness to learn, but we gotta go. I’m blocking the road.”

“What will we be fishing for?” I asked, as I grabbed my backpack and coat.

“Tonight, we seek the bluefish.”

Al Ericson was a big guy, probably in his mid-fifties. Under his Penn Reel cap he looked to be slightly balding, his face worn from years fishing salt water. Dressed in a heavy sweatshirt and stained jeans, he looked like the real deal. Right off the bat, I took him for a comedian.

Together, Ray and I followed him down the driveway to his rusted out Ford pickup truck. Hooked to the rear was a trailer supporting a center-console style cruiser. It looked to be all of twenty feet long.

“Hop in,” Ericson said. “We’ll leave from Hog Creek.”

At the gate, he slid a magnetic card through a slot and the gate opened. I asked, “You a member?”

He cocked his head and crinkled his nose. “Used to be. Tora gives me a card.”

As the sun dropped over the horizon, we helped Ericson slide his boat off the ramp and into the water. Loaded up, we motored for clear water. Once in the channel, he laid it down good, throwing a rooster tail off the stern and moving us well above the posted speed limit.

Approaching the same jetty where earlier I’d found and lost my Hampton’s princess, we buzzed past an older man who was standing on the corner of bulkhead. Leaving the channel in a sloppy mess, I watched the bow slowly rise as Ericson increased speed when Ray wildly tapped me on the shoulder. Glancing back at him, he motioned for me to look further back toward the old man. The codger seemed livid, shaking his fist and moving along the jetty, as though following us. Ericson had no idea. If he did, he didn’t strike me as someone who cared.

At two-thirds throttle, we were moving fast over the water and headed toward the north tip of Gardiners Island. When he dropped it to full throttle my head snapped back and the wind battered my face, making my eyes tear. Off to the right, high on the darkened bank, I could see Tora's deck and house. The lights were on.

Shouting above the engine, we discussed boats.

"I knew a guy who swore by his Rinker," Ray shouted, unbalanced and wavering as he fought his way forward from the stern up behind Ericson. Still getting splashed, Ray grabbed the rail attached to the center console.

"A what?" Ericson asked, straining to hear over the engine. "A Renken?"

"A Rinker."

Ericson returned a knowing nod and smiled. "Renken's are mick. Never heard of the other." Then he looked at Ray. "You're taking a lot of water, try to lean in."

My phone buzzed. It was my boss, Michael Righetti. I let it go to voice mail.

Speeding into the night, pounding wave after wave, sometimes getting knocked slightly off course, we were collecting plenty of spray. As I watched the looming outline of Gardiners Island change something else caught my eye. It was off the other side of the boat. Jagged and odd I wondered what it was. Being I didn't see a tugboat or anything else around it, it seemed out of place. "That's a huge barge load of rock."

"It's not floating," Ericson said.

"It's not?"

Ericson shook his head. "It's an island... a pile of rubble."

About that time, Ericson slowed and watched his depth finder. With the engine backed off, I still wasn't satisfied. "So, what's with that weird island?"

Unwavering, he followed the profile of the seabed marked across his colorful display. "The Ruins." Then he scanned the heavens. "No moon tonight. The tide will be weaker but we'll still see some action."

We headed toward Little Gull Lighthouse. As we rounded Gardiners Island, we entered a new body of rougher water. To our left, the lights of Connecticut twinkled clear and ahead, I was beginning to make out a line of boats bobbing in the distance. Bracing myself for impact, the bow slammed harder off the waves. By that point, Ray and I were quite wet. Fighting choppy seas, Ericson was at least blessed with a windshield.

Then he brought the boat to a crawl and watched his depth finder. "Someone get ready to drop anchor."

I moved forward and lifted the hinged weight. "Galvanized, eh?"

With all seriousness, he replied, "Don't run it across your fillings."

Holding the anchor off the bow, I looked at him and pondered his statement. *Did he think I'd actually try to bite the anchor?*

"O...kay. Now!" Ericson cried, as he walked forward. "Be careful of the rope. Don't need anyone yanked overboard."

As the anchor dropped down through the inky depths, Ericson held the line loosely, his eyes glued to the coil. Once it hit bottom, he watched the line go taut against the incoming tide. Then he tied it off and cut the engine.

"So how do you know where to go?" I asked.

"The key is decent sonar. Differentiate soft bottoms from hard ones. When you find good bottom structure, mark it on your GPS. Understand the waters, tides, and currents. Use the weather and lastly, rely on your experience."

"Structure?" I asked our host, the acting deep-sea professor.

"Rocks, wrecks, debris and oddities on the bottom attract fish which attract bigger fish which then attracts Al Ericson. Capiche?"

I was beginning to sense that he could catch fish out of my cell phone.

"So, what are we seeing here?" Ray asked, gazing at the bright fish finder screen.

"A gaggle of bluefish," Ericson replied, as he moved to sort through his fishing gear. "Plum Island is back there. Owned by Homeland Security, it's an animal disease center. Wouldn't want to get marooned there. We're in the Race...that big white light? That's Little Gull light. Way off to the southeast, across Block Island Sound is Montauk Point Lighthouse. Blinks every five seconds."

"Why do they call it the Race?" Ray said.

"Big drop offs, huge volumes of water, when the tide changes it becomes a saltwater river. Strong currents literally race through here. Traps tons of baitfish. Great for nailing whatever's chasing after them."

I studied the night, the clear sky full of astronomical bodies. It was easy to see how a murder could happen out here, black everywhere with boats lit up broadcasting *here I am!* And Connecticut was so close. "So, is this where all the trouble is happening?" I asked.

Ericson chose a pole and casted. "You're a fast learner," he said, as he handed Ray the pole. "Must be a mariner in your blood," he clowned. "Move to the bow," he told Ray. "Let it run...then begin reeling in."

I was next. Ericson did the same for me and handed me a pole. "You're fishing mid-boat," he said, waving me off. Lording over us, watching our technique, he moaned, "Don't get them crossed or tangled."

Then he readied his own pole for action. “Yeah, they occurred on moonless nights like this one,” he said, leaning the pole against the transom. He stood tall and stretched one hand out, pointing lazily with his palm down and middle finger barely up, like a limp scarecrow.

I listened to the waves lap off the hull, trying to imagine what he was describing.

“Over there, toward Gardiners...that’s where the lobsterman was shot. Guess there’s some kind of underwater scuba diving park in that vicinity.” He stopped and pointed toward the white light flashing off Montauk Lighthouse. “The remains of the other lobsterman was found in his trap probably two-thirds the distance from here to that lighthouse.”

Then Ericson grabbed his pole, casted off the stern and began working his jig.

Reeling in, feeling nibbles, I asked, “And the torched fishing boat? Was it torched near the lighthouse?”

“Close enough,” he replied. “I’m in! Get the net.” He maneuvered around the boat keeping pressure on the tip of his pole. “Be quick, I’ve got more than one hooked.”

Fighting hard, once the fish saw the bottom of the boat, they went berserk, but it was too late. He brought them to the surface and I was able to net both fish. As he undid the hooks, I asked, “Who do you think is responsible?”

He bled the fish and threw them in the cooler. With his nose crinkled up, he rubbed the sweat off his face. “I don’t know. Those guys from Connecticut are pretty aggressive. I’ve seen it myself.”

“Really? How?”

“Back, oh...ten years, I got an umbrella rig, like that one,” he said, pointing toward the jig hanging off his pole, “tangled up with some guy from over there. There were three of them, teachers from Groton. Big boat. Bigger egos, but we were there first.”

“Here?”

He stabbed his finger toward the Ruins. “Back that way. Anyway, the guy pulled in my jig, waved it at me...kinda like teasing me, and then he cut the surgical tubing off.”

“The plastic streamers?”

“Same thing, then he waved the metal frame at me and yelled, ‘We keep the jig’.”

Ericson re-set his pole and casted. As the rig sunk, he continued. “So, I motored over to their cruiser in a smaller boat, like this one. My friend took the wheel and I pulled onto their boat to get my frame. The guy punches me, so I climb aboard and let him have it. He goes down. Another guy comes at me and I give it to him. The third guy lights up the overhead floods and runs out of the wheelhouse with a long knife. I really took it to him...hit him hard. His eyes rolled back into his head, like garage doors folding up. I call that being ‘lunarized’. I grabbed what was left of my umbrella rig and left. That was that.”

“Any repercussions?”

“Plenty. They got my number and reported me. Had to get a lawyer, the whole bit, but the judge sided with me. Now I look over my back when a boat approaches from over there.” His rod bent. “I’m in, get the net.”

As I worked the net, I asked, “So, you think our perpetrators may be from Connecticut?”

He brought a trio of fish closer to the boat. “Easy cowboy, don’t lose them,” he said. We landed them, Ericson bled them, and he casted again. “You going to fish, or what?” he asked. “Hey Ray, any bites?”

Pelted by a growing easterly wind, I picked up my rod and reeled in. At that moment, I felt a slight rub and then a hard strike. Then another. I was in. A half hour later in water boiling with activity, we limited on bluefish.

After Ray and I traded pulls, hauling in the anchor, I asked Ericson again. “You think our guy, or guys, are from Connecticut?”

“There’s the Orient Point ferry,” he said, looking at a large vessel maneuver a few miles off the starboard side. “But what’s that coming at us?”

Less than ten minutes later, a large white Coast Guard cutter approached us. Pulling broadside, but comfortably away, they lit us up with blinding floodlights. The glare reflecting madly off the waves.

“Any reports of shooting?” someone asked, using an obnoxious megaphone. Shielding their searchlight with a hand over my eyes, I saw nobody on deck, though with as much light as they were shedding on us, I probably couldn’t have anyway.

Ericson responded with a stiff head nod.

“Are you armed or stowing any weapons?” they asked.

Same response.

They killed the floodlights and headed northeast, toward the other boats. “Have a good voyage and travel safely.”

Ericson started the engine. “That’s a first.” At half throttle, he maneuvered the craft back towards Hog Creek. “Probably out of New Haven.” At the wheel he remained silent, seemingly lost in the moment. Then he came to life. “Look, I know a lobsterman in Montauk. A real Bonacker. Sonny Augustino, a paisano. I think their family moved to Springs right after the glacier retreated.”

“He’s Italian?” Ray asked.

“They gotta fish, too,” Ericson replied, as he fed the Evinrude more fuel. “You never heard of mariner sauce?”

“Marinara—” Ray replied.

Recognizing that Ericson and Ray were getting jerky, I asked, “Can I meet Sonny?”

“I’ll call him and see if he’s willing,” Ericson shouted over the engine. “He’s usually a pretty good guy but he’ll nix you if he thinks you’re a stain.” His eyes met mine. “Know what I mean?”

I did, thinking my boss would have a fit if he knew I was engaging without approval.

Ericson nestled into the captain’s chair. “If Sonny agrees, I’ll drive you out to meet him.”

Beyond that, nobody spoke until we reached Hog Creek. Once in the channel with the engine down, I asked, “What’ll you do with the catch?”

Ericson didn’t hesitate. “Early tomorrow, I’ll call a few local chefs eager for a Michelin star. I’ll deliver whole gutted fish to whoever offers a fair cash price.”

“You don’t clean them?”

“They want to see what it is and whether or not it’s fresh.”

“Good money?”

He shrugged. “Strictly cash...good as it gets.”

## CHAPTER 7

### Sonny Augustino

The next day Ericson showed up with a plastic bag full of bluefish fillets.

“How delightful,” Tora said, as he handed it to her.

“Four pounds,” he replied. “There’s more where they came from. Hey,” he said to me.

“Sonny said it’s okay to visit him this morning. Better take it while you can. I’ve got to drop off fish and then we can travel out to Montauk.”

“Let’s go,” I replied.

“Ericson,” Tora said. “Don’t forget the town meeting.”

He was already heading for the door. “When is that?”

“Two days.”

The door slammed. I felt somewhat guilty about leaving Ray behind, but I hadn't seen him that morning. Besides, I wasn't obligated.

He made two stops, dropping off fish at a restaurant in Wainscott and another in Amagansett. Then it was on to Montauk.

Following Montauk Highway east, in contrast to the grandeur of East Hampton, Amagansett struck me as the wanting stepchild—*The Coal-dust Cindy of the Hamptons*, but Montauk, in her raw splendor and drenched in legend and tale, impressed me as a commercial paradise packed with hamburger joints, gift shops and run-of-the mill hotels. In between both towns, stately hardwoods and quaint structures gave way to a wind-beaten sandy landscape punctuated with huge antennas, mounds of salt grass and endless red broken fence lines.

"It must be true that real estate is driven by location because architecturally, there's little to behold along this stretch of the Atlantic."

"Too expensive for me," Ericson said. "Still, it's hard to see these seasonal cracker boxes selling at the prices as advertised. I wonder if our killer lives nearby?"

Just a few miles short of the famed lighthouse, he turned onto East Lake Drive. Veering around a jogger he said, "Always lots bicyclists and people walking their dogs along here. A pain in the you know what."

While occasionally catching glimpses of Lake Montauk, I asked, "Is that the lake?"

"That's it. The salt-water harbor most boating Montaukians call homeport."

Driving further, almost into Block Island Sound, Ericson turned hard left and parked on the pier that defined the edge of Montauk Harbor. "That's his pickup," he said, nodding toward a rusted out Dodge. We got out.

The place was alive with activity; boats coming and going and seafarers toiling about, messing with their gear, fine-tuning their floating investments in preparation to try and earn a living.

"Hear that?" he asked.

"Yeah," I replied, hearing the thump of a helicopter in spite of the peripheral racket caused by squawking gulls.

In front of us were two piers, each docked with sturdy working boats. Piled on the sand were buoys, miscellaneous rusted metal objects, colorful plastic barrels and stacks of lobster traps. At the end of one pier stood a large gray boathouse, the masts of a large and hidden fishing boat sticking high above its roofline.

Ericson led me down a sandy path.

"Across the harbor," he said, "is where the pleasure crowd moors. Many of their boats are large, bred for offshore travel. Off to the right's a restaurant...been there for years, and in the middle of the harbor is Coast Guard headquarters."

The Coast Guard facility stood sentinel for everyone to see. Docked at its side was a cutter at least fifty feet long. “That cutter is different than the one that approached us in the Race.”

“Yeah,” he said. “It was probably out of their Groton facility but this is where the arson took place.” He paused, waving his arms like a tour guide. “See those two older boats docked next to each other?” He pointed in his usual way, hand held out knuckles up, flat but limp, his middle finger hanging lazily above the others. “Sonny’s boats. The big one’s a thirty-seven footer.”

The larger boat looked like a traditional fishing trawler. It was painted white with a high profile, its masts adorned with rigging supporting a big steel basket. The other craft was low slung, a bit longer with a deep bow and lots of open working deck. It reminded me of a bedroom slipper.

Ericson made another classic face. “Don’t be surprised if he shoos us off.”

We walked down a sandy path toward Sonny’s boats.

“Hey Sonny,” he shouted, from two docking spaces away. “Been out?”

“Naw,” Sonny replied, with a cranky look. “Getting ready to.”

Sonny was wearing dark green rubber overalls. His hairy tanned forearms reminded me of water-stained steam pipes.

“So how’s the lobstering?”

“Down,” Sonny replied. “Why?” He shook his head. “Some guys have been forced offshore, others out of business.”

Ericson copped a sympathetic tone and made another face. “There was talk of reducing or eliminating catch quotas.”

“Stricter regulations, changing trap configurations, it all don’t matter.” Sonny said. “The Connecticut guys keep invading our area. I run into them all the time when I’m chumming.”

Ericson laughed. “The Connecticut Lobstermen’s Guild claims there’s only thirty of them left.”

“Thirty?” Sonny echoed. “One,” he said, sticking a rubber-tipped index finger into the air, “is enough!”

Ericson gestured toward me. “This is Cain Rippinger. A personal friend of the Kasans.”

Sonny dropped a rope and walked to the stern. He reached up from the boat and removed his rubber glove. We shook hands.

“They find out who shot Ragnar?” he asked.

Ericson shrugged. “Cain’s a U.S. Marshal. Mind if he asks you a few questions?”

“You’d be the first,” Sonny replied, pulling the glove back on and going back to work. “What do you know?”

Sonny caught me off guard. “Not too much,” I replied. “Just arrived. Getting a feel for the place.”

“Hey,” Ericson said, hands in his pockets as he squatted to peek into the cabin. “I see you’ve got a helper.”

Sonny blushed and nodded back toward her. “Yeah, she and her sister have their own boat but now they’re afraid to go out on their own.” He grabbed a hose off the deck. “Water...we have no pressure. Water table’s dropping. That New Year’s Day fire? Had it happened in summer, the fire department said more than one boat...even the pier would have burned.”

“Lack of water?”

“No volume.”

“Isn’t East Hampton supposed to pipe water here?”

He laughed. “You for real? They’ve got their own contamination issues. Now it’s turning salty.”

The gal came out from below and waved at us.

Like a protective father, Sonny looked at her. “She helps and we split the catch.”

I noticed that Sonny pronounced certain words oddly, as though he had a chunk of dried hamburger parked somewhere in his mouth. It could have been his jaw. Maybe it had been broken and didn’t heal right.

“But...regardless of how catty-wumper it gets,” he said, as he ducked to enter the wooden cabin. “I’ve got another helper—”

Ericson elbowed me and chuckled.

“This,” Sonny said, approaching us with a scoped stainless steel rifle. “Don’t worry,” he said as he handed it to me. “It’s not loaded.”

I read the barrel, resisting the urge to bring it to my shoulder within the busy harbor. Nodding toward Coast Guard headquarters, I asked, “Don’t they get spooked if guys are carrying guns around?”

Though he knew where the Coast Guard facility was, Sonny gazed at it anyway. “They can twist on my gaff, besides, they’d be tickled red if any of us brought in the culprits. Almost six months since the first fire and nothing...but my taxes keep going up.”

Unbolting the action, I checked the chamber. “A .243 should do the trick.”

“Yeah,” Sonny said. “Remington. Light kick back. Won’t rust either...synthetic stock, the works.”

“How’s it getting ammo out here?”

He wiped the sweat off his brow and laughed. “C’mon man. With enough lobster and bass, I can get whatever I want.”

I handed it back to him. He patted the stock, brought it back below and returned. “We all have them,” he said, turning toward the harbor and panning his hand across the fishing fleet. “Someone’s going to get it.”

“Well,” I replied. “No offense, but I hope the law gets him, or them, first.”

“They better,” he replied. “Because I check more than pots every day.”

“Who knows the way of the big bass?” Ericson piped. “Its habits and home? It’s up to you, my friend, to solve the mystery.”

Sonny howled like he hadn’t laughed in a while. “Al...you’re crazy.” He pulled on his rubber gloves. “What can I do for you, Cain?”

“What can you tell us about the crimes?”

For half a minute, he worked straightening up buckets of bait. Then he exhaled and looked toward Ericson’s pickup. “I knew them...both lobstermen.”

“How well?”

“Let’s see. Bub was of the finest kind. He and I lobstered for over thirty years.”

“Which one was Bub?”

He breathed in and exhaled hard. “The one they cut up.”

I paused. “Who found him?”

“When he failed to return to port, the Coast Guard honed in on his GPS. They found his blood-spattered boat anchored where he lobstered. I heard there were signs of a struggle, axe marks on the transom, but it’s all anecdotal—no prints.”

“So, you haven’t spoken to anyone about it?”

He shook his head. “Just his wife. At the time of the first killing, they believed it was random. Now, with three murders on the books, they’re thinking differently.”

“You think they’re related?”

“The lobstermen? Absolutely. We’ve had nut jobs trying to get us all out of the water for years. It’s the wrong message, of course, but a stinging overture nonetheless.”

“That doesn’t explain the surf fisherman?”

“No, that’s a different deal. My hunch is that it has something to do with that Ditch Plains resort.”

“What about him, did he have any enemies?”

“My friend?”

I nodded.

“A few over in Connecticut...some locals out of Greenport.”

“Which was most intense?”

“Definitely the guys out of Connecticut. He was over there, not too long ago...followed a boat out of Block that had been stealing a bunch of pots. Caught them in the act. He was sitting coy in his brother-in-law’s Boston Whaler. Followed them to port and confronted them.”

“Did it get physical?”

Sonny coiled a rope and straightened out a few buoys. “No, he was too smart for that. He was outnumbered. But he let them know he had taken video.” He laughed. “He was a sneaky guy. He would bring in these fantastic hauls. Never shared his coordinates.”

“Sonny will tell you,” Erickson said. “Lobstermen are like clammers. Real clannish. They operate in secret, never revealing where they catch anything.” Nobody spoke. Ericson continued. “You can probably get the coordinates now.”

Sonny waved him off. “I leave the dead alone.”

“What about the lobsterman who got shot?”

“They found him in his boat drifting in the Atlantic, southwest of Block Island.” Sonny started messing with some wire rope. “I didn’t know him as well.” Suddenly busy, he went to the cabin and started looking at some papers.

I looked at Ericson, wondering if we’d worn out our welcome. Then Sonny returned from the cabin. “I’ll tell you something else, I’ve gotta tell you.” He looked up at us. “He was a stain.” Sonny began muddling about moving storage bins and fussing about his rigging. Fondling a buoy, smacking it with his fist, he said, “I got into it with him, once. Caught him hanging near my pots. I wanted to drown the guy. Everyone knows about our incident, but...he had a more recent run-in.”

“With who?”

“Well, he blamed a Latino fisherman for fouling up his pots. When the fisherman came to dock, he started a fight, knocked the guy against a pier and began pummeling him while yelling racial slurs.”

“Here?”

“Greenport, but the fisherman was originally from Connecticut.”

“I think I know the guy,” Ericson added. “Did his lips stick out like they were locked into saying the words ‘The commish’?”

Sonny nodded and then shook his head. “You’re weird, Al. Yeah, that’s him.”

“So,” I continued, “you think this Latino may have taken revenge?”

Sonny shook his head in disappointment. “He’s a good guy, a hard worker. He didn’t press charges, but none of us wanted that any way. As long as everyone respects each other out there, we’re all brothers trying to make it.”

“Was he a Pinhooker?” Ericson asked.

“No rod and reel, just dragging the bottom,” Sonny said. “He also lobstered, but he wasn’t at the time.”

“Lobstering and fishing?” I asked. “Two professions?”

“If you can call it that,” Sonny responded. “But it’s a fickle business. A lot can go wrong.” He nodded at his lobster boat docked alongside and then stamped his boot on the deck of the boat. “I also have to fish to make ends meet.”

“Maybe he fouled the pots out of spite?” I asked.

“Could have,” Sonny said. “Don’t know, but the ongoing feud between us and the Connecticut guys continues. I hate it.”

“Besides territory, any other reasons why a lobstermen would go after each other?”

Sonny punched one hand into the palm of the other. “Fights. Confrontations happen.” He looked up at Ericson. “Hey, did you tell Cain about ‘fistfights on the open seas’?”

Ericson laughed. “The Groton teachers?”

“Oh yeah...I recall it well. Didn’t the teacher with the knife receive concussion protocol?”

“But wasn’t there something about bullying a few years back?” Ericson asked.

Sonny watched a commercial fishing boat motor past the Coast Guard facility. He waved. “Some were bullying others into giving up the trade.”

“Over territory?” I asked.

“Don’t recall, exactly...but yeah...there were threats.”

“What type?”

“Oh, cutting traps loose, sabotage, even confrontations...one guy, with a steel hull, even intimidated another saying he was going to ram him.”

“How far did it get?”

“You know, as far as I know, nobody was affected, but it put a scare into all of us.”

“Connecticut on Long Island lobstermen?”

“No, more Long Island on Long Island.”

“The police knew?”

“I remember reading something about violations of antitrust laws. Then it all went away.”

From the road we heard somebody command an animal. A policeman with a tight leash on a gorgeous black German Shepherd guard dog rounded some bushes and headed for the piers.

Sonny squinted and shot the officer a quick wave. Half-heartily, the officer returned an unconvincing nod. “Too hard to wave?” Sonny mumbled. “They’ve had the canine unit here checking the dock and boats. It’s a wonder they haven’t checked me.”

The officer headed for the opposite pier. We watched him lead the dog from boat to boat, pulling the dog in tight when people passed. They entered the large gray and white warehouse at the end of the pier.

“Have they boarded any?” I asked.

He pushed off the cabin. “Not that I’ve seen.”

I waited. “Sonny... could the culprits be here?”

“One of us?”

“Just a fisher— or lobsterman.”

He sat on the side of his boat, folded his arms and cocked his head. Looking at the washed plank deck, he replied, “I’ve thought of that. Hell—” Staring at the deck, he rocked back and forth in his olive green rubber boots. “I’ve thought of everything.”

“Still think they’re dealing with more than one perp?”

“I do.”

“Connecticut guys?”

He nodded in agreement.

Feeling that Sonny had other things to do, I was glad when Ericson offered to help him lobster that week. Sonny beamed. As we left, I asked, “Any news on what caliber’s been used?”

Sonny groaned. “Nothing I’ve heard.”

Driving back on East Lake Drive, I asked, “What’d you think about his helper?”

“Fishing girl?” Ericson draped his wrist over the wheel, cocked his balding head and thought. “She was stout, all right. Built for trench warfare.”

## CHAPTER 8

### Moments

Two days later, the Town of East Hampton held an emergency public meeting at Town Hall. Representatives from all law enforcement agencies were expected to attend the State of the Hamptons Address. That made three days since I'd ignored the voice message that my boss, Michael Righetti, D.C. Assistant Director of Investigations for the U.S. Marshal's Service, had left on my cell phone. He'd inquired about my status for returning to work. Problem was, I didn't want to return to the Marshals Service or work again in any National Park, let alone Glacier. However, I *was* interested in the crime wave engulfing the Hamptons.

Fondling my phone while leaning against Tora's wooden deck railing, I waited for Ericson to pick me up for the meeting. Alone, I had the privacy needed for calling Righetti. Checking my watch, I calculated he was probably stuck in morning traffic near the Capitol Beltway. I pressed his number and brought the phone to my ear. Two rings later, he answered.

"Rippinger! Where the hell have you been?" he said. "I called days ago."

"No excuses, I know. Getting you at a good time?"

"Got lots of time. Crawling near 95."

"The Beltway."

"Yeah." Silence. "How's the leg?"

"Getting better but—"

"But what?" He sounded irritated. "You've been on sabbatical for eight months. I'm having a hard time explaining your absence. Besides, we have pressing needs."

Wanting out of the U.S. Marshal's Service, I couldn't push the conversation. I respected Righetti too much to continue masquerading. I thought of ending it all right then. Just as I was about to do that, he asked, "How much more time do you need?"

I scrambled. "The doctor says I need time to recuperate."

"Doctor, huh? Aren't you finishing up rehab?" Before I could respond, he swore. Then I heard his car horn through the phone. "You'll need a note...something to justify your absence. Email me a copy. If I recall correctly, you were supposed to be healthy by now."

"I was, and it's coming along, but...I could use more time."

"By the way, there's a lot of action going on in the Hamptons. The murders, and such. Never been but I hear it's a wonderland for the rich. Are the 'Fibbies' closing in?"

"The FBI?"

"Yeah."

"Haven't a clue. Would you like me to get involved?"

"Get involved? You kidding? It's not our job and you've got a bum leg. You've no business in that mess."

“Just kidding. Wanted to see if you were still with me.”

“Yeah right. I’ve got something brewing out west for you. Sharpshooter work. End of the summer would work perfect.”

“Where?”

“Washington State.” Then the phone went silent. “I gotta go. Traffic’s bad. Send me the note, got it?”

“I’ll email it,” I said, wondering where I’d find a doctor willing to testify. I didn’t worry long. Ericson pulled up in the driveway.

I climbed into his sorry-looking pickup and we left for town.

“Where’s Tora?” he asked.

“She and Ray left early. Said they had some business to attend to. They’ll meet us there.”

His wrist draped casually over the steering wheel, Ericson slid in a 60’s music CD. “These chumps better have something important to say.”

“Hey,” I said. “I need a doctor’s note. Know where I can get one?”

He rubbed his chin. “A doctor’s note. For the leg?”

I nodded.

“I know a doctor who would be glad to write you whatever you want.”

“How?”

He pointed to the bed of his truck. Looking through the back window of his cab, I saw several sealed tubs. “Fish?”

“The best... striped bass.”

“You know a doctor willing to write a medical note for fish?”

“Oh sure. And I know a ton of doctors willing to write anything for fresh fish and lobster.” He looked at me and smiled. “The secrets in the filet.”

“Quid pro quo?”

“What?”

I paused.

“You got it, my friend. Write down what you want him to say and I’ll get it for you, word for word.”

“Where’s the lobster?”

“Sonny will throw me a few.”

“How can that be?”

He smiled. “You’re in New York. Everything’s for sale.”

## CHAPTER 9

### Town Hall

Arriving at Town Hall, Ericson drove around trying to find a parking space. Finally, one opened up in front of him. Just then a small green hatchback sped up, cut him off and took his space. Ericson jammed on the brake, put his window down and waited for the driver to get out. After she and her male friend exited the car, she beeped twice, ensuring her car was locked.

Through his green Aviator sunglasses, he watched them walk away. Then he lowered his window. "Hey Bo-joe," he said. "That was my spot."

She turned and flashed her keys, but didn't look at him. "Sorry buddy... finders keepers." Then she gave his rusted out pickup the eye. "Been around somebody who cuts fish all day?" she said loudly to her friend. He laughed. "Never, they need to shower before doing anything."

"Oh... a wise guy," Ericson replied, craning his neck. "How'd you like me to pull that Kia all the way to Accabonac?" he shouted.

"Dumb Bonacker!" the guy said, walking backwards. "Just try it, fish killer. By the way... what's your brand of soap?"

Ericson threw the pickup in reverse, causing drivers looking for parking to veer, shift and move out of the way. It caused a massive jam. Not being able to move, he threw the shifter into park, got out and yelled, "Playing goalie requires a mask. You didn't know that?"

Cars started honking so Ericson lumbered back to the idling Ford, put it in gear and found another place to park.

We caught up with Tora in front of Town Hall where a crowd had gathered, waiting to enter.

"Where's Ray?" I asked, as Ericson walked over to a guard standing at a side door.

"Oh," she said. "He had other matters to attend to."

Ericson waved quickly for us to follow him. We broke from the crowd and passed the couple that had stolen Ericson's parking space. After Ericson introduced us, the guard opened the door, letting us in. As I walked through the door, I glanced back at Ericson. He shot the couple an arm pump. Then he pointed them out to the guard saying, "They hate fishermen. Don't let them in." The guard looked at them and nodded.

"Who's that?" Tora asked.

"One of my fishing buddies," Ericson replied. "We take care of each other."

Behind us, Sonny entered the room. He saw us and took a seat next to Ericson. "Here," he said, handing Ericson a brown bag. "A dozen big brown ones, right from the chicken coop."

As the place filled, a few people approached Sonny and shook his hand while others waited in line to speak with him. I thought I heard them whispering about an explosion.

“Must be a popular guy,” Tora said. “Considering there might not be any seats left when they’re done chatting.”

“All of Sonny’s friends are here,” Ericson said, as Sonny finished speaking with the last of them.

“Yeah,” Sonny said. “They must have emptied Montauk.”

Ericson turned to him. “Hey, what’s this I hear about an explosion?”

Sonny shook his head. “There was an explosion last night.”

“Where?”

“Nobody knows.”

“Did you hear it?”

“Oh yeah. I was at the marina. Sounded like it came from the Point, but on the water you can never tell.”

The room was buzzing. A banner hung above the stage. It read *‘Bay Country Pride*.

Sonny surveyed the room. “I see the front row is all law enforcement. Maybe we’ll learn something today.” He looked at me. “Know any of them?”

I shook my head and asked, “Who’s on the stage?”

Sonny squinted. “Let’s see...left of the podium are the town commissioners. The head of police is sitting between them and the podium.”

“Mitch Kragen?” Ericson asked.

“Yeah...Magpie. Use to be the harbormaster. He’s a clown. Off to the right is Benny Lerner, Town Moderator and then there’s the town attorney. She’s a quack. An upislander...Brooklynite, but I like her. I don’t know who the guy on the end is.”

“All your buddies are here,” Ericson said, elbowing Sonny. “The place is packed.”

Sonny leaned forward and looked back. “Fishermen and lobstermen trying to—”

Just then, with a deafening blare, the speaker system kicked in. Benny Lerner had taken the podium. “Welcome to the State of the Hamptons Address,” he said. “We’ve called this special session to inform you as to what we know regarding the crime wave we’ve experienced over the past year and to provide a forum for questions and answers. Sitting in front of me are representatives from all the law enforcement and associated agencies involved in the on-going investigation. Give it up!”

There was a mild applause.

The long and short of Lerner’s introduction was that the town had nothing new to offer, or wasn’t going to share more than had already been reported. The fact was, due to Ericson’s and my conversation with Sonny, I knew more than most people, which was well beyond anything

that had been reported by the media. I also had the feeling that the meeting was an empty display, a bone the politicians were throwing to the public.

One by one, the people seated on stage explained their role in the investigation. It was interesting. Mild politicking overlaid with rehashed information, a grueling display of showmanship over substance. The audience became restless and their conversation grew louder, prompting law enforcement people in the front row to turn and stare at them with disapproving eyes. To no avail, their noise only got louder. Finally, Lerner retook the podium, quieted things down, and shifted the meeting into the question and answer segment.

Hands shot up across the room.

Lerner chose a larger fellow in suspenders. "Please tell us your name, where you live and what you do for a living."

An assistant handed the citizen a wireless microphone. "The name's Dan Miller. Three Mile Harbor. Fisherman."

"Go ahead, Mr. Miller."

"This...lawlessness. This guy, or guys, they're wrecking us. We're afraid to go out at night. This investigation...when do you think you'll have something?"

Rising, a man seated with the law enforcement group was handed a microphone. He tapped it and turned toward Miller. "Mr. Miller. I'm Norm Peters, Special Agent, FBI, Long Island Bureau." He paused. "I can tell you there are hundreds of people working to solve this case, or cases, as I speak. I—"

"Well," Miller said, breaking in. "That ain't good enough. No arrests, not even a hunch. Three men dead and a ton of property destroyed."

Peters nodded, holding the microphone at his chest. He waited, as though frozen in place. "Understood, but rest assured, we *are* making headway."

Lerner chose another citizen.

"Hi...Cobb's the name. Henry Cobb, Lobsterman, Montauk."

Sonny leaned forward and whispered something in Ericson's ear. I thought I heard him call Cobb an original Bonacker.

"One of them killed, he was my cousin," Cobb said. He stopped, leaned on a chair and hung his head. A woman reached up and handed him a tissue. Wiping his face, he continued. "Been working these waters for a lot of years. Have had a lot of trouble year after year with lobstermen coming over from Connecticut and Rhode Island, stealing from my pots. Ain't anyone taking my means of providing away from me." He stopped and looked around. "I'm armed and ready. Thank you."

Lerner chose another.

“Marge Becker, surfer, Napeague. I came to find out about this guy we’re calling *Calendar Man*...but what can you tell us about the explosion last night?”

“I can handle that one,” Lerner said. He pointed at the front row. “These folks here are investigating that as we speak.”

Holding his head in his hands, Ericson cracked up. Sonny followed.

“At this time we know very little,” Lerner said, “however, there have been no reports of injury or damage.”

Becker asked, “Where did it happen?”

“We believe somewhere between Block Island and Montauk Point, that right fellas?”

As multiple law enforcement people in the front row nodded, citizens began shouting questions from all over the room, some quite nasty.

Microphone in hand, Becker looked around. “Well, Memorial Day is three days away. What are you doing to prevent another occurrence?” She handed the microphone back and sat down.

Lerner gazed back at the town commissioners. They all looked at each other, whispering and listening. One of them turned his microphone on. “Everyone hear me?”

People nodded.

“Hi, I’m Jimmy St. Andre, Commissioner. We’ve been coordinating with the Town Police, the Coast Guard, Suffolk County Sheriff’s Marine Bureau, State Police, Suffolk County Aviation Unit...the FBI...and a host of other agencies trying to get a handle on what has happened, here. I can tell you that we will be tightening security at all beaches and marinas, including private ones, to ensure everyone’s safety.”

Someone stood without raising his hand. “Burch Hawley, part-time lobsterman,” he yelled. “If I’m not mistaken, two fellow lobstermen have been killed in their boats. Just how do you plan to protect us on the water?”

St. Andre nodded to the head of police. “Mitch,” he said. St. Andre’s voice unintentionally passed through his desk microphone and over the speaker system, alarming Lerner. Mitch didn’t respond. Then St. Andre pointed and repeated, “Mitch.” His back toward us, Lerner took a step toward Mitch. With a blank expression, Mitch Kragen tilted his head toward St. Andre and sat up. Lerner moved back from the podium and gestured for Kragen to take it. Reluctantly, Kragen, a large man, struggled to his feet. With a lawyer’s gimp, he made for the podium.

“What happened to him?” I asked Tora.

“Boating accident.”

Seemingly disinterested, Kragen mumbled something. Then he adjusted the mic. “I’m Mitch Kragen.” He smiled. “Many of you know me from Harbors and Docks. I headed that unit for years with no increase in on-water crime.” He paused and scanned the crowd. “Now, I’m no

longer senior harbor master nor town waterways management supervisor, but I can assure you, with support from the Coast Guard and Suffolk County, in addition to other unmarked boats patrolling these waters, we'll have a multitude of boats providing surveillance and emergency response capability for all of you. I—”

Still standing, Hawley shouted, “Like who?”

People in the audience laughed.

“Burch!” Kragen said. “You know Lars Pederson.”

“Sure,” Hawley said. “Been Lobstering and fishing with him for years.”

“Well, Lars has begun voluntary patrolling of Block Island Sound. Isn't that good news?”

“That's crap,” someone yelled from the back of the room.

“Say what?” Kragen said, stretching his neck past the front of the podium, staring at the citizen. “And you are?”

I turned and saw a tattooed muscular man with thick blond hair and a big brushy mustache. He wore a tank top. I took him for a rock singer.

“Billy Sabbath,” he said. “Living large. Been fishing these waters since the original beginning.”

Kragen cleared his throat. “Proceed...Mr. Sabbath.”

“Citizen protection? You gotta be kidding.”

Kragen readjusted himself and leaned hard on the podium. Looking down, he spoke to the law enforcement officials. “There's a lot of water out there. Boats from all over.” He stopped and stared at Sabbath. “You're all deputized to provide us with information. You, Mr. Sabbath, fall into that category. Call 911 if you see something suspicious.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah...that's bull,” Sabbath said. “I got a job...when are you going to nail someone in Connecticut? That's where Calendar Man is.”

Norm Peters quickly stood. Still holding a microphone, he addressed Sabbath. “This is a huge ongoing investigation with many possibilities. We're concentrating our efforts there, exploring a possible link.”

“No Connecticut suspects?” Sabbath yelled. “What are you waiting for?”

“That's all I can say at this time,” Peters said, and sat down.

An older man in our row slowly stood, his back crooked and bent. Raising his hand, he looked back at Sabbath and scowled, or maybe he always looked that way.

“Yes sir,” Lerner said, thrusting his chin up at the older man.

The old man breathed in and tried to straighten up. He waited to be handed a microphone. The attendant handed him one. “For fear of my own safety, I am withholding my name, however, I can tell you that I represent the Connecticut Lobstermen's Guild.” He paused and looked around, meeting all comers eye to eye. “And I think it's thoroughly disgusting that professional

men like yourselves, hard working men who brave the sea, are so ready to blame the murders on Connecticut lobstermen. People they don't even know. I'm not sure who you think burned the boats, or who shot that poor fellow surf fishing, but I can assure you that nobody from Connecticut was involved."

"What about the two lobstermen?"

"Them too."

"How do you know that, sir?" Sabbath shouted.

The old man turned to confront the antagonist. "I know a witch hunt when I see one young man... and this is a witch hunt."

Sabbath chuckled. "No trials yet."

"People like you don't help."

"Yeah!" a younger man said, standing and stabbing the air in Sabbath's direction.

Another man, from behind, got up into the younger man's face. They went nose-to-nose yelling and then swearing. When they began shoving each other, town police swarmed in and established calm. When the two men sat, Lerner spoke. "There's no place in this town for that brand of behavior, gentlemen. Please control yourselves or leave."

Lerner paused for an extended period of time. Then he turned toward the old man. "I'm sorry you think that, sir. Nobody here is blaming anyone from Connecticut."

"Well, he is," the old man said, pointing back at Sabbath. "And they are."

"Excuse me sir," a woman sitting nearby said. "Are you through?"

The old man sat down and shook his head. Then he passed the microphone forward.

From her seat, the woman yelled, "When will the barricading cease?"

Lerner chose someone else to speak, but a voice rang out from behind. "Any arrests?"

"No arrests have been made."

"What about closing off the beach to four by fours?"

"That might happen," Lerner said. "Most beaches are still open to dune buggies and four wheel drives."

"Why are we talking about this?" another woman asked, using the microphone. Her voice was muddled.

Lerner waved his hands, crossing them quickly. "Please take your lips off the microphone ma'am and hold it away as you speak."

She studied the microphone as though it was a mathematical equation. Then she said, "Once you deem something temporary, like taxes, it never goes away! Are you using these crimes as an excuse to increase regulations?"

"No ma'am," Lerner said. "We have reason to believe the Ditch Plains shooter drove in and out using a four-wheel drive. Our goal is to close another door."

“You’re full of it,” someone yelled.

When the attendant went to remove the microphone from her hand she resisted. Pulling away, she asked, “What about the water situation? How about an update.”

“Yeah...” Tora said to herself. “What’s going on with the water supply?”

The man on stage that Sonny didn’t recognize raised his hand. After more bantering between Lerner and a few angry citizens, Lerner bit his lip and appeared weary with it all. Glancing back, he saw his hand up and wildly motioned for him to take the podium. By then, I guessed, Lerner would have done anything to escape the heat.

“I’d like to introduce one of our new key players,” Lerner said, clapping softly.

With perfect posture, the well-dressed man seemed to float toward Lerner, as though he moved on a cushion of air. Before he rounded the end of his table, he was smiling and waving at the audience. He stretched his throat, adjusted the microphone and gently patted Lerner on the shoulder. He struck me as the consummate politician, always in control.

“Hi, my name is Franz Uerrman—”

Sonny leaned into Ericson. “He’s European.”

“—Director of Earth Diocese on Gardiners Island, or shall I say, of the ED Gardiners Island Experience.” He stopped and scanned the audience.” I want everyone to know that Earth Diocese will be doing their part in helping to monitor both Gardiners Bay and Block Island Sound.” He looked at Kragen. “You have my word, we will use our hotline to the town police whenever we need to.”

A hand went up.

Uerrman pointed at the woman. “Go ahead, please.”

Using a microphone that had been circulating through the crowd, she spoke clearly. “Just who will be monitoring these waters and from where?”

“We have onsite security. Capable people who routinely man the old observation tower and who guard the island twenty-four seven.” He smiled and brought the fingertips of both hands together. Bouncing them back and forth, he asked, “Any other questions?”

“Yeah,” a crusty old woman said. “What’s your plan?”

“Ah!” he said. “As an overture to mankind, we are going to preserve that beautiful place while providing opportunities for eco-tourism. But first, let me explain.” He studied the crowd and nodded approvingly. “At Earth Diocese, we have ideals. Aspirations. A need to fulfill our destiny...to encourage our culture, our species to evolve in better, more enlightened ways. Yes...preservation and ecotourism has a place in this most desirable location, the Hamptons, and it’s here, now.”

He stepped back to loud applause. Everyone representing the Town of East Hampton looked happy.

Someone up front held up a hand. I couldn't hear the question.

"What do we bring to the Hamptons?" Uerrman said, leaning his ear down toward the front row. More applause. "Among other things, Earth Diocese plans to protect the island's biodiversity. We will identify, inventory, and protect all animal, marine, and vegetative ecological communities. This will include regulating critical habitats and educating the public on the importance of ecological systems. We've already developed a shoreline preservation plan. Next...we plan to develop a fresh water hydro preservation project."

The place erupted.

Uerrman held up his hands. It got quiet. "Naturally our brand, Earth Diocese Resorts, as at our other oceanfront facilities in California, Alaska, the Bahamas, and on the Chesapeake, stands behind our plan for Gardiners Island." He removed the wireless microphone from its holder, walked off the stage and pranced across the front row. After some light conversation and handshakes, he said, "That is...to showcase marine research for all inland waters this side of Block Island and the Montauk Lighthouse, to a westerly line loosely defined by Riverhead, if I have that right."

The Coast Guard representative, in dress whites, nodded.

More applause.

"So, come join us, won't you? Learn to paddleboard, take water samples, analyze beach erosion, help enhance portions of the island, ecotour and perhaps even dive to the bottom for a good look!"

"That guy looks strange," Ericson said, as Uerrman continued.

Tora appeared concerned. "What do you mean? His head?" Her comments caused a woman, sitting in front of us, to rotate around and shoot Tora a nasty look. Tora shooed her off.

"Maybe that's it," Ericson said. "His ancestors may have used their heads to bang open doors, but it's his big red nose."

"It is rather bulbous," Tora said, putting on her glasses.

Meanwhile, people in the row in front of us had begun talking to themselves, shifting in their seats and looking around.

"Big and juicy, isn't it?" Tora said. "He probably has a drinking problem."

"That or he's been unmercifully battered by the wind and salty sun," Sonny added. "Like the netting you see on a ham."

"That's gross," Tora said, removing her glasses. She laughed, bringing the back of her hand up to cover her mouth. A few people in front of us got up and left. "But you're right. Christmas dinner will never be the same."

I tried to control myself, but Ericson was a crack-up.

"I'll bet his friends don't say he has a nose," Ericson said. "They call it a 'schnocker'.

Tora was in stitches. I didn't think she was capable of laughing so hard. People began to look back at us to see what all the humor was about, but the show was over. Lerner had ended the meeting.

Tora rose and jingled her car keys. "Another Hamptons disappointment."

## CHAPTER 10

### Primer

On a flyer I picked up at Town Hall, I wrote what I needed the doctor to include in my physician's memo to Righetti. Handing it to Ericson, I said, "I find Gardiners Island intriguing. I wonder who's in charge of security."

"Never know," he said. "They might be hiring." He took the paper, folded it and placed it into a compartment in the dash. "You should have spoken to ol' red nose, what's his name? Herman?"

"Something like that... what's with the Hamptons water?"

"A shortage, it's..." Ericson's head snapped up. As he peered into his rear view mirror, a siren went off. Ericson pulled over. A town police officer approached his window.

"License and registration, please."

Irritated, he grabbed his registration and slammed the glove box closed. Handing it to the officer he asked, "What's wrong?"

Stone-faced, the officer collected his information. "Stay in the truck. I'll be back."

Ericson looked at me. "What the heck did I do? I wasn't speeding."

I was clueless.

Five minutes later, the officer returned and handed him his papers. "You've got a brake light out, Mr. Ericson. I could issue you a warning. Get that fixed."

"I will officer. Thanks for letting me know."

The officer paused and looked away. "Mind if I ask you a few questions?"

Ericson shrugged. "Go ahead."

"Our records indicate you have an on-going relationship with a Mr. Sonny Augustino of Montauk. That correct?"

Ericson thought. "A relationship? That sounds pretty serious. How about we're just friends."

As Ericson spoke, the officer scanned the inside of the pickup. "Just friends," he said, as though buying time. "To the best of your knowledge, has Sonny ever threatened anyone or fired at anyone from his boat?"

"Ah...is Sonny a suspect?"

"Please, just answer the question."

Ericson played his fingers on the steering wheel. "No. Sonny's a good guy. He's clean."

The officer slapped the pickup door. "Thank you for your time. Sorry for have bothered you." He returned to his car.

Meanwhile, we sat on the edge of the road.

"Was that guy following us?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I didn't see any cops behind me. He came out of nowhere." He looked in his rear-view mirror. "How'd they connect me with Sonny?"

As I glanced through the rear window, the patrol car pulled a U-turn and disappeared. "I'll bet we've been picked up on cameras at the harbor."

"Yeah...Sonny had that rifle," he said, smacking the steering wheel. "This is the kind of crap I try to avoid. Did it look like it had been fired?"

"Not from what I could see."

He nodded. "Sonny a suspect?" Then he called Sonny and told him what had transpired. It was a short conversation.

Ericson pulled back on the road.

"What did Sonny say?"

He shook his head. "Very little." He drove a short distance. "Can they just do that?"

"Do what?"

"Just pull anyone off for questioning?"

"Well...they did."

Within minutes, we were at Tora's place.

I got out of the truck. "Staying?" I asked.

"Hey...do me a favor. Tell me which brake light's out?"

I walked behind his truck and he applied the brakes.

I laughed. "Neither," I shouted. "They work perfectly."

“You’re kidding.”

I had him try the brakes again. Same result.

He was speechless...so was I.

I walked over to his window. “I think our policeman-friend wanted an excuse to stop you.”

Nibbling on his finger, Ericson stared through his windshield. “I can’t worry about it...I’ve got things to do. See you at the clambake.” He shifted into reverse.

“Where does that happen?”

“At the public beach. Be there. These people know how to eat.” He turned from the windshield.

“Thanks for taking care of the doctor thing for me.”

He nodded, backed up and left. I think he had more than Sonny on his mind.

Inside, Tora was preparing something in the kitchen. “What’d you think of the meeting?” she said.

Knowing that Tora knew less than me, I said. “Interesting. Got some concerned people. By the way, do you know who to contact regarding what’s happening at Gardiners Island?”

She grabbed a dishrag and, while wiping her hands, headed for the sliding glass doors facing the bay.

“You want to speak with Libby next door. She was at the meeting.”

“Libby?”

Tora turned. “Liberty Schwartz. She and her boyfriend are big environmentalists. I think they know the guy with the red nose, what’s his name?”

“Herman?”

“Herman? Can’t remember. I see her car. Want to meet her?”

“Now?”

She ran to the old orange phone. “Libby’s an expert on everything you can see from the deck, Greenport to Montauk. Want to know about Captain Kidd? Ask her—” She paused and rested the corded phone against her shoulder. “So...should I call her?”

I thought for a moment. “Sure...why not?”

Within a minute, I was granted permission to visit Libby.

I hopped a short splintered gray post and rail fence separating both properties. I tapped on the door and a petite woman answered. “Come in, Cain. Tora said you might be coming over.”

She led me to her living room. “We’re weekenders, can’t get out of Manhattan enough. Can I get you something to drink?”

“Ah...”

“Some Perrier? Iced coffee...non-alcoholic Sangria?”

“No thanks.”

She plopped down on a sofa, crossed her legs and exhaled. “Just arrived this morning for the State of the Hamptons meeting. We’re here for the holiday.” She bent over and picked at some lint stuck to her carpet. “Well then, what can I do for you?”

“I was wondering about Gardiners Island. My background is in law enforcement so—”

“I know they’re hiring but only for very select positions. Earth Diocese only takes the best of the best.” She got up and parted the blinds of a large picture window. Looking across the bay at the island, she said, “I’m so happy the island is not going to be developed. Could you imagine seeing a yellow McDonalds sign over there? And they did it without finding one endangered species. Remarkable.”

“I was thinking about maybe looking into security there.”

“I hear the person responsible for ED security rarely leaves the island.”

“Know his name?”

“I don’t,” she said, thoughtfully. “I think he’s a young guy, talented, with a geology background.”

“Can’t I visit him?”

“On Gardiners?”

I nodded.

She laughed. “Only the invited get to visit Gardiners Island, but you might catch Franz Uerrman at Sag Harbor. He and other ED employees frequent the Cork & Bib.”

“Cork & Bib?”

“A restaurant and bar. Good food...weekends can get pretty wild.”

“What’s the crowd?”

“Privileged,” she said. “It’s an old place...oh, I forgot. I hear an ED guy plays in a band there. Might be a good lead?”

“Maybe.”

She nodded. “Will Tora put you up?”

“Tora? Why would she put me up?”

“Oh, excuse me for prying, but most new workers don’t live on Gardiners Island. At best, you’d have to commute, daily.”

“No offices?”

“No telephone or electrical lines either. Just generators.”

“So, Earth Diocese isn’t going to erect housing?”

“They might someday,” she said. “The town only has a twenty-year preservation agreement with ED, and mind you...it’s also signed by the original owners, but from what Mr. Uerrman says,” she stopped. “You heard him speak at the meeting, didn’t you?”

I nodded.

She nodded back. "I thought I saw you sitting next to Tora. What a guy! Franz Uerrman thrills me... anyway, the things they're going to do out here." With an open hand, she patted her chest. "My word, it's so exciting."

"Is it Herman or Uerrman?"

"It's Franz Uerrman. He's a Dutchman, and a good-looking one at that."

Thinking Libby had spent too much time breathing mid-town Manhattan air, I asked, "What's included in the agreement?"

She sat down and nursed some bottled water. "From what I understand, the original owners donated the island to Earth Diocese, or ED, under a very strict set of rules that had to be approved by the Town of East Hampton." She rose and walked to an antique oak sideboard. On it was a cardboard box. She started rifling through it, searching through reams of paper and booklets. "I may even have a copy of the agreement here." She came up empty handed. "Must be at the apartment. Anyway... Gardiners Island has been encumbered with a twenty-year conservation easement, held by the Town of East Hampton."

"Looks like a big island."

"I think it's five by seven miles. The easement ensures that all 3,400 acres of virgin forest, ponds and fields, including all plants and other species, will remain in an undeveloped state for a long time."

"So ED's sole source for revenue will depend on ecotourism."

"I'm loving it."

"To get it right," I said, "I thought I heard you say new buildings are out?"

Deep in thought, she walked around her living room. She checked her box again. Nothing. "I believe the clause disallowing ED to build anything manmade was amended to include existing structures."

"No restoration of, say, the windmill?"

"Human history means nothing to me. It certainly means less to ED." She took time to think. "The agreement may have been changed to allow preservation of existing structures, but I'm not sure. I never saw the final draft. I don't know anyone who has."

"Fire, hurricane, rising water, it doesn't matter."

She made a face and shook her head. "Not in my world."

"But... there has to be an allowance for some manner of structure to exist, just to run the island from."

She sat and drank more water. "The last private individuals to own the island were constantly bickering over the place. Imagine that? They were instructed, in no uncertain terms, that the ecosystem in which the island remains is greater than individuals and far more important than ownership of private property."

“Who told them that?”

“Benny Lerner delivered the message, but I think it was penned by ED.”

“You believe that?”

She appeared unsure. “I accept some of it.”

“Where are they based?”

“ED?”

I nodded.

“Brussels. They have resorts everywhere but command center is back in Europe.”

Mulling her words very carefully, it appeared that Earth Diocese wrote the rules that eventually spelled the end of private ownership over Gardiners Island. “So then,” I said slowly. “Basically, the island was taken from the former owners and sold to an environmental group.”

“Placed in a trust, that’s how I understood it.” She gazed out the picture window. “You know...they refer to Gardiners as the ‘isle without sorrow’.” She leaned on one leg. “I find that romantic.”

“So then it’s a trust.”

“A bargain. For a while, the town can’t re-assess, acquire, or rezone the island. I heard one local politician privately remark, ‘the owners have enjoyed their private paradise for over 400 years’. They should donate it to mankind with no compensation.” She looked at me. “I questioned that.”

“This never got out?”

“Oh, it did. Not by me, but it did.”

“Nobody questioned that decision?”

“Mr. Rippinger, you have to understand that people out here have investments. Many of them require the Hamptons for survival. Their sanity—” She stood, walked over to the window and panned Gardiners Bay. “You kidding?” she said. “Nobody objected. Nobody except the Bonackers, those crusty old timers that have stripped the ocean for years.” Her tone changed. “But there’s no proof the agreement ever happened. My understanding is that it was a verbal.”

“Word of mouth?”

She nodded and smiled. “Fantastic isn’t it? Powerful people live here.”

“Did the same people help finance ED?”

“Of course. Many did, it’s what we do. However, one individual stands out. He donated a fortune, and still does, for land preservation.”

“And that’s?”

“Breakwater.”

## CHAPTER 11

### Private Property

About that time, on the far side of Gardiners Island off Eastern Plain Point, a pleasure cruiser had dropped anchor in shallow water not far from shore. The fishermen onboard didn't know it, but they had been under surveillance. In sporting fashion, they'd come to kick off Memorial Day. Casting toward the shore of Gardiners Island and reeling back toward their boat, they were in the hunt for striped bass. To them, the bigger the better.

From the observation tower overlooking that portion of Block Island Sound, the security man had seen enough. Wiping salt from the lenses of his binoculars, he contemplated his next move. Walking down the rocky steps, he left the tower and hopped into a four-wheel drive vehicle. He drove across the island, retrieved his paddleboard and loaded it on the roof of his vehicle. Speeding back, he parked deep enough along the inner curve of Tobaccot Bay to stay out of sight. He put on his wetsuit and life jacket, and slipped his paddleboard into the water. Standing erect, quickly he gained balance as he paddled toward the imposing cliffs that marked the point.

Rounding the point, he figured he was still a quarter mile from the fishermen. Driven to protect the Gardiners Island ecosystem, with his sight set on the cruiser, he gained momentum, closing fast. The fishermen continued to cast, occasionally their poles bending, but the security man had yet to see them land a fish. He had to stop them.

Staying comfortably south of the boat, suddenly a fishing lure splashed into the water off the bow of his board. He jerked, almost losing his balance. Someone on the boat started laughing. "Hey seal man," he shouted. "You're in the way. Nice recovery."

"Hey!" the security man yelled. "Get out of here. This is a sanctuary. You can't fish here."

The fisherman didn't listen so the security guard paddled hard, coming closer to the boat.

Then one of the fishermen turned his back, bent down and pulled his bathing trunks to his knees. As he flashed his white hairy bottom, another fisherman shouted, "We're in public waters. Go home."

Off to the side, the security man thought he saw a fin. Afraid of falling in, he yelled, "Are your lures touching the bottom?"

Nobody answered. Then he heard, "Maybe they are and maybe they aren't."

"If you are, then you're touching part of the Gardiners Island sanctuary. Leave now or I'll call the town police."

"How'd you like that paddle board wrapped around your skinny little head?"

"I'm serious. Leave now."

The fishermen shot him obscene gestures. Then someone threw a loaded beer can at him. As he watched the label fade into the depths, he became enraged.

Stoked with anger, the security man paddled around the boat to see the name written across the Transom. It read, *Grand Ol' Lady*, without a homeport. Placing the name to memory, he left the fisherman and paddled back to his vehicle, ever watchful for a dreaded black fin.

In the vehicle, he opened his logbook and scribbled down the name of the boat. Then he fingered through his list of phone numbers searching for the number the town had given to Franz Uerrman to call in case an issue arose. Dialing the number, he waited. Then he disconnected and sat back. Realizing he hadn't a case, he raced back to the observation tower and watched the fishermen. His phone rang. It was Uerrman.

He looked back at the cruiser, hoping the fishermen would leave. The phone rang again. Determined to see them depart, he contemplated ignoring Uerrman's call, but he knew better. It rang again. *Were they from Connecticut?*

On the fourth ring, he answered the phone. "Yes Franz."

"Can you come to the Manor House? We're trying to determine why the security system keeps failing."

"Sure, but I have something to report." Uerrman went silent. "I caught some guys fishing off the east side."

"Where?"

"North of Eastern Plain Point."

"And?"

"I approached them on my paddleboard and they threatened me."

"Did you call marine patrol?"

He hesitated. "Should I have?"

"Your job is to secure the island! Yes, you should have." There was a pause. "Here," Uerrman said, a bit rattled. "Give me the information. I have a meeting with Lerner. I'll tell him."

"They were off the point. When I approached them, they threw things and yelled obscenities at me."

"How big?"

"The boat?"

"How long?"

"Oh, maybe a thirty-five footer."

"Get a registration number?"

"None."

"No numbers? Strange...sometimes they paint the homeport on the stern."

“I didn’t see any.”

“Okay, forget it...this is good,” Uerrman said. “At the town meeting, I told everyone we’d do our share observing. Lerner will like that. If they’re still fishing, take a photo of the boat. I’ll look for you at the Manor House.”

## CHAPTER 12

### Clambake

The fog lifting off the water, promised another glorious morning of sunshine. To the hum of motorboats out in the mist I stood, savoring a fresh cup of coffee on the deck. Having never been to one, I’d looked forward to the Memorial Day clambake. Tora said it was an annual event put on by the beach association. From everything I’d heard, the assortment of clams alone was worth the drive from Manhattan.

I placed a towel on a damp chair and sat down. Within minutes I smelled smoke. On the public beach, someone had started a fire. As Tora wasn’t up, I decided to stroll there for a look. I finished my coffee, brought the cup inside, and left for the beach.

I followed the water’s edge, occasionally venturing onto private property wherever it seemed attractive for finding an Indian Paint Pot, though I never did. By then, the neighbors had gotten used to my routine. My daily walks. They waved and smiled and I waved and smiled back. I think their friendliness stemmed from knowing Tora. And my leg was feeling great.

My phone rang. “Broberg,” I said.

“Hey chief. How about I come out in a few weeks.”

I had to think. “Tora won’t mind...she’s been asking when you plan to pick up your gun.”

“Yeah...so, how do you like it out there?”

“The Hamptons? You kidding? This place is awesome.”

“Meet any women?”

I looked down the beach at the jetty where I thought I saw the Hampton's princess. I was going to mention it to Broberg, but didn't. "I've seen my share but so far, no contacts. Been relaxing... fishing."

He paused. "Think she's got room for me?"

"Tora?"

Silence.

I asked, "You plan on staying overnight?"

"Well...I've got a pile of free time. I wouldn't mind sniffing around, see the place and learn more about this Calendar Man."

"You're not thinking of getting involved?"

"Oh no...not me. Not my jurisdiction, besides I'd be on vacation, right?"

I remembered our last adventure in the Allagash. "Right..."

"So ah ...let me know, okay?"

"Yeah, sure. I'll get with Tora."

We hung up.

At the public beach, I watched them tend a smoldering fire buried in a hole that they'd covered with seaweed and wet canvas tarps. Offering to help, I was told it was up to the fire to do the rest. I walked to the rock jetty, the same place I saw the mysterious Hampton's princess. Between the rocks, I observed sea life swimming about in small tidal pools, hoping she'd attend the clambake. Alone, if possible. Then I heard my name. Turning around, I saw Ericson. He'd backed onto the beach with a pickup load of seaweed. I left the jetty to help him shovel it out.

Reaching for a pitchfork, he left the cab and handed me a yellow envelope. My name was written on it.

"What did it cost?"

"Don't even ask," he said.

I opened the envelope. "How can I re-pay you?" I asked, removing the doctor's note. I glanced at it. "Perfect." I folded the note and placed it back into the envelope. "C'mon. I'm curious."

He began shoveling seaweed on to the beach. "Four pounds of striped bass, four whole bluefish and two lobsters, which I haven't delivered yet."

"What's that worth?" I grabbed a pitchfork and began moving wads of seaweed.

"Nothing." He stopped and looked around. "Look," he said, stooping closer to me. "I visited Sonny." He lowered his voice. "He's bummed. I asked him why we were stopped. He had no answer."

"What do you think?"

Ericson scowled. "It's not the Sonny I know, but then again, this isn't the Hamptons I used to know...but Sonny said he'd swear on a stack of Bibles."

I stopped forking seaweed. "That means he'd swear twice."

Ericson laughed. "He's a serious guy."

"What'd you think about the meeting?"

"Honestly? A waste of time. I don't trust Kragen. Sonny despises him."

"What about Lerner? You think he's hiding something?"

He jumped off the bed of the truck and banged his shovel onto a rock. I heard an approaching helicopter. He stopped and waited for the chopper to appear. Flying low, it came near us, hugging the beach. "You're a cop. What do you think?"

"What do I think?" I watched the helicopter pass and forked more seaweed. "I don't think so. There's too much money, too many people with smarts here to be playing games."

Ericson leaned on his shovel. "Here's what I think...suppose they know more and are just laying back to snag Calendar Man on a holiday?"

"Today's Memorial Day."

"We'll see."

We finished emptying out his truck and he left. I looked toward the fire and saw Libby walking my way. "Wow," she said. "We'll have 70 or more people in attendance. The beach permit allows no more than 100. Around here, good luck if we go over."

I scanned the bay. "Any sharks out there?"

She twisted toward the water. "I guess something grabbed some kid waterskiing and let go," she said. "Cut his swim trunks and left a pretty good gash, but nothing life threatening."

"Could have been anything."

"Yeah...right."

"You know these people?"

She took me by the hand. "Here, I want you to meet one, our resident attorneys. He knows a lot about everything."

Pulling me downhill toward the water, we approached a fellow dressed in a white business shirt and expensive shorts. He was wading in shallow water watching a child.

"Hi Ike," she said. "I want to introduce you to a friend of Tora's. Cain Rippinger, a U.S. Marshal on sabbatical. He has questions about Gardiners Island. I figured you might help."

Balding and wearing horn-rimmed glasses, he gave me the once-over. Then he smiled, wiped sand off his hands and gradually held one out. "Ike West," he said, as we shook. Leaning toward me he pulled me off balance, his head cocked sideways. "Is it Wayne?"

"No sir, Cain."

"Oh...like the biblical character."

I smiled. "Last name's Rippinger."

"Huh...never heard that one before. I like it. Sounds bold...very Germanic. So...what brings you to the Hamptons?"

I gave him the short version of my life, punctuating my account with the Cape buffalo attack.

A woman yelled a boy's name.

"Go see mom," Ike said, chasing the child out of the water and onto the beach. "That's my wife. She hates the place. Calls it 'Hampton Hell'. Her thing is bopping around SOHO with an iced espresso." Looking around me, I presumed for his child, he asked, "What can I do for you?"

I said, "So if a hurricane erased the South Fork, she'd be happy."

"You mean my wife?" He chuckled. "You got me there...she'd be elated." Ike waved to her. "But I love her."

"So then, vacationing?"

"We own here, but I also work for the town."

"Year round?"

"Not on the payroll, though I should be. Consulting attorney. I get the messy work. So, what would you like to know about Gardiners?"

"Oh...not much. I thought it interesting the island was donated."

"Who told you that?"

"Ah...Libby..."

"Schwartz?" He nodded down the beach toward her house. "Don't believe it. The owners wanted to avoid inheritance taxes, upkeep...condemnation. For years, people have wanted to create a federal wildlife refuge over there."

I peeked across the bay, eyeing the Manor House. "The town could have downsized the island, making it less valuable."

"Gardiners? Never. It's worth a cool two hundred mill anyway you zone it, maybe more. However, nowadays land's easy to take. Over in Connecticut, it's standard operating procedure. Heard of Earth Diocese?"

"ED?"

He nodded and glanced at Gardiners Island. "All that Swamp Maple, Wild Cherry and White Oak, my they sure know how to push the right levers."

"Everyone sure loves them."

"Can't blame them. Eco-adventures, paddle boarding, school tours. People dig it. They're focused on wildlife conservation. Preservation. All their activity fees go to supporting the 'Save Our Island Foundation'. They hire local guides, cooperate with environmental organizations and have pledged to work educating everyone on the treasures awaiting them in 'Bay Country'.

“You don’t think they’ll develop the island?”

He peered at Gardiners Island. “Develop all of it? That’s absurd. However there are already plans to develop part of it.”

“How much?”

“Over a hundred and fifty acres.”

“How does ED allow that?”

He rubbed his index finger and thumb together. “Why does anyone develop anything?” He waited for my response. “Tax revenue, real estate sales, notoriety...” He smiled and looked back at the bay. “Plum Island’s next...and to think ED set up shop in a carpenter’s shack that dates back to 1639!”

“Is ED defacing the island?”

He made an uneasy face. “I wouldn’t say defacing, but let’s just say the culture’s changed dramatically.”

“Sometimes change can be good.”

“Like the occult?” He paused, cocked his head again and planted his blue eyes on mine. “Not for my kids, sir.”

“What are they up to?”

“I understand they hold regular séances. Lots of newcomers not working for ED, coming and going at will, boats in and out around the clock. Partying. That wasn’t the way things were supposed to go down.”

“At the Manor House?”

He turned and pointed toward the Manor House across the water. We looked at it, the building standing proud, bricked, white trimmed and gabled, next to an old windmill. “In front of the fireplace, where they say a mysterious green flame sometimes revolves at midnight, even when there’s no fire. Can you believe it?”

“Do you believe it?”

“I’ve read first-hand accounts.”

“Can’t séances trigger supernatural activity?” He was tongue-tied. I’d taken him too far. “Who’s in control?”

He shrugged and held his hands out, palms up. “You tell me. Whoever it is isn’t concerned about the Manor House. It’s been turned in a hangout. A high-tech mess of wires and statues.”

“Statues? What kind?”

“Wired ones.” He kicked at the water and laughed. “Everything’s great until one night you see it move.”

“So the place is haunted?”

“Oh yes. I was there once. Lots of creaks and peculiar noises. It was eerie. I couldn’t wait to get out.” He began splashing around in the water, distracted, digging his toes into the pebbles and sand. “She’d kill me if she found out I told you this, but remember when I mentioned the town attorney?”

“Saw her at the meeting.”

“Right. Well, before ED took over, when the deal was being struck, she got stuck there one night. The boat wouldn’t start, or something cosmically crazy. So, she’s sitting waiting in the Manor House and all the lights go off, everywhere. She’s in the dark and sees sparks of light coming down the stairway. She freaks out and screams. Nobody heard her. They were all down at the dock. She ran from the place, slipped and twisted her ankle.” He touched me on the arm, his eyes widened. “Said she’s never going back.” He peered back at the Manor House. “I told her she should have stayed in the haunted bed chamber. She about cried.” He turned to me and howled.

Perhaps that incident had something to do with her nickname, “Mooneyes”, I thought. “Were you at yesterday’s meeting?”

“The State of the Hamptons event. Of course, I work closely with the town attorney.”

Immediately I pictured her sitting up on stage. I didn’t remember her speaking.

“You’re taking a sabbatical from the U.S. Marshals Service, right?” he asked.

“You could say that.”

“You heard about that surf fisherman who was shot near where the protest occurred.”

“Protest?”

“Big demonstration by the surfers and beach bums over converting a motel to a private club.”

“What was the issue?”

“Access. If it happens, dune buggies, surf fishing even surfing could be out.”

“Hey guys,” I heard from behind.

“Oh,” Ike said. “Libby and Tora.”

“Hi Ike,” Tora said, clutching a mason jar filled to the brim with ice and what looked like a red cocktail. “The strangest thing happened last night.”

“When?” I asked.

“After you went to bed.” She rolled her eyes and shot us an exasperated, yet dramatic, look. “Remember that boat that comes by at night? Well it came by again, same routine. Then, twenty minutes later, I head a boat without running lights. Just an engine in the dark. It sounded like it was motoring near the buoy. Then I thought I saw a faded light, but I’m not sure. Anyway, the boat left and returned in the direction it came from.”

“You too?” Libby asked. Tora looked at her. “I see the same boat at night. Occasionally I also see a guy in a black kayak near the buoy. Sometimes he gets on Lions Rock and dives off. He must tie his boat to the buoy, or somewhere. I love seeing that.”

“No motor?”

Libby shook her head. “Paddles.”

“Well, kayakers are every—”

“The motor boat,” I asked, looking at Tora to be sure I wasn’t interrupting.

She smiled. “Go ahead.”

“It went where?”

“To the right?” Tora said, using her index finger to indicate direction.

“That’s left,” Libby said.

“East,” I said, “toward Montauk?”

“I think...I don’t know. I couldn’t see it.”

“Tell Kragen,” Ike said.

“Kragen? He’s too controversial. Besides, he’s flaky.”

Ike laughed. “The baymen don’t like him.”

“No kidding...what’s Kragen ever done for them?”

Tora put her arm around Libby’s waist. “On the bay side, if you own a boat, everyone’s your friend. On the ocean side, switch the word boat for yacht. We prefer yachts.”

“Some people here can afford a yacht,” Ike said. He looked at the crowd eating and carrying on. “These people are making good money. Hah, they’re loaded.”

Ike’s wife called for him. We shook hands and he left.

“Get some clams,” Tora said to me. “Steamers, cherry stones, little necks...learn to use a clam knife, open them fresh through the muscle in the back. Steamers are best in butter sauce.”

“By the way,” I said. “Dick Broberg called. He’d like to visit in a few weeks. Is it okay if he spends a few days?”

“You for real?” Tora said. “Absolutely. Tell him he can stay as long as he wishes.”

I left for the tables lined up next to the fire. As I passed Libby she said, “You’ll have to meet Franz, head of Earth Diocese.”

“Got a boat?” I asked.

“Oh, you can’t,” Libby replied. “They guard the island against intrusion.”

Tora faced Libby. “I’ve known folks who sneaked onto the island.”

“I’ll bet you also know folks that were chased off by security.”

Tora got up on her toes and scanned the bay. “Libby, isn’t Uerrman expected to show today?”

“He...was invited.”

I went to the buffet and loaded my plate with corn and clams. Looking for Ericson or the Hampton's princess, whichever came first, I thanked one of the servers as she handed me a cup of chowder.

"Hi, new here?" she asked.

"I am." I scanned the parking area. "A visitor."

"Sorry about the corn," she said. "Local corn's not ready but we managed to find something to bake."

I took a seat on a driftwood log. After a few more plates of mussels, clams, and other mollusks, I laid out a towel and went for a swim. While I was speaking with someone on the raft, a cruiser approached the rope and buoy line that demarcated the limit for swimming. As it idled in deeper water, blue smoke pouring out of the outboard engine, a man on board began waving toward shore.

"Franz Uerrman," a woman on the raft yelled, as she waved to him. He waved back.

To the sound of people yelling his name on shore, Uerrman's boat picked up speed, swerved and made for the channel leading to the Hog Creek marina. It disappeared behind the jetty. Within minutes, like a conquering hero, Uerrman walked over the dunes and down toward the fire. The orderly clambake changed, taking on a carnival-type atmosphere with admirers surrounded him, lots of handshaking and hugs, and kids taking advantage of their distracted parents by chasing each other, picking from the open buffet and wrestling in the sand.

"Time for wine and cheese," the fellow next to me said as he prepared to dive.

"At a clambake?"

"It's a global thing. That's how they welcome their own in Europe. Imagine what Earth Diocese is going to do for us here, in Springs." He didn't wait for my response. Instead he dove off the raft and swam for shore. Others followed, each one kicking the raft into deeper water. Soon I was sitting alone, bobbing up and down. Tora waved from shore. "Cain," she said, waving some more. "Come in."

I jumped in and casually swam to shore. Dripping as I left the water, Tora met me with a towel. "That guy you were sitting next to on the raft, avoid him. He's a shyster."

Seeing that someone had stuck a slew of tiki torches into the sand, I watched Ericson unload split firewood from the back of his truck, kids galore helping out while eating watermelon. I rubbed my head with the towel. "Who?"

She stopped. "Him...that couple over there," she said, pointing.

"He left the impression he was a worldwide traveler."

"Him? Bad news. They live a few doors down. She's a retired NYC schoolteacher and he's a bartender. They leave their sprinklers on all day—"

"They're paying for the water?"

“We’re all paying for it. I know people who have to haul water to their house because our water table’s low.”

“Tora”, I said. “You think any of these people are responsible for what’s happening out here?”

“Calendar Man?”

I nodded.

She waved her bony, blue-veined hand in the air. “Arson? Murder? No way.” She drained her Mason jar quickly, causing some of the drink to drip down the edge of her mouth. “Excuse me,” she said, wiping it away. “My neighbors here...we’re talking people from the city, if not from abroad. Let me tell you about them. First they try Southampton. Those that don’t like it move further east. Bigger money flowing to Sagaponack, Wainscott, East Hampton and Amagansett. Less to Montauk. The picky ones fly to Martha’s Vineyard and the recluses? They parachute over Block Island.” She laughed and lit a cigarette. “At least that’s how I figure it, so...who would cause such pain and destruction here?”

We walked closer to the action.

Uerrman had made a stand. Casually dressed in classic, but expensive beachwear, he slurped a plate of clams. Then he had a second helping. “We’ll keep the island and that bay pristine,” he said.

“He’s truly a hero,” I heard someone say.

“We almost passed the harbor,” he said. “Guess we were flying too much canvas.”

Everyone clapped and smiled. They loved Uerrman’s delivery.

After sipping a beer, he continued, “This place, this beach, this place called Springs is a vestige of what the Hamptons were. A quieter, less demanding reprieve from the rat race lining the urban Atlantic.”

“What’s next for Earth Diocese?” someone yelled.

“For the old guard,” Uerrman said, ignoring the question, “the Hamptons represent the finest in passive luxury. Void of man-made attractions such as amusement parks and the like, the Hamptons have survived on raw beauty...a deep reservoir of incredible natural resources. To them, and you, those people that travel every weekend here, we will offer much more. New ways to recreate in our collective paradise.” He thrust his fist into the air. “Become part of the fabric.”

Someone started a music machine. After a rousing Beach Boys surfing song, they played “A Summer Place,” the Percy Faith instrumental version. It seemed out of place.

The music had drowned Uerrman out. “Thank you for helping with your finances and support in helping to save Gardiners Island,” he shouted. “I promise you...you will not be disappointed.”

I wanted to approach Uerrman but he was hustled off as quickly as he came. He broke over the dunes and everyone followed. Loaded onto his boat, as they left Hog Creek, he waved at the crowd.

“That was awfully short,” Tora said. “Why’d he even come?”

Same rap he gave at the town meeting, I thought. “You think he’s conditioning everyone for something else?”

She looked at me, concerned. “Like what?”

“Maybe a development...I don’t know.”

“Don’t even say that word,” Tora said, placing her arm around mine. We walked back to the fire. “But speaking of development...I wonder why nobody addressed the water supply. It was supposed to be on the agenda.”

“A code of silence?”

“Why? Hate to think so.”

“According to Sonny, the Montauk Fire Department hardly had any water pressure to fight the boat fire, even in winter.”

“It’s terrible.” She stretched her face in a way that made her eyes widen and her lips pucker. “It’s been well documented by state and university studies that our groundwater levels are not healthy, and some reading indicate the presence of harmful compounds, even salt water.”

“Did I hear groundwater?” Libby said, sneaking up on us from behind. “They used to have the LF2WC.”

“An activist group?” I asked.

“Kinda, stands for the Lower Fork Fresh Water Coalition. One of the neighbors was involved. I’d ask him but they’re renting out this year.”

“Isn’t Ike working on water issues?” Libby said as she removed her sandals.

“Did you put your sandals on for Uerrman?” Tora asked.

Libby tried to hold a straight face. “Getting back to the water issue, I know Ike’s been drafting the town’s renewable energy plan.”

“Libby,” Tora said. “I think you need to draft a new plan.”

## CHAPTER 13

### Coecles Harbor

The DJ began playing intense electronic music, which was enough to make me retreat. I snagged a cold beer and a burger and walked the beach back to Tora's place. On the way I called Broberg, telling him he should plan on vacationing for a few days.

After a short shower and change of fresh clothes, I remembered the doctor's note. I tried to read it but the doctor's handwriting was atrocious. Fortunately, it contained a short typed paragraph explaining my condition. Using Tora's printer, I scanned it and emailed it to Righetti. Then I sprayed some insect repellent on my clothes and headed for the deck. On the way I grabbed a pair of Ragnar's Leica binoculars. He always owned the best.

As the late afternoon sun dropped over Shelter Island, I took a seat hoping to see the mysterious boat venture to Buoy 13. At the beach, they had switched to non-stop beat-driven dance music. Thankful I wasn't there, I brought the binoculars up and scanned the crowd. Amidst a picket of flaming torches, everyone was dancing around the cooking pit, having a good time. I looked for the Hampton's princess. Even Ericson. Nothing.

I was about to drop the binoculars when an orange flash caught my eye. It came from across the bay, in the direction of Shelter Island. Then I heard an explosion as a distant fireball billowed into a reddish-yellow cloud, setting the early evening sky aglow. Bringing the binoculars back to my eyes, I adjusted the field of view in time to watch the fireball collapse on itself. Then I heard a second, smaller explosion. Following a corkscrew shaped path of white light arc high into the air and then drop back into the fray, I lowered the glasses scanning the orangey brightness reflecting off the bay. Though it was past dusk, I could see smoke beginning to waft up, dark gray pillars illuminated by the flames. It was awful and at the same time, spectacular.

Then, in front of the blaze, I saw the running lights of a boat moving away from the general area into Gardiners Bay. I couldn't determine where the boat was relative to the explosion and I hadn't a clue as to the boat's size. Scoping through the binoculars, I watched the boat run northward toward Plum Gut. Then it vanished in the night.

The conflagration continued to rage. Wondering when, or if, it would die down, my phone rang. It was Ericson.

I kept the glasses on the burning mound and lifted the phone. "Al," I said.

"Hey, you see that?"

"I'm watching it through binoculars. Where is that?"

"Hard to say, exactly...looks like it might be on the water, over in Coecles Harbor."

"Shelter Island?"

“The big harbor on the east side, yeah.”

I scoped the bay in search of more running lights. There were plenty but none in the vicinity of the fire. Then I panned Buoy 13. Nothing but blackness. “I saw a boat leave the area.”

“From the explosion?” I didn’t respond. “Which way did it go?”

Silence. “North...I think. Then I lost it...I can’t prove it originated from the explosion.”

“It was either a small boat or they may turned off their running lights,” he mumbled.

“You thinking what I am?”

“Calendar Man?” He paused. “I don’t want to speculate but there’s little to no industry on Shelter Island, especially on the east side.”

“No sources for an explosion like that?”

“Vacation homes and a ton of boats, besides it’s a holiday. I’d say we’ve been hit again.”

I heard footsteps coming up the wooden stairway from the beach. Then a second pair. Libby and Tora stepped onto the deck. Turning back toward the explosion, they watched the fire.

“What could it be?” I asked Ericson.

“On fire? A boathouse...a fuel facility, possibly a large home.”

“But an explosion like that?”

Tora tapped me on the shoulder. I looked up at her. “Who’s that?” she whispered.

I covered the phone. “Al Ericson.”

“Did he say where the fire is?”

Ericson kept talking. I nodded at Tora.

“Where?” she asked.

I shrugged “Coecles?”

Tora left for the house.

I removed my hand from covering the phone. “Yeah, but it keeps burning,” I said, rejoining the conversation.

“You read my mind.”

I left the binoculars and looked down at the public beach. The music had ended. No merriment, just the shocked milling around, figures meandering in and out between the tiki torches. “Nobody mentioned Calendar Man at the clambake.”

There was no response.

“Al, you there?”

“Climbing into my truck,” he said. “Heading to town to learn more. What’d you ask?”

“If you were there.”

“No, before that.”

I had to think. “Oh yeah...at the clambake, nobody mentioned the return of Calendar Man.”

“No mystery,” he said. “Who’s conditioned to expect violence every holiday?”

That was one of the wisest things I ever heard Ericson say. “You’re right.”

“I’m going. I’ll let you know what I find out.” He signed off.

As the fire diminished, Libby and I stared at it. Entertained but uneasy, neither of us spoke. If Calendar Man had indeed struck again, I knew the authorities were no closer to solving the case, unless they were dealing with a copycat, or if the explosion was purely coincidental. I hoped for the latter.

The storm door slammed.

From our vantage point, gradually, the orange light became one with the night. Soon, it disappeared.

“Coecles is six miles away,” Tora said, returning to the deck. “Where’s the fire?”

“It may have burned out or they put it out,” Libby said.

With the binoculars, I tried to find the buoy. I couldn’t locate it in the dark. I scanned the bay instead, honing in on lighthouses, other craft moving across the outer bay, and the remains of our clambake. Someone had removed most of the tiki torches.

For the better part of an hour we sat enjoying the night, drinking fine wine, counting shooting stars and searching the heavens for satellites. Then my phone rang. Ericson again.

“Okay, here’s the scoop...what an explosion! Three boats blown up. Two of them belong to local families and the other was a charter out of Block Island. It was moored for the weekend.”

“Anyone hurt?”

“Not that I’m aware of, but he didn’t say.”

I covered the phone and relayed that information to Tora and Libby.

“How big were they?” I said.

Ericson waited. “He was sketchy on that—”

“Who’s ‘he’?”

“A fishing buddy on the police force. The charter was an older wooden commercial fishing boat. Apparently it was loaded with fuel plus a full auxiliary tank. So, I imagine...thirty to forty feet.”

“I don’t think gas alone caused that explosion,” I said. “What about the others?”

“Modern. One was a good-sized cruiser. He though thirty-foot plus and the third boat was a smaller cutty, about the size of my boat, outfitted for recreational fishing. A smaller ski boat moored close by somehow escaped.”

“A charter boat.”

“Yep...wanna take a ride out to see Sonny?”

“It’s Memorial Day.”

“I reached him. He’s off the point. Says he’s coming in soon.”

Feeling the wine, I said, “When can you be here?”

“Twenty minutes.”

“Let’s go.” I left the deck and headed for the house. Behind me I heard Tora. “Guess the checkpoints didn’t work.”

One of Sonny’s boat slips was empty. He was still out. Ericson called him.

“He’s passed the bell buoy. It’ll be a couple of minutes.”

Soon, the red light mounted on the nose of Sonny’s boat rounded the dock. Under a pair of working floodlights, we helped him tie up his boat and unload his catch.

“When did you hear?” Ericson asked.

“Right after they blew up.” Sonny waved his hand back toward the open Atlantic. “News travels fast on the water, especially now. I understand it sounded similar to the explosions we’d been hearing out on the water.”

“What a way to celebrate Memorial Day,” Ericson said.

“Yeah,” he said, as he threw a tub of fish onto the pier. “Fortunately nobody was hurt.”

“What do you know about the charter from Block Island?”

“Block Island Charter?”

“Wasn’t the big boat a charter out of Block Island?”

“Who said that?”

“A friend of mine. Suffolk County PD.”

“Naw...radio chatter said he was a part-time fisherman. Did some chartering. He liked going offshore. I think I know who he was.”

“In an old wooden job?”

“Ancient. I heard he was delivering fish to the locals. He docks in Napeague Harbor.” We finished unloading Sonny’s catch.

“Come aboard,” he said, as he disappeared into the dim cabin. He turned up his marine radio. The airwaves were buzzing.

Ericson scampered down the skimpy wooden ladder. I was tentative, especially given the shadows thrown off by the boat’s lights, but I made it down.

On the way back Sonny stopped to listen to a discussion on the radio. He returned with a plastic two-liter bottle of booze.

“Good Canadian Whiskey,” he said. “You fellas don’t mind celebrating the holiday with me, do ya?”

I asked, “What are you chasing it with?”

“Hey Al,” Sonny said. “Get some cans of Coke out of the cooler would you?”

Sonny provided plastic cups and ice. I didn’t need whiskey on top of wine.

“So, Calendar Man struck again.” Ericson said, opening three cans of soda.

Sonny poured whiskey straight into an iced cup and drank. “Did you think he’d quit?”

Ericson handed me a can. I sat on the side of the boat and mixed a drink. Sipping it I looked at Sonny. "You think its Calendar Man?"

Sonny nodded.

"Why them?" I asked.

Sonny shrugged and shook his head. "You mean those boats?"

I nodded.

"If it's the guy I think it is, he was a part-timer. Made his living in radiology." Sonny mixed his drink and laughed. "I'll turn in my coordinates so the cops don't think it was me."

"How so?" I asked.

Sonny stared at me. "You don't have a recorder going, do you?"

"I'm clean."

Sonny walked into the cabin and returned with a pack of cigarettes. "Anyone want a smoke?"

No response.

He lit a cigarette puffed on it and placed it on a cargo box. Then he went for his drink. "Like I said, if it's the same guy I think it is, he's had problems out on the shelf."

"Shelf?" I asked.

"Continental shelf...off shore." He waved his cigarette, his hand still quivering, and stuck it between his lips. "The way it's been told, he was fishing when his engine wouldn't start. He put out a call for help and a lobster boat responded."

"How far out?" Ericson asked.

"Area Three, about twenty-five miles southeast of the lighthouse. A little early for tuna but for cod or fluke..."

He removed his hat, used the sleeve of his shirt to wipe his forehead, and grabbed a beer from the cooler. He offered me one. I declined. Popping the lid, he said, "So, the lobster boat arrives with plenty of horsepower to tow him back, but the lobsterman refuses when he finds out that the guy has tied his fishing boat off to another lobsterman's anchor line." He paused and went below. Coming out, he laid a fishhook in my hand. "A number seven," he said. "Occasionally I'll weave a few of those into my trapline. Keeps those who try to steal my pots honest."

"Was he chartering?" I asked.

"Don't know, but I heard there were others fishing with him."

Calculating sips to make my whiskey and Coke last, I tried to imagine the scene. Two boats in the middle of nowhere arguing over an anchor. "What's the problem?"

Sonny smiled and tilted his face toward me. "For one, when fishermen do that, they're profiting from our research regarding where underwater breaks occur. Second? Well," he said,

getting up and moseying to the transom. Leaning against it, he continued. "It goes like this." On his third swill of beer he'd emptied the can, crushed it and lazily tossed it across the floor of his boat. He went for another. Rotating it slowly, he found the tab, lifted it and continued. "Not only can we lose our gear...anchors, baits, buoys and pots...illegal tie-ups cause our pots to tangle. If it's a large heavy boat and the seas are bad, everything compounds. We have to yank the whole mess off the bottom to unravel it. That's added work, time and money out my pocket."

"Did he get pulled in?"

"Oh yeah, eventually, but I guarantee it caused some angry feelings."

"How long ago?"

"Don't know the month for sure, last year."

"A year's a long time to wait for revenge. Was the lobsterman from Connecticut?"

"New London."

"You think a Connecticut lobsterman's responsible for the explosion?"

He finished his beer, crushed the can and threw it on the deck. Wiping his face, he looked down. "Knowing them over there, wouldn't surprise me, but then again, someone else may have had it in for him."

"Or it's a coincidence?" I said.

"Don't think so," Sonny replied, shaking his head.

"Could be a coincidence," Ericson said. "Why three boats and why a year later?"

Sonny folded his arms and burped. "Hard to say. Maybe it was Calendar Man. Or, maybe someone else."

"If it was Calendar Man," Ericson said, "pulling something like this off could take more than one person."

"Calendar Men?"

"Or a copycat."

"Never know, but I know this," Sonny said. "Connecticut lobstermen are aggressive."

I was going to speak and then hesitated. Not wanting to wedge myself between Ericson and Sonny, I said, "Are you going to report this account to the police?"

Sonny compressed his lips, the skin on his cheeks folded, his brow wrinkled. Under the floodlights, he looked much older. Could have been his unwashed stubble. "Not too many people know about that story, but I'll have to..." he said. He paused and looked at me. "Won't I?"

On the way back, Ericson was unusually quiet. No jokes, no radio, not even his customary 60's CD. Darting down narrow roads away from Amagansett and East Hampton, he was a master at avoiding the checkpoints.

"What do you think?" I asked, breaking the silence. "What was Sonny doing out there on Memorial Day? Is that the question?"

He didn't respond. I waited a minute before continuing. "You think he's involved?"

Behind the wheel, I could see him shake his head, his Penn Reel ball cap bounding sideways in the dark. "I'd hate to think so, but I know Sonny has a temper. I love the guy. He's a good man."

"Let me ask you something." He turned to me. "To get from Shelter Island to Montauk, you have to pass Tora's place, right?"

"Well...that's the smart way. You can also loop around Gardiners Island."

"A dumb way?"

"Rough water, longer distance...doesn't make sense."

"After the explosion, I didn't see any boats pass the front of her house."

"But you saw one go north, right?"

I nodded. "Why would anyone do that?"

"Take the back door? Only if you wanted to circle Gardiners on the way to Montauk... or head for the north fork."

"Or...head toward Connecticut."

## CHAPTER 14

### Madeline

The woman fumbled a crinkled piece of paper and re-read the address. From the trunk of the taxi, she grabbed her luggage and walked to the front door. She knocked. Nobody answered so she knocked harder. In the afternoon breeze she detected the faint, putrid odor of spent tobacco. The taxi driver's cigarette smoke had permeating her clothing. Realizing it was a mistake to hire a cabbie that smoked, her thoughts were interrupted by the thud of footsteps followed by the swish of a dropping chain. After a second lock snapped, the old brass doorknob twisted and the door opened. Unable to see through the glare reflecting off the storm door glass, she could hardly make out the shape of the woman peering back at her. Then, watching aged fingers work to unlock and open the storm door, she glanced to the street to make sure the cab was still waiting.

It was. Slowly, the aluminum door creaked open. Looking up at an older woman, she peered into a pair of eyes she'd visited countless times in her dreams.

"Mrs. Ripinger?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I'm looking for Cain."

"Cain? Who are you?"

"Madeline Kidder. I'm a friend of his."

"I'm Ruth, Cain's mother." She smiled as she pushed the door open. "Come in...come in." Without looking back, Madeline waved the taxi off and entered the house. Ruth helped her with her luggage. As she hung Madeline's coat, the tart smell of cigarette smoke caught her attention. *How could such a glamorous girl succumb to smoking?*

"Why didn't you say you were coming?" Ruth asked, as they sat on comfortable couches. "I've heard your name...what brings you to New York?"

"One of the university professors was scheduled to deliver a research paper to the Zoological Society, but he became ill. They asked me to fill in and present my research."

"How exciting!" Ruth said. "At the zoo?"

"The World Museum of Natural History." Ruth looked puzzled. "I flew in yesterday, gave my presentation, and thought I'd surprise Cain."

"Dear," she said, "he's out in East Hampton recuperating with the widow of the man who was killed in Africa." A pained look crept across Ruth's face. "I don't know too much, he's pretty quiet about things."

"Are they—?"

"Involved? No, she's twice his age."

"I see. It's just so confusing."

"Confusing?"

Madeline was tentative. "It's just me," she said. "I worry."

"About my son?"

Madeline nodded.

"How so?"

Madeline was slow in speaking. "Well, Cain says he wants to quit, yet he continues in law enforcement. First Maine and then Africa. He's supposed to be on sabbatical."

"Then the mauling."

"Right. He emailed me saying he was almost fully recovered."

Ruth changed the subject, wanting to learn more about Madeline. When she was satisfied knowing what Madeline knew, she asked, "Has he mentioned his father?"

Madeline shook her head. "I mentioned that once and he became distant."

“He was an alcoholic. He couldn’t handle family life and I couldn’t handle his drinking.”

Throughout their conversation, both women held back information, but Madeline was beginning to piece together the components needed to explain Cain’s personality. After sharing tea, Ruth showed Madeline the house.

“You know,” Ruth said, as she led Madeline to the upstairs bedrooms. “You’re welcome anytime. Perhaps work at the museum or the zoo. We have lots of them and you could stay here.” At the top of the dimly lit stairs they gazed into a perfectly kept bedroom. “Cain’s older sister wouldn’t mind. This was her room.”

As Ruth explained the advantages of taking the subway to work, Madeline spied a picture in the hallway. It showed a younger and leaner Cain wearing red shorts and posing with boxing gloves.

Seeing that Madeline had noticed Cain’s picture, Ruth asked, “Are you hungry? Let’s go down for something to eat.”

Madeline watched Ruth take a few steps down. “Thank you,” she said, “but I over-ate at the symposium.”

Ruth stopped on the stairs and stared straight ahead. Madeline took one step down and touched Ruth lightly on the shoulder. “Mrs. Rippinger?” she asked. “Could I see Cain’s room?”

Ruth dropped her head. Then she studied the handrail. “Sure...to the right.” She turned and re-climbed the stairs.

Following Ruth into Cain’s room, Madeline recognized it as a sanctuary dedicated to the sport of boxing. Pictures of famous heavyweights, shelves of trophies and medals, theatre posters advertising his fights and other memorabilia filled the place. She was especially drawn to a blown-up picture of a mongoose crushing the head of a cobra.

Madeline walked to the headboard on Cain’s bed. She pulled a red pair of boxing gloves from the bedpost. “Who signed this?” she asked, trying to read the gold lettering.

Her face showing stress, Ruth shook her head. “Don’t remember.”

Madeline let go and moseyed to Cain’s dresser. She picked up a pair of gold presentation gloves. “It says ‘Rippinger, the Mongoose’.” She paused. “*Heavyweight Champion.*”

“He was quite a fighter,” Ruth said, pride welling in her voice. “But I wanted no part of it.” She pulled a photo album from a bookshelf and handed it to Madeline.

Madeline sat on the bed and opened it up. Scattered throughout the photographs were snapshots showing Cain cut, bleeding, swollen, battered and victorious. Finding them repulsive, Madeline closed the book. “I don’t know what to say.”

Ruth took the book and put it back on the shelf. “I don’t know where to begin.”

“Is that why he has those scars?”

“Honey,” Ruth said, sitting on the bed next to Madeline. “It’s not the outside scars, it’s the inside ones that get you.”

Madeline nodded and stared at one of the posters. “What’s with ‘the Mongoose’?”

“They called him that because he struck so fast,” Ruth replied, pointing to a silver medal. “He also took second place in the state heavyweight high school wrestling championship. Lost by a point. Didn’t he tell you?”

“About the boxing?”

Ruth looked into Madeline’s eyes. Trembling slightly, she fingered the front of her sweater. “He was champion. Had things gone differently...” Ruth broke up. Tears ran down her cheeks. Looking up, she focused again on his trophies. “Had things...oh, I don’t know...”

She brought her hands up to her face.

“Well,” Madeline said, putting her arm around Ruth’s shoulder. “He was good at it.” She chuckled. “He’s good at a lot of things.”

Ruth raised her head. “The doctor said he was born with an ability to hit hard. Since he was little he punched holes in the wall. Liked to pummel neighborhood toughs...dent cars...you name it, he had this fist of steel. It was always bruised, but my son wasn’t a bully.”

“It may have led him to being a U.S. Marshal.”

Ruth smiled. “Thankfully he didn’t punch while in the womb...yeah, something good came of it.”

An eerie silence fell over the room. Madeline removed her arm from Ruth. “He’s so gentle...how’d he get into it?”

Ruth looked at the floor. “Cain was nine when his father left. It did a job on him. You know...old enough to know and young enough to never forget. From then, Cain avoided relationships. I think it was fear of rejection. At sixteen, he took a part-time job because we needed the money. Sometimes I didn’t see him for days. He missed a lot of school. On the street, he grew tough.”

“It’s okay if you’d rather not talk about this.”

Dredging up memories she had buried long ago, Ruth said, “It’s time. Someone has to know.” She got off the bed. “That night in Bayonne ...” she said, gazing out a window. “Honey, you have to learn how to deal with loss.”

Madeline breathed in heavy and exhaled. “I’m beat,” she said.

“I hear you, sweetheart. What are your plans?”

“I’d like to see Cain. Can I?”

“I don’t see why not.” She thought for a moment. “You can take the train to the Hamptons. I can drop you off at Jamaica.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Madeline said. “I can change my flight.”

“Atta girl,” Ruth said.

Using her I-Phone, Madeline checked the Jamaica to East Hampton train schedule. “Looks like the train leaves tomorrow around ten in the morning. A three hour ride, not bad.”

“You can rest here,” Ruth said. “Spend the night in Nancy’s room. We’ll eat...have a good time. Tomorrow I’ll drop you off.”

They had dinner and talked, and in the morning Ruth dropped Madeline off. After a hug and kiss, she boarded a Long Island Railroad train bound for East Hampton.

An hour later the train stopped at Patchogue. Knowing she had a few minutes before the train would leave the station, she rushed through the open door and on to the station platform. She called Cain. After four rings, he answered.

“Whoa, what a surprise!” he said. “When you visiting?”

“I’m in...wait, Patchogue? On the train.”

“Patchogue!”

“Yeah cowboy...just spent last night at your mom’s.”

Silence. “How’d that go?”

“Terrific,” she said, as the train’s airbrakes blew. “Can’t wait to see you.”

He paused. “You’ll need to get off at the East Hampton station.”

“Will do. Oh, I’m so excited! See you in a few hours.”

“Ah, I’m fishing. Can’t be there to pick you up. I’ll call Tora.”

“Oh Cain,” she said. “I’m so looking forward to holding you.”

“How long can you stay?”

“I’ve got lots of time. I’m...hey, they’re closing the doors. Gotta go.”

“Okay baby. Look for Tora, or someone. Be cool.”

“Always.”

## CHAPTER 15

### Gearing Up

While Madeline was on the phone, someone took her seat. Rather than make a fuss she found the only one left, next to an unkempt young male.

“Hi,” Madeline said, settling in.

“How do?” he asked, leaning back with his eyes closed.

The train lurched forward, soon reaching full speed. “Where are you heading?” he asked.

“East Hampton. And you?”

He smacked his lips, “The pleasant shores of Amagansett.”

She waited, observing the people around her. “You live there?”

He peeked at her. “You kidding? It’s out-of-control expensive.”

Tentative, she whispered, “big money, huh?”

“Too much big money. Too much attitude...crassness.”

Madeline pictured spoiled kids.

He continued. “And I don’t even want to get into it, but suffice it to say they insist on getting what they want at any price.”

“So then...you visiting for the summer?”

“I wish. No...just expected to show up for a weekend party. Can’t stand them.”

Madeline froze, pondering his words, unsure whether to engage him. She asked, “Why can’t you stand them?”

“The parties?” He looked at her.

She nodded.

“The phonies come for the glitter. Young punks and rich babes wanting to be the deal.” He adjusted himself and looked out the window. “To be talked about, maybe catch some skin...be known as one who ‘does the Hamptons’.”

She looked around. “I think I see some of the people you’re referring to.”

He closed his eyes. “Oh yeah...many of the invited are instructed to take the Long Island Railroad.” He shifted in his seat to face her. “I’ve never met anyone on the train who owns. A few renters, lots of gawkers.”

“So, mainly people that don’t own a vehicle.”

“I guess.”

“What about driving there?”

“Traffic’s insane. Now the roads are blocked. It’s terrible.”

“Road’s blocked?”

“You haven’t heard?”

“About what?”

“Calendar Man.”

She paused and looked ahead. “Who’s Calendar Man?”

“Someone’s murdering people and destroying boats. He, or they, strike on the holidays.”

“Are the U.S. Marshals involved?”

“Don’t know anything about those dudes. There’s too much law enforcement here already.”

Madeline got the message. Another holiday was approaching. She knew Cain too well to believe he wasn’t thinking about getting involved, if he wasn’t already engaged. “So, what were you saying about driving to East Hampton?”

“The uninvited drive. The beach bums, the punks...they slave all week in the city, saving their hard-earned money. When the weekend comes, they load up and travel east, fighting traffic all the way. No time to chill. When they arrive, they’re delighted to blow it all on parties, favors, drugs...whatever. Then next week, or next month...they repeat the process.”

He’d described a society she’d only read about. It left her speechless, but she enjoyed hearing about it.

He continued. “I know girls...they head out there not really knowing what they’re getting into. Spend a fortune pursuing rumors, trying to get invited to a party or to someone’s bed...always trying to connect.”

“Expensive?”

“On what? The mind, body, or wallet?”

She thought. “All of the above.”

He smiled and shook his head. “It’s cash-driven. You could spend thousands chasing a day’s worth of vices.”

“Vices?”

“Pick one.” He looked at her. “You’re really from far away, aren’t you?”

She paused. “Illinois...the Pacific Northwest.”

“Wow,” he said, folding his arms. “You’ll see. Too many empty suits...everyone putting on an act, like they belong there, or something. Really sad.”

They rode in silence the rest of the way.

At the East Hampton train station, she maneuvered her way out into the aisle. “Have a nice trip,” she said.

With his eyes closed, he nodded once.

She walked off the train and on to the platform. Claiming her luggage, she moved toward a bench and pulled out her cellphone. As the train gradually edged forward on its way toward Montauk, she punched in Cain’s number and waited. A few rings later, he answered.

“Hey baby. Tora should be there.”

“Okay...I don’t see anyone. Just passengers leaving.”

“Here, let me give you her number.”

She reached into her handbag and withdrew a pad of blue paper. Using a dull pencil, she listened and hastily scribbled down 10 digits. “Give me a minute so I can find out where she is,” he said. “Then try that number.”

Cain hung up. Madeline waited a few minutes to call. Secretly, she hoped Cain would magically appear. After three rings, someone answered.

“My caller ID says Madeline Kidder,” Tora said. “Are you Cain’s Madeline?”

“I am.”

“Sorry...I just got here. See me waving?”

Madeline lowered her phone and looked around. In the parking lot, she saw a woman standing behind a red sports car, jumping up and down and waving. She couldn’t get over the woman’s oversized cat-eye sunglasses, but she noticed the cigarette.

“Over here,” Tora shouted.

Madeline grabbed her luggage and made for the parking lot.

“Here,” Tora said, opening her trunk. She watched Madeline heft her bag into the trunk.

“Welcome to the Hamptons,” Tora said, taking a stiff drag. “After visiting this place, you’ll never be the same.” She dropped the butt, toed it into the pavement and gave Madeline a once-over. “Have you clothes for this place?” Tora didn’t wait for her response. She pushed down on Madeline’s soft luggage. “Anything fragile in here?” she asked, as she laid her weight onto the bag.

Madeline watched the car bounce and shook her head.

“Hope not. If it doesn’t fit, you may end up carrying stuff in your lap.” Tora slammed the trunk shut.

Madeline shook Tora’s hand. “I’m not a beach person.”

“Yeah honey, got it. Get in...let’s talk.”

Tora maneuvered onto Newtown Lane. She drove to Main Street, put on her left blinker and stopped at the light. “Before we head home, I can see you dress rather formally. We live on the water. Summer life, beachwear. Got a bathing suit?”

Madeline shook her head. “Didn’t bring one.”

Tora craned her neck, studying the traffic stacked behind her. She changed her blinker and angled into the right-hand lane. “No, huh? You’ve got the body. Dazzle them. Why don’t we pick you up a bathing suit? No A-list boutiques here, but...”

She parked on Main Street. They got out and started walking. When they reached a certain shop, Tora gazed in the window. Looking up, she stood back and observed the pink and Caribbean green facade. "I like the cheesy colors," she said. "Especially the beach icons."

"Like a summer ad."

"It's how things used to look around here. They had a hard time getting this approved by the village. Let's go in."

Walking across the old creaky wooden floor, Tora made a beeline for the bathing suits.

Tora evaluated Madeline. "I see you in something classic." She rifled through a rack of suits.

"Size twelve," Madeline said.

"Here," Tora said, pulling a one-piece turquoise suit off the rack. "Round neckline, medium straps, and a scooped back...should ride just up to the hip...nice." Then she placed it against herself. "I prefer a tank."

"Why?"

"Versatility," Tora replied.

"What about...a two piece," Madeline muttered, as she lazily moved across the aisle to the bikinis.

Tora followed. "Never could wear one, just avoid Lycra." Then she pinched the side of her waistline. "Shows too much of this."

Madeline selected one. "Like it?" she asked as she placed it loosely against her body.

"A bandeau works well on you." She pressed the suit firmer against Madeline. "White's your color, dear."

Still holding the suit, Madeline walked to a mirror and looked at herself. "Medium...yuck," she said. "Alpha sizing—"

The salesperson reappeared. "Can I help?"

Tora threw up a hand. "We've got it darling, thanks."

As the young lady walked away, Tora whispered, "They pay these kids next to nothing...how do they expect them to know anything."

Madeline tried different poses.

"Play to your strength," Tora said. "You're a big girl...firm and tough...show off those legs. Let the world know what a moose hunter looks like!"

"Made and displayed, huh?" She rehung the suit.

"Forget that. You need a high cut on the legs with no cutouts." She brought a finger to her lips and contemplated. "Don't know if a caftan or a sundress would be best over your suit."

Madeline moseyed back to the one-piece tanks. She pulled a white suit, identical in style to the one Tora chose earlier. "This one," she said, flipping it around. "I'll take it."

“Want to try it on?”

Madeline held the suit up. “It’s the right size.”

Tora picked a straw hat off the head of a mannequin and placed on Madeline. “You look terrific.” She removed the hat, gently snatched the suit from Madeline and headed to the cash register. “You can always find a bikini,” she said, pulling out a credit card. “But a good tank...” she giggled. “A good tank’s a necessity.”

While walking around town, Tora explained the heavy police presence. Her iPhone chimed. Tora pulled it out. “Apply SPF 30?” She squinted up and into the large tree canopies overhead. Then she looked again at her phone. “Says I need a hat and sunglasses,” she muttered, as she fondled her gold brooch with her free hand. “Need anything else?”

Madeline didn’t, so they found the car and headed to Springs.

“What a beautiful place,” Madeline said, moving her seat back.

“Main Street and Newtown Lane are sterile. Used to be full of people, full of energy. The newcomers...they don’t know the difference. Nobody who lives here shops here anymore.”

“What’s changed?”

“Beyond the arson and murders? Is that what you mean?”

Madeline nodded.

“Used to have hardware and tackle stores. Shops full of toys and cheap beach stuff for kids. A family town.”

They approached the line of vehicles waiting to pass the Springs checkpoint. “This is why I was late picking you up,” she said. “Sometimes the line’s endless. Earlier, they had some schlemiel spread-eagled on the ground. Hope they got him for more than spilling soup in someone’s lap. Hate it.”

“Is it around the clock?”

“Know what I think?” Tora said, inching her car toward the barricade. “I think those seasonal shops are just tax write-offs for people having fun. That’s what I think.”

She dropped her window to show identification. “Got a driver’s license?” the officer asked, looking in at Madeline.

Madeline removed hers from her bag and handed it to the officer.

“Thank you ma’am,” the officer said, seemingly bored with the whole routine. He gave them a quick read and handed them back. “You may proceed.”

Tora put her window up and patted Madeline on the hand. “I can see you’re modest. Stay that way, honey.”

Halfway to Springs, Madeline said, “Cain mentioned your late husband. I am so sorry.”

Tora drove a short distance. “Ragnar and I lived on coffee, conversation and love. He was indebted to no one. He treated me like a queen, always honoring me as his life partner.” She paused. “I’m doing much better, now.”

“I’d love to have a man like that.”

“You’ve got a wonderful guy. What are you talking about?”

“He’s considering leaving for Africa.”

“Maybe we can work on keeping him here. He’s a great lawman. I’d like to see him go after the scum that’s been haunting us. Stay in the Hamptons...but it’s expensive.” She drove a distance further. “Heard about the explosion?”

Madeline nodded.

“We saw it happen from our deck.”

“That close?”

“Ah, it was miles away...when we get there you’ll see...I need another smoke.” Tora glanced at Madeline. “So...what do you think of Cain? I understand it’s been awhile.”

“It has,” Madeline said, seemingly mesmerized by the scenery. “I don’t know...romantically, I guess.”

“You guess?”

“Well...yeah. My research has been my life.”

“And?”

She was slow to respond. “Here, in a place like this—”

“Yeah...go on...”

“I envision what every woman would...you know, walks on the beach, talking, touching, wading in the surf.” She looked out her side window at a corner of the bay. “Maybe someone playing soft guitar as I hold him...feeling the water rush between us. The warmth of his body, his strength.”

“Have you spent much time at the beach?”

“Only the Great Lakes.”

“Good thing we picked you up a bathing suit, huh.” Tora laughed. “I drove to the beach once to pick up my sister. As I parked, I saw her with a guy in the surf. Two figures woven together ankle-deep in water, like on the cover of a romance novel. So, she’s making out with this guy, standing on one leg while lifting her other leg up, almost kneeling the guy in his you-know-what.” She looked at Madeline. “You with me?”

Madeline nodded.

“Well,” Tora cracked up. “She drops her leg fast and grabs the back of it. Thrashing around in the water, looks like she’s dying. Her hamstring cramped! She swam too much that day. Don’t

let that happen to you, dear.” She placed the backs of two fingers against her lips and nodded slowly. “If you knew the politics of it, it’s an even better story.”

They pulled into the driveway and got out.

“So when will Cain be back?” Madeline asked, struggling with her luggage.

“He’s with Ericson. Leave your bags here. He can get them. I’ll show you.”

Tora slammed the trunk shut and led Madeline to her deck overlooking Gardiners Bay. She pointed past Buoy 13. “See that little rough thing sticking out of the water?”

Madeline strained to see. “Brown? By itself?”

“That’s Plum Island. They’re not far from that.”

“And he’s with ...”

“Al Ericson, a fishing fanatic. They say he can find fish by watching the wind. Don’t expect them back for hours.”

“Hey,” Libby shouted from across the property line. “I’ve been waiting for you. I’m coming over.”

She walked around the fence and approached the deck. Tora introduced her to Madeline.

“I spoke with Ike West,” Libby said. “His wife and kids left for the city. He said he’d be happy to come over and answer questions about the water situation.”

“That was nice of him,” Tora said.

“I think he’s lonely.”

“When?”

“Tonight. He said to call.”

Tora looked at herself. “Tonight? I look horrible.”

“You’re not dating. You look fine.” Libby said.

“Still,” Tora pulled her sunglasses off and glanced at Libby. “Might as well have him come here for dinner.”

“I was hoping you’d say that,” Libby said, as she looked at Madeline. “So, here to see Cain?”

Madeline sipped her drink and nodded.

“Good choice. Nice guy...I like him.”

Tora left her seat, stood and peered at the bay. “Is that them?” she asked, watching a boat race toward Hog Creek, its bow raised and cutting waves.

“Yup...looks like Ericson’s boat,” Libby said. “Maybe he’ll give us some fish.”

Tora sighed. “He’s usually pretty generous with the bluefish. Not so with the striped bass.”

“—Or the fluke.”

“Yeah...forget the fluke. He holds on to that like a bulldog.”

They followed the boat to the entrance of Hog Creek before losing it behind the rock jetty.

Tora stepped off the deck. "Let's get ready."

## CHAPTER 16

### Reunion

I climbed out of Ericson's truck, eager to hold Madeline. I didn't have to wait long. She shot out of the house and ran down the back stairs toward me.

Her dark hair, loose and lustrous, flew in the breeze as she leapt into my arms.

"Cain," she cried hugging me. We kissed and she pushed away. "I've missed you so much."

"Are those tears of joy?" I asked, drawing her in. I brought my face to hers. We kissed again. "Sorry about the fishy smell. I didn't expect you."

She spoke using her fingers, her hands, and her arms, holding me tight as though it was our last embrace.

Ericson approached. "Madeline...Al Ericson," he said, reaching out his hand.

After shaking hands with him, she threw her arms around me and pulled us together again.

We kissed but I tried to keep from rubbing her with my beard. "Sorry about the stubble."

She reached up and touched his face. "Your whiskers never felt so good." She smiled, wrapped her hands around the back of my neck and nudged me down. As I gently caressed, she brought her face hard into mine. "I just can't kiss and hug you enough," she said.

By then, Tora and Libby had joined us.

"Hey everyone," Tora said. "Ike West will be here soon. He's going to tell us about the water shortage."

"Does he know any more about the explosion?" Ericson asked.

"We'll find out. Staying for dinner?"

"What's cooking?" Ericson asked.

"What'd you bring?"

He smiled. "Okay, I'll stay awhile." He went to the back of his truck and grabbed a bucket of fresh fish.

Holding Madeline's hand, I led her around the house and out onto the deck overlooking the bay. On the way, she told me about her presentation at the Zoological Society.

"Isn't this place incredible?" I said, overlooking the water.

My phone rang. It was Broberg. He said he'd be joining us in a few days.

As I spoke with Broberg, I noticed Madeline gaze toward Shelter Island. She was studying the sky, watching the sun drop over the horizon. A faded orangey sheen had formed across the crown of her head, highlighting her beautiful dark hair. I hung up and put my arm around her.

"I had no idea a place like this existed...it's all so perfect."

"Over there, where you're watching," I said. She nodded, still observing the sunset. "That's where the Memorial Day explosion took place."

"That's what Tora said. Any news on who did it?"

I nudged her closer. "News? You're the news—"

Caught off guard, she turned and looked up at me. "You know what I mean...how do people become so deranged? So demented?"

Placing my nose against her, I was invigorated by her scent. My mind was on other things.

Under a fading sunset, together we faced the bay. Slowly, she started to rock. I joined in. A mild maritime breeze ruffled her hair, catching and tossing it up into her face. I gently pushed it back and looked in her eyes.

With a serious look, she said, "I feel something for you like I've never felt for any man before."

That was an admission I'd longed to hear. "Back at Glacier," I said. "In my line of work I didn't know if a relationship could ever work out."

"You were gone a lot." She looked away. "Those cold nights...I knew you were with other women in other places."

"I never knew when I was coming home."

She pulled herself closer to me. "What do you see in risking your life and living in constant peril?" she asked.

"I don't...that's why I want out of the Marshals Service."

She shook her head and placed it on my chest. "Doesn't seem that way. You leave your job—and me—to find...I don't know what? Something new. Then you got involved with bikers in the Allagash...poachers in Africa, then the mauling." She stopped and looked at me. "What's your involvement here?"

"Nothing yet."

She stared at me. "Baloney."

“Really nothing, but I can see a future here.” I turned toward the water. “Just look at it.”

Instead, she glanced the opposite way, back toward Tora’s house. Then she gazed at Libby’s house. “Look at these mansions. Cain, these people live way above our means. This...this is a different society. How—”

“How can I do it?” “I’ll tell you how. It happens with you, you and me. Two incomes, good contacts, hard work...a little luck.”

“Luck? There has to be more.”

“Don’t worry.”

She gave me her disbelieving look. I’d seen it before. “I’ve got school. Besides, who’s going to hire a wildlife biologist here?”

I turned and pointed toward Gardiners Island. “They will.”

“Pretty landscape but I smell unemployment.”

“It’s run by an environmental organization. They plan to run a series of ecotours. Marine ecology is high on the list.”

“I still don’t get it.”

“You’re a biologist. You can lead tours.”

She dropped her arms. “More stardust.”

I pulled her back. “I can find a way. Who knows...maybe I have to stay in law enforcement for a while.”

“Who knows anything,” she charged, releasing her grip and moving away.

I moved with her, reaching out and hugging her tighter. “I hear you. But remember this.” I stopped and held her. “I want you and I’ll always want you.”

“After graduate school...okay?”

“After that and after dumping your biologist friend.”

She relaxed, made a face and became limp in my arms. I let her go. “Okay,” I said. “Sorry I mentioned him. That’s all I can ask.”

She turned her back to me and stared at the bay. “After school, I’ll leave Montana and follow wherever you are.” She looked back at me. “You understand?”

We embraced. I felt her firm breasts planted into my chest. She was a lot of woman. As much as I’d ever held. We kissed again.

She scratched her head. “What’s biting me?”

“Gnats,” I said. “Probably your perfume. Let’s go in.”

I walked her to the house. In the sand, I spun around to hold her one more time. After another kiss, I said, “Look out there one more time.” She glanced at the bay. “That can be ours.”

She melted and held on tighter. In rare form, her countenance overwhelmed me and for a moment—for just one slim moment—I felt inordinately weak. Her visit, her love, it had all happened so fast. “Where are you staying?” I asked.

“In a bedroom next to Tora’s.”

At the house, I opened the sliding screen door and smelled cooked fish.

“Good,” Tora said. “I was about to get you. Dinner will be ready in a few. Ike’s on the way.”

Libby wasn’t around and Ericson was drinking a beer while studying a nautical wall chart. There was a tap on the rear door.

“Come on in,” Tora shouted.

It was Ike, complete with a bottle of wine.

Over dinner, we shared small talk and a few jokes. At Madeline’s insistence, I ended up telling a few hair-raising tales. We finished and broke for the living room.

As Madeline and Libby helped Tora clean up, Ericson and I sat with Ike.

“Libby said you’re working on a Hamptons energy plan,” I asked. “How’s it going?”

“Great,” Ike said. “It’s all lined up. Renewables to provide all of our energy needs.”

“For the entire South Fork?”

He smiled. “All of it.” Then he laughed. “Maybe we’ll sell excess energy up island.”

“To the rest of Long Island?”

“Why not?”

“That confident, huh?”

He drank his wine. “Absolutely. Hey...this is the Hamptons. We’re leaders. Our goal is to lead the nation in renewable energy.”

“I presume any plan would require additional infrastructure.”

He nodded. “You’re right. Poles and such.”

“Are people out here going for that?”

“No way. There’s a ton of opposition,” Libby said, cutting in from the kitchen. “Transmission poles are ugly and they’re vulnerable during storms.”

Ike rotated toward her, pushed his glasses up and sipped his wine. “All true Libby, however much of that will be installed underground.”

“So,” Ericson said, warming into the conversation. “What are we talking? Solar? Wind? Monkeys on barrels?”

Ike paused. “No monkeys...but yes...a wind farm twenty miles off Montauk.”

Tora walked over nursing another highball. “Excuse me Ike,” she said, “but I’m so over the wind thing. I just don’t think it’ll work. Sorry.”

Ike looked at his watch and nodded. Finding solace in his wine, he didn’t respond.

“How about the explosion?” Tora asked. “Any news?”

Ike clapped his hands. “Okay, the explosion. Here’s what I know.”

He stopped, held his hands up and raised his eyebrows. “Everything I say is, of course, off the record.” One by one, he looked at everyone in the room. “Are we copasetic?”

Most of us nodded.

“The deal is this...three boats and one floating dock destroyed, blown out of the water. Debris everywhere. There were two explosions. One more powerful than the other. At least ten other boats damaged, three beyond repair. Homes damaged by flying debris. Nobody injured, however there are reports of people experiencing hearing damage.”

“That’s yesterday’s news,” Tora said.

“Word is, one of the boat owners had a run-in with a lobster boat offshore.” He looked at Tora. “That’s not in the news.”

“From where? Connecticut?”

He leaned back and stretched out his legs. “That’s all I know.”

“Any reasoning on why the explosions differed?” I said.

Ike shook his head. “Don’t know yet.”

“What type of explosive was used?”

“Don’t know that either. There are teams of forensics people from everywhere investigating. The governor was there today. Hope to know more soon.”

“Any theories?”

“Being nobody was injured, remote control’s a popular thought. Everyone agrees the explosions weren’t fuel-induced. After detonation, the fuel exploded.”

“Let me ask it,” Tora said, slowly as she took a seat. “We’re thinking Calendar Man. Are they?”

He shrugged and made an uncomfortable face. “Would seem like it. It happened on Memorial Day, however...could be coincidental.”

“But not accidental.”

Ike paused. “No...it’s being handled as a terrorist case.”

Tora sat upright, her hands folded in her lap. “Ike,” she said. “Tell us about the water shortage.”

“That’s another real issue. Montauk’s going dry. There’s a plan to pump town water to them.”

Ike went on to describe the state of Montauk’s wells, contaminants, the water distribution system, and the politics involved. Nothing, he said, seemed to be getting resolved.

“So, where does the water get pumped from?” Libby asked.

“Napeague, for one.”

Libby was perched on the edge of her seat. "What's the backup plan?"

"Backup plan?" Ike asked.

"In case we all run out?"

Ike scratched his head and reached for his wine. He drained the glass.

"After that question," Tora said with a smirk. "You'd better take a drink."

"There isn't one." Ike said.

"No backup plan?"

"No. The aquifer is what it is. Next step would be... could be, desalination."

"Yeah," Tora said. "Got plenty of seawater, but consider the cost."

For a long moment, we sat quietly.

"You understand," Ike said. "There's a good side to having less water."

"How?"

"Municipalities use water and sewerage as blunt objects to control land development. Less water means less building which means fewer people. That equates to less traffic."

Ericson stood. "On that note, I'm calling it a day."

"Yeah, me too," Ike said, slapping his knees and rising from his chair. "Dinner was wonderful, and so fresh."

Ericson shook Ike's hand. "Want some fillets?"

"Who? Me?" Ike said, pointing at himself.

Ericson motioned with his index finger. "Grab a plastic bag and follow me."

Libby went to the kitchen for a baggie.

"Any other questions?" Ike asked, pleased at scoring some fish.

Libby stood. "I've got another question. Any news on Gardiners?"

"How so?"

"I don't know...anything about Uerrman, ecotours...I find it all so fascinating."

"You like backhoes?"

With a blank look she said, "Not really."

Ike snickered. "I was there yesterday. There're digging holes all over with a backhoe, trying to map the island's geology. I even saw a drill rig."

"Oil?"

"Hardly."

"Why then?"

"They've got this erosion problem. They want to plant trees and shrubs. So, they've hired a geologist. He said knowing the soils helps to determine what to plant."

Tora laughed and handed Ike a large baggie. "You're kidding me...can't they tell that from what's already growing there?"

“I don’t know,” Ike said, shaking his head. “Not my field of expertise. From the town’s standpoint, it’s not a big deal.”

Ike and Ericson left.

## CHAPTER 17

### Arrival

Broberg was due to arrive. Tora laid his gift, the Smith and Wesson engraved handgun that Ragnar had purchased for him, on the kitchen table. It was good that I was there. Should the police show up for any reason, without a license, Tora would have been in a violation of the law.

About dinnertime, I was beginning to worry. There was no sign of Broberg. Tora was getting hungry so we ate. Madeline helped her clean up and I went to the deck.

The sea was flat and the winds were low. Then I noticed a paddleboarder circling the buoy and Lion’s Rock. He was wearing a wet suit. After a while, he headed toward Gardiners Island. I thought of getting the binoculars when Tora shouted from the house, “Cain...I think he might be here. A yellow Corvette’s cruising up and down the road.”

I walked around the house and down her driveway. Sure enough, it was Broberg.

I flagged him down. “Hey man,” I said, through his car window. “Didn’t you have the address?”

Gently he shook his head and looked through the windshield. Grabbing a piece of paper, he showed it to me.

“The last two numbers aren’t 23. It’s 32,” I laughed. “How’d you manage to reverse them?”

“Close enough for rock and roll,” he said, as he cranked up his car stereo.

“Turn it down,” I said. “Pull in alongside me, behind Tora’s car.”

He backed in and got out. “No wonder I couldn’t find your pickup. I was looking for a compact. You’ve got a Tundra.” He surveyed the yard and house. “Nice...but man, three road blocks! What a pain.”

“Have you eaten?”

“Almost ate a deer with my grill. Glad it stopped when it did but yeah, I’m okay.”

“The place is infested with them. Tora can’t keep a garden.”

He laughed. “She’s got the Smith. Tell her to use it.”

At the house, Tora gave him a hug and a kiss.

As I introduced Broberg to Madeline, a helicopter rattled the house.

“So, Mr. Broberg,” Tora said, trying to ignore it. “I presume you like subversive, under-cover work.”

He copped his crooked smile. “Actually ma’am, I prefer full scale engagement.”

“That’s good,” she said, with a smile. “What I have will suit you well.”

As she sauntered to the kitchen table, Broberg glanced at me. His crooked smile widened.

“Here,” she said, struggling to lift the heavy wooden presentation case. “I’m sure Cain has shared why Ragnar has given these guns to you. It’s all about the diamond smuggling ring you guys broke up in Maine. He was forever grateful. Enjoy.”

Broberg accepted the box. “May I open it?”

“Of course...what else are you going to do with it?”

He unlatched the locks, lifted the big gun out and placed the box on a chair. Bringing it up and pointing it away from us, he said, “Man...what a beauty. Love it!”

“Yeah...I’ll bet you say that to all the guns...” Tora replied.

Pointing the barrel up, he looked over the tip of the handgun at Tora. “I wish I’d met your husband. Cain’s told me about him.”

She waved him off. “It’s over. He’s in a better place.”

Broberg inspected the weapon and nodded. “I can see we’re going to get along great.”

“You and me or you and the gun?”

Broberg looked surprised. “Oh...you and me.”

“We’d better, mister. I’m the provider.”

Broberg looked at me and arched his eyebrows. “Any place to shoot out here?”

“You kidding?” Tora said, as she moved behind a kitchen chair. She grabbed the wooden back and leaned on it. “When we first bought, Ragnar would go down on the beach and plink with a .22. Those days are long gone.” Then she smiled. “You’re with the FBI. You can shoot all day at bad guys.” She nodded. “I can tell you this, if you can nab the people responsible for the crime wave, they’ll let you fire it in East Hampton at high noon.”

He liked that. So did I.

“You know about the explosion?” she asked.

He nodded. “Isn’t the Fourth of July a month away?” He paused and hefted the piece.

“Yeah, I did...glad nobody was injured. Any news?”

“Nothing,” I said.

“What do you think?” he asked, dropping the gun back into its case.

“Don’t know. Nobody does.”

“I can tell you this,” he said, locking the latches on the box. “They’ve got a ton of people working on it. From what I hear, they may even have a few suspects...but that’s just job-talk, follow?”

“Got it. Where? Connecticut?”

“Rhode Island.”

“Sounds like a New Yorker to me,” Tora said. “An escapee from Creedmoor.”

“Creedmoor?” Madeline asked.

“Don’t worry, darling. A psychiatric ward in the city. Dick?” she said. “What can I get you?”

Broberg rubbed his stomach. “I’m good... stopped on the way.” He looked out the picture window.

“Cain,” Tora said. “Put him in Ray’s room. I don’t expect him soon.”

After setting Broberg up, we headed for the deck.

“Crime wave? Here?” Broberg said, standing on her vista overlooking Gardiners Bay.

“This is the milk and honey I was expecting.”

Aware that Madeline and I hadn’t done much since she’d arrived, I said, “Let’s go out for a drink. I’ve heard of a place in Sag Harbor.”

“Sounds great,” Broberg said.

“What’s it called?” Madeline asked.

“The Cork & Bib.”

We walked into the house. “Tora,” I said. “We’re heading out for a drink. Want to join us?”

“Where?”

“Cork & Bib.”

She reached for a pack of Ultra Lights and pulled one out. Tapping it end over end on the coffee table, she said, “Going over to Sag, huh?”

“I...think so.”

“The abode of beleaguered elites,” she said. “Seems to be in everyone’s comfort zone.”

“C’mon.”

“I’ll pass,” Tora said. “A friend’s invited us all to a posh garden party.” She looked at Broberg. “There will be some models there.”

“What’s the occasion?” I asked.

“Oh...he designs apparel. His company prevailed on a patent infringement case. It’s a big deal so he’s throwing a blowout.” She lit the cigarette. “That’ll be enough action for me this week.”

“Sounds like fun,” Madeline said. “Besides, people putting up with this disruption need a break.”

“Oh, you’ll love it,” Tora said. “Everything he hosts is elegant, nothing’s low key. They’re predicting a lot of people and rain, so don’t wear white pants.”

Madeline nodded.

“Looking good here requires more than being tony,” Tora said, the cigarette pasted to her lips. “You gotta blend in. Don’t forget that straw hat.”

Broberg, Madeline and I climbed into my pickup. I had already imputed the Cork & Bib into my GPS.

Along the way I explained the strange occurrences at Buoy 13, like boats without running lights hanging out for a short while before speeding off over the dark bay. Broberg, who’s usually creative at detective work, hadn’t a hunch. Not even a joke.

“So,” I asked. “You still working the waterfront?”

“Pretty much. Brooklyn...some Manhattan.”

“No way you’d get involved out here?”

“Not my baby.”

“Who’s assigned to this fiasco?”

“It’s Long Island’s, a guy named Norm Peters. He and the New London office have it.”

“He a standup guy?”

Broberg rubbed his chin. “Don’t know him that well. He’s not considered one of the sharpest. Personally, no...let me take that back. A lot of people think he’s in over his head.”

“Why don’t they do something about it?”

Broberg looked out his window. “I don’t know. He says he thinks he’s close.”

I pondered that. “Close to what? Having another killing or explosion?”

Broberg didn’t respond.

“So, what’s the inside scoop?” I asked. “I picture a mad scramble, the locals demanding a solution, all the agencies involved being wary of each other...stepping on toes, reluctant to share information.”

“It’s a weird scene,” Broberg replied. “Guys that make their living on the water in New York City’s playground. Who’s going to get the credit? Overlapping jurisdictions.” He looked at me. “Has it affected tourism?”

I shook my head. “Doesn’t seem like it, but summer’s nearly half over.”

“We hear there’s been an endless stream of false accusations. Dead ends. Guys ratting on each other...tit for tat stuff.”

“So how do you profile this guy? Or guys? Or gals?”

“Very carefully,” he said. “We know he has it in for fisherman and lobstermen, maybe boaters.”

“Probably a working stiff,” I said. “Free on the holidays.”

“Or unemployed.”

“You think?”

He shrugged.

“It takes money to do what’s been done. Agreed?”

“I do. Money and a sick mind.” Broberg paused. “He’s patient. He waits for big days. Wants to make a scene. Likes disruption.”

“How about wealth, intelligence, educated, maybe private schooled?”

“Maybe a terrorist?” Madeline added.

“That, too. All of that!” Broberg said. “For some reason that word hasn’t been used by the press.”

“Year-round presence,” I said. “This spree started on January first.”

“Knows about guns. Can shoot.”

“Maybe, knows something about explosives,” I said.

Broberg shifted in his seat. “This is where I diverge. I believe we could be dealing with multiple personalities. Too wide a profile for one. Explosives work is very specialized. You certainly don’t get it here, on Long Island.”

“You can in Connecticut. They must still shoot rock up there.”

We drove a distance. I turned up the radio.

“Also,” Madeline said, “killers kill. Destroyers destroy. Wouldn’t it be rare that one bird does both, fluidly?”

“Hey,” Broberg said. “Good point. I like your thinking.”

“Well it would require two mindsets,” she said.

“Where’s that come from?” I asked, dropping my hand onto her thigh.

“In my line of work, I evaluate predator behavior. Bears, wolves, cougars...man. When I stumble upon a carcass, I determine how that animal died.” She looked at Broberg. “Animals die differently.”

“That’s wild,” Broberg said. “So do people.” He chuckled. “I’m going to use your logic but I’m not going to lie. I’d like to get involved. Send whomever upstate to Ossining...or take em’ out. Clean house—”

Broberg had read my mind. It was time to call my boss, Mike Righetti.

## CHAPTER 18

### Sag Harbor

We drove through a light summer rain and arrived at the restaurant.

Painted gray and white, it was a cozy looking place. Above the front door hung an old sign displaying a gilded coat of arms complete with a three-masted schooner and a pair of crossed harpoons. Underneath the harpoons something was written in Latin. From the bottom of the sign, the wooden shape of a sperm whale swung back and forth on rusted hinges. In Old English lettering, the name *Cork & Bib* was etched on its side.

Walking in, we passed a large bronze ship's bell. Madeline walked over and read the brass plate riveted to the bell. "*According to maritime tradition, whoever rings this bell buys drinks for the house.*" With a disbelieving grin, she glanced at me.

"Stay away from that bell," I said, easing her into the restaurant and toward the bar.

Broberg moved beside me and whispered, "I brought a box of .50 caliber rounds for that Smith. We gotta find a way to fire it." Then he meandered past the bar in search of a restroom.

The place was packed. Holding Madeline's hand I led her across the room looking for an open table. No luck. We headed for the bar and found some stools. With only two available, I was wondering how I could save one for Broberg when a gorgeous dirty blonde walked over. She threw her bag on the lacquered bar and took one of the stools—the one closest to me.

Leaning on the bar she glanced at me, slathering me with her warm pretty smile. Seeing Madeline on my other side, she looked away, caught the bartender's attention and ordered.

Broberg's only chance for a seat was to take the stool on the other side of her, which he did. Shooting me a suspicious yet satisfied glance, he sat and ordered a beer.

This was very interesting. I wondered how long it would take for him to hit on her.

In one motion, Broberg laid his money on the bar and turned to the woman. "So...this is the glamorous and exciting Hamptons, huh?"

She crossed her legs. "Depends on which Hamptons you're referring to," she said, looking straight ahead.

His beer came. He took a long swig and met her eye to eye in the mirror behind the bar. "I notice you're carrying a journalist's bag."

"Really," she said, pulling the bag closer to herself. "That's pretty observant."

He chuckled. "I'm an observing kind of guy." He took another sip. "So then...what do you do?"

"I'm a freelance...journalist."

“Freelance huh? What’s your beat?”

She looked intrigued. “You mean...what do I cover?”

“Yeah...”

“I used to cover water sports. I’d spend a fortune every other week getting here to enjoy the Hamptons. Write stuff and submit it.”

Broberg looked amazed. “Wouldn’t that get pricey?”

She shrugged and sipped her drink. “It was worth it...it made me happy. Now I report on coastal issues.”

He nodded. “So...I suppose you’re having a field day with Calendar Man.”

As I watched in the mirror, she rubbed the rim of her glass across her lips. “Field day?” she said, shaking her head. “They aren’t releasing anything about the Shelter Island explosion. It’s frustrating.”

“You cover Shelter Island?”

“Why not? I cover salt and sand anywhere from the cape down the Jersey coast.” She took a long sip of her drink.

“Beach issues?”

With authority, she dropped her glass on to the bar. “Not really. More recreational and commercial fishing.”

“Lobstering?”

She stared at him. “You for real?” She paused. “Sometimes.”

Broberg looked at me and smiled. Then he turned to her. “How’d you get in that line of work?”

“I double majored. Journalism and Marine Science.”

“Nice setup,” he said with a nod. “Are you privy to the murders?”

She took a moment to gaze into the mirror. “Yeah...I’ve covered them.”

Broberg looked around. “Excuse my morbid curiosity,” he said, changing his tone and leaning closer towards her. “But I’m catching up on what’s been happening.”

She stirred her drink and centered it on the coaster.

He asked, “Is it true they found the remains one of the lobsterman in his own lobster trap?”

She shook her head. “It’s gross...I still can’t get over it.”

A waitress came over and chatted with the journalist. Broberg looked away as the blonde ordered. The waitress gave Broberg the once-over and left.

“Looks like you two are friends,” Broberg said as he watched the waitress head for the bartender.

“Hey...I just weaseled you a free drink,” she said. Then she drained her glass. “We worked together. Kinda like friends.”

“Well... thank you,” Broberg said. “So... you used to work here?”

“At the whaling museum. One summer I part-timed.” She looked at the waitress clearing tables. “She likes to hook up with guys from Gardiners Island. Now it’s some coked-out drummer.” In the mirror I saw her roll her eyes and glance at the stage. “Pretty soon he’ll be up there banging away. Can’t stand it.”

“Museum, huh?”

She smiled and pointed toward the back door. “Yeah, follow the ghosts down the road.”

“Hmm... think I’ll pass.”

“So then, you’re mister who?”

“Oh,” he said. “I apologize. Broberg. Dick Broberg. And you?”

She stuck her hand across the table. “Kathy McGuire.”

“I’ll bet you’re Irish.”

“Really? How’d you guess? The green hair?” She paused and stared at him. Then she broke out laughing. “I’ll bet they call you ‘Bro’.”

Broberg pretended to appear insulted. “Ah yes... my old nickname. Don’t hear it much these days.”

“And... what do you do these days, Mr. Broberg.”

Hearing that, I pulled away from Madeline, leaned closer to McGuire and looked at her in the mirror.

By then, Broberg had thrown his head back and copped his trademark crooked smile.

“These days, I pursue a different tempo.”

“Really,” she said, unfolding her legs and angling closer toward him. “Fast or slow?”

He chuckled. “Neither... a little bit of this... a little bit of that.”

She nodded. “Okay, so you’re not some hip transplant from Williamsburg?”

Broberg shook his head and sipped his beer. “Sometimes I work in that area.”

She scanned the room, seemingly bored. “We’ve got some big boats in the harbor.” She stopped and glared at a guy walking toward the stage. “Which one’s yours?”

Broberg sat back and rotated his mug of beer. Cockier than usual, he finished his beer. “Wouldn’t be any fun if I told you, would it?”

“Honey, maybe you don’t know the kind of fun I like.”

Broberg laughed. “‘Honey’, huh?”

Broberg liked being teased, especially by attractive women. Made him believe he was doubly above the law... as though someone special.

“So then,” he said. “Is everyone your Honey?”

McGuire laughed and banged the bar with her fist. “I love a man with a sense of humor.”

“I’ll drink to that... you married?”

She raised her left hand, looked at her ring and showed it to Broberg. Then she took it off. "I wear it to scare off the creeps."

He laughed. "It didn't scare me off."

"Well," she said. "You're not a creep, are you?" He didn't respond. "Besides, you needed a seat."

"You're right. I could have done worse."

The waitress returned with their drinks. Broberg folded a bill and dropped it onto her tray. "Keep the change."

McGuire looked up and winked at her. "So, Leah...this is my friend Dick Broberg."

Broberg pointed at me. "And my friends are seated on the other side of you."

"Really?" McGuire said turning to face us. "Hi," she said.

I introduced Madeline and myself to her.

"You look familiar," McGuire said. "You folks live here?"

"No. Just visiting," I said.

She sipped her drink, her eyes glued to mine, and asked, "And...where is that?"

"Springs."

She nodded. "Your inflection. You're not a New Yorker, are you?"

I looked at Madeline. Pivoting off Broberg's rap, I said, "We're from out west. Wildlife researchers."

The band started up playing a brand of hard southern rock. "You need to meet some of the Earth Diocese people," McGuire shouted, as the music got louder. "I know they're looking for biologists to work as tour guides."

To no avail, she continued to speak. I strained to hear anything over the music. As everyone looked toward the stage, I turned toward Madeline, gave her a devilish look, and said, "I told you."

She got up and left for the women's room.

Nursing a well-drawn pint of Guinness, Broberg pulled his stool over and placed it behind McGuire and myself. As the band began to dig in, McGuire started moving her shoulders to the music. Broberg noticed.

People began dancing. Then the guitar player kicked in with Queen's *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*. It was from one of Broberg's favorite bands and he was digging it. Far from being inebriated, he began playing air guitar. "I can dance this," he said, as he rose from his stool. McGuire turned toward him and smiled. He pushed his mug down the bar toward me. "Hold my beer."

He placed his mouth adjacent to McGuire's ear, slightly placing his nose in her hair, and said something. She said something back, turned toward me and pointed at her workbag. I nodded. They left for the dance floor. Broberg was in his element.

After a few numbers, they returned to the bar. Broberg continued to shuffle his feet. Then he started to sing. It was bad.

McGuire turned away, embarrassed. "Hey brother!" she shouted. "You never mentioned the bad vocals."

Broberg quit and sat down.

McGuire's friend, Leah the waitress appeared. "What are you guys doing later?" Balancing a tray loaded with dirty glasses, with her free hand she faked smoking a joint and smiled.

McGuire glanced at the band. "Oh, we were thinking of attending the benefit bash on the wharf. Might do some on-board tours...throw a few bucks at the auction."

Broberg looked surprised.

"Mix and mingle with celebrities and yacht owners?" She said. "Dutch would never go for that. Sorry...we're out." She left.

Broberg watched her leave. "What was that all about?"

"I excused us from going out with them."

"But she's your friend."

"He isn't. He's a loser, besides, you want to cram under someone's boat cover and smoke tubes of Jamaican blue?"

"Is that what they do here? Sit under boat covers and get high?"

"C'mon...it's the Hamptons. Everyone's getting high on everything but the good stuff happens at people's houses. Not in town, at least, not at night. And, it's a guarded glitter."

"Know of any parties nearby?"

"You just can't show up and party. Would you allow that on your boat?"

Broberg shrugged.

"When the nightclubs shut down, there's no place to go. There's nothing to do except dodge police bent on prowling for drunk drivers." She stopped and surveyed the crowd. "And at night, it can get lonely. It's very black."

Broberg asked, "So who's Dutch?"

"Her boyfriend I was telling you about. Ger Dutcher." She looked over her shoulder and nodded toward the band. "That's him on the drums. He works for Earth Diocese. They play on Thursdays."

I looked at McGuire. "If you don't mind me asking, what does he do?"

"Dutch?"

I nodded.

“He says a marine biologist if you can believe him.” She nodded toward Leah. “She believes everything he tells her.”

Broberg wasn't being truthful and I thought she might not have been, either. He reached for his beer. “You weren't serious about an auction, were you?”

McGuire tightened her lips wanting to appear dignified. “Let's check it out.”

“So then,” Broberg asked. “Are you loaded?”

She tipped her glass back and emptied it. “Sure, let's make out in my 05' Camry and I'll tell you all about it.”

McGuire turned toward the band. For a few minutes, we sat and listened to the music. I turned to McGuire. “What do you think's going on out here?” I asked, loudly.

She thought. “The explosion and everything? I just think it's odd that someone was shot at Ditch Plains. That's where I used to surf.”

“Why's that odd?”

“Well, it's just a tad ironic that somebody would be shot maybe as a means to delay the permit process.”

“For building a private resort?” I asked.

“Yeah, that's what I think.”

“What's your take on Calendar Man?” Broberg said.

She ordered another drink. “He's out there. We'd all like to know. What's next? Flag Day?”

“You thinking one or more?” he asked.

She shook her head. “Hard to say.” She paid for her drink and took a sip. “If it's one, he's pretty damn good.”

“If it's one, he's pretty damn sick. If it's more, we've got a bigger problem.”

She nodded.

I'd been studying the crowd. It was a well-to-do bunch. Lots of gold chains, white dockers and expensive beach wear. The food and drink were flying.

“Who owns this place?” I said.

She shook her head and looked around, almost knocking her drink over. She had drunk too much, too fast. “I think a bunch of investors. I used to work around one at the museum. He was haughty...claimed to be an institutional investment strategist. Said he focused on international environmental nonprofits.” She laughed. “Same guy owns an art gallery. Go figure.”

We ordered appetizers and chilled, listening to the music.

After a while, McGuire turned to Broberg. “Hey,” she said, leaning slightly off-center. “I need to get going. My friend will be watching. You and I will have to be seen leaving together.”

“Baby,” Broberg said. “You'll be keeping me from doing my homework.”

“Really? And what would that be? Sleeping on your boat?”

Broberg clapped his hands. “You’ve got it, and it won’t be under a cover.”

McGuire gave Broberg her card.

“Let’s get together,” he said, looking it over. “Okay if I email you?”

She got up, caught her friend’s eye and waved. Then she slung her bag over her shoulder and put her arms around Broberg. Kissing him on the neck, she dropped her hand into his. “Let’s go, beautiful.”

Broberg looked at me and frowned. We finished our drinks and followed them out the door.

Passing the ship’s bell, Broberg faked grabbing the ring chord. “Let’s chime it and run.”

McGuire pulled him harder.

Outside, she let go of Broberg’s hand. “Absolutely,” she said, walking away. “Email or call. I’ll be around.”

“Next time, let me know what you’ve found out, okay?”

“Ciao,” she said, turning the corner of the building.

“Ciao,” Broberg echoed, picking at his teeth with a plastic drink stirrer. “Nice touch.”

## **CHAPTER 19**

### **Garden Party**

That Saturday, Madeline and Tora left early for the garden party. Broberg and I followed later, relying on his GPS to weave through the village of East Hampton and into the land of summertime bliss.

Passing extensive lawns, gated entrances, and old cedar-shingled mansions we came upon a driveway decorated with balloons. Pulling in, we skirted a long line of shiny and expensive automobiles, some of which I’d never seen before. Finally the house and English-style gardens came into view.

“Look at the size of this place,” Broberg commented, as we meandered around a koi pond. “You could sleep in a different bedroom every night and still have rooms left for the holidays.”

Near Tora's Porsche, he wedged the Corvette on to a strip of grass and we got out. With the pond in the background, Broberg looked sharp in his tropical slacks and crocodile loafers. Listening to the muffled beat of distant music, I felt his stylized T-shirt. "Cashmere?"

Broberg ignored me and surveyed the curved driveway lined with BMWs, Mercedes and rare European sports cars. "Probably a good place to find loose change."

I gazed at a stream of pond water gushing from the bucket held by a statue. "You think our man has money?"

"Calendar Man?" Broberg said, jingling his car keys. "A bourgeois baby? Never know."

We followed an elderly couple up a brick path around the house and past a small lawn littered with mats and chairs. Veering onto a yellow graveled path lined with tall shrubs, we passed a renovated barn and rounded a patio. At an open veranda, we'd reached the outer edge of the party. There was no sign of Madeline or Tora.

Broberg surveyed the guests sunbathing and sitting under umbrella tables, sipping drinks and eating from porcelain plates piled high with haute cuisine and monster shrimp. "Talk about high-on-the-hog," he whispered as he looked past the barn towards the pool.

One woman seemed to have caught his eye. "Check her out," he said, his eyes glued to her.

Slowly, we walked to the pool. "Her strut...the legs...the high heels, I'd like to flush this chicken my way."

He watched as she walked around the edge of the pool to a happy wooden Buddha. The statue was lined with bouquets of fresh flowers. "Natives," I heard someone say from a beach chair to the woman. "Shipwreck Rose."

The woman smiled and nodded.

"You see any sign of Tora or Madeline?" I asked.

"None," Broberg said, still eyeing the woman. "Gotta remember her."

I couldn't take smelling seafood anymore. "Let's downshift our way to the buffet."

To the sound of pleasant chatter and lively jazz music, I moved toward the food. Just as Broberg caught up, Tora and Madeline walked out of the house.

Broberg eyed another guest. "Look at this one," he whispered. "Think she folds her toilet paper twice?"

I looked at him.

He made a goofy face.

"She's alone. Go ask her," I said, relishing the sight of Madeline coming at me in her tight summer outfit.

"You wouldn't believe it!" Madeline said. She was angry.

Tora seemed to object.

“Here we were driving along the double yellow line when this black sports car cuts us off on a curve. Another car was approaching so Tora had to slam on the brakes to avoid rear-ending him.”

“Shhh,” Tora said, scanning the crowd. “Forget it. Don’t make a scene.”

“How rude,” Broberg said. “Too bad he isn’t here.”

Madeline looked at Tora.

“Is he?” I asked.

Tora looked around. “He’s here. We pulled in behind him.”

I could tell Tora was getting wound up. I looked at Madeline. She wrinkled her brow and nodded.

“So...now that you know,” Tora whispered. “I yelled at him. ‘What are you? The schmerrick of the Hamptons?’”

“Yeah,” Madeline said with a laugh. “Then he stumbled, adjusted his hat and said something nasty.”

“Some guff, huh? What did he say?” I asked.

“I fired back and then you know what he did?” Tora stopped and stared at Broberg and me. “He shoots me the finger and walks into the party...just like that.”

Nobody spoke.

Tora said, “He’s wearing red corduroy pants, a bright yellow shirt and a tan Kangol cap. But leave it be. I have to live with these people.”

“Okay,” I said. “I’m hungry.”

Tora nodded and began walking toward the buffet. “You won’t find anything like this at Glacier Park.”

Before we got there, Tora stopped and looked at an attractive woman with endless legs.

“A white and tan mini frock. Spare me!” she said. “Ah...she’s always on parade...thinks the world’s her runway.”

True, I thought. Most men would die for a woman with those legs.

Tora faced Madeline. “She’s very much dialed into the French social scene though I understand she’s not very intelligent...just leggy.” She hesitated. “She’s also the daughter of our host—who’s gone absent.”

Oblivious, the woman continued to load her plate with food.

“Think she’s hunting for a husband?” Broberg said.

“No way,” Tora said. “She’s hunting for a bank account.”

Just then someone yelled, “Tora!”

As the woman came at us, all I saw was hair. Blond, gray and white, it was perfectly combed and lacquered flat. Jutting out beyond her forehead, like stiff vegetation, it resembled something midway between shredded wheat and a flying shear.

The woman hugged Tora and stepped back. "I love it."

"My dress?"

"Yellow and khaki safari-style...so artisanal. Comfortable?" the woman asked, as she lightly fingered the fabric. "Where'd you get it?"

"Below the equator," Tora said. "I also have a black and white zebra patterned dress." Tora looked at herself, shifting her feet and admiring her reflection in a glass china cabinet. "And you can't have either one," she teased.

"When do you think they're going to get this guy?" the woman asked.

"Or guys," Tora said wringing her hands. "I'm so over the helicopters...the checkpoints...the cops."

The woman laughed and floated toward the buffet. "I understand some of the law enforcement people have been invited." She stopped and scanned the crowd. "Keep an eye for them. Some may be here now."

"Why?"

"Because they felt it was the right thing to do."

We got in line at the buffet table.

"Look at this china," Madeline said. She picked up a stone-studded fork. "Are these real?"

"Oh yes," Tora said. "Pure silver, diamonds and gems." She grabbed a fork and began placing food on Madeline's plate. "Here, try the black truffle tartlets and Bialys."

I went for the herring, calamari, and lobster salad.

"When there was a shortage of lobster," Tora said, "they wanted over a hundred and twenty dollars a pound. I think they paid eighty bucks for this. It better be good."

Our plates piled with food, we headed toward a large empty table under an umbrella on the patio.

Tora poked me with her fingernail. "Did you try the baked sea bass casserole?"

"Not yet."

"Thirty bucks a pound...you better."

Sea bass? I thought of Sonny and Ericson.

"She a good friend?" Madeline asked Tora.

Tora looked back at the woman. "She has pleasure to burn."

"How so?"

"Not only does she make a ton as a stylist...her associate about owns all of Gin Lane."

I glanced at the pool. There were a few well-toned men and lots of babes in skimpy bathing suits, many of which should have worn a one-piece. “What does that mean?” I asked.

“You know how many celebrities are here?” Tora said.

Nobody answered.

“Tons.” She looked around. “Over there’s Times editor Jovina Cromarty. She’s speaking with Tab Larsen. He’s a famous investor.” She squinted at someone behind us. “The guy leaning against the post? See him? That’s ‘Slinger’. He’s an actor... a rich local hotboy.”

As Tora ate, she’d pick out more people and tell us about them. “So then,” I asked, “I’m curious about the Gin Lane thing.”

“I was referring to Hamptons Breakwater.” She paused and looked around. “I don’t see him.”

I nodded and continued to eat.

“Hamptons Breakwater... that’s an odd name,” Madeline said.

“Well, like most people here, he doesn’t go by his real name. That’s his nickname.” She ate some. “But he was the driving force behind funding Earth Diocese’s takeover of Gardiners Island.”

“Really?” Broberg said. “That affluent?”

“You have no idea—“

A waitress came to our table.

“Our barista would like to know if any of you would like an iced or hot drink.”

“How about a cappuccino?” Tora said, chinning her words my way.

“Sorry,” I replied. “I’m not a cappuccino drinker.”

“That’s okay,” she said. “It’s not too late to be one.”

“Don’t worry,” Tora said. “It doesn’t lead to anything stronger than bad breath.”

She took our order and left.

“Tell us more about this guy that calls him Hamptons, what? Breakwater?” Madeline said.

To ask about someone like that was so unlike her. Unnerved, I was beginning to wonder.

“Well... they call him Breakwater,” Tora said, in a hushed tone, “and he isn’t much to look at.”

Neither was the stylist, I thought.

“He has these flabby cheeks, like a blowfish, but he’s filthy rich.” Tora broke up laughing, almost choking on some food. “I heard that he once had an anxiety attack triggered by a shower curtain.” She laughed again. “I know... it sounds bizarre... that’s what I’ve been told.”

We all laughed. People turned and looked at us.

“Shhh...” she said, still chuckling. “But it’s true. With his big round head and flushed cheeks, he could pass for the town drunk.”

“How’d he make his money,” I asked.

“His real name is, or was, Rupert Klinkenberger. You’re from New York,” she said, looking at Broberg and then at me. “Ever heard of Klinkenberger motors?”

Broberg shook his head, his face deep into the shrimp.

“No,” I said.

“It was up on 25A, in Manhasset.”

I shook my head. “That’s Nassau, not Queens.”

“Anyway, his father Herb was killed in a tragic plane crash flying back from the track in Saratoga. Rupert was an only child. No mother. So, he was often left alone with caretakers. From what I understand, he never worked a day in his life, but at twenty suddenly he inherited a fortune. Klinkenberger dealerships were spread over six states. His father also had investments in real estate and commodities. Upon liquidating everything Rupert moved to Sagaponack, bought a wide-brim Panama hat, and legally changed his name to Hamptons Breakwater. You’ll see him from time to time, strolling around town with his cane.”

“Why the name change?”

Our drinks came. Tora pulled what looked like a fifty-dollar bill from her pocket and laid it on the tray.

The waitress didn’t acknowledge the tip. Perhaps it wasn’t enough.

Tora sipped her drink. “Why you ask?” I didn’t respond. She took another sip. “Why else? Presumably to disguise his father’s fortune.”

“From moochers, the press, those looking for a handout...I got it,” Broberg said. “Sounds like he’s purchased his own dream world.”

“Yes...and they love him.”

“Hamptonites?”

“He does the entire east end auction and party thing...when he’s invited, which is often.” She stopped and looked around. “I’m sure he’ll show. He funds countless environmental causes. Ragnar couldn’t stand—oh—” Tora paused and grabbed my arm. “He’s over there, at the pool.”

We craned our necks to see.

Broberg slipped on his glasses and said, “With all his money, you’d think he’d get a better job done on his facial hair.”

“Yeah,” Tora said. “It’s all the real hair he has. He’s wearing a red wig.”

## CHAPTER 20

### Deceivers & Believers

I moved closer to Broberg. “Did you hear what the stylist said?”

“Stylist?”

“The gal that approached Tora.”

“Naw, I was scoping things out.”

“She mentioned that some law enforcement people might be here.”

He surveyed the crowd. “Good luck finding them.” He ate some more. “Hey, that guy looks familiar.”

“Which one?”

As he stared at the man, he caught Tora’s attention. “The guy with the crisp-looking pants...got a hand in his pocket.”

“Near the garden?” Tora asked.

“Yeah.”

“That’s...oh...I can’t remember his name.” Frustrated, she continued. “He’s an environmental activist, you know. He comes up with ideas, like Fish Gate Park, and Breakwater pays for it.”

“What’s Fish gate Park?” I asked.

Appearing confused, she said, “I think it’s supposed to be an underwater park for divers.” She ate a shrimp and waved her hand. “ED runs an underwater ecotour there...in Block Island Sound...off the other side of Gardiners Island.”

I remembered Ericson mentioning an underwater diving park near where one of the lobstermen had been shot. I faced Broberg. “Still think you know him?”

He glanced at the activist one more time. “Mistaken identity.”

Just then I heard people clapping. Hamptons Breakwater appeared without his wig, bald as a rutabaga, in a bright yellow bathing suit. Pale and knock-kneed, I wondered how he was able to walk.

He waved to everyone and jumped into the pool. After briefly lounging in the shallow end, he climbed out, wrapped himself in a towel and headed for the barn.

Broberg tapped me. “We lost our chance.”

“For what?”

With a slight push, he joshed me. “His wallet was in there.”

Tora got up and stretched. “That was fabulous.” Placing her hand on Madeline, she asked, “Want to hang by the pool?”

“I’d love to,” she said, “but I’m afraid of getting burned.”

“C’mon,” Tora said. “Wear your hat and I’ll lather you up with lotion. I want to introduce you to the girls.”

As they were about to leave, Breakwater appeared. Cloaked in a scarlet robe and wearing sandals, he hugged Tora. Still grasping her slightly, he mentioned something about Ragnar. Tora whispered something back. Then she introduced us as her ‘vacationing police buddies’.

He beamed. “Oh...working on solving the case for us?” he asked.

Broberg and I exchanged glances. “Not officially,” I said. “Just visiting.”

Breakwater looked around. “Cool...I understand confidentiality. I met some enforcement people earlier. They may be inside at the game room.”

Tora said, “Tell them what you do.”

He seemed shy, almost withdrawn. “Nothing more than anyone with enough means would do.” He paused, his light blue eyes afire with excitement. “I like to make the improbable happen, the impossible possible and so it goes.”

“He’s so humble.” Tora said. “I know a number of landowners who are delighted to see their legacy continue in an eco-friendly manner, all thanks to you. And making the Gardiners Island deal happen for Earth Diocese...how noble.”

“Well...if I can, I help underwrite and structure deals so that we can continue to preserve our nature heritage well into the future.” He looked at me. “I purchase development rights and that stops growth. I’d lay down my life to preserve this area.” Then he shifted his gaze toward Broberg. “But this wanton death and destruction must stop.”

After discussing how long we thought it would be before they solved the crime wave, Broberg and I headed for the coffee bar. On the way, he saw the gal that caught his eye when we first arrived.

“Mind if I try to find my own personal friend in the Hamptons?” he said.

I checked her out. “Looks like she’s worth the effort.”

“Yes sir! And still alone.”

Then she walked right at us and smiled.

Broberg jerked his chin her way and asked, “So, what do you do?”

“Don’t give me that...I’ve seen you a few times since you arrived.”

Broberg looked stunned.

Not all shaken by his question, she said, “I specialize in the ‘field of personal happiness’.”

“So let me guess,” he said. “Upper East Side?”

She laughed. “No darling. I left there long ago. Try Soho Tribeca.”

“Ah...that’s chic enough.”

She reached out and touched Broberg on the sleeve. “Mind if we go outside? I need a light.”

Iced coffees in hand, we followed her past the buffet to the patio.

She pulled out a cigarette and lit it. “So, where are you from?”

“Ah...originally?” Broberg said.

She stood, balancing on the spike of one high heel, inhaled and nodded.

“Ozone Park?”

“My word...talk about being left behind.”

“Oh...very flattering,” Broberg responded, while reaching back to the buffet table for a jumbo shrimp. He dipped it in a small plastic cup of cocktail sauce. “You know,” he said to her. “I could just eat the sauce...the horseradish, know what I mean?”

“You’re a little light of mind, my friend,” she replied.

Broberg chuckled. “When I consume something good, like quality whiskey or even cocktail sauce, I have a relationship with it. It’s very personal. Know where I’m coming from?”

“Yeah,” she said. “Queens.”

Broberg noticed someone off in the crowd and stared. “Excuse me,” he said, lightly patting her on the arm. He turned and nodded for me to follow.

“What’s that all about?” she asked, working her cigarette.

I shrugged.

Snaking through the party, we approached a guy wearing white Italian deck shoes, jeans, and a light blue jacket over a two hundred dollar gray tee shirt. He was speaking with a woman.

As we walked, Broberg held his hand over his mouth. “He wants everyone to think he’s a fashion insider,” he said. “He’s a commoner, like us.”

The man caught sight of us and stopped talking. All color seemed to have raced from his face. “Broberg?” he said. “What are you doing here?”

“I...ah, drifted in with the carnival.”

“This is our jurisdiction.”

“Don’t jones on me, Peters, I’m here for a little beach and water.”

“Who’d you suck up to get invited here?”

“I was born with the hair, Peters. I get to enjoy life. What’s your ticket?”

“Chief of police always comes through, never fails, but aren’t you a...a bit robust for the Hamptons?”

“Between waves I’m going to make sure you don’t screw up.”

“Yeah, well...keep your nose in the sand. This baby’s mine.”

“This is Norm Peters, LI Bureau Special Agent,” Broberg said. He introduced me as ‘a hunting’ buddy. “So...Peters, just Long Island? Connecticut’s not involved?”

“Oh, she’s sniffing around,” Peters said, eyeing the crowd. “New London’s present and accounted for. But you already know that.”

“Don’t assume I know anything,” Broberg said. He took a sip of his iced coffee. “Tell me. What do you know?”

Peters stalled. “I can’t share anything with you. It’s not your problem. Let Lenihan tell you. He’s got access to our information.”

“Oh, so we’re going to play games.”

“It’s not a game Broberg.”

“C’mon Peters. Give it up.”

Peters looked nervous. Lightly, he gripped the blouse of the gal he was speaking to and moved back, further from everyone. “About the torch?” he asked, still slowly slithering away.

“Yeah,” Broberg said, as we followed him. “That and everything else.”

Out of the corner of his mouth, Peters mumbled something to the gal he was with. She left and stood off to the side. With a snotty face he said, “Nothing.”

“Peters,” Broberg said, looking back at the crowd. “Don’t stonewall—”

“I’m serious Broberg...nothing. One cut to pieces for lobster bait and two more shot.”

“Same weapon?”

“Maybe,” he said. “.45 ACP.

“Forty-five, huh?”

“The lobsterman we found drifting. Went through him. Embedded in the back of the captain’s chair.”

“Figure point blank?”

“You’d figure, but not quite. It was fired from a long barrel. A rifle.”

“A rifle? You’re putting me on...same ballistic for the fisherman at Ditch Plains?”

With a wary eye, he panned the area around us and shook his head. “Best we can tell it was something fast and nasty.”

“.223?”

“Anything from that up to .30 caliber.”

“Not the .45?”

He shrugged.

“Two gunmen?”

“Would appear that way.”

“How about the explosion?”

Peters stiffened. “What do you think I am? A web browser?”

Broberg stared at him.

“Deliberate,” Peter said. “Same as the arson. Forensics is on it.”

“Well...sounds like you’ve got what? Six incidents to solve? When are you going to call Manhattan for backup?”

Peters smiled. “Never, dude. Like I said, I’ve got this.”

“So...who’s the Calendar Man?”

Peters angled his face away from the crowd. “We’re pursuing a couple of suspects.” He glanced as a starlet walked by. “Look Dick...I hate to go. Stay out of this. You’ve had your glory.”

“Peters...another holiday’s coming up. Don’t choke.”

“Choke?” He smirked and shook his head. “We’ll get him. You go back to surfing...these guys are mine.”

He motioned for his woman to return. Then he took her by the arm and walked away.

“Why’s he unwilling to talk?” I asked, as we watched him head outside.

“Ol’ Norm Peters.” Broberg shook his head. “He thinks the Long Island Bureau alone can handle this.”

“Didn’t he say the Connecticut Bureau was also involved?”

“That’s what he implied. I’ll check with Lenihan.”

“So what’s his beef?”

“He’s smarting over the notoriety we received after breaking that ring in the Allagash.”

“There you are,” Tora said, approaching fast. “I have an investigator that wants to meet you guys. She says she knows all kinds of things. She wants to meet in private.”

“What did you tell her?”

“Just who you guys are.”

“But we’re not working on the case.”

“She doesn’t know that...c’mon.”

With Tora in the lead, we left for the barn. Walking past a bronze astrolabe, Tora pointed to the barn. “She’s in there. Nice girl.” At the barn, she pushed the creaky door open.

No sooner did we walk through the old cedar door than we came up behind a woman eating by herself at a small table.

“This here is Nicky Escalante, boys,” Tora said, standing behind Nicky. “She’s a private investigator.”

Nicky turned in her chair and I about fell over.

“Kathy McGuire!” Broberg said. “Is that you?”

Still chewing, Nicky turned beet red.

“So...you lied to me,” Broberg charged. “You’re not some beat reporter.”

Nicky got up from her chair and held her hands up. "Let me explain."

"You better."

Nicky turned to Tora. "Are these the agents you mentioned?"

Tora shriveled.

"Well," Nicky said. "You didn't tell me you guys were with the FBI and U.S. Marshals Service either."

"So," Broberg said, "you're on the job."

"I'm always on the job."

I started laughing. Broberg howled.

"Let's get some real drinks and talk this out," I said.

"I'll get the drinks," Tora said. "Nicky wants to meet in here away from everybody. What do you want?"

We ordered a collection of strong summer drinks and sat down with Nicky.

"So I was wrong," Broberg said.

"About what?"

"Escalante...you're not Irish."

"Actually, you were half right," she said. "My mother was."

Broberg slapped the tabletop.

"Yeah," Nicky said. "McGuire's my alias. Sometimes I don't know which person I am."

"Does this mean I shouldn't call you?" Broberg said, with a crooked grin.

Nicky brushed him off and continued to eat.

"So...tell me again about yourself," Broberg said.

She wiped her mouth. "I'm an investigator with the Homicide Bureau, East End, Suffolk County's District Attorney's Office."

"DA's office, huh."

"Collecting data."

"So, you're not a private investigator."

"Not at all." She asked, "Which of you is with the FBI?"

"You're looking at him."

"Long Island?"

Broberg shook his head. "Manhattan."

She stared at me. "So then you're the Marshal."

I nodded.

"They aren't in on this."

"I know," I said. "I didn't lie...I'm just vacationing."

She shot Broberg another wily grin. "It's not yours either."

“Agreed.”

Someone walked into the barn to change. Nicky quickly changed the subject. “I’ve never seen either of you at the Cork & Bib before. Great food, huh?” She glanced at the dressing room. “Do you frequent that place often?”

“First time,” I said. “Interesting place.”

“Yes...it is interesting, isn’t it?” She wrinkled her brow and made a face. “Especially since it’s where a bunch of the lobstering and fishing guys like to party.”

Broberg leaned forward and whispered, “So...what else did you lie about?”

She paused, intent on the dressing room door. “Nothing. Just my name and what I did for a living.”

“She is really your friend?”

“We became friends. She’s local, a great source. I tip her well.”

With a slam, the person left the dressing room.

Nicky waited for her to leave the barn. Then she said, “I ran into Norm Peters. He’s awfully tight. Doesn’t want to collaborate.”

Broberg smiled. “That’s his shtick.”

She nodded. “So, how deep into this mess are you guys?”

“Not very,” I said. “Though...we’d like to find the perps.”

“Wouldn’t we all,” she said.

Tora walked in with our drinks.

“Here,” she said. “You guys talk business. I’ve got people to see.”

“How’s Madeline doing?” I asked.

Tora waved me off. “Having a ball, but you better watch it. She’s pretty popular with the guys.”

That was nothing new.

“I presume you’re all over the cases out here,” Nicky said.

“Ah—” I began, when Broberg cut me off. “If fact, we are.” He handed his card to Nicky. “How can we help?”

Nicky was confused. The lies were still flying.

She looked around. “I’d like to confer with you guys. Would I be taking you from anything?”

“Not at all,” I said, shooting Broberg a visual barb.

“There’s a nautical chart on the wall inside. Let’s go...I need to show you something.”

## CHAPTER 21

### Bonetrager

Madeline stood alone near the buffet table. Not fitting in, she felt attending such an outlandish party was either a hapless journey fueled by vain stupidity or just a reason to freeload on someone else's nickel. Feeling dumber by the minute, she noticed that a younger crowd was gradually taking over.

Still picking at succulent shrimp, the likes of which she'd never experienced before, she heard a European-accented voice echo from behind. Turning, she saw a nicely dressed tall dark man closing in on her from the bar.

"All alone?" he asked.

Quickly she scanned the crowd hoping for a familiar face. "Ah...just for the moment."

He moved on to the buffet. "My...they must have known I was coming."

She remained silent.

"So tell me," he asked, as he forked choice seafood and salad onto his plate. "What do you like about the Hamptons? The galleries?" He turned toward her. "People creating beautiful pieces."

"Haven't been to one," she said.

"That's so crazy," he said with gleam in his eye. "I'm a gallerist."

"A gallerist? Where do you gallery?"

"Anywhere...everywhere." He seemed pleased stating his own ambiguity. "I've an establishment here."

"The Hamptons?"

"Yes, that's right," he said. Then he spoke some Italian. "Also in Milan and Brussels. Here, in my Wainscott studio, I call it...Afrasia Gallery."

"Don't know where that is," she said. "What do you sell?"

"My dear," he replied. "I specialize in...ah, relic recreations. Creative works worth a fortune."

"Sounds exciting. Local art?"

"Oh no...Africa...Oceania...tribal...I love Asia."

Shifting gears she never knew she had, she was intrigued, greased by his blatant audacity. Unsure whether to run or indulge, she chose the latter. Yet something told her to remain cautious. Having dealt with large predators, she was accustomed to protecting herself. But her head was beginning to swirl. Was this guy for real? Did Afrasia really exist? This was New York. Did he want to sexually abuse her, drug her or sell her?

He ate some. "I can take you there, now. Give you a private showing. Have you eaten?"

“I have,” she said.

He ate some more, spilling some on his jacket. Under his breath, he cursed. “Excuse me,” he said, wiping the stain. “Oh...I didn’t introduce myself. The name’s Helios,” he said, extending his hand while still grasping the napkin. “Helios Bonetrager.”

She accepted. “Madeline.”

He leaned his ear toward her. “German?”

“Me?”

He laughed. “Mixed, and you?”

“Oh...Midwest and Montana.”

“I see...Madeline,” Bonetrager said. “And you do—?”

She had to think. “Zoology...I’m a zoologist. Animal research.”

He chuckled. “Having a good time of it?”

“The garden party?” she said, looking past the crowd toward the pool. “Not what I’m used to but for today, it’s interesting.”

“Shall we sit somewhere?” he said.

She smiled and followed him to the patio.

They sat at a table. “So tell me, what guy would purchase a beautiful castle for someone stunning like you?”

Madeline was countrified, but she wasn’t stupid. “Oh, I don’t own,” she said, looking around. “I’m visiting. Staying in a place called Springs, on the bay.”

“Comfy Springs...lots of sportsmen there. The old timers.” He smiled and followed it with a subdued snicker. “Bet it’s very nice...can you see Gardiners Island?”

“Clearly, and Shelter Island, too.”

He continued to eat. “Anything else?”

“There’s a large rock in the water.”

He smiled and rocked gently, enjoying his food. “Near any channel markers?”

“I don’t—”

“Buoys,” he said quickly. “Things that float...warn boaters.”

She smiled. “Way off the left, I think I can hear one sometimes. At least they tell me it’s a buoy.”

“Yes, that’s likely the Three Mile Harbor bell buoy, but can you actually see one?”

“Maybe. In front of the house there’s one near a rock, I think.”

“Must be Lionhead,” he mumbled. “What color is it?”

“It’s a brown rock, but we only see it at low tide.”

“No,” he replied, seemingly a bit impatient. “The buoy near the rock, what color is that?”

“Oh...it looks black. Why?”

“Does it have a number?”

She shrugged and laughed. “Who knows? Do buoys have numbers?”

He laughed and shook it off. “I don’t know. Just curious, I guess.” He ate some more. “I know exactly where you are staying.”

“Are you a boater?”

He continued to chew. Then he looked straight ahead. “I’m a man of many things.”

With both hands, she held her glass of wine up as though hiding behind it. Rotating her eyes in both directions, she took small sips.

“I forgot,” he said. “There’s live music tonight. Did you know that?”

A waiter, dressed in a kilt, approached and handed each of them a placard.

“Ah, wine,” Bonetrager said.

The waiter glanced at Madeline. “For you?” he asked with a distinctively British accent.

“How about a glass of local red?” she said.

“May I recommend a Pinot Noir?” the waiter said.

“Perf—” she began when Bonetrager cut her off.

“What year, my dear man?”

“I...I believe the Pinot Noir is a 2011.”

Bonetrager nodded approvingly. “Splendid. I’ll do another three fingers of Glenmorangie, on ice.”

“Single malt Scotch it is!”

After the waiter bowed and left, Bonetrager checked him out. Meanwhile, she checked Bonetrager out. His cavorting and seamless gesturing didn’t turn her off. Unlike the men she had grown used to out west, he was polished. Sophisticated. And he appeared to be looking out for her, though she would have ordered the same wine anyway.

“Even Jewish guys like me can appreciate a good kilt now and then,” he said, his eyes still glued to the waiter.

Still unsure, Madeline scanned the crowd for Cain. Being in New York was one thing. Listening to a handsome and suave European speak about single malt Scotch and Jewish ways was another.

“Excuse me,” she said rising from her chair. “I’ll be right back.”

Bonetrager was painted in disappointment.

She headed for the restroom and meandered about, looking for Cain or Broberg. They weren’t to be found. In the thickening crowd, she couldn’t even see Tora.

She found the bathroom, locked the door and admired the mahogany and copper trim. Fixing her hair, she realized, even in their short acquaintance, she’d had never met anyone like

Bonetrager. At first impression, she found him mildly dangerous, but so mysterious. Almost inviting.

She left the bathroom and returned to Bonetrager.

“Ah! You returned,” he said. “That’s a good sign.”

Madeline wasted no time going for her wine.

“Currently, my dear,” he said, “I’m exhibiting both abstract and figurative charcoal and pastel sketches from Northern Africa.”

“Native art?” she asked, positioning herself squarely in front of him.

“No, a collection more on the order of documenting the struggles, or shall I say...atrocities, going on over there.” He wiped his mouth with a cloth napkin. “You can call it impressionist with a splash of blood.”

She pondered his description. “Are you a...supporter of grisly art?”

“I am indeed when the spillage results in positive change. Yes...cultural change. After all...isn’t that what we’re all about today?”

She sipped her wine. “I like this,” she said, swirling it around in her glass. She played the rim of her glass against her bottom lip, swung her hair slightly and looked at him.

“Well...isn’t it?” he asked.

She paused. “Not to everyone.”

“Poppycock,” he replied, shooting her an odd look. “Read the paper...most seem to be.”

Taken by his change of demeanor, she was beginning to realize that Bonetrager operated by a different metric. She didn’t know if she liked him or not. He was odd, but gravitational. Daring to maneuver secret pathways transecting her imagination, she came to the realization that this wasn’t the place for cavorting, after all, too much gravity can pull one into the combustible heat of the sun, and the party was filled with many of those types. No, not that day, she decided.

“Who’s your connection here?” she asked.

Slow to respond, he finally said, “I have universal connections but I choose to work with Mr. Hamptons Breakwater. He was here earlier. A dear friend...did you see him?”

Sensing pathways she’d rather not travel, she shook her head. “I don’t recall.”

“Well, not to worry,” he said, inspecting the burgeoning crowd. “It’s getting quite raucous. I don’t like crowds.” He became fidgety. “Sure you’re not up for checking out my gallery?”

She played with her wine glass, staring at its clear burgundy color. “Not now.”

“Later?”

She smiled. “I’m here with the woman I’m staying with.”

“I didn’t know...are you...?”

She shook her head. “Just friends.”

He stood. "I know a good Italian restaurant in Wainscott, not far from my studio. It's called Roshettio's. Run by an Arab-Italian friend of mine who delights in making the finest Italian food." He rubbed his stomach. "I'm no longer hungry but he takes special care of me and mine. His wine selection is superb. I can tell you more about the work I do with environmental groups worldwide." He held his hand out, inviting her to depart. "Shall we go?"

She sipped her wine, nursing it slowly, not wanting to drain the glass. "Not tonight."

The DJ started turning disks. She knew she had to decide. As couples began matching up on the lawn she asked, "Do you dance?"

Instantly, as he scoped the lawn, the volume went up. They'd formed a line dance.

Bonetrager looked at his watch. "Gotta go," he said as he reached into the inside pocket of his jacket. "But not before I give you this."

He handed her his business card.

"Call," he said, as he bent down and kissed her cheek. "We must see each other again."

## CHAPTER 22

### Bureau-crazy

"Okay," Nicky said, as we stared at a colorful wall chart depicting Gardiners Bay and Block Island Sound. "Maybe I didn't explain myself well. Let's try again."

Someone walked into the study.

"Ah, we're busy," she said, chasing him away and locking the door.

She moved closer to the chart and pointed. "Montauk Harbor. Boat fire. Arson, January one." Then she moved her finger to Three Mile Harbor. "Valentine's Day fire. Another boat."

"Tora said a boat burned on St. Paddy's day."

"False alarm. Electrical malfunction."

Next she shifted to Block Island Sound. Inspecting depths, she appeared confused. "Around...here was where the first lobsterman was killed and...you know the rest. They found his remains cut up in one of his lobster pots."

I looked at the soundings. “How deep?”

“Well here it’s...sixty feet of water.”

“April One?” I said.

She didn’t look at me. “Yes...that’s right.”

She shifted to the waters closer to Gardiners Island. “And over here...somewhere is Fish Gate Park.” She stopped and faced us. “You know what that is, right?”

We nodded.

“Good. Okay...anyway, Mother’s Day.” She smiled. “I’m getting my holidays out of order but try to follow. Here’s where most of us think the second lobsterman was shot.” She stabbed the chart and looked at me. “We don’t know exactly where he was shot. Our best guess is based on currents, one visual, and his GPS log...but it aligns close to the scuba park.”

“But wait,” I said. “What’s a lobsterman doing in shallow water? Don’t lobsters live in the deep?”

“That’s...one of the issues we’re confronting,” she said. “Nobody knows. At this time, we can only speculate he was fishing or had drifted close to Gardiners Island.”

“Or,” Broberg said, “it’s a setup.”

“How so?”

“Someone with him killed him. He motored to the fish park, punched the coordinates and left in another boat.”

She marveled. “That’s a new take. Trying to mask the murder?”

He shrugged. “These guys are clever. Happens all the time.”

She looked at the chart. “Convoluting.” She nodded and stepped back from the chart. “I could use another drink. You guys remembering this?”

“Excuse me,” I said. “Which of the lobsterman’s boats was found drifting in the Atlantic?”

“The one that was shot.”

I paused, trying to remember what Al Ericson had told me. “So then, the lobsterman who was found in the pot...his boat was anchored in place?”

“Correct, as though the culprit wanted us to pull the pot and find the remains.”

“Hum...that’s not how I understood it,” Broberg said. “I was told it was the other way around.”

“Rumors and bad information abound on these cases, but that’s the story. The one that was shot? The Coast Guard located him and his boat miles offshore.”

“Got it,” he said.

“Let’s proceed,” she said. She looked at the lower section of the chart. “Here is where the surf fisherman was shot on the evening of...Earth Day.”

“He was shot after dark?”

“That’s the wrap.”

“What caliber?”

“Something fast. They’re still working on it.” She exhaled.

“And...the lobsterman found drifting?”

“.45.”

Broberg looked at me. His eyes confirmed that her account matched that of Peters.

“Now...Memorial Day.” She walked us to another map. Finding Coecles Harbor on Shelter Island, she pointed to it. “The explosion happened here.”

“So different,” Broberg said, “and away from the location of the killings.”

“We’ve considered separating the explosion from the serial killings...anyway...you see a pattern emerging?”

Silence.

“C’mon guys!” she said. “What’s the common denominator?”

“All the crazies are assigned to Block Island Sound?” Broberg teased.

She shot him an ugly face and pointed at Hither Hills State Park. “It points here, the epicenter.”

“That’s a state park?” Broberg asked.

“Well, I mean the Montauk area. You’ve got four crime scenes almost at the same longitude.” She put her finger to her lips. “What about here?” She pointed at the tip of Springs, near Tora’s house. “Shelter Island and Three Mile harbor are nearby.”

I felt Nicky was chasing straws. “What’s the point?”

“About Springs?”

“I don’t think so,” I said, having met a few of the locals. “Three Mile Harbor, Hog Creek Point or Accabonac...maybe they work as kick-off points.”

“I agree,” she said, “in the order you described, from most likely to least likely.”

Broberg pointed at Montauk Harbor. “I think you’d increase your chance of success concentrating here. For some reason, I smell a guy scraping to get by.”

“You don’t think rich guys have the capacity to kill?”

He folded his arms and shook his head.

“We’re talking Father’s Day,” she said. “That’s next.”

“Don’t get me wrong,” he said. “Rich punks will blow you away as fast as anyone, but I think our man might be from Connecticut...but only for the lobstermen killings.” He moved to the chart and pointed at Hither Hills State Park. “Why would a lobsterman travel to the ocean shore to shoot a surf fisherman, or bomb some boats belonging to a few vacationers and an old clam digger?”

“Don’t forget. The boats torched at Montauk and at Three Mile Harbor all belonged to commercial guys.” She sat down. “Look...we’re going to get hit again. I’ll lay it out clearly. I could use your experience.”

I sat next to her. “What’s going on with the investigation?”

“Can I get a good stiff drink?”

“Sure,” Broberg said. “I’ll go with you.” He took my order and they left.

I walked over to the charts. Rehashing her presentation, I realized she was onto something. Problem was, the territory was too big to analyze. Shelter Island alone required its own chart. I traced the route that anyone would have taken to motor from the explosion at Coecles Harbor around Gardiners Island and back to Montauk. It was a long shot but plausible, especially if he was responsible for setting and detonating the charges.

Soon they returned, drinks in hand.

“How’s Madeline doing?” I asked, as Broberg handed me my cocktail.

“Didn’t see her. There must be two hundred people here.”

Before Nicky sat down, I asked, “Did the explosion require underwater work?”

She nodded. “We now know that charges were set under all three hulls.”

We sat in silence. “Okay,” I said. “So our killer might be a lobsterman who also dives.”

“Or we’re dealing with more than one suspect.”

“Do lobstermen dive?” Broberg asked.

“We understand some of them dive to salvage things like fishing gear and lobster pots, but let me continue on the investigation.” She stirred her drink and took a long sip. “We’re all working on parallel investigations. Nobody’s sharing information.”

“Even the Coast Guard?”

“Great guys but they have nothing.”

“They were first on more than one scene.”

“Nothing,” she said. “No prints, no witnesses, not even hearsay.”

At that point, my thinking changed. I’d come to the conclusion we were dealing with an intelligent monster, or monsters. “What about the town police?”

“Kragen? Useless, plus, I think he’s a creep.” She took another sip. “Excuse me guys but...I’ve had zero help from the feds. Peters won’t cooperate. He knows something but he isn’t talking.”

“Hold on Nicky,” Broberg said. “Don’t let Peters define the Long Island Bureau. There are a lot of good people in Hauppauge. Peters...he carries his own baggage and it stinks. We all know that.”

“I know...I know,” she said. “Just don’t quote me.”

“And Homeland?” Broberg said.

“They’re reluctant to label anything an act of terror. I’ve seen a few of their people, but not many. It’s mostly been us. A county effort. Our land, marine and air people.”

“Any suspects?” I asked.

“A handful.”

“Local?”

“One in particular. He’s prime. A guy from Montauk...owns two boats. Alternates between commercial fishing and lobstering.”

“What’s his name?” I asked.

“Augustino. Real name is Alberto but he goes by Sonny.”

I sipped my drink and glanced at Broberg. Breathing in slowly, I exhaled and asked, “What have you got on him?”

“Well, for one, he’s no daisy. Multiple DUI’s, disturbing the peace, exceeding quotas, assault...small time stuff but, all together, enough to put him on the edge.”

“What’s the hook?”

“Apparently there was bad blood between Augustino and the owner of the commercial fishing boat that was blown up at Coecles Harbor.”

“Over what?”

“What else? Money. Apparently he owed Augustino. Then there was the lobsterman who was shot. He and Augustino were engaged in a long running feud over the same woman. She’s already given us a verbal that Sonny told her multiple times he was going to kill him.”

“She hasn’t signed anything?”

“That’s part of the problem.”

I paused. “Have you visited Augustino?”

“I’ve tried, at his boat. He’s crass. Usually hitting the sauce, every other word is foul. He denies everything, but I don’t have enough to justify a warrant.”

“If you did, what would you be after?”

“Explosives...a .45 caliber rifle.”

“What kind of explosive was used?”

“Forensics is still working on it.”

Thinking that Peters said a .45 caliber round had been used to kill all the victims, I recalled Sonny Augustino’s rifle being a .243. His bore was clean. “Back to the gun,” I said. “You think this Augustino guy may have plugged the lobsterman.”

“It’s a real possibility.”

Though her reasoning was off, I nodded. “That would mean he has the rifle used in all the killings.”

She remained silent.

“Have you a reason to believe he’s connected to the arson or the surf fisherman shooting?” Broberg asked.

She made a face and shook her head. “That’s where the wheels fly off the wagon.”

“What about groups? Anarchists, anti-fishing extremists, wackos...you fill in the blank.”

She nodded. “A few. Could be something there. I need to check on where we are with that.”

Broberg checked his watch. “You never told me,” he said, gazing at her. “How’d you get into this place?”

She relaxed. “The chamber sent us invitations. We’re locked in politically.”

“You think for benevolence or for, say...thinly disguised event protection?”

“Hum,” she said. “Never heard it put that way.”

“You’re packing aren’t you?”

“Always.”

He rose from his seat. “Who cares,” he said. “Food’s great and the drinks flow.”

“And I get to hang with a few great guys.” Her demeanor had changed. She was more like when we met her at the Cork & Bib in Sag Harbor.

“Yeah right,” Broberg said. “Don’t try to butter us up. We know nothing.”

As we were about to leave the study, she said, “Did you guys know the Montauketts called Gardiners ‘Manchonake’?”

“Had no idea,” Broberg said, with a hint of sarcasm.

“Yeah,” she said. “Stands for the *Island of Death*.”

“Why?”

“They battled the Pequots there. Guess casualties were high.”

“What’s that worth?” I asked.

She didn’t reply. Instead, she opened the door and led us back to the party. The music about knocked us over. She and Broberg went off to talk. Then she waved and left.

I was about to look for Madeline when Broberg walked back to join me. “Notice Peters never mentioned any other agency involved?”

“Why do you think?”

“He doesn’t want me nosing around. After what she said, I’d like to bawl him out.”

We made it to the patio. The place had gone rock and roll mad. People making out, hanging around and enjoying the pool. The smell of marijuana was thick. Then I saw Madeline dancing. Though I minded, quickly I came to terms with it. They weren’t slow dancing. Besides I’d left her for most of the party.

“Another drink?” I asked, angling toward the bar. Then I saw her. She entered the barn.

“Dick,” I said. “Remember the Hamptons princess I told you about. The woman I’d seen on the end of the jetty at the mouth of Hog Creek.”

“She here?”

“I saw her enter the barn. You didn’t see her? Raven black hair?”

He ordered a drink.

“She’s ace gorgeous.”

Madeline caught my eye. She’d stopped dancing and was chatting with a tall dark guy dressed suave and debonair.

I left Broberg and sped toward the barn. Grabbing the iron handle on the door, suddenly the door flew into my face.

“Forgive me,” a woman said, exiting the barn. “We nearly collided. Dressing rooms are to the left.”

I peeked in the barn.

She returned. “Pardon me but I’m the host. Who are you?”

With one eye in the barn, I introduced myself. Then I asked, “Who was that raven-haired beauty?”

“I don’t know who you are referring to.”

“She just entered the barn. Long black hair. Tall.”

She studied my face as though feeling sorry for me.

“She must have gone into one of the dressing rooms,” I said.

She peeked into the barn. “I was just in the dressing rooms. Nobody’s there...the barn’s empty.”

“Can’t be. I just saw her.”

She dropped her eyes to the grass. “You must be referring to one of my guests.” She gestured for me to follow her. “I’m heading for the pool area. Come, I’ll introduce you.”

She led me around the pool to a woman who had long black hair but she was much shorter and larger. Tapping her from behind, the host said, “Mr. Rippinger here would like to meet you.”

The dark-haired woman turned with a huge smile. Then she left her friends, moved closer and angled for a hug.

*Agh...the Hamptons.*

I resisted and looked at our host. “I’m sorry,” I said with most apologetic face. “I was looking for someone else...someone I work with.”

When she began to survey the crowd, I left in a hurry.

Grateful and a proud she was mine, I walked up behind Madeline. Relishing her profile, I noticed how the dim light played off her hair throwing off auburn-tinted accents. How the

shadows accentuated her opaque eyes and fine cheekbones. Putting my arm around her I said, "Let's go baby. Time to leave."

She pushed away and offered me an impish smile. "Hey...we haven't enjoyed anything together here." She pressed herself into me and reached down below my beltline. "I'm feeling it so bad," she said.

I knew she was running hot. "We can enjoy each other later."

Tora and Broberg walked over. He was into another plate of seafood.

"I'm exhausted," Tora said. "Ready to leave?"

Madeline pulled me closer. "Absolutely," she said.

On the way out, Tora bumped into me. "That guy that cut me off. He's over there, behind the buffet. See him...sitting with another guy."

"Let's check this duck out," I said, dropping my arm from Madeline's waist.

"No don't," she said. "Okay...but be nice."

I approached him. Standing over his table, I said, "Hi...I understand you cut these ladies off earlier today."

"Oh my good man, you're quite mistaken," he said.

Tora walked over. "You schmuck. There's no mistake. You could have killed us."

She smelled of alcohol.

He got up and stared at Tora: "Stop your kvetching...you haven't a clue who I am." He pointed at his rear end. "You can kiss my you know what." He rose from his table and wiped his mouth on a napkin. "I had nothing to do with her."

"Yeah...and you don't have years of lint stuck in your belly button, either," she said.

"I wouldn't speak to me like that." He threw his napkin at Tora.

"Hey buddy," I said, watching the napkin drop to the floor. "How'd you like to go for a swim in the pool?"

"You wouldn't dare...I'll sue you."

Simultaneously, Broberg and I each pulled out our badges and showed him. "State Department," Broberg said, turning to Tora. "She's an investigator. How'd you like to be held for interrupting an investigation?"

"Besides breaking the law," she added.

He about collapsed onto the table.

I turned to find Madeline. She was back loading up on snacks.

He put his hands up. "I take that back...I'll apologize to both of them."

"Yes-you-will," I replied.

“For the sake of decency, learn how to respect others,” Tora said. “You’re giving me a double migraine.” Again, she reached into her bag for a bottle of Paxil. She popped a few tablets. I knew it as an anti-depressant drug, but not for migraines.

We left the party and found our way to the driveway.

“Whoa,” Broberg said. “Look at all the SUVs. Talk about a transformation.”

“What’d you expect?” Tora said. “It’s a younger crowd. Less affluent.”

We left the women, passed a few unmarked squad cars, and climbed into Broberg’s Corvette.

“You ever catch up with your Hamptons princess?” he said.

I looked out the side window. “Let’s just leave.”

He pulled out. “Nicky said she’d share what she knows if we get involved.”

“What is this?” I asked. “Everyone forms their own posse?”

Broberg laughed. “Interesting perspective.”

“Besides...what do you think she knows?”

He pawed his face and grinned. “She knows I’ll be calling.”

“Ah...I need to cut her some slack,” I said. “She’s under pressure from everyone, from the governor down to these people.”

We drove in silence. “Think about it,” he said with a curious stare. “What if we can bust things wide open?” He paused. “Mama mia—”

It didn’t take long to decide. “Let’s go for it,” I said. “All they can do is fire me.”

“You’re almost out the door anyway.” He checked his GPS. “Guess I’m calling Lenihan...and you?”

“This isn’t our business.”

“You’re still on the roster.”

“I’m on sabbatical.”

Silence.

“And?”

He had me. “Righetti’s chomping to get me back out west.”

“Can you smell it?” he asked. We drove a few miles. “C’mon, I know you want it.”

## CHAPTER 23

### Reflection

As I made coffee the next morning, I heard a car pull into the driveway. Then footsteps up the back stairs and across the back deck. The screen door opened. It was Ray Constellioni, VP of security for Southern Cross.

“Hey,” he said, slowly sliding the door closed. “I thought I’d catch everyone asleep.”

“Didn’t sleep well. Out to pick up Tora?”

“Naw...got to get some work papers signed.” He crept across the room and sat in front of the chess set. “Been wondering what’s going on out here—”

“I guess. Me too—”

“How about a quick game of chess?” He dropped his head, eyes on me and jaw relaxed anticipating my reply. “C’mon...just until everyone gets up?”

I had no interest in playing chess, let alone at seven in the morning. Mixing cream with my coffee, I offered to make him a cup. He accepted. The sound of a motorboat cutting across the bay made me eager to sit overlooking the water. I poured him a cup, black.

“You got me last time,” he said.

I nodded toward the bay. “Tell you what. Let’s play on the deck.”

Ray collected the pieces and grabbed the board. Soon we were at it.

The coffee began to kick in. “For the sake of discussion, where do you think our guy is hiding?”

He shook his head and slid a knight forward. I countered with my queen.

“Don’t know,” he replied, seemingly lost in our game. “I think the guy might be found in Connecticut.”

His response didn’t surprise me.

“Guy? Not a woman?”

“Naw,” he said, as he brought a bishop out. “There aren’t many women lobstering these days.”

“So, you think we’re dealing with a lobsterman.”

He stopped and looked up at me. “Who else would commit these crimes?”

“Even the surf fisherman shot at Ditch Plains?”

He nodded. “Your turn.”

I heard a door close. It was Tora. She usually slept in, especially after drinking.

“What time did you get here?” she yelled, walking toward us from the house.

Ray sat up and looked at his watch. "About a half hour ago."

"Your voice woke me up," she said, stepping onto the deck. She pulled a chair up to the board. "I'm ready to sign those papers if you want."

Ray was concentrating on beating me. "Sure, I've got them in the car."

Tora sat and watched us play. "So," she said, looking at me. "How'd you like the party?"

I smiled. "Food was incredible."

"You and Broberg would have enjoyed it more if you didn't isolate yourselves up with those law enforcement people."

I didn't respond.

"And Broberg," she said, patting her hair. "Does he always argue with women?"

I had to smile again. "Only those he's interested in."

"I guess." Tora laughed. "Madeline met some guy she said was 'model handsome, a perfect gentleman and loaded'." Her statement shattered my concentration. "You should ask her about him."

I wondered why Madeline would say something like that and even why Tora would echo it. I played worse but Ray was ecstatic. Finally he beat me.

"So," she said, followed by an expletive. "I'm trying to have a late night drink...try and get to sleep...and I get a call from the broad that owns that timeworn abomination across the street. She complained about Broberg's Corvette being too loud."

"Too loud? We returned early."

"Yeah...but he left sometime after midnight. I heard him. No big deal."

I stared at Buoy thirteen and wondered where Broberg may have gone.

"Don't worry about her," Tora said. "She's always waiting to be outraged. I told her to 'knock it off already'." Tora pulled out and lit a cigarette. "I don't need some schlepper from Bensonhurst ragging on me."

In one motion, Tora crossed her legs and faced the bay. She seemed worked up. Maybe she didn't like it that Broberg and I didn't mingle at the party. Then again, her tone could have been attributed to anything—like being hung over or lack of sleep.

Ray talked me into a second game. "Staying overnight?" I asked.

"After we get the papers signed, I hate to but I gotta battle traffic back to Manhattan."

Broberg joined us.

"Up early," I said, still ruminating on what Tora said about Madeline.

"Yeah...couldn't sleep." He walked to the deck railing and folded his arms. Shaking his head he said, "My mind's swimming over this Calendar Man crap."

"Seems like none of us could sleep," I said. "Flag Day's coming up."

“Yeah...that’s the next holiday, isn’t it?” Broberg said, as he dropped his arms, leaned on the rail and looked out over the bay. “At least on paper.”

“Isn’t much of holiday, but whatever, whoever we’re dealing with doesn’t care. It could be an opportunity.”

Broberg agreed. “Last night I ran out to Ditch Plains. Watched the surf fishermen. It was blacker than a pile of coal buried in a closed casket.”

“Montauk’s always dark at night,” Tora said. “By the way...our neighbor’s complaining about your car.”

Broberg rolled his eyes and stared blankly across the water. “It’s a free society.”

“Just mentioning it, sweetheart. She can be a pain.”

Broberg glanced at her. “What’s her level of hotitude?”

“Who’s?”

“Your neighbor’s.”

She waved him off. “Forget it. You’re not rich enough, besides she’s fallen in love with a chocolatier. Wealthy guy from Belgium shows up now and then.”

“Anyway,” he said, refocusing on the bay, “based on what I saw last night, I understand how someone could get away with shooting a surf fisherman.” He paused and gazed at Shelter Island. “The wind...white breakers crashing on the shore, noisy as heck...guys up to their knees in inky-black water casting for a bite. Can’t see, run, or hear...plenty of dunes to hide behind.” He turned, folded his arms and leaned on the railing. “It’s perfect for a killing.”

Tora’s cell phone rang.

“Hello,” she said without checking to see who it was.

As she listened, her eyes met mine. “Well. He’s right here,” she said. “Ask him yourself.”

“It’s Ericson,” she whispered, handing me her phone.

I took it. “Hey Al,” I said. “What’s up?”

“Hey, you up for some fishing?”

I remembered that Broberg hated to go on the water. “Probably not today,” I said, “but I want to introduce you to a friend. He’s staying here at the house.”

I held the phone to my chest and looked at Broberg. “Should I ask him to connect us with Sonny Augustino?”

“He’s friends with Augustino?”

I nodded and brought the phone back to my ear. Ericson continued to speak about catching some fish. “That big, huh?” I said, having no idea what I was referring to.

He went on and on, telling me a story about catching his latest monster striper. At the right time, I broke in. “Say—Al?”

Ericson stopped.

“I’d like to visit Sonny. Ask him a few questions.”

Silence. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“You think he’d mind?”

More silence. “About what?”

“The crime wave?” I said.

“Don’t you think he’s grown tired of that?”

I hesitated, fingering the phone. “Ah...yeah, but I heard something the other day that might interest him.” No response. I glanced at Broberg and shrugged.

Broberg shrugged back.

“Well...you know where to find him,” Ericson said. “He’s usually at sea or on his boat. Want his number?”

“Sure,” I said, scrambling to find something to write with.

Ericson didn’t wait. He reiterated the number. “Got it?”

“Yeah,” I said, committing the number to memory. I pulled out my own phone and punched it in. “Have you ever seen him lose his temper?”

“Sonny? All the time. He’s quick tempered. Everyone knows that.”

I’d heard enough. After telling Ericson I had to go, I took a rain check on fishing and hung up.

I looked at Broberg. “It’s all ours. You up for heading to Montauk?”

He checked the time. “It’s Sunday.” He stared at the wooden deck. “Is he working?”

Tora peered at Broberg. “Let me tell you. When you fish or lobster for a living, there are no days off.”

Broberg nodded. “Tomorrow I’ll call Lenihan...tell him what we find out.”

## CHAPTER 24

### Just Asking

That afternoon we climbed in my pickup and headed east to Montauk. Following familiar roads, I drove through East Hampton, Amagansett and then toward the Montauk Marine Basin.

As we passed Ditch Plains, Broberg pointed out where he'd investigated. When he finished, I asked, "At the party, did you notice Madeline with any guys?"

He paused. "Only once, toward the end. That was it. Why?"

I shook my head. "Just asking. Tora mentioned something about some guy."

We let it be.

We drove through Montauk. From there, it got sketchy but I found the right road that lead to Sonny's marina.

"You know," I said, looking at the harbor through the trees. "We may crack this case wide open today. You're carrying, right?"

"Always," he said, as he twisted to look in the back seat. He checked the storage compartment between both front seats. "No cuffs?"

I shook my head. "You kidding?"

Slamming the storage lid closed, he said, "Me neither."

It was a good point. Then I remembered Sonny's gear. "If we need it, he has plenty of rope."

As we pulled up to the path that led to his boat, Broberg stopped. "As a Marshal, you have no jurisdiction here. If we get into it, it's all me. FBI."

I understood.

I parked where Ericson had before, on the edge of the pier. I didn't see Sonny's rusted out Dodge, but of his boats were docked. We got out and walked over to them.

I looked around. Then down from the pier, into each boat. "Sonny," I yelled. All I heard was saltwater lightly lap off each hull. I tried again. Nothing. I put my foot on the ladder that lead down to the stern of his larger boat. Dropping down, I jumped onto the deck. "I'm tempted to go below. Maybe look around."

Broberg looked nervous. "I...don't like it. We're too vulnerable." He scanned the marina. "Even if we're not seen, what if he suddenly shows up and freaks out? We don't have a warrant."

I reconsidered, left the boat and climbed back onto the pier.

"Too bad."

"Didn't Tora say he'd be working today?"

"Tora doesn't know..."

We returned to the truck and headed back to Springs. Suddenly, as I pulled out onto Montauk Highway, I noticed what looked like his pickup pass us. Without signaling, the driver turned hard and accelerated toward the marina. I strained to see through the windshield.

“That’s him,” I said.

I drove out onto the main highway, pulled a U-turn and followed Sonny back to the dock. He pulled his rusted Dodge into the parking lot and I pulled in alongside him. I didn’t think he recognized me so I smiled and waved. He sat stoic, watching us. We got out.

As we rounded the rear of his pickup, he got out slowly. Then he recognized me. “Cain?” he said, reaching out to shake. He seemed cautious. “I’m about to go out.” He looked at Broberg up and down. “I could use a hand. Want to earn tonight’s dinner?”

Broberg put up his hands and stepped backwards. “Water and me don’t get along.”

“Sonny,” I said, after shaking hands. “This here is Dick Broberg. He’s a personal friend of mine.” They shook. “He’s with the FBI.”

Sonny left for the back of his pickup, picked up a box and without saying a word headed for his boats. Dismayed, I looked at Broberg. He shrugged. At a casual pace, we followed him.

Sonny laid the box on the pier, got on the ladder and hauled it down onto the bigger boat. By the time we caught up with him, he was at work on the deck, busy with intent. Then he disappeared into the cabin.

We stood on the pier and waited.

Finally, he poked his head out of the cabin. “Look Cain,” he said, I respect you but I’ve already met everyone, including with the FBI. I’m done talking about this.”

Broberg elbowed me.

I glanced at him.

“Excuse me Sonny,” he said. “Can I ask if you know the name of the FBI agent you spoke with?”

Sonny went back down below. We waited forever. I could hear him but couldn’t see him. Then he came back on deck.

“Okay boys,” he said, dressed in different clothes while he snapped the shoulder straps on his rubber bibs. Caution evolved to mild anger. “I haven’t the time for playing suspect, know what I mean?”

“That’s why we’re here,” I said. I looked at Broberg. “We’ve heard some things and wanted to ask you a few questions.” He kept working, preparing to leave port.

“Sonny...nobody’s saying you’re part of this. We’re not here to tell you that.”

He threw a plastic box across the deck, leaned against the side of the boat and firmly folded his arms. Without looking at us, he said, “Talk!”

“May we board?”

He walked to the stern and pulled the boat closer to the ladder.

I went first, then Broberg. On the last step, he almost flopped. I caught him and helped him onto the boat.

“Told you boats and me don’t get along,” Broberg said.

I asked Sonny, “Do you remember the name of the FBI agent you spoke with?”

Looking down, he pushed his hat up and scratched his scalp. “Don’t remember. It’s all running together.” He squinted at the deck. “Some guy once and then a gal, looked Latino. She’s been here twice. She’s annoying. Then a different guy...I think from Homeland. Nobody from the town.”

I nodded. “Do you still have the rifle you showed me?”

He retrieved it from the cabin and handed it to me. I looked down the bore. It was still spotless. “You’re not worried about getting it stolen?” I said, handing it to Broberg.

“Nobody boards the boats of strangers here,” he replied. “It’s a good way to get your head blown off.”

Broberg looked it over and read the inscription on the side of the barrel. “.243.” He unbolted it and looked down the barrel. “Clean.” He handed it back to Sonny.

At that time, a few of his friends walked by presumably to also go out on the water. One of them laughed and faked like he was shooting a rifle. “Nail him Sonny before I do,” he said, his voice gravelly and worn.

Sonny shot them a thumbs up.

They smiled and kept moving.

“Is the rifle you showed me the only one you own?” I asked.

“First and last,” he said. “Hopefully.”

“Ever fired it?” Broberg said.

He shook his head and checked his watch. Then he peered up at the sun. “Not yet...but at the drop of a hat, I will.”

We stood in silence. Sonny was becoming impatient. “So tell me why you’re here,” he said.

“We heard you had something going with the guy whose fishing boat was blown up over on Shelter Island,” I said. “That correct?”

“What do you mean?” he said, carrying the rifle back to the cabin.

“Like you guys had a disagreement over money...maybe over a woman?”

He walked out of the cabin. “If we did...what’s it to you?”

I hadn’t a response.

“So...” Broberg began. “Where were you when the explosion happened?”

He gestured toward the sound. “Ten miles south of Block Island coming in empty.” He paused and stared at me. “You knew that...you and Ericson were here when I arrived.”

“You weren’t quite empty, if I recall. You had fish.”

“Yeah,” he said, lighting a cigarette. “Some. It was a slow day.”

Sonny’s little white lies were beginning to grate on me. “Still, we had no idea where you arrived from.”

I watched the wrinkles deepen around his eyes as he began to laugh. “You wouldn’t have known if I told you.”

“You didn’t try me.”

He inhaled, blew a plume of smoke my way, and pointed in the direction of the sound. “Out there.”

“Can I ask...why didn’t you mention you had issues with the guy who lost his boat?”

He shook his head, smoked some and offered Broberg a cigarette. Then in anger, he jabbed his cigarette on the gunwale and threw the blackened stub at my feet. “Because it’s none of your business, that’s why—”

I paused.

“Next question,” Sonny said. “Do I dive?”

Broberg glanced at me and raised his brow. Sonny was getting ahead of us.

“The ten-thousand dollar answer is yes,” Sonny said. “So...what does that mean?”

“Well,” Broberg said. He cleared his throat and spit off the side, into the water. “It just fortifies a potential case against you.”

“There’s no case against me. I dive to reclaim lost gear.”

Broberg nodded. “You’ve seen nothing since that might help with the investigation?”

“Negative. Only a bunch of incompetent investigators crawling over each other hoping to be the first one to nail this Calendar Man, or whoever the guilty party is.”

Broberg caught my eye and motioned he wanted to leave.

Sonny went back to work. “Sorry, but I have to make a living...while I still can.”

As we climbed up the ladder and back onto the pier, the engine started. Through a cloud of blue exhaust, we watched Sonny dart back and forth until he stopped and looked up.

“You want us to untie you?” I asked.

He smiled. “That would be nice.”

In the parking lot, we watched him motor past Coast Guard Headquarters and into the channel. When his boat faded out of view, we left for Springs.

Broberg looked pale. “You did fine on the boat,” I said.

He felt his stomach. “It wasn’t moving.”

After I pulled onto Montauk Highway, I asked, “Well...what do you think?”

Broberg rubbed his face and thought. “I see a guy with a mean streak who’s super paranoid.” He looked at me. “Do I see a serial killer? No. Could he kill? I believe so...but I’ve been wrong before.”

Finding it easy to agree, I wondered if we had been standing on the same boat I saw leave Shelter Island after the explosion. It was similar in shape and size, but I wasn’t sure.

“Can you ask Ericson if he’s noticed anything different in Sonny?”

Broberg had great instinct for fingering suspects. Though I felt he was honing in, I said, “I don’t know if we should involve Ericson.”

“What’s your fear?”

“That he could poison everything.”

He shrugged. “How well do you know him?”

“Not very—”

We drove through East Hampton, landed in Tora’s driveway and got out. Ray’s car was still parked.

“From this point forward,” Broberg said, “we’re working it. I’ll call Lenihan in the morning.”

I already knew I had a phone date with my boss, Michael Righetti.

Once inside I cozied up to Madeline, hugging her and pecking at her neck. She seemed cold, bored. I couldn’t figure it out. Ray hit me up for another game of chess. I accepted.

“Anyone want to go for a walk down to the dock?” Madeline said.

“Not me,” I said, contemplating winning another game.

“I’ll go,” Broberg replied rising from the leather couch he had just sat down in. “I need to clear my head.”

He walked over to the sliding glass door and looked out over the darkness surrounding Gardiners Bay. “Beautiful night. I’ll need a jacket.”

## CHAPTER 25

### Bayonne

The black macadam roadway was still hot from the sun. Madeline gazed into the sky. “The Milky Way’s amazing.”

“Don’t know much about it,” Broberg replied, glancing up quickly. “They say it’s romantic.”

“So Dick,” she said, “who’s your temptation?”

“My temptation? You make that sound so...appealing.” He looked upward, scanning the heavens. “Tonight...she’s someone else’s problem.”

Madeline backed off.

Assuming the role of star-guide, she pointed out what she could in the heavens above. He listened. Then they headed for the channel. Madeline walked to the edge and stood on the top of the creosoted bulkhead.

“The water’s so dark, so forbidding.”

“Yeah,” he said. “I’d hate to fall in.”

She slipped her hands into the pockets of her sweatshirt and looked at him. “Cain’s mom mentioned something about ‘that night in Bayonne’.”

He didn’t respond.

“Any idea what she meant?”

Slowly he shook his head and yawned. Turning to watch a sailboat enter the harbor, he said, “Yeah...boxing.”

Watching the boat sail by she said, “Tell me more.”

He waved at the passing boat, its bow carving white shards out of the murky water. He waited for the boat to pass. “Well...Cain grew up tough. No father...no brother, so he got bullied. My folks liked him so they enrolled us in boxing lessons at the YMCA. They never asked his mother for approval.”

“Approval for what?”

“You know...to fight. His father wasn’t around. People did stuff back then you can’t get away with today.”

“So you took lessons in Bayonne?”

“Not quite. We moved on to the Police Boy’s Club. Queens. The cops...they taught us a lot of good things.” He hesitated.

“And?” she said.

“Right. So,” Broberg said, “Cain took this job working for a food distributor. One night, I guess he about seventeen...he’s on his way out when he hears screams. He runs in the office and catches three guys beating the owner with a rubber hose. One of them takes a poke at Cain so he unhinges and destroys the guy. The thug with the hose goes after him and Cain takes him out. Same for the third guy. They had to be hospitalized. Cain comes out smelling like lavender.”

“Why were they beating somebody?”

“His boss wasn’t union.”

She nodded. “That’s Cain.”

“Long story short, for saving his life, his boss offered to sponsor him as an amateur boxer. Cain’s family needed money and he was doing badly in school so he accepted the offer.”

“He’s going to school, working a job, and training...do I have it right?”

“Pretty much. So, this gym was a tough place. We walk in,” Dick cracked up laughing, “And the air’s stinking...super foul. We’re in a brick basement attached to an underground parking garage that somebody converted to a gym. First thing you’d hear is the Yorks clanging off the concrete floor.”

“Yorks?”

“Plates...free weights...anyway, we’re ducking bare light bulbs strung from crusty fixtures, trying to avoid getting electrocuted.” He shook his head in disbelief. “The walls were painted two-tone; gray on the bottom and white on top and the pipes in the ceiling were brown and flaking from corrosion and sweat, but... it was the place.” He stopped and sniffed the salty air. “Smell that?”

“Just the ocean.”

“Smells like a Croton backup.”

“So who was his trainer?”

“Giovanni DeSimone, or ‘Gerry De’ as we called him. Cain wins ten or so matches and develops a reputation for hitting so hard, his opponents were checking his gloves.”

“Were you boxing?”

He shook his head. “I quit. Anyway, Gerry thinks he’s ready for the tournament. Weighing two-twenty, he enters the heavyweight division. Right off the bat, he gets a ‘dem and doze’ monster from a rival club in Brooklyn. Cain loses the first two rounds before getting it right. Half way into the third, he catches this guy with one of his big mitts. That’s it, out cold. The next couple of fights were all knock outs.”

“Funny,” she said. “Back in Montana, I’d heard rumors about him beating up criminals that attacked him.”

“Back in the woods?”

“Yeah,” she replied. “Washington and Canadian border, and on forest service and park lands. So then, what about Bayonne?”

“Okay, the next fight was interesting. They matched him up against an undefeated street fighter from the Bronx. It looked like the interns at Bellevue practiced knife work on this guy’s face. This one doesn’t go well...at first. The kid knocks Cain down twice. He’s bleeding, hanging back, and losing the fight, big time. In the fourth round, he gets repairs and comes out in a fury. Dancing and bobbing, he catches his opponent with a left hook, right jab combination. The other guy staggers and Cain moves in with two right jabs and a sharp left uppercut. The kid collapses. Cain’s eliminated the number one seed in his bracket. He’s undefeated.”

“I think I saw pictures of that fight in his bedroom. He looked awful.”

“Beat up bad. Took him awhile to recover.”

He looked down and spotted a piece of gnarly driftwood sticking out of the sand. Picking it up he said, “You see this?”

In the dark, she took out her cellphone and lit it up. “Now I can.”

Rolling the wood back and forth in his fingers, he asked, “Ever watch a snake?”

She nodded.

He held the stick while shaping his other hand to resemble a mouth. “Ever see a snake meet its match?”

She shook her head.

Dick moved the stick back and forth and suddenly seized it tightly with his open hand. In vain, he shook the stick but his other hand wouldn’t let go. “That’s how the mongoose kills the cobra.”

She swallowed and nodded. “He had a blown-up picture of a mongoose killing a snake in his bedroom.”

“Been there for years,” Broberg said. “Well they started calling him ‘The Mongoose’.”

“Who named him that?”

“Some Olympic hopeful from Paterson. After the fight, the kid said Cain waits and then strikes...like a mongoose. A ring magazine did a story playing up the Mongoose thing. That’s how it started.”

The wind had picked up, peppering them with sand and damp air. Broberg turned and lifted his collar. Sensing he was willing to let the story die, she pushed harder, “So, that’s it? He boxes and leaves New York?”

He was reluctant to continue. “No, there’s more.” He sounded exasperated, his eyes glued to the choppy black waters of Hog Creek. “But before continuing, you should know that his mother called after you left.”

“Really?”

“She thought you should know what happened that night.”

Madeline stood in anticipation.

“Don’t know how he’ll feel about me telling you this.”

“I don’t understand.” She stood motionless. “Please...continue.”

“Cain marched through two feared contenders. His next fight was a blood bath. Cain fractured the guy’s jaw in the sixth and knocked him out in the seventh. In the other bracket, another hopeful took some Ukrainian’s face apart. Everyone thought that was the title fight. Then the guy predicted he’d break Cain up. That really worked on his mother.”

“No wonder she didn’t want to talk about it.”

“Hey...I’m surprised you got upstairs. Ruth’s real touchy about Cain’s bedroom, his boxing and all that—”

The wind began to worsen. She brought the hood of her sweatshirt over her head.

Broberg stalled.

“So...”

“Let me explain a little. This next guy had been in and out of jail all his life. Nobody knew his age. On the docks, he worked as a union enforcer. He was their guy. The unions backed him all the way...so, you gotta understand there was a lot of hate and rhetoric flying everywhere.” He stopped and looked at her. “You get it?”

“I’m getting the picture...yeah,” she said.

“What picture?”

“Okay,” she said. “So the union guys saw this as payback time.”

He paused and looked up at the stars. “At the last minute, they switch the championship fight from Queens to Bayonne. The union says Cain’s from Queens so they wanted a neutral site. The fact is, Bayonne’s loaded with union people, and the union knew it.”

“Bayonne...where’s that?”

“New Jersey. Anyway, we arrive and the place is a glorified barn. Pigeons pooping from the rafters, the wooden bleachers are leaning, and everything’s concrete or it’s rusting away. They’d rented a bunch of propane blow-heaters for heat. I guess the police used the place for auctioning stuff. They’d open one end and the weather from Newark Bay would follow. The city tore the joint down shortly after the fight.”

“Nobody protested?”

“Can’t be done, besides this wasn’t Off Track Betting. I mean...the unions know what they’re doing.”

“Was his mom there?”

“She never saw Cain fight. She’d wait for him to call later.”

It was getting chilly.

“C’mon,” he said. “I’m cold. Let’s walk.”

On the way back to the house, he continued. “So, for the first two rounds, the guy rope-a-dopes trying to get Cain to punch himself out. But someone gave the kid bad advice because Cain’s a stingy puncher. In round three, the guy leaves his corner and immediately throws a low blow. The ref calls it. At the end of the round, Cain surprises him with a double left jab and a right hook, left jab combination. The kid wobbles, but he isn’t hurt. His corner reams him out for not taking it to Cain. There are some good exchanges but Cain’s bleeding heavy. Then another low blow...at the end of the fifth, he head-butts Cain and punches him in the wound after the bell. More blood.”

“Low blow? Getting hit in the...you know what?”

Broberg grimaced. “Right...so this place’s filled with union cronies and they’re going crazy.”

“I’d have been outraged at the low blows.”

Broberg unconsciously felt himself there and nodded. “We thought the refs were on the take.”

Rounding the boat ramp, Broberg slipped on seaweed stuck to the wet wood. Catching himself, he avoided cascading into the drink. He found solid footing and continued. “Throughout the fight, the crowd verbally assaulted Cain.”

They walked to the floating dock and stepped onto it. Trying to maintain his balance, Broberg checked out a few boats. “Pretty nice,” he said. “Bet this place’s expensive.”

“Dick,” Madeline said. “What happened?”

Broberg rested his hand on a piling. “In the seventh, Cain uncorks. His opponent tries to escape, but the kid’s face...it was like getting re-arranged...like how they show the continents coming apart in different directions.”

“Plate movement.”

“Instead of land, it was lips, a nose, and eyes moving around.”

Madeline couldn’t imagine what Broberg was saying, but he’d grossed her out. “I think we should head back.”

“Sure I should continue?”

By flashlight, a couple approached and greeted them on the road. Madeline waited for them to pass. “Yeah...go ahead.”

As they walked, Broberg said, “The ref could have ended right there on a TKO. The eighth starts and the guy’s shaky. He comes at Cain and hits him low again.”

“Three times?”

“By then, the union was controlling the fight. Cain was enraged. He connected with a right jab, left hook combo. The guy stumbled and Cain moved in. Jab after jab, he couldn’t miss.”

“Why didn’t they call it?”

Broberg paused, trying to reassemble the facts. “A real nasty almost criminal element wanted Cain defeated,” he said. “Fights were breaking out in the stands; I was waiting for a gun to go off...real bad. I feared for my own life. The ref looked petrified.”

They reached Tora’s driveway and stopped. “In the ninth, the guy’s staggering, trying to hold on. He comes and Cain hits him with a straight right off the chin. That was it. The guy melted into the ropes and went stiff.”

“So, Cain won the championship,” Madeline replied, relieved.

“Sure, but not what he wanted.”

She looked puzzled. “How’s that?”

“The guy never woke up.” He looked at her. “Cracked neck vertebrae, internal bleeding, severe brain swelling, he was all messed up.” He glanced up at Tora’s house. “He died the next day.”

“He died?”

Broberg leaned in and whispered, “If it will make you feel any better, a few years after his death, they linked the guy to two homicides and four more deaths over in Jersey City.” Once again he looked to the stars. “Don’t tell him I shared this with you...not until after I leave, at least.”

Her eyes fell to the dark pebbly driveway. Slowly, she started walking toward the staircase leading up to the rear deck, then stopped.

Hands back in pockets, Broberg bit his lip, wrinkled his brow and followed. “Guess we should,” he said, nodding toward the lights of Tora’s place.

Madeline looped her hand around Broberg’s wrist and pulled in tight.

Broberg dug it but he knew it was more a sister call than a sexual prod. “Later. Cain said he knew the guy was hurt. But they wouldn’t call it.”

She turned to face him. “That’s what hate can do.”

Madeline looked up toward the stars and studied a sliver of the universe. “So where does Cain go from here?”

Broberg shook his head and placed his hand on the stairway railing. “Hard to say. Maybe we can help nail Calendar Man.”

She smiled and perked up. “So Dick, what are you doing after vacationing?”

“Heading to a case outside of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.”

She had to think. “Bay Ridge,” she said. “Sounds familiar.”

“You know the song.” He began singing: *‘Well, you can tell by the way I use my walk, I’m a woman’s man, no time to talk’.*”

“Oh sure,” she said. “The movie.”

“Right on sister! Disco city,” he replied, pondering a strong nightcap. As he was about to step onto the stair tread she pulled him back.

“Hey, before we go,” she said, “can I share something with you?”

“Shoot.”

“I met this guy at the garden party. He’s a gallerist...an art freak. He mentioned collecting whiskey. I’d like to check out his gallery. What do you think?”

“By yourself?”

She nodded. “Maybe with Tora?”

“Was he the guy with the white hat you were talking to?”

She looked bewildered. Then she remembered. “Different guy. He spoke with a European accent. Smooth...educated. He wasn’t there long.”

“You must have met him while we were gone.” He paused. “Cain know?”

She shook her head and peered up at the house. “I’m reluctant to tell him.”

“Any...reason for that?”

“He’s an acquaintance. I hardly know the guy, so...I’m not obligated.” Then she threw her hair back and peeked at her watch. “It’s getting late...we better go up.”

On her third step up, he said, “If you don’t mind me asking...what’s the attraction?”

She stopped and stared straight ahead. “That’s just it.” She looked down at him. “I don’t know.”

## CHAPTER 26

### Gulls

I still found it hard to sleep. The night before was no exception. Though I dreamt, or thought I did, the next morning I remembered nothing. Only vague recollections of something dark and forbidding. Thinking my conscious was tied tightly to, or even twisted, by the crime wave that had gripped the Hamptons, with Flag Day and the Fourth of July approaching, I felt pressured to crack Calendar Man. Based on what I'd learned and the people we had met, I knew Broberg and I could do better than those working the case. Opportunities were opening up.

At first light, I decided to call headquarters to speak with my boss, Michael Righetti. I wanted him to grant me extended recuperation time in exchange for returning to work to handle an assignment in Washington State. One where he said I'd have a *bundle of fun*.

I got up, dressed, grabbed some fruit and left for the front deck. Outside I noticed it had rained. Funny, I thought, rain usually puts me to sleep.

I leaned on the railing to stretch and glanced toward Buoy 13. I couldn't see it. Instead, a black boat was anchored in front of it, or to it. I couldn't tell. Occasionally, I'd seen paddleboarders and kayakers hang near the buoy, but seeing a boat there during daylight hours was a first.

I took a few pictures of it with my phone, ran down the steps on to the beach and started jogging toward the public beach. Pounding the sand felt good. My blood flowing, I anticipated calling Righetti. Then I heard a boat engine fire up. I stopped and turned. The boat maneuvered around the buoy and headed straight across the bay, toward Plum Island. Throwing off a curved white plume of water and slicing waves, it accelerated hard, the bow rising and shoving the stern deeper into the sea. As the boat faded out of view, it became a speck blending in with the bay's choppy surface.

I jogged across the public beach and ended up on the pier that overlooked the inlet to Hog Creek. I looked back at the buoy. The boat had followed the same course as the ones we'd seen at night. Not knowing what to make of it, I checked my phone for messages. Nothing.

I stared at waves crashing off the jetty and checked my watch again. It was time. I punched Righetti's work number and waited. Knowing he wouldn't be in, I left a message for him to call. I told him I was ready to discuss the assignment he had mentioned earlier.

After hanging up, I began walking toward the marina when something caught my eye. Glancing across the channel, I saw an attractive dark-haired woman. On closer examination, I thought I recognized her. Was she the same raven-haired beauty I'd seen at the party and before that at the jetty?

Barefoot and dressed in a black tunic, the cloth fluttering in the wind, she was lingering on the far end of the pier, on the opposite side of the channel.

As I gazed at her, I thought she waved. I didn't see her look at me but I could have sworn I saw her raise her hand and gesture my way. I waved at her. Making no eye contact, she gazed straight ahead toward the bay.

I waved a second time.

Gracefully, as though touching the ground lightly, she continued to move along the pier, almost wandering. She stopped.

I found her mysteriously affecting. A subject of my hidden desire. I had to meet her, know her name, and discover who she was. Then I heard words floating in the breeze. Soft words, a voice becoming of beauty. They had to have come from across the channel—from her lips.

“Come...” I heard.

Wanting whatever she was advertising, I stared. She didn't look back. I moved forward, down my side of the channel to get closer across the water from where she was standing.

Again I heard a woman's voice. “Come—”

She turned my way. With the sun rising behind her, she was cloaked in shadow, but under her shroud of raven hair her skin seemed pale. I tried to remember her face from before, when I first saw her fishing from the jetty. All I could recall were her dark eyes and black hair, not her sharp chin. At the party, she was just a fleeting image. A glimpse that came and went.

Rolling her fingers, one after the other, she motioned me to come. Then she lifted her head and threw back her mane of hair. Amazing.

I looked at the deep green channel. *Swim across?*

“How do I reach you?” I shouted.

She pointed to the channel. “Here,” I heard the wind deliver. Then I heard it a second time, only stronger. A sheet of sand flew against my leg as though kicked by some invisible force.

Again I contemplated swimming across the channel. It didn't make sense. Why was she so elusive? Dressed in bedroom garb, I figured she must have lived on that side of the channel.

I pulled out my cell phone and held it high for her to see. She turned and began to walk away.

“I'll drive over.” I shouted.

She turned and motioned for me to follow.

Tora's house was close by so I rushed back down the road. Running up the back stairs and into my room, I grabbed my keys and ran to the truck. Having never driven to that side of the channel, I stayed on roads that allowed me an occasional glimpse of Hog Creek. After a few wrong turns, I finally found it. Cautious not to get mired in the sand or risk pounding a cut shell into one of my tires, I drove short of the beach and parked.

From my seat, I scanned the area. She had disappeared. The beach was empty.

I turned the engine off, got out and walked toward the bay, hoping I'd find her wading in the water. No luck.

I reversed course and jogged toward the marina. The only life I saw was a growing number of seagulls flying overhead. Their chatter had grown by the minute.

Slowly retracing where I thought she had traveled, I found no footprints. Just dimples in the sand caused by the prior night's rain.

I hopped onto the creosoted bulkhead that forms the channel's pier and began walking back toward the bay. Scanning everywhere for her, shadows on the ground began to intensify from the gulls soaring above. I looked up at them, hoping to avoid any droppings, but it was futile. Immediately, a gooey smear of green and yellow liquid dropped onto my shoulder. Giving up, I headed for my pickup.

At that moment the gulls broke rank and descended.

White headed with clumsy-looking yellow bills, the large gray and white birds began swooping down at me. Squawking and performing close flyovers, they were threatening me as though I was raiding their nests. At first they swarmed, crowding me with their wings, performing quick turns and aerial movements. Then they came closer, diving and washing me with wind from their flapping wings.

I looked for a stick, anything to protect myself. The beach was bare.

Tempted to look up again, fearing for my eyes, I dared not. I broke into a trot and began swinging my hands above my head. The birds circled and took turns harassing me. I cursed my decision to park so far away.

Halfway to my truck, it was clear the flock had grown larger. Pursuing me, they pounded me, covering me with their dung and striking at me with their webbed orange feet. The screeching became louder—the birds in frenzy—some pecking at my hand while other managed to slice portions of my scalp. Feeling their claws mangle the back of my hands, I was desperate to escape their attack. At one point, they were so thick they obscured all sunlight. By then, I was in a panic, running madly toward my truck.

But as I got closer, the birds seemed to know where I was headed. Their imposing shadows maneuvered to hold me hostage as if they enjoyed a level of intelligence beyond their natural instinct. And the noise—their screams became deafening.

Approaching me at knee height, not far above the sand, they began to fly at me from the direction of my truck, as though trying to prevent me from reaching it. This confused me, causing me to run in the wrong direction...anything to get away. Then I changed tack and sped for the truck.

Dodging birds, I threw myself against the door and grabbed the handle. Thankful it wasn't locked, I opening the door and slammed it shut.

One bird got its molted gray wing caught in the door. As it flapped madly against the inside of the door window, I grabbed it and wrenched it backwards. Bones splintered, preventing the wing from being useful again. I was glad.

Meanwhile, the birds swarmed the truck and began diving at it, striking the roof and hood and trying to damage the metal.

I inserted the key, turned the engine over and dropped the visor. Checking myself in the mirror, I was a mess. I was bleeding profusely from somewhere on my scalp and along the brow of my forehead. Like my windshield, I was stained with yellow liquid and drippings of gull excrement.

Pecking and biting, the gulls continued their rage on the truck.

I threw it into gear and took off, not caring which direction I was heading. Bouncing over the sand, short of the channel, I spun the truck around and drove for the exit.

Reaching asphalt, about a quarter mile from the beach, the gulls broke off their attack, but a black crow continued to dive-bomb the truck. It was a new bird, one with a purplish-colored plume. I didn't recall seeing it earlier. Then it disappeared.

At the first stop sign, I opened the door. The bird with the crushed wing dropped onto the road. Trying to right itself, it cackled and fussed, even raising its head and snapping at me. I got back in and turned the truck in a way that guaranteed the rear wheel would find the hapless creature, and it did. En route to Tora's place, I continued wiping blood and gunk from my head and face.

Upon arrival, Tora was tending the garden. I pulled up and got out.

"What happened to you?" she asked, dropping her tools and moving in my direction.

By the arm, she led me to the hose. Making me bend over, she rinsed my head. "Here," she said, handing me the nozzle. "I'll be right back."

She returned with a Coast Guard-approved first aid kit.

Pawing through the box, she pulled out a tube and began treating my wounds. Then she stopped.

I was reticent to mention I'd walked into such a calamity while chasing an unknown woman dressed only in a black tunic.

"So," she began. "Where did this happen?"

I hesitated. "Ah...down at the public beach." Since she'd given me a pass to enter through the gate, my tale seemed plausible. But it was a story...a lie...and she appeared dubious.

"This isn't natural," she said, placing her face in front of mine. "You know that, right?"

I didn't know what to say. I winced as she picked at my scalp.

"I've never heard of such a thing. If your hair wasn't so thick the top of your head would have taken a worse beating."

"Think I'll have scars?"

"Hum...maybe on the brow." She paused to check the deeper wounds. "Maybe not. Nothing's ragged."

I stood in silence. "How could something like this happen?"

She dabbed my skin. "Don't know...I haven't any idea where they lay their eggs."

She continued a bit longer, prodding and poking. "Go shower. Soap up. Get everything clean. Then meet me in the kitchen."

In the shower, blood stained water collected at my feet. Gradually it became pink and then colorless. Still, I was hesitant to dig too deeply into my wounds. I shut off the hot water and stood under a cold stream as long as I could. I dried off, avoiding where I'd been slashed, and returned to the kitchen. She was waiting.

I sat as she patched me. At the last bandage, Tora slapped me on the shoulder. "You're good."

I headed for Madeline's bedroom. "Is she up?"

"Cain," she said. I stopped and faced her. "Seagulls just don't attack."

"This is rare?"

She nodded. "I hate to say it but when things like that happen, the old folks around here say something's wrong in your life."

"Wrong?" I stopped and walked back to her. "Like what?"

She finished packing up the kit. "I can't tell you...it's between you and your conscience."

My wounds were beginning to hurt. Contemplating hearing from Righetti, I bypassed checking in with Madeline, took some aspirin and went to my room. I checked my head and dozed off.

## CHAPTER 27

### Proposal

“Okay Mr. Bonetrager,” Lerner said, tossing his business card across the table. “I’ve little time. Let’s get down to business.”

“Gentlemen, before we begin,” Bonetrager said. “I ask...are there any recording or video devices operating?”

St. Andre looked at Lerner. They shook their heads. “None—”

“Good,” Bonetrager said as he collected Lerner’s card. He nodded toward St. Andre. “And you are?”

St. Andre pulled his card and slid it across the table. “I’m a town commissioner.”

Bonetrager took the cards, read them and placed them in his pocket. “So...I have an audience with a town commissioner and with the Town Moderator. Splendid.”

“So, let me get this right,” Lerner said, checking his watch. “This is about Gardiners Island. Not another proposed solution to the Amagansett public restroom fiasco, correct?”

St. Andre brought his finger to his lip and laughed.

Bonetrager nodded. “Gardiners Island. I’ll be brief.”

“Wait, Mr. Bonetrager. You say you have the authority to represent Earth Diocese legally and administratively?”

Bonetrager reached into his satchel and pulled out an envelope. Removing a letter, he slid it across the table to Lerner. “Straight from Brussels.”

Lerner read the letter and handed it to St. Andre. “I thought you were an art dealer?”

Bonetrager grinned. “I am a man of many things.”

St. Andre read the letter, looked at Lerner and dropped it on the table. “Why hasn’t Uerrman mentioned you, or this to us?”

“Uerrman’s a politician. It’s above him,” Bonetrager said. He waited for their response. “May I proceed?”

Lerner gestured with an open hand.

Bonetrager removed his hat and leaned back in his chair. “It’s all really quite simple. On behalf of Earth Diocese, I’ve come to request additional developable land to the tune of five percent more.”

Silence.

“Is ED requesting an upzone?” Lerner asked.

“Hardly. We request a change in the agreed-upon proportion of preserved land to be made available for planning and developing. Zoning to remain as is.”

“Five percent more developable land?”

“Five more making the total ten percent. Mind you...all to be non-contiguous at our discretion.”

“That equates to what?” St. Andre asked.

“Three hundred acres...or so,” Bonetrager said.

“Three hundred acres of what?”

Bonetrager looked surprised. “Why...a destination paradise for the entitled.”

Lerner waited, rolling a pencil back and forth between the palms of his hands. “Is there a plan?”

“There is,” Bonetrager said. “It’s in Brussels.”

“So then,” Lerner said with a chuckle, “what does the town receive?”

“Something you’re in dire need of.”

Lerner smirked at St. Andre and relaxed. “Well, what could that be? Another beach...maybe a second lighthouse? Tell us.”

The townies laughed, seemingly pleased in their wit.

Bonetrager stared at them. “How about an unlimited source of crystal-clear New England water?”

In a flurry the town attorney entered the room, pad in hand. “And who’s this darling?” Bonetrager asked, his aristocratic accent front and center.

“Our Town attorney.”

Bonetrager looked at her and smiled: “No offense my dear, but you’re not needed. This is a private discussion.”

Lerner sat erect, looked at her, and pushed his wire rim glasses back over the bridge of his nose. She stared at him. He looked away.

She remained.

St. Andre glanced at her and shrugged.

Visibly annoyed, she left the room.

“Expound,” Lerner said, as the door closed.

“Have you ever wondered why Gardiners Island is flush with abundant fresh water and lush vegetation?”

Neither town official responded.

Giving them less time to reply, he continued. “We did, so we researched the island’s geology.” Bonetrager sat upright and placed both elbows on the table. He folded one hand over the other. “Gentlemen, we’re sitting on a glacial formation that extends beyond the Connecticut shore. It runs under Long Island Sound and tapers to a point under Gardiners Island. This vein of rock and rubble contains a tremendous supply of clean potable water.”

“So...this deep vein of water doesn’t extend beyond Gardiners?”

Bonetrager shook his head. "It terminates under our soil."

"A fixed supply?" Lerner asked.

"You mean perched?" Bonetrager asked. Lerner didn't elaborate. "Not at all. It's sourced where the Thames and the Connecticut River basins merge. An endless well waiting to be tapped...like a big fat keg."

"How far down?"

"It varies. The main aquifer is hundreds of feet below sea level, but it rises as it approaches Gardiners."

"And we don't have it here in Montauk...that's unimaginable."

"Mind you," Bonetrager said. "The water I'm referring to is not linked to rain or surface collection basins. I believe, and others agree with me, that the source definitely terminates not far from the southern tip of Gardiners Island."

"Near the sand bar?"

"I...don't know about that."

"So then...the ponds and creeks aren't the same water we're talking about?"

"Separate and distinct."

"Point taken," Lerner said. "So...you're telling me we can tap water fed from the mountains of New England here in East Hampton."

Bonetrager smiled. He removed a geologic map from his satchel and slid it across to Lerner. "Imagine that!" he said. "You've exhausted the local wells and now I offer you a way out. A stable supply of water for years to come."

Lerner unfolded the map. After a few moments he asked, "How...Mr. Bonetrager...do we know this is accurate?"

Bonetrager bent over and pulled out a spiral-bound report. "We have third-party verification. It's from White and Cramer, respected hydrogeologists and engineers based in London. Earth Diocese relies on their counsel when developing resorts worldwide." He slid it to St. Andre.

The officials took a few minutes to review the report and map. Then Lerner unfolded a series of attachments stuck to the back of the report. Thumbing through them, he came to a plan showing where potential wellheads could be located on the island.

"Have you seen the proposed pipeline route?" Bonetrager asked.

"Pipeline?" St. Andre asked.

"Yes, we've done your work for you. It's attached to the report."

They spent more time examining Bonetrager's offerings.

"I see they're proposing a pump station at Whale Hill," Lerner said, turning to St. Andre.

“Yes,” Bonetrager said. “All the wellheads are located on higher ground where there’s hydraulic conductivity.”

“What’s that?” St. Andre asked.

“A term for describing the ground’s ability to pass water.” Bonetrager paused. “Picture lots of rocks and sand drenched in life-sustaining fresh water.”

St. Andre nodded.

After a few more minutes, Lerner said, “Very impressive. Can we keep these?”

“I’ll need a confidentiality agreement,” Bonetrager said, reaching into his satchel. He removed a series of legal sized papers. Sliding them to Lerner, he said, “Look for the yellow arrows. Sign and date the agreement, make a copy and I’ll retain the originals.

Lerner looked them over. “I’ll require legal advice for this.”

Bonetrager bowed his head slightly and gestured approvingly.

“I’ll get her,” St. Andre said as he left the room.

Lerner waited for St. Andre to leave the room. When the door closed, he said, “This is all very impressive.”

“Yes, I’d say so,” Bonetrager said. “Checkmate?”

Lerner smiled. “Perhaps...but there’s one problem.”

“And?”

He paused. “How does one, say, get compensated for championing this strategy?”

Bonetrager thought. “On your part or mine?”

Lerner made a face and smirked. “Tempt me.”

Bonetrager sat motionless, staring at the conference table. “I’ll need time to think.” He breathed heavy, feeling Lerner’s unexpected pressure. “What have you in mind?”

Lerner was about to say something when the door opened. It was St. Andre and the town attorney.

“So then, Mr. Bonetrager,” Lerner said, seemingly weighing his words with great care. “What’s your timetable?”

Bonetrager looked at the attorney. “I’d like to know something very soon.”

St. Andre asked, “How soon?”

“Every minute counts.”

“Negotiations move forward at their own pace,” Lerner said with a jagged grin.

Bonetrager looked pained. “One of the advantages of oral commitments is that they happen relatively quickly. You have competitors with deep pockets, eager to strike a deal.”

“Who said anything about an oral agreement?” Lerner asked.

“I just did.”

“That’s...fine,” Lerner said, looking first at St. Andre and then at the attorney.

She raised her hand. "I can guarantee nothing."

"But I must tell you," Bonetrager said, ignoring her. "I am in contact with people on the North Fork."

"Where?" St. Andre asked. "Plum Island?"

"Funny you should ask. They are looking to develop aren't they?"

"Are they in agreement regarding your oral agreement?" the attorney asked.

Lerner stopped doodling on his pad of paper. "Hold on...hold on," he said, looking at her. He removed his glasses and stared at Bonetrager while cleaning the lenses on his shirt. "What leverage do you hold over any entity on the North Fork?"

"None, really," Bonetrager said. "Except, they could afford to pay more."

"How?"

"Their project would be easier to sell."

"I don't follow."

"Think about it—." He paused. "Running a water pipeline extension westward from say...Cutchogue versus trying to run a pipeline through the Hamptons and over the Shinnecock Canal."

St. Andre looked at Lerner and nodded. "So...you charge the North Fork more for something they'll find easier to sell. But you lose by forfeiting more developable acreage on Gardiners Island."

"Precisely—it's all based on dollars. However, we prefer to be here. So, if we can agree, you pay less...barring any, shall we say, unworkable or unreasonable requests."

"So...why can't both forks enjoy this wonderful bounty?"

Bonetrager leaned forward, his elbows on the table. "It all comes down to price."

Lerner whispered to St. Andre. "Mind if we take a minute?"

Bonetrager smiled. "Suit yourself. As you would expect, first comers help create the rules. They also reap the benefits."

"Benefits?" the attorney said.

Lerner and St. Andre left the room. After a short while they returned.

Lerner looked at the attorney. "Did you discuss anything in our absence?"

Still annoyed, she moved quickly through her papers, shook her head and nearly stuck the tip of her red pen into her cheek.

"Before you say another word," Lerner said to Bonetrager. "For the record, we're tasked with providing for the public's good."

Bonetrager looked at St. Andre and then the attorney. "Right!" he said, smiling at Lerner's statement. "What about your own good?"

"What...what do you propose?" Lerner asked, stumbling over his words.

Bonetrager leaned back in his chair. “Great water, low rates, a long-term rate schedule, a non-compete clause, cost-sharing on the infrastructure needed to deliver water through Springs to your mainline, shared water rights, and... personal benefits, but—” He stuck his index finger into the air. “You must guarantee expedited permitting, a truncated and transparent EIS process, protection from lawsuits, and unchallenged approval for the pipeline, distribution lines, reservoirs, and pump stations.”

“You mentioned expanded development rights.”

“I did, didn’t I...?” Bonetrager relaxed. “You saw the water infrastructure maps. They require deeds, easements, perhaps right of ways. We aren’t in this to get screwed. We require expanded development rights...not necessarily now, but definitely by the time the moratorium ends.”

“You sound like you’ve already engineered this project.”

“You saw the report, the maps, the pipeline location. It’s well underway. Costs, schedules, bid documents...all on the drawing board. We even have potential bidders lined up.”

“I hate to rain on your...proposal,” the attorney said, madly scribbling notes, “but this isn’t the Wild West. We follow a process.”

“So do we,” Bonetrager said. “It’s called getting it done.”

The attorney took more notes. Then she glanced at Lerner. “You mentioned benefits. Please expound.”

Bonetrager laughed. “Yes...that always gets people’s attention, doesn’t it?” He sat up, removed his hands from his pockets and folded them again on the table. “To be negotiated.”

Lerner breathed in hard. “Okay,” he said. “We know what you want. We’ll get back to you. We’ll need these documents.”

“They’re yours,” Bonetrager said, rising from the table. “When can I expect my signed non-disclosure agreement?”

Lerner looked at the attorney. “Tomorrow, after noon.”

Bonetrager pushed his chair back into place and smiled. “I’ll look forward to your call.” He shook everyone’s hand and left the room.

As soon as the door latched, the attorney said, “I missed most of it. Did he leave a proposal?”

“None,” Lerner said, handing her Bonetrager’s confidentiality agreement.

She gave it a quick once over. “Okay...what’s the abridged version? Any attachments?”

St. Andre scratched his head and glanced at Lerner. “He wants expanded development rights in return for the right to sell us water.”

“Expanded?” She looked at him. “Explain.”

“Ten percent of the gross acres rather than five.”

“He’s dreaming,” she said. “You know how long getting that approved would take?”

“He says they already have a development plan.”

“What plan?” she asked. “I didn’t know there was a plan.”

“Apparently, there is,” Lerner said, “But not by us.”

“By whom?”

“Earth Diocese.”

She kept writing. “ED? Okay...no changes in the land assessment?”

“He didn’t mention any.”

“Hum, that’s interesting,” she said. “Even global environmental groups expect to pay less whenever possible.”

Lerner shared only what he wanted regarding Bonetrager’s proposal. As he dictated, translating in his own words what Bonetrager had said, she wrote madly, finding it difficult to keep up. “So...who pays for what?” she asked, flipping a page over to a fresh sheet.

“To be decided, I guess,” he said, looking at St. Andre.

They sat quietly as she asked questions while jotting down information.

She pushed her hair back and paused. “That it?”

Lerner grimaced and pushed away from the table. “That’s all I have.”

“Well!” She brought her pen to her lips and thought. “I say no dice. We can’t circumvent the water board on this. Hearings. Protocol. And in regard to orals...we’ve already been through this with other parties. We can’t verbally agree to anything, let alone exercise broad authority on behalf of the municipality.”

“This is water...H2O!” Lerner said. “We need it.”

“What we don’t need are penalties and lawsuits.” She wrote something down. “No orals.”

“Who are you to issue policy?” Lerner said. “You’re an advisor.”

“I’m here to keep things by the book and prevent someone from throwing the book at you. That’s who I am.”

Lerner rose from the table. “Make sure you follow through on the confidentiality agreement. I’ll need it tomorrow before noon.” He commanded St. Andre to help work on it.

She became enraged. “This...this arbitrary crap doesn’t cut it boys! Laws are laws and rules are rules. There’s no fair play here.”

Lerner waited for St. Andre to leave the room. When the door latched, he walked over to the attorney. “Let me see your notes.”

She handed him her pad.

“This everything?”

She nodded.

“Thanks,” he said, tucking it under his arm. “I’ll make a copy and return it.”

## CHAPTER 28

### Righetti

My phone rang.

Straining for the bed stand, I reached across the bed and picked it up. With my other hand I felt my bandages, checking for signs of blood.

“Yo,” I groaned.

“Rippinger,” I heard. “You sound groggy.”

I thought I recognized the voice but I wasn’t sure. I pulled the phone from my ear and checked. It was Michael Righetti. “Ah...yeah. Just dozing off.”

“Sleeping? It’s past ten.”

I inhaled and looked out the window. “Had a hard night.”

“So, you’re ready to discuss returning for service?” he asked.

I sat up. “What have you got?”

“Olympic National Park. They want to thin the goat herd.”

“That’s been debated for years.”

“Well,” he said, “they’ve concluded the animals are doing too much damage. They aren’t native, you know.”

I knew that. “Thin or eradicate?”

“Maybe both. Eradicate in the northerly sections and maybe thin further south.”

“What do you mean, maybe?”

He laughed. Meanwhile a chopper shook the house. “They seem to be sensitive about remote areas. Don’t know what that’s all about.”

I’d been to the Olympic Ranges some of the nastiest terrain in Washington State. “That’s rugged...isolated country,” I said. “How?”

“You’ll start with fixed wing. Scope it out. Figure our options. Then...maybe some on foot, thinning from a chopper...you used to take wolves from fixed wing, right?”

“Sure...in Alaska.”

“So then...what’s your situation?”

I rotated to the edge of the bed and put my feet on the floor. “I’d like more time.”

As I stroked my head, I heard a tap on the door. Turning to see, Madeline entered the room. I covered the phone and mouthed the word *Righetti*. She nodded and left as quietly as she had come.

“How much more?” I heard him say, loudly

Righetti sounded irritated. Though I'd already hashed the details out in my head, I tried to rethink everything. It had to be right.

"Hel...lo—," he said.

"Yeah...I'm here."

"Have you recovered from the buffalo attack?"

I felt my leg. "Pretty much but..."

He cut in. "But what? You're not thinking of getting involved in that Hamptons mess are you?"

He knew me too well. I didn't respond.

"That's not ours. It's totally local. Understand?"

"I know," I said. "I'm just watching things play out."

"Rippinger...excuses cause problems. I need a date!"

"How about August?" I blurted, shooting from the hip.

"When in August?"

I hesitated. "I'll let you know—"

Dead air.

"Look...I'm under pressure to get on this. You've been milking this sabbatical thing too long. If everyone here didn't know how good you are, you'd have been long gone." He stopped. "I can't cover for you forever. This has to end."

"I know...I know," I said, standing and checking myself in the mirror.

"Okay," he said. "You've got six weeks."

"Or less," I said. "I may be calling you sooner."

"Let's hope so. Stay safe and damn it...whatever you do, stay out of trouble. My reputation is on the line."

"I know, chief...I won't let you down."

We hung up and I started to dress. My phone rang again. It was Ericson. I took his call. "What's up?" I asked.

"Just found out there's an all-agency meeting early tomorrow morning."

Tomorrow was Flag Day. "Isn't that a bit late?" I asked.

"Who knows," he said. "Anyway, it's at Town Hall. Same place where the State of the Hamptons forum was held. There's a checklist to get it, but I can fix that."

I pondered the opportunity. "Maybe Broberg and I can make that."

"Let me know," he said. "My guy will be there if you have trouble getting in. Bring ID."

"What time?"

"Six."

"Thanks for the tip."

I left my room and found Broberg outside on the deck.

“What the—” he said, as I approached him. “You fall into a medicine cabinet?”

“She didn’t tell you?” I asked.

“Are those cuts?” I felt the bandages and looked at my fingers. Soreness was setting in.

“Tora,” he said. “Haven’t seen her or Madeline. Her car’s gone.”

I peered at Buoy 13. “A black boat was moored there this morning.”

“Black? I don’t get it.” He stared at the buoy. “Anchored?”

“That or tethered to the buoy. The engines were cut. Then they fired up and laid down hard toward Plum Gut.”

Broberg looked in the direction of the Gut. Then he looked at me. “Still doesn’t explain what happened to you.”

I shook my head. “Seagulls.”

Broberg looked down at the beach below us. Three seagulls were standing along the rim of washed up seaweed that marked high tide. “Down there?”

I nodded toward the public beach. “Other side of the channel.”

“When?”

“This morning.”

He rotated in his chair and looked down the beach. “What were you doing over there?”

Instinctively I looked for Madeline, even though she wasn’t around. “Remember that raven-haired gal I mentioned? The one I saw on the jetty and then at the party?”

“Yeah.”

“She was standing on the other side.”

“On the beach?”

“Just strolling down the pier. She had nothing on except a black tunic.”

He smiled. “You catch up with her?”

“By the time I drove over there, she’d left without a trace.” I paused. “Look...I told Madeline and Tora it happened on this side of the channel, at the public beach, so keep it mum.”

He licked his lips and nodded. “Heck...I wouldn’t change the story. I like women...all women. You’re not married to anyone.”

“Maybe Tora’s right.”

“How so?”

“She thinks you’re a nympho...”

“She said that?”

“Paraphrasing...” I laughed. “You’re infatuated with anything female.”

“Really. Do I come across that way?”

“She said, ‘This Broberg guy isn’t suffering from low ‘T’.” Broberg howled. I touched him on the arm. “There’s more.”

He quieted down. “I’m listening.”

“Once a man, twice a child...he can’t have them all’.”

He laughed harder. “You mimic her pretty well,” he said, leaning forward and shaking his head. “I certainly try to love them all.”

We watched a large yacht head for deeper water.

“I should have studied banking,” he said. “I’m digging this place in spades.”

“By the way,” I said. “Ericson called. He said there’s an all-agency meeting tomorrow morning at Town Hall.”

“When?”

“Six.”

“Six? What’s wrong with tonight?”

I shrugged. “I also have the green light, per se, from Righetti.”

Lightly he massaged his chin. “I’ll call Lenihan and see what I can find out.”

## CHAPTER 29

### Flag Day

Early the next morning, in a drizzle, we left for Town Hall. Broberg offered to drive so we climbed into his Corvette.

“You look horrible,” he said, getting in. “You bring a hat?”

“You know me and hats.”

He popped the trunk and got out. I heard the lid slam and he got back in. “Here.” He handed me a brand new navy blue cap. Across the front, *FBI* was printed in bright gold letters. He chuckled. “Wear it proudly.”

Approaching mid-June, roadblocks and police presence had bound the Hamptons into a knot. Though the Memorial Day explosion continued to reverberate throughout eastern Long

Island, the locals considered the summer almost half gone. Storeowners complained about making less money than the year before.

Judging by the crowds and traffic, it wasn't apparent. To beat the tie-ups, flights in and out of the airport had increased dramatically, resulting in a few near misses. That, combined with helicopter and fixed-wing fly-overs, had the locals seething. But there was no way around it. Everyone needed some good news and another holiday, albeit it an obscure one, was upon us.

On the way Broberg checked for messages. Hearing one, I thought I recognized Lenihan's voice. Broberg listened, hung up and threw his phone on the console. Suddenly, his tires whined louder and the rain felt colder. Chewing on what he heard, Broberg peered through the windshield. His two-day stubble darkened his face in the morning light like in the old days, when work mattered more than women.

"Guess you heard that, huh?" he said.

I looked at him. "Sounded familiar."

He hesitated. Business calls had a way of spiking Broberg's senses, making him more aware of his surroundings. "Lenihan told me to find Norm Peters," he said. "Said there should be a forensics gal with him. She knows something."

"That's it?"

He drove awhile. "We keep missing each other. My fault."

"Is Nicky going to be here?"

He reached for his phone and dialed. "Never thought of asking," he said. He waited for the phone to ring. It must have gone to voice mail. He hung up. A moment later, his phone went off. He picked it up. "Nicky," he said.

She spoke but I couldn't hear.

"So...you're not going to be at the meeting."

More talk.

Broberg nodded and signed off. "Guess not," he said, placing the phone back on the console.

We entered the town of East Hampton.

"Lenihan offered nothing new?"

"A little," he said. "They're finished examining the explosion site. Guess it was an old powder. Something...I don't know, not common. Maybe we can learn more if we run into the forensics person." He waited and continued. "He also said he'd put out the word for Peters to cooperate."

We entered a checkpoint and showed them our ID. As I slipped on my new hat, Broberg pulled into Town Hall. We got out and headed for the door. He looked at me. "Boy," he said. "I hope you don't get your picture taken while wearing that hat."

Showing ID, I whispered to the guard, "You know Al Ericson?"

He looked at my hat and smiled. "Al...yeah, sure. He's a fishing nut." He inspected me from head to foot. "I know all about you guys. Come in."

We walked in.

Broberg searched for Norm Peters. Seeing him up front, we headed his way.

"Hey beach boy," Peters said, seeing us coming. "I thought I told you to avoid this case."

"Sure pal," Broberg replied, without shaking Peters' hand. "You also said you'd nail them."

Peters copped a blank stare.

"Any suspects?" Broberg asked.

Peters ignored him and studied my hat. "I thought you said you were a marshal," he said to me.

Broberg cut in. "Well, yeah. Sometimes he is and sometimes he isn't."

Peters made an uncomfortable face. "The New London office has a suspect, but it's getting political. He's claiming he's being profiled."

"A minority?"

"Heck no. Just because he's from Connecticut."

"So...Connecticut people wanted in New York are sensitive about being profiled as being from Connecticut? I have that right?"

He stopped and looked around. "Look...an attorney from the 'Connecticut Lobstermen's Guild' claims the guy was in Lobster Management Area 2 the day of the shooting. His boat's location history supposedly supports that."

"Don't steer me this management area stuff. Where'd the shooting take place?" Broberg said.

"Area 6. I haven't gotten up to Connecticut and interview anyone."

"You shouldn't," Broberg said. "Up there...its there's to handle." He stepped back. "Who the hell is running this operation?"

A few people turned their heads our way.

"Things are getting hot," Peters whispered.

"They ought to," Broberg said. "Today's another holiday."

"Precisely."

"Is that guild you mentioned...is that a union?"

"Don't know."

"Peters...don't try to send me. I may know what's going on."

"You may," he said, "But I do."

"Okay," Broberg said, putting up his hands. "You win. Tell me."

Peters folded his arms and looked at the floor. “The killer cut the lobsterman’s body into pieces and threw everything overboard except the arms and lower legs. Then he lifted the trap onto the working deck, released the lobsters, and loaded it with the man’s extremities.”

“What about his head?”

“Not so fast,” Peters said, raising his hand. “The killer noticed a bottle of blackberry brandy.”

“How do you know the killer wasn’t drinking brandy?”

Peters smiled. “Because...the lobsterman’s wife verified the brand and bottle.” He paused, content to let his facts sink in.

“Go on.”

“We suspect the bottle was either empty or the killer spilled the rest out. Then he tore that day’s page out of the logbook, scribbled a note, dropped it into the bottle, screwed it tight, and dropped it, with the body parts, into the lobster trap. The whole package sank fifty-five feet down to the bottom of Block Island Sound. He left the lobster boat floating and escaped in his own boat.”

“What then?”

“Beyond trying to read smeared ink? Things become vague.”

“You have the note?”

Peters nodded.

“What’d it say?”

“That’s as far as I can go,” Peters said. “Confidential.”

“You’re so smart. One call to Manhattan and I can have the answer.”

“Then call, hot shot.” He smiled and started to leave.

“What about the head?” Broberg asked. He didn’t respond. “Lenihan told me there’d be a forensics person here.”

Peters stopped, scanned the crowd and returned. “Follow me. I’ll introduce you.”

“Wait,” Broberg said. “I want to know about that note.”

“We’ve got our other suspects. That’s about it.”

“The note, Peters!”

“I’m discussing suspects...Broberg!”

Broberg turned red. I thought he was going to clobber Peters. Then he calmed down. “Okay...lobstermen?”

Peters nodded. “That and some guys we’ve nabbed out of the woodwork, but it’s been slim pickings.”

The speaker system went off. We were asked to take seats.

“This investigation’s gone on forever,” Broberg said, sitting between Peters and myself. “You guys should have arrested someone by now.”

I checked my watch. Six sharp.

It was a brief call to arms. A classic kick-off meeting where they reviewed procedures, protocol, and lines of communication. Fifteen minutes later, it ended. As I learned nothing, I wondered why it was even held.

“Another waste of time,” Peters complained, standing to glance over the crowd. “C’mon,” he said. He led us to a svelte woman.

On the way, Broberg said, “Peters...I’ll be candid with you. You’re in over your head.”

Peters stopped and looked Broberg in the eye. “You think so, huh. I see Lenihan’s left me a message.”

“Don’t take it so hard,” Broberg said. “It isn’t personal.”

“Right. Now you’re officially in. I’m waiting to see you fall flat on your face.”

“They don’t have the best.”

“What?”

“We’re not in gear yet.”

Peters broke into a wide grin and looked at me, then at Broberg. “I’d laugh,” he said, “but it’s too early for humor.” Then he walked away.

Quick to introduce us to the forensics expert, Peters said his bit and left.

Meanwhile, she reached out and we shook hands. I waited for Broberg to take the lead.

“So, I was expecting to meet you,” she said, shaking Broberg’s hand, “but I wasn’t expecting two agents.”

Broberg gazed at my hat. “He’s really a U.S. Marshal masquerading as...what else?” He chuckled. “The best?”

She smiled at me. “A marshal? I don’t recall you guys being involved in this.”

“We’re not,” I said. “I just like hanging out in the Hamptons and—” I readjusted the FBI hat on my head, “wearing FBI hats.”

She laid her brown eyes on me and smiled, as though enchanted with my response.

“Hanging in the Hamptons, huh? I didn’t know the Department of Interior paid so well.”

“Baby,” I said. “You’d be surprised.”

With a knowing glance, she turned away and faced Broberg. “We think we have a handle on the explosive used at Coecles Harbor. The residue...chemically, is an old powder. I’m not sure it’s available today. If it was, certainly nobody would be able to acquire it without proper clearance.”

I asked, “Could it be an off-the-shelf concoction cooked up in someone’s basement?”

“Not really...I mean, it’s an uncommon powder.”

“Well, this was a sophisticated explosion.”

“True,” she said, “but due to the nature of the ordinance—it’s ancient—our people thought it better to involve the military. Have their experts analyze the powder, try to find a match.”

“The military?” I said. “They’re nowhere to be found out here.”

“They are in New England,” she said.

“What does Norm know?” Broberg asked.

“Norm Peters?”

“He mentioned a note found at one of the crime scenes.”

“A note?”

Broberg glazed over. “You must know him as a man of impeccable taste fueled by a legendary appetite for fancy food and exotic women.”

“Ah yes,” she said, seemingly rocked by Broberg’s description. “Norm Peters, Long Island Bureau...same one?” She laughed. “I thought that too until I found out he gulps red wine straight from the bottle...and keeps it cold in his refrigerator, no less!”

He laughed. “That’s our man, Peters.”

“Norm doesn’t know much,” she said. “And he doesn’t show his cards.”

“Memories shorten in a crisis,” Broberg said.

“Yes,” she said, looking back over her shoulder. “And he appears focused on the shootings, nothing else.”

“That’s because explosives are one of his many blind spots.”

She checked her watch. “That’s all I have.”

“You mentioned the military,” Broberg said. “Which branch?”

“Navy. They’re close by.”

“Any idea when you might know something?”

“With them...could be forever.”

Broberg inhaled and stuck his hands into his pockets. “We don’t have forever. Got a card?”

She tightened her lips and left.

Broberg watched her until she exited the building “It’s too early to call Lenihan on that note. You think Peters was lying?”

“I don’t know. He did mention the victim’s wife. Would he have done that if he was lying?”

“Good point,” Broberg said. “What should we do?”

I noticed sun streaming in through the window. “The rain stopped. Why don’t we get something to eat, pick up Madeline and head to the ocean for the day?”

He liked that idea so we drove back to Springs. Choppers were flying everywhere.

“I’d like to avoid the media scrum,” Broberg said. “Which beach?”

“Somewhere in Montauk I’d guess, maybe Amagansett.”

“Where there might be some action?”

“Where we might get lucky.”

Later that day, while we sunbathed on the shore, Broberg connected with Lenihan. He asked about the note. Shaking his head, the glare off his sunglasses blinded me. He hung up.

“Lenihan knows nothing about a note,” he said. He leaned back, catching more of the sun’s rays. “He said he’d check into it.”

## CHAPTER 30

### Mud

Flag Day came and went. Except for Broberg gifting me his FBI hat, the day was uneventful.

“Why nothing?” I asked Tora as we watched the morning news.

She pulled away from her grapefruit. Still chewing she said, “No idea, but I’m glad.” She lifted the newspaper. “Maybe the killer, or killers don’t observe the nation’s flag.”

I pondered that. How prophetic. “Anarchists?”

“Not necessarily. Maybe there’s no love for the flag. They don’t observe it so it never was a holiday.” She ate some more. “By the way, that boat came by the buoy again last night.”

“Same thing?”

“Yup...took off straight across the bay.”

“That reminds me,” I said. “Two days ago, the day I was attacked by the seagulls, I saw a black boat, early in the morning, in front of the buoy.”

“Black?”

I flashed the picture onto my screen and showed her the phone.

“How weird,” she said, craning her neck to look at my photo. “I rarely see black boats.” She reached for my phone. I gave it to her. “Looks like a bayman’s boat.” She studied the photo.

“What’s a bayman’s boat?”

She placed one hand over her eyes and squinted at the bay. “Oh...I don’t know. They aren’t pretty. Just old wooden work boats.” She dropped her hand and returned my phone. “Did it leave the same way?”

I nodded. “At first its engine was off. Then it fired up and they took off.”

As Tora got up to look out the window, Madeline walked in and gave me a hug.

“You enjoyed the ocean?” I asked.

“Yeah...love it.” She fixed herself coffee and a bagel. “Broberg,” she muttered. “He’s all over women. It’s embarrassing.”

“At the beach?” Tora said.

“He must have introduced himself to five women.”

Tora laughed. “I love it,” she said. “The world dictates that life follows a natural order of things. Without that, after a few generations, we would perish.” She looked at Madeline. “You’re a biologist. You understand that.”

“I do?”

“One of the basic precepts of this order is that men chase women...not the reverse.”

Broberg walked into the room.

Tora watched him maneuver around the kitchen. “For as much as you like to run, you must have come out feet first,” she said.

Broberg laughed and slapped both thighs. “So...I take it last night was a dud.”

“Quiet,” she said.

“Well...that’s a good thing.”

She continued eating her grapefruit. “Maybe the spree’s over.”

He nodded. “Later today, I’m heading over to the Cork & Bib. Think I’ll give Nicky a call, see if she’s in town.”

“The gal from the Cork & Bib?”

“Yeah, that Irish...Latino blonde.”

“What’s Irish-Latino blonde?” Tora asked.

“Oh...Scandinavian with a tint of reddish dark.”

“Sounds like a drink.”

“I agree,” Broberg said. “I think she’ll go down smooth.”

Broberg arranged to meet Nicky at the Cork & Bib so we piled into the pickup and headed over. It was late afternoon, the day after a holiday, so I didn’t expect a crowd. I was wrong. Snaking through a collection of tables and umbrellas out front, Nicky found us.

She moseyed over to Broberg and handed him her lighter. Placing a cigarette between her pink lips, she said, "Would you light me, please?"

He complied.

"Hi Madeline," Nicky said after inhaling, her eyes sullen.

Madeline smiled and waved her a quick one. "I hear you were at the garden party. I missed you."

"Guess you've heard about—" she hesitated and looked at Broberg. "My identity shift."

"Oh yeah," Madeline replied with a cute sneer. She waved her off. "No biggie... we get to do that now and then, don't we?"

I reached around and pinched Madeline on her tight rear. She broke into a wild laugh.

The crowd was growing so I suggested we get a seat. As we filed in, I looked at Nicky. "Driving here, I made a wrong turn and ended up downtown."

"Sag Harbor's quaint, isn't it?" she said.

"Lovely."

"We ended up passing the Whaling Museum," Broberg added.

"Sounds exciting."

"Did you lie about working there, too?" he asked, holding the door for her.

"Lie?" Nicky said. "I hate that word, but no...that was real. One summer."

"Place looks old."

"You have no idea..."

Inside, Nicky ran to the house bell. The one where if you ring it, you buy drinks for everyone. She faked like she was going to pull the cord.

"Do that," Broberg said, "and I'm out of here."

She let go and Madeline steered us to a booth.

"Oh hi," Nicky said, as her waitress friend Leah approached us.

"I see you're all back," Leah said. She laid down four coasters. "It's Thursday. Happy hour. Dutch's band will be playing live music. You've come at a good time."

"Awfully crowded," Broberg said.

Leah looked around and saw a group of brawny men taking up the center of the room. "Yeah...happy hour brings em' in. A lot of guys that work on the water." She turned, ready to take our order. "Giving all that's been going on, guess they need a break."

We ordered and she left.

"So Nicky," I asked. "Why do you hang out here?"

"Look around," she said. "All I see are people who work on the water. Go outside and check the license plates. Connecticut...North Fork, Shelter Island. All lobster and fishermen."

She tightened her lips and looked at the crowd. "I've learned a lot here." She focused on Broberg. "We're going to crack the case here."

Broberg breathed in hard and pushed back from the table. "You sound confident."

"I've reviewed the department's file on boating incidents. I've found a few matches. One involving a lobsterman and a fisherman from Montauk. Another called in by a recreational fisherman."

"What's the catch?"

"Both of their boats were destroyed in the Coecles Harbor explosion."

"Anything...compelling?"

"Compelling? We've got two leads."

I took out my phone and showed her the picture of the black boat. "See any pictures of this boat?"

She took the phone from my hand. "Doesn't look familiar." She looked closer. "What's with the black color?"

Leah returned with our drinks. After she served them, Nicky showed her the picture. "Ever seen this boat?"

Leah studied the picture. "That Lionhead Rock?"

"I think so."

Leah glanced at me and refocused on the picture. "So...that's Gardiners Island in the background...I think I've seen it here at Sag."

"Any idea who owns it?"

She looked back toward the bar. "Hold on," she said, leaving with my phone. She walked up to a few guys drinking at the bar. One of them turned and looked at me. Then he spoke to Leah. She returned. "Those guys are fishermen. They know everything about this harbor. They called it a bayman's boat. One of them thinks it belongs to that weird guy at the museum."

"What weird guy?" Nicky asked.

She gazed at Nicky. "You know...the one with an office. The art trader."

"Ah," Nicky said. "It's some European name. Tall...thin...brazen. Can't remember—"

For some reason, Madeline got fidgety. She couldn't seem to get comfortable. I put my arm around her, but she slowly pulled away. That too, was strange.

"Huh?" Broberg groaned. "An art dude having an office at the whaling museum?"

"Yeah," Leah said. "One real creepy guy, too."

Broberg laughed. "Let me get this right...what does he do, scrub whale bones all night?"

She laughed. "No, he does some kind of business there. Said he deals with international environmental agencies and banks."

"What name did you say?" I asked her.

She looked at Nicky.

“I met a guy named Helios at the garden party,” Madeline said, “but he said he was a gallerist. Nice guy.”

“Helios!” Nicky said. “That’s him.”

“Nice if he likes you,” Leah said preparing to leave.

Nicky faced Madeline: “Where did you meet?”

“At the garden party.”

Nicky paused. “He really stands out, but I didn’t see him.”

“He wasn’t there very long.”

I turned toward Madeline. “This Helios guy didn’t mesmerize you, did he?”

She became defensive, pulling further away from me. “What do you mean?”

“Bonetrager,” Nicky said, cutting in. “Helios Bonetrager...the epitome of Euro-Bohemian, with an Amagansett flair.”

For a moment we sat in silence, enjoying our drinks.

“Madeline,” Nicky said. “Out of curiosity, what did he say to you?”

Madeline shook her head. “Let’s just drop it, okay?”

“Well, Bonetrager comes on strong, using his foreign enchantments and well-worn tongue to entice women. Beware.”

Leah led someone to our table.

“Hey,” she said, introducing the man as Henry, the old maintenance chief from the whaling museum. “You guys seemed interested in the museum so Henry said he’ll answer any questions.”

Henry stuck his index finger up. “For a free drink, that is.” The he giggled.

“I got it,” Broberg said, his brow furrowed and shiny.

“So, where do we begin?” Henry said, standing next to our table. “With the ghosts?”

“Sure,” Nicky teased. “Have at it.”

He nodded. “I’d open the place sometimes. It’d be a bit spooky, like something had been going on. And there’d been this strange smell. Heavy...like oil, but it would go away quickly.”

“That’s explainable,” Nicky said. “It’s an old mansion.”

“Yes,” he said, “But it’s full of ghosts. It was built in 1845, a Masonic Temple since 1920. Masons still occupy the top floor. It would have made a terrific museum bar...like London’s ‘Scotch of St. James’.”

“Interesting,” Broberg said.

Leah brought our food and stood by, listening.

“Can we get you something to eat?” Nicky asked.

“No,” Henry said.

I looked at Henry. “Do you know this Bonetrager guy?”

He thought. “Not very well. Bonetrager was a loner. He’d spend quite a bit of time there at night...upstairs in the club.”

“A club?”

“Let me re-phrase that...some fraternity. There was an art office up there, or something.”

“A gallery, huh.”

“I believe so...but only for the elect. The public wasn’t allowed upstairs.”

Leah laughed. “Bonetrager once gave a friend of mine a bottle of whiskey and told her to come up after work. Can you imagine?”

“Yes,” Henry said. “But there’s much more than that if you’ve the stomach for it.”

That got our attention.

“Go ahead,” I said, digging into my burger.

He stared at the wall at the end of our booth. “The witching influence over Sag Harbor continues to this day. Visions, strange lanterns floating over the water and ships’ lights moving through the darkness are seen to this day. Even the sounds of dead whales trying to communicate in the night.”

As Henry spoke Leah nodded, as though validating every word he said.

Henry looked around. Then he leaned over our table. “I’ve seen the shapes of sperm whales take form out of the billowing mist and fog.” He stopped and stood. “And in the museum, I once saw the grayish ghost of a massive whale swimming in the air.” His eyes got big and he spread his arms out. “It charged me with its long narrow jaw hinged wide open and agape, ready to snatch me away.” He leaned back over the table. “I didn’t want to enter its bowels and embark on an endless journey to rejoin its ghostly pod. Then the apparition passed through me. I turned and saw its massive tail, the size of a school bus, blend into the walls and leave.”

Leah said, “Once my watch lost a full hour in there.” She gave a final nod and left.

“Man,” Broberg said in a joking manner. “You’ve been ghosted.”

“You don’t believe me?” Henry asked.

“I do,” Broberg said. “But let’s not tempt the haints...I used to be into that.”

Nicky finished her salad and pushed the bowl aside. “What do you think of devils disguised as ghost whales?”

Henry lit up. “Don’t know about that. I’ve always thought of it as the final earthly resting place for the spirits of lost whales.”

“Still have a key?” I asked.

Henry hiked up his pants. “I...I think so. Why?”

“Can you get us in there?”

He looked out a window. Then he swung his head around, lowering it my way. “At night? You crazy?”

“Bonetrager might be in.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it,” he replied. “But I have no business with Mr. Bonetrager.” He put up his hand and hooked his finger at us. “Come.”

“You want us to follow you?” Nicky asked.

I nodded and looked at Broberg. He nodded and looked at Nicky.

“Okay,” she said.

As we left our seats, Madeline offered to stay and save our table.

We followed Henry toward the restrooms.

He stopped and turned. “Back in the mid-1800’s, there used to be a road house on this very spot. It served the whalers with food and lodging.”

He continued walking past the restrooms to a brick hallway at the rear of the building. We turned and he stopped again. Facing a tarnished bronze plaque, he said, “This riddle was written on the back wall of the original road house. They say it was written by a Celt who tried to halt whale hunting.”

He read out loud.

*“For want of oil, ivory, and bone  
the dead will come to take you home.  
He who knows the sacred ways,  
redeems the whales of ancient days.”*

I had no idea what to make of the riddle.

“What do you suppose this means?” Nicky asked.

Henry laughed. “I was hoping one of you would be able to answer that for me.”

He started walking back into the restaurant, stopped at the restrooms and shrugged. “Just superstition, I suppose.”

Then he melted into the crowd.

## CHAPTER 31

### Brawl

We returned to our table. I asked Madeline, “Did Bonetrager mention anything about what he could be doing in his black boat near the buoy?”

“How do you know he’s snooping at the buoy in a black boat?”

She was right. “I don’t know...just asking.”

Slowly she shook her head. “He perked up when he found out I was staying near Lionhead Rock.” She looked at me. “That’s when he asked about the buoy.”

“So, I was correct.” She didn’t respond. “Can you find out what type of boat he has?”

Madeline looked at Broberg. She was about to speak and then stopped. “I’d have to visit him to do that.” She looked at me.

“We’ll see,” I said.

“So then,” Nicky said, “if I may ask...what exactly did Bonetrager tell you?”

“Oh...just that he owns an art gallery.” She seemed annoyed and took a quick sip of water. “That he’s an international consultant.”

Nicky nodded. “Well, from what we’ve heard, that jibes.”

Broberg looked at me and wrinkled his nose. “International consultant...Bonetrager,” he said with a distant gaze. “Somehow I’ve heard that name before.”

“What’s he consult in?” I asked, thinking the same thing.

“He never explained, exactly. Only that works with environmental groups worldwide.”

“Interesting,” Broberg said. “Someone like that...who thinks he’s international-cool, usually gets shady financing, makes illicit connections, applies political pressure and ends up smuggling something...or somebody into the country.”

Madeline looked at Broberg. “He’s too hip for that.”

Leah returned with an unkempt character. “Hi everyone,” she said, turning to face him. She smiled. “Meet Dutch. He’s in the band. He also works for Earth Diocese on Gardiners Island.” Then she hugged him.

Dutch seemed distracted. He kept looking back at the group of fishermen hanging in the middle of the room. She held him tighter. “Forget it,” she said quietly.

Dutch stiffened. “I just can’t walk away,” he said. “One of those guys over there was bragging about how he scraped the female’s eggs from her tail to legally keep the lobster. That’s crap.”

With a scowl, Dutch turned toward them.

She held his arm. “Dutch...don’t...let it go.”

“Check out the gold-plated necklace,” Nicky said, commenting on one of the fishermen. “The lout’s not worth it.”

One of the fishermen began talking about cutting the fins off ‘worthless sharks.’

“For this,” Dutch said, “they deserve death. I spit on them.”

On and on the fishermen went, drinking and getting louder—one of them accusing another of fishing over the limit.

Leah appeared confused. She peered back at the fishermen and then at Dutch. Dutch pulled away from her and slammed his mug of beer on the table. “I gotta do this,” he said. He walked toward the fishermen. “What day do your checks arrive?” he said, stretching each syllable with his salty voice. “Looks like someone trims your hair with a pair of jagged rocks.”

Gradually, the noise level decreased.

One of them said, “Why...we fish. Some of us lobster. A few do both. Why?”

Dutch threw his hands down flat, palms out and stretched his neck forward. “All I’ve heard is talk about pillaging lobsters and cutting the fins off sharks. You guys are notorious for leaving abandoned pots that trap and kill marine life.”

The room became quieter.

“Those pots you’re referring to have been lost,” the fisherman responded. “Some of us don’t dive so they stay on the bottom.”

“It’s legal,” another fisherman yelled. “Besides, you and your ilk cut the lines with your props and knives. That’s how they become ghost pots.”

“Yeah,” the biggest fisherman said. “I’ve seen you messing around the docks, too!” He was a bear of a man. Brawny with a large brown beard. He wore green rubber fishing boots. “What are you looking to do? Damage our boats?”

Dutch clenched his fist and yelled, “I’ll stand behind anyone who’ll damage boats being used to harvest illegally. It’s criminal!”

“Criminal to who?”

“The sea!”

“Punk!” one of the fisherman shouted. “I catch you there...and it won’t be any good.”

“Do something about it!” Dutch yelled.

Before I could process Dutch’s audacity, someone from a side table flicked a spoonful of something white onto his shirt.

“That’s it,” Dutch said, scraping the glob off his shirt with his fingers. His face turning slightly blue, he threw whatever he could of the wad back at the table from where it came from.

One of the fishermen walked forward and put his arm around Dutch. Trying to lead him away, he said, “Now, we don’t have to—”

Dutch threw his arm off, pushed him away and marched back toward the group.

“Dutch!” someone yelled from the bar.

“You’d do best to leave and mind your own business,” the same fisherman said, pointing his finger at Dutch.

The big fisherman looked down at Dutch. After throwing down a slosh of beer, he smiled and burped. “You’ve spent too much time in the hashish closet.”

“Say what?” Dutch said, squaring himself in front of him.

All the fishermen laughed.

“I lobster,” the big man said. “And you? What does a fag hippie do in the Hamptons except light up and complain about sacred sand?”

The lobsterman’s friends joined in, howling and mocking Dutch.

Leah dropped her tray on the table and rushed to intervene. Forcing herself between both men, she backed into the big lobsterman and wrapped her arms backwards around him, as though trying to block him. Another waitress got involved.

“Hey,” Broberg said. “Isn’t that the guy from for State of the Hamptons address? The angry fisherman?”

“Which one?”

“The big guy. Stood in the back. Think he called himself Billy Sabbath.”

I strained for a clue. Anything. “Don’t recognize him.”

Realizing the big man probably had Dutch by sixty pounds, I looked at the bartender but he was busy serving drinks. At the time, I remember thinking he seemed either cavalier, or scared, given the degree of hostility shown by all parties. Shoes shuffled. People moved fast. Somehow, our waitress went down hard onto the floor.

Nicky turned and grabbed Broberg. “You just going to sit there?”

Broberg looked at me.

As one waitress knelt to assist the other, Dutch stepped around both of them and took a poke at the lobsterman. The lobsterman dodged his blow, dropped his beer onto an adjoining table and lunged over the women at Dutch.

People started screaming and vacating their tables.

The big lobsterman engulfed Dutch tying him up and getting him in a chokehold. Then he began raining his fist down on Dutch’s head and face. As the waitress scrambled off the floor to the side, Leah brought her hand to her mouth and broke down crying. She looked at Nicky and Nicky tugged on Broberg. Broberg started to stand.

A patron tried to break up the fight but he was subdued by one of the fisherman. Then he was knocked to the floor, being kicked and punched. Another scuffle broke out.

With Dutch getting hammered, Leah ran into the big lobsterman and pounded him with both fists. He continued to slam Dutch and then turned and knocked her to the floor with his elbow. Bleeding, she rolled on the floor holding her nose and mouth.

As Nicky moved to allow Broberg out, someone threw a chair. It became chaotic.

I followed Broberg, more to keep him from getting hurt than anything else.

With both hands, Broberg gripped the lobsterman's shoulders and tried to pull him off Dutch. "You've made your point. Let him up."

The lobsterman let go of Dutch and turned. He scowled, pulling his lip up and showing his teeth, like a dog would. "So now you want me?" he shouted at Broberg.

Dutch dove for the big man's legs, but he got kicked into submission.

Broberg pushed the lobsterman back, but the big man drove his fist into Broberg's gut. Broberg doubled over and returned with a roundhouse that missed. The lobsterman crashed into him, knocking him back across the floor and into a table.

The impact jarred Broberg's gun from his pocket holster, sending it bouncing across the floor. I went for it, beating another guy to it. Tearing it from his grip, he moved aggressively toward me. I pointed the muzzle at him. He backed off.

Meanwhile, the lobsterman had grabbed Dutch by the ankles and was dragging him toward the lobby. A hash pipe dropped from Dutch's pocket. Hoisting Dutch up to the happy hour bell, he yelled. "Ring it...ring it you worthless scum bucket!"

"Yeah," some in crowd yelled. "Ring the bell, ring the bell..." Others started yelling the same line in unison.

Dutch resisted. Then the lobsterman kicked him in the ribs. That was it. Leah scrambled to help Dutch. I placed Broberg's gun in front of Madeline and cut her off. "I'll take care of this," I said.

As the lobsterman was getting ready to kick Dutch again, I shoved him away. He charged me, exposing his face.

I hit him square in the kisser, sending him backwards into the bell. It chimed wildly. The crowd cheered. He tried me again, but I caught him with a quick jab to the throat. He dropped to his knees.

The police streamed into the restaurant, blocking all doors and preventing anyone from leaving.

The bartender pointed to the cameras mounted on the ceiling. Then he led them around, picking out the rabble-rousers. He didn't include Dutch in the mix. Being that Dutch started everything, I figured the police would sort things out once they examined the video.

Madeline walked over and held me tight. Nicky was tending to Broberg. Both waitresses walked Dutch off for repairs. He had taken an awful beating but the big guy didn't hit hard. Still, Dutch got off easy.

"Let's bag out of here," I said.

We approached the officers guarding the doors. Broberg and I showed our identification and left with the gals.

Outside, Nicky held Broberg and they kissed.

"I'll give you a call," Broberg said. "Know of any peaceful beaches?"

"Maidstone isn't far away...you going to be okay?"

He rubbed his stomach and winced. "I need beach therapy and a cold one."

She brushed his hair back. "If we go later in the day, we can make a fire and cook S'mores."

"You're a romantic," Broberg said. "But you already knew that."

She giggled, shook her head and put her arm around him. She leaned into him and looked him in the eye.

"In the dark," he said, "if we put our heads together, hold each other tight and stare into the flames." He paused. "We might find clues hidden in the embers."

## CHAPTER 32

### Maidstone

The next day Broberg called Lenihan. He asked about the note Peters said was found in a bottle in the dead lobsterman's pot. As I listened to him speak, I had my doubts. Broberg hung up.

"So...what'd he say?"

He flipped his phone into the air and caught it. "Peters must have been putting me on." With a blank stare, Broberg looked at Gardiners Island. "Either that or Peters is hiding evidence, which at this stage I find highly unlikely."

As I massaged my fist, Tora walked over. "Beautiful morning," she said, looking down at me. "What's wrong with your hand?"

I stopped rubbing it. "Oh...had a disagreement last night. No big deal."

"Over at Sag Harbor?"

"Cork & Bib."

Broberg explained the brawl to her.

"It's enough already," she said. "You're giving me a five-star headache."

"Me too," Broberg said.

"I came out to tell you guys there's going to be an art exhibition and Earth Diocese dedication ceremony at Ashawagh Hall."

Neither of us responded.

"I'll be going," she said. "Madeline wants to go."

"When?" I asked.

"Tomorrow...Saturday. It's by invitation only. You want to go?"

"Hey, maybe that art guy Bonetrager will show?" Broberg said. "Does Madeline have his number?"

"Why would she have his number?"

He shrugged. "Just wondering. She seems to know him. Have her text him and find out."

Tora stepped off the deck. "I gotta go."

Broberg glanced at her. "Can you get a ticket for Nicky?"

"Your girlfriend?"

He laughed. "You can call her that."

"Sure, but you'll have to meet her somewhere and give her a ticket in order to park."

"They're checking parking?"

"From what I understand. I'll have the tickets later today." She left for the house.

Broberg stretched. "I'm going to meet Nicky at Maidstone. You and Madeline want to come?"

I shook my head. “No. I’ve got to spend more quality time with her. Think we’ll visit Montauk Lighthouse. Spend the rest of the day in the water.” I looked back at the house. “Try to break her away from Tora. They’re too close.”

“Well, you’ve got her all night. I hardly see you after eight.”

He was right. I’d been spending nights with her, touching...loving, talking. “I have,” I said. “But something’s missing.”

“She getting cold?”

“In a way. Can’t figure it out. That’s why I want to start spending more time with her during the day.”

He finished the remains of his coffee. “I’m off. If you change your mind, we’ll be at a place called Maidstone Park.”

“Hey,” Broberg said, as Nicky approached him in the parking lot. “For someone deeply involved in a messy investigation, you look great. Dig the suit.”

“Like it?” She flung her hair back, looked at the beach and slid her arm under his. “Got it at Bloomies. Have any trouble finding this place?”

“Nope,” he said. “Want me to take that?”

She swung her bag and blanket away. “I’m fine.”

They walked to the beach, laid out her blanket and sat down.

Broberg was all eyes. “Restrooms, picnic area, baseball...I like this place,” he said.

She ignored him and began applying suntan lotion. “Would you get my back?”

He moved over and applied lotion across the top of her shoulders, lightly massaging with his thumbs and feeling her skin. He finished, whispered something softly, kissed her and laid on the blanket. She rolled toward him, crossed her leg over his and caressed his thigh, her fingers lightly working their way up over his swimsuit across his waste and touching his chest. She brought both hands to his cheeks and pulled herself closer. Ignoring the sounds of kids and the feeling of sand blowing across their bodies, they embraced. For the moment, nothing else mattered. She let go. He pulled her back down and gazed into her eyes. They kissed, deeply. She sat up and pulled her hair back. “Where’s the lotion?”

“Any news?” he asked handing her the tube.

She lathered him and stared at the bay. “I’ve been on other matters lately. They’ve shifted to interviewing lobstermen as far away as Maine.”

“Who would come down here from Maine just to nail a few Long Island guys?”

“That’s what we want to find out, but you should already know this...you’re one of their guys.”

“FBI—sure. However my dear, I’m not officially on this case.”

“So as to not piss people off?”

“Can you keep a secret?” he said.

“Does it involve love?” she moaned softly.

Broberg rolled over the blanket and steadied himself above her. “Love?”

“Yeah,” she said cracking up laughing. “What’s that got to do with it?”

“Funny,” he said, dropping down and kissing her.

She took her sunglasses off, placed her hands on his shoulders and pulled his body onto hers. Embracing, they kissed and rubbed against each other.

He pushed up from her. “Well, can you?”

“One more kiss and I’ll tell you.”

He complied and went back to his place on the blanket.

She put her sunglasses on. “Yeah...I think so.”

“Peters told me there was a bottle with a note inside in the lobster pot that contained the victim’s appendages.” He stared at her. “You heard anything about that?”

She rose and shook her head. “A note? I’ve heard nothing.”

Broberg watched a boat leave Three Mile Harbor for the bay. “That’s what I thought.”

She laid on her side and faced him. Wrapping her leg over his, she said, “What did it say?”

“Don’t know...he wouldn’t tell me.”

She moved and began to sunbathe. “How can one agent deprive another of information? Doesn’t make sense. Think he’s putting you on?”

“No,” he said. “I think he’s lying.”

They laid in the sun for an hour. Then Broberg got up and used his towel to knock sand off his ankles. “I’m heading for the water.”

At first she didn’t respond. Then she rose and moved close to him. Placing her arms around him, she pulled him in. They kissed.

“You swim?” he asked.

She took his hand, nodded and kicked the sand. “All the time.”

“Good, let’s go.”

They swam and then rested in the shallows, allowing gentle waves to lap around them as they tried to catch minnows.

A couple entered the water, their arms locked as they headed for deeper water.

“I hope she’s finally found the right one,” Broberg said.

“That’s rude...you don’t even know her.”

Broberg watched them frolic. “Don’t have to. Look at her. It can’t be the first guy she’s ever locked arms with.”

“Agh...you can be so obnoxious. I’m thirsty.”

“Hey, let’s get lunch at the Silver Cutlass?”

She looked at the restaurant. “Sure...let’s go back to the blanket. I brought some drinks in my bag. Hope you like diet.”

Back on the blanket, Broberg sipped his root beer. Then he began to sing:

*“I topped my schooner off with diesel for the day, left the harbor making waves for Gardiners Bay, past the laterals and bell buoys I did sail, straight for Maidstone Park to kick some loser’s tail.”*

“C’mon,” she said. “People are listening.”

He stopped. Then he continued louder. *“I’m a Bonacker from Springs I’m proud to say, but with the laws and regs fishing just don’t pay, something’s rotten here and nothing’s on the line, guess I’ll sell my joint and move to Caroline.”*

A kid walked over. “Mister, I know that song.”

“You do, huh?” Broberg said, bending down.

“Yeah...but those aren’t the right words.”

“What are the right words?”

He chuckled.

“I tell you for a sip of your soda?”

Broberg looked at him suspiciously. Then he slowly reached over to give him the can. “No backwash.”

The kid laughed.

“I’m serious,” Broberg said.

The kid took a strong sip, churned the liquid in his mouth, pressure-washed the inside of his cheeks and pumped the mound of liquid down his throat. His eye caught Nicky’s holstered pistol sitting in the drink bag. “A gun...that real?”

“Scram...I only work with professionals.”

The kid gave him the can back and headed toward the water.

“Dick! Look,” Nicky said, pointing toward the inlet. “That boat.”

He looked and began slowly walking toward the inlet.

“Isn’t that it?” she said, rushing to get her cellphone from her bag. She stood and took a number of photos.

In silence, he watched the boat accelerate and enter the bay. “Sure doesn’t look like a threat,” he said. “It’s old, but it’s black from stern to bow.”

They watched the boat pick up speed and turn toward Shelter Island.

“Too bad I can’t get a picture inside the wheelhouse,” she said.

“Where do you suppose it’s heading?”

She pulled up her photos. "Here...look at this one."

Broberg took the phone. "Wow...great shot."

"Department optics. Cain must compare this photo with his."

"I'll email it to myself," he said, still following the boat. "Then send it to him."

Broberg watched the black boat until it went around a bend and out of sight. "That's the way to Sag Harbor, isn't it?" He checked his phone. Then he began punching keys. "There...off to Rippinger."

"We might want to start checking Three Mile Harbor for that boat," she said.

"Didn't a fishing boat get burned there?"

"Back in February. Valentine's Day."

Broberg's phone went off. He listened. "All yours chief. Nicky took the picture. I'll tell her." He hung up.

"That was Rippinger. He said it was the same boat and that you're talented."

Nicky smiled and reclined on the blanket. "You're not too bad yourself."

"Huh?"

"You sing beautifully."

"Yeah, right. Not what you said at the Cork & Bib."

"You were bombed."

He sat down and handed her phone back. "I just made those lines up."

"Really?" she said. "I'd love to hear you at a night club."

"Don't be silly."

"I'm not," she said loudly. "You carried the melody. I've heard that song. Who did it?"

He thought for a while. "The Piano Man."

## CHAPTER 33

### Dealing

Nine miles away, Bonetrager was preparing the art shop when his cell phone went off.

“Helios here.”

“Yes...Mr. Bonetrager? Benny Lerner, from the town.”

“Ah, Mr. Lerner. Good to hear from you.”

“I was wondering. Would you be available to meet?”

Bonetrager looked at his watch. “When and where?”

“I was thinking today...before the weekend. Somewhere we can talk in private.”

Bonetrager thought. “Main Beach?”

Dead air. “Someplace out of the way.”

“How about Indian Wells?”

More dead air. “The old Coast Guard Beach. How soon?”

Bonetrager scanned the shop and looked again at his watch. “I can be there in half an hour.”

“Meet you in the parking lot,” Lerner said.

Bonetrager arrived in customary white, fedora and all. He heard a door slam. Looking over his shoulder, he saw a man wearing a windbreaker, sunglasses and a floppy-brimmed beach hat approach him. The man stuck out his hand. “Benny Lerner,” he said.

Bonetrager smiled. “I didn’t recognize you.”

Lerner put his hand up to block the morning sun and surveyed the beach. “That’s the point.” He smirked. “Shall we?”

Bonetrager bowed and motioned for him to lead.

They walked down the beach hugging the dunes, Lerner setting the pace in the direction of the lighthouse. After passing numerous homes and well away from anyone, Lerner said, “I’ve been evaluating your water proposal.”

“Splendid,” Bonetrager said. “And—”

Lerner stopped. “Before we begin...are you recording this?”

Bonetrager threw out his hands. “What you see is what you get.”

Lerner looked around. Seeing a large driftwood log wedged into the salt grass, he walked to it and took a seat. “I love this place.”

Bonetrager brushed away some sand and sat on the same log. “So...where are we on this?”

“Before we begin, I want you to understand my power is limited.”

Bonetrager nodded. “So is our money.”

Lerner laughed. "I can see...never mind. Look, I need a sample of your water. It has to be analyzed."

"We can do that."

"I also need a representative to verify the source of the sample."

"Like who?"

"Oh...a third party. Someone technical...impartial. I'm thinking from Stoney Brook, the county, USGS...a consultant. Maybe even from the LF2WC."

"Activists?"

"The Lower Fork Fresh Water Coalition can help procure grant monies...having them on board eliminates one obstacle. Plus, they give us credibility."

Bonetrager nodded.

"However...I'll need more than that."

Bonetrager didn't respond.

Lerner took his glasses off and cleaned them. He put them back on and scanned the dunes behind them. "You mentioned benefits in our meeting. Can you elaborate?"

"Before I do, you need to know that the deal I'm offering the town actually bails the town out."

Lerner smirked. "Bails us out? Of what?"

Bonetrager stretched his legs, folded his arms and looked back toward the lifeguard stand. "How shall I name them? Gasoline additives, pesticides, fertilizers, salt intrusion, a hideous dump waiting to contaminate the works with carcinogens, low pressure, limited volume—"

"Hold it," Lerner said. "I'm trying to figure you out. Are you an art dealer? An environmentalist? A capitalist? Or a political—"

"Hack?"

"Tell me."

"All the above. But I worship cash. After all...isn't money the bottom line?"

Lerner exhaled and looked down the beach.

"You know," Bonetrager said. "Sooner or later, the town's bill will come due. That is...provided a hurricane doesn't flatten this place and contaminate the whole damn aquifer with salt water first. You've got some hard decisions to make."

Lerner began pushing the sand around with his feet.

"I can make you a hero...and quite wealthy," Bonetrager said.

Lerner was lost for words.

"Or...I can send our water to Suffolk County through a pipeline running from Greenport. Your choice."

"It's not that easy," Lerner said.

“Can you afford not to? Clearly there’s not enough clean water for everyone.”

“I’m not sure which is the right way to go.”

“I’m not a very patient man,” Bonetrager said. He pointed back over the dunes. “I have a willing audience on the other side of Gardiners Bay.”

“Limited water is our...whip for controlling growth.”

“Well,” Bonetrager said, laughing. “Your whip has become a straw man.” He paused. “Use our water to flush out salt contamination. Replenish what you have, dear man. Still maintain local wells.”

“What about Southampton? We share the same water source.”

“Bloody well make them a hero, too! Have them reconsider the Pine Barrens plan. With our water, you...and I mean you *personally*, can accept any restrictive water plan without alienating your real estate and builder buddies.”

Lerner looked at the ocean. His face relaxed. He nodded confidently. “I’m concerned about lawsuits.”

“C’mon...how can they sue you?” Bonetrager said. “It’s like fracking oil. You’ve stumbled upon a solution. It isn’t the town’s fault a fresh-water bonanza exists under Gardiners Island.” He paused and grabbed a broken shell from the sand. “Hell...it’d be criminal not to exploit something like that.”

Lerner scanned the horizon, looking from right to left, following the line where the sky meets sea.

“If what you say is true,” Lerner said, “any state-imposed water protection plans would be off the table.”

Bonetrager removed his hat. “Want to increase density? It’s yours. Want to sell water? Go ahead. The town, in conjunction with other South Fork communities, calls the shots. We just pipe you an endless supply of fresh water.”

“There could be a regional problem,” Lerner said.

“How’s that?”

“The deepest part of the aquifer is below Southampton. What’s their incentive?”

Bonetrager took a moment. “It boils down to money. Montauk’s a money sink. As they say in Algeria, ‘it’s your monkey’. Convince Southampton to join in.” He laughed. “They’re not out of the woods by a long shot.”

“What do I say when I’m told money is secondary?” He faced Bonetrager. “That all they want is limited use?”

Bonetrager shook his head and put his hat on. “You don’t get it, do you?” He waited. “Surface protection does nothing to mitigate saltwater intrusion, or iron content...or encroaching poison.”

“Nobody believes we have a crisis.”

“They don’t so you plant the seeds for one.”

“How?”

“The same way the government does. The way the press does.”

“I don’t follow,” Lerner said. “I can’t usurp another town, let alone increase their debt.”

Bonetrager stood and wiped off his pants. “I’m afraid we’re coming to an impasse. I haven’t the time for ignorance.”

Lerner stood. “You calling me ignorant?”

“My dear man...I just explained your situation. You don’t get it.”

“Tell me,” Lerner said. “How do I create a crisis?”

“The same way we do to push whatever cause we desire.”

Lerner kicked at the sand. “Explain.”

“Well...say something revealing. A word...a phrase. Concoct something dire...negative...a warning. Pander to their fears. I use words like ‘could’ and ‘likely’ when associating cause and potential effect. People are suckers for running with hypothetical statements. They connect the dots. Especially when they can’t verify jack.”

“Jack?”

“Vastness. The oceans, atmosphere, genetics, outer space...aquifers...who can prove, or disprove science when it cannot be seen, felt, or heard—let alone accessed and comprehended.”

Lerner nodded continually. He seemed to be learning.

Bonetrager looked at his watch. “Before I go, I’ll tell you one more thing.”

Lerner folded his arms.

“You’re in a unique position. Increase water pressure and the firemen love you. Increase water quantity and you’ll have a lush community, gorgeous golf courses, swimming pools, options for affordable housing, and stable agriculture. Increase water quality and everyone loves you.” He stared into Lerner’s sunglasses. “Do all of that and then sell the excess. What is there not to behold?”

“I’ll need to solicit public opinion.”

“So?”

“Things like pipeline locations, pump facilities, underground water distribution networks...these are personal. We’ll also trigger sewerage concerns.”

“You still don’t get it.”

Lerner looked away.

“As your partner, Earth Diocese...and I...are committed. Public forums, advertising, expertise...you can have it all. We’ll assist you all the way—to a limit.”

“And that’s?”

“To be expected. You’ve already run an Environmental Impact Statement. We aren’t going to pussyfoot around. The time is now. Someone on your end is going to have to take the bull by the horns. I do have an alternative.” Bonetrager slipped his sunglasses on. “This is business...for both of us.”

Bonetrager turned and began walking back to the parking area.

“Wait,” Lerner said. “Suppose I say yes. What’s in it for me?”

Bonetrager turned. “Your cut? Or shall I say, kickback?”

Lerner nodded.

“When do you plan on retiring?”

Lerner shrugged. “Anytime, I suppose. What does it buy me?”

“How about a parcel when we develop Gardiner’s Island?”

“A parcel...how big?”

Bonetrager paused. “Depends on the deal we get.”

“I’ll need something in writing.”

“Not a problem,” Bonetrager said as he began walking back. “So will we. For now though, everything’s verbal.”

Lerner caught up to him. “Why’d you ask about retirement?”

“Because once the deal goes down, you’ll have to quit your job. You’ll know too much.”

“I can’t operate on a verbal.”

Bonetrager paused. “Once our permits are issued, I’m sure we’ll find a way to make life more, shall we say...rewarding for you.”

They walked back to the parking lot in silence.

At Bonetrager’s car, Lerner said, “As I only need one commissioner to recommend a course of action, this would be self-executed between both of you. I’ll have had nothing to do with it, however I will comment on it.”

“All fine and well, however, you’ll need to shepherd this project to final acceptance. You cannot leave your post.”

Lerner reached out his hand and they shook. “Understood.”

“Been to Florida recently?” Bonetrager said with a smirk.

“No...why?”

“Desalination’s very expensive.”

As Lerner waited, Bonetrager got in his car, put his window down and backed out. He pulled in front of Lerner. “Choose right,” Bonetrager said.

“How?”

“Be a hero.”

## CHAPTER 34

### Ashawagh

Saturday was beautiful. Low humidity, average temperature with a slight breeze. Perfect for an outdoor event.

Broberg left early to pickup Nicky. That left three of us. I got a cup of coffee and sat next to Tora in the shade of the back deck.

“Cain,” she said. “Before I forget, Ericson stopped by. Said he’s going out tomorrow. Wanted to know if he could take you and Broberg fishing.”

“Forget Broberg, but I’ll call him.”

Fishing sounded good. I’d been on Ericson to take me striped bass fishing. I wondered if Madeline was interested. “What do you expect at this event?”

She folded the paper and laid it aside. “It’s a fund raiser. They’ll be auctioning off art to support Earth Diocese.” She ate a spoonful of yogurt. “You’ll see the usual... a well-mixed collection of art dealers, environmentalists, politicians, celebs, artsy-people... you know, creative individuals. You name it. And, they’ll all have money.”

I sipped my coffee. “You plan to bid?”

“Me? Look at the walls of this place. No way, besides ED is loaded. They don’t need me.”

Madeline walked to the deck and laid an increasingly rare morning hug and kiss on me. “Why do you go?” she asked Tora.

“Morning sweetheart,” Tora said. Quickly, she returned to her paper. “Me? For the food and drink. Socializing. Sometimes the music...but if you don’t show, you don’t get invited again.”

We arrived at Ashawagh Hall. Orange plastic fencing lined the perimeter of the site. Security was tight and parking was even tighter.

We entered a roadblock, I flashed our tickets, and we parked on the grass next to a school. Then we walked behind Springs Library, around a small pond and toward the hall. They were setting up chairs under a canopy near the pond.

“That pond,” Tora said. “It’s called ‘Pussy Pond’.”

I wondered but let it go.

“Oh,” Tora said. “There’s Hamptons Breakwater. He comes to all these events.” She stopped and looked at me. “You met him. Remember?”

Sure enough, there he was. What I remembered was seeing him cannonball into the pool at the garden party. Dressed in bright colors and wearing what looked like a different wig, he was chatting away, swirling his drink and laughing.

“Yeah,” I said. “Said he likes to make the improbable happen. The impossible possible.”

She stared at him. “It’s so like him.”

“And so it goes,” I said to Madeline.

She smiled and started walking.

“See that gal ahead of us,” Tora said, exchanging waves with Breakwater. “She’s a model.”

“How do you know?”

“Easy. She’s confident. See how her arms fall to her side? She glides, her fingernails brushing lightly against her thigh.”

I looked at Madeline and rolled my eyes. See and be seen, I thought.

We made it through a ticket checkpoint, picked up black and white event pamphlets and entered Ashawagh Hall.

It was a small place, the walls covered with art and tribal artifacts. Meandering around pedestals exhibiting handcrafted objects, I turned to Madeline.

“You see Bonetrager?”

“No...not yet.”

I opened my pamphlet and started reading. The auction celebrated one year of Earth Diocese eco-touring. The town and a foundation out of Philadelphia were sponsoring the event.

“Is he coming?”

She scanned the crowd. “I texted him but he didn’t answer.”

I had the feeling she knew more about Bonetrager than she was sharing. “Let me know if you see him.”

She nodded and moved away from me.

“From these minimum bid prices,” Tora whispered, “they’ll raise millions.”

Madeline looked at her phone and shook her head.

We walked outside to another canopy covering the buffet. Passing an open bar, we got in line.

“I see Candy Dad,” Tora whispered to me.

“Candy who?” I replied. “The celebrity chef mentioned in the pamphlet?”

“He’s a rapper. Married to Caroline Day. She does the nightly news. Family’s been coming to Accabonac for years.”

The buffet wasn’t extensive but it was rich in sushi, salads and breads.

We filled our plates, sat and began eating.

“I think I just saw Banchera Liston,” Madeline said.

“The author?” Tora asked.

At the auction tent, they started testing the audio system. People left the food area for seats at the stage.

Broberg and Nicky showed up. As he stood behind me, a woman ran into him causing him to accidently spill his drink on her. She freaked.

“Why drink if you can’t hold it?” she yelled, frozen with her hands up, looking at him in horror. Nicky rushed to the woman with cloth napkins. “What was it?”

“Oh...gin and tonic,” Broberg said, “But I think just the tonic spilled.”

“Very funny, funny man”, she replied. “How’d you like a call from my husband? He’s an attorney.”

“I didn’t do it intentionally.”

She shot him a queer look. “The way you stare at me, how do I know you weren’t trying to meet me?”

“I...I gotta go,” Broberg said. He left his food and drink and walked into the hall.

“Clumsy jerk,” she mumbled to herself. “Good thing my dress’s white.” She strutted off and glanced back at us with a disgusted look.

Within minutes Broberg returned. “Let’s try this again,” he said, looking around before sitting down. If she comes back, tell her my name is...Vince Pizzaiola. An exchange student.”

“So...” Tora said, looking at Broberg. “Now that you’ve made a grand entrance, what do you think of the art inside?”

“Truthfully?”

She nodded.

“I think its junk.”

Tora’s eye widened. “Well...what type of art do you like?”

He thought. “I like paintings of people behind bars.”

A woman’s voice came over the speakers. She said she represented the foundation. Then she introduced Town Moderator, Benny Lerner. He came to the microphone and said he’d soon have good news on two fronts, but he didn’t mention what they were. After some political garble, he handed the stage over to Franz Uerrman of Earth Diocese.

“Let’s head over there,” Tora said, getting up from the table. “I want to hear this.” She tapped me on the shoulder. “So do you if you’re angling for a job on Gardiners Island.”

I was about to get up when Broberg held me down.

“Hey pal...you better check on everything. I doubt the pay’s good and the benefits...this is a seasonal place.”

I nodded and escorted Madeline to the auction area. Broberg and Nicky arrived later and sat behind us.

Uerrman repeated the speech he gave earlier at the State of the Hamptons address, but he ended this one with a list of ED’s material and financial needs. ”Bid high and give with a smile,” he said, “for the sanctity of the earth.”

“Listen to this guy,” Broberg whispered in my ear. “Picture him in a Kaiser helmet.”

Next up was Breakwater. “Consider this a victory party over development and water usage abuse,” he said. “That island could have gone to developers, but it didn’t. It could have been tied up for the selfish, but it wasn’t. Earth Diocese’s a worthy neighbor.” He pointed at Uerrman. “His brilliance elevates him above any of us. Regarding Gardiners, he’s had a profound influence at every level of environmental consciousness...and from here...it only gets better.” He paused and looked at Uerrman. “I’m proud to be his friend and financial supporter.”

Everyone clapped.

He said more and handed the microphone back to the foundation spokeswoman.

“And now,” she said, “before we open the auction, I want to introduce one of our many special art gallery dealers.” With a big smile, she nodded toward the front row. A tall man dressed in white stood and walked up on stage. When he turned, I saw that he had two red roses stuck in his coat pocket.

Immediately, I sensed something different in Madeline. “That him?”

She sat erect and nodded.

The spokeswoman shook his hand. “We didn’t expect him today. Many of us know him as a good friend, some as a successful merchant, but I know him as a connoisseur of rare and hard-to-find tribal art from around the globe.” Holding the microphone in one hand, she began to clap. “And a very generous one at that. Please welcome Helios Bonetrager.”

In the front row, Breakwater stood and clapped wildly. Then he turned to the crowd and motioned for everyone to rise. Like parishioners, they did. He lumbered up on stage.

Bonetrager took one of the roses out of his pocket and gave it to the spokeswoman. She hugged and kissed him.

Holding the rose, the spokeswoman moved to the side and pointed to three works of art sitting on easels in the center of the stage.

“These works are late additions to the auction,” she said. “Mr. Bonetrager has graciously donated them to increase the bottom line. Before we allow prospective bidders to review these fine works, without further ado...”

Unaware of his presence, Breakwater surprised her by sliding his arm round her waist and taking the microphone. “Thank you my dear,” he said to the spokeswoman, before kissing her on the cheek. “You deserve a rose.”

More clapping.

“We all deserve roses!”

Breakwater looked at Bonetrager. “My associate in crime,” he said with a chuckle, walking toward him. “He’s an aesthete. An art aficionado. A curioso. A lover of earth, and...a tad bohemian ... please welcome Helios Bonetrager.”

Bonetrager looked out of place.

Breakwater handed him the microphone. After a clumsy attempt to speak through it, Bonetrager found his range and tapped on it just to be sure.

“Thank you, thank you,” he said, his European accent clear. He used a telescoping pointer. “I present three pieces. Rare samples from the Middle East. The first, a sixteenth century Brocade comes from the mountain country of Iran. Beautiful...and, highly collectible.” He paused. “The second, a stunning painting depicts the children of royalty playing in a river. It is from the Afsharids period.” He looked at the painting, cocked his head and laughed. “Hadn’t I known better, this piece could have been described as Impressionistic? Perhaps even Fauvistic...yet a superb investment.” He moved to the third piece. “And this gem...it is from the Nile country of Egypt. A handmade papyrus featuring the god Anubis. The date is uncertain, however we are projecting it as fourteenth-century.” He stopped and looked at Breakwater. “Or earlier.” He faced the audience. “Mind you, these pieces are museum quality. Worthy to be displayed in the finest homes.”

He stepped aside.

“Bidding for each piece begins at \$15,000.” He brought his hands together and bowed. “Bid for *ars gratia artis*, *l’art pour l’art!*” Then he handed the microphone back to the spokeswoman, threw a kiss into the crowd and left the stage.

“We’ve ten minutes for everyone to come up and inspect these new additions,” she said. “Please be prompt. Bidding will begin shortly thereafter.”

“What did Bonetrager say?” Broberg asked.

““Art for art’s sake,”” Tora said.

“Well,” I said, “he knows how to work a crowd.” I tuned to Madeline. “I thought you said he wasn’t showing?”

Madeline quickly stood and messed with her hair. “Let me see him alone.”

“Alone?” I said. “What’s that all about?”

“He’s very sensitive,” she said. “He might find you unsettling.”

Unsettling? That got me thinking. To that point, I felt I never really had Madeline. It could have been my insecurity, but there was always somebody, or something in the way. She was never totally mine.

Broberg put his hand on my shoulder. “Maybe Madeline’s right. It might be best to back off. Let him continue to trust her. We can get more information that way.”

Madeline didn’t turn from the stage, keeping her eye on Bonetrager.

“Look, I feel a bit schmaltzy about this,” Tora said. “We’ve stopped by his gallery. He knows us.”

Madeline glanced at me and dropped her eyes.

“So...I think Madeline owes it to him,” Tora said. “After all, she texted him, right?”

Madeline nodded.

“Good,” Tora said. “Don’t treat him like a schlemiel. Approach him. Cain wants to see Uerrman anyway. Then we’ll get out of here.”

We left our seats, Madeline toward the stage and me right behind her.

“I’d like to grill Lerner,” Nicky said. “He’s been avoiding me. Always busy. He’s holding back information.”

“How so?” Broberg asked.

“I hear things. Rumors. I just don’t want to make a scene.”

Ahead of the crowd we left and made it to the foot of the stage.

“Mr. Uerrman,” I said, reaching out to shake hands. “I’d like to apply for a job in security on Gardiners Island.”

Uerrman shook his head. “Security? We’re good.” Then he stepped back and looked me over. “However, I can use a boatman. Someone strong to cart supplies back and forth from the island.”

“Not interested,” I said, distracted, trying to appear casual while watching Madeline and Bonetrager.

“Good seasonal work,” Uerrman pushed.

I thanked him and looked for Madeline. She was still standing in line.

Meanwhile, Nicky had cornered Lerner. She was speaking loudly, confronting him as to why he didn’t return calls. A security man walked up behind her.

Broberg moved in and showed his badge. “I’ll take care of this,” he said. He escorted Nicky back towards the hall. Tora followed.

I stayed back. Slowly, Madeline moved up in line, observing Bonetrager’s art. At one point, Bonetrager seemed to look back at her. From then on, the line moved quicker.

When she arrived, he hugged and kissed her, taking what I considered flagrant liberties beyond how well I thought he knew her. Then he pulled the red rose from his pocket and gave it to her. She was elated.

I turned and walked toward the hall, my mind buzzing. Someone else was intimate with her. He held her tight and made her happy. A man I considered a prime character of interest involving the crime wave that had gripped the South Fork. Beyond that, of course, I still considered Madeline mine.

Within minutes, she ran up beside me, giddy and on fire.

“You up for going fishing tomorrow?” I asked, not looking at her.

She turned toward the stage. “No thanks,” she said, with a quick shake of her head. “Think I’ll hang and catch some rays.”

## CHAPTER 35

### The Ruins

Ericson asked for a hickory club with the word 'Wonderstick' burned into it. "What's this for?" I said, handing it to him.

He whacked it against the captain's chair. "Knocking out fish. I'm feeling something big tonight."

He gave the signal so I threw anchor.

"If I didn't have to work, I'd be out here every night," he said. He took a moment and inhaled deeply. "Clean salty air...my freedom."

I smelled baitfish. "Ever feel vulnerable out here?"

He tied off the anchor line. "How so?" His arms looked bigger in the moonlight. "Who's going to bother me?"

I shrugged. "Anything."

He raised his brow. "Ah...get the rods. You've got an overactive imagination."

I handed him his rod, adjusted my jig and casted.

"Got a new moon, cold beer, radio—" He looked up. "Even the stars." He casted. "Short of something shapely and warm...I'm okay."

We fished. "I'm in," he said.

He landed a bluefish. I netted it, dislodged the hook and bled the fish. I kicked it into the cooler. "I mean...it can get a bit creepy, can't it?"

Ericson casted. "I knew an old fisherman. Long gone. Had this big jutting jaw. Used to work the breakers under the Montauk Lighthouse. I asked him about the strange lights seen off the point." He paused. "Told me all kinds of crazy things I'd never heard of. Know what he said?"

He didn't wait for my reply.

"Curse your eyes and keep fishing. If you believe it, you'll quit."

We fished under a yellow moon, landing bluefish after bluefish. Close to limiting out, a flash caught the corner of my eye. Thinking nothing of it, I went back to fishing. Then I saw another one, at the far end of Gardiners Island.

"I've just seen two flashes near Gardiners," I said.

Ericson turned and looked. "Haven't heard anything."

He went back to working his pole. "Remember the old man," he said with a chuckle. He yanked on his pole and began slowly reeling in. "Forget it...your mind's playing tricks on you."

My pole shook. "I'm in," I said, as the tip of my rod bent downward. I reeled in, allowing no slack in the line. The fish fought hard.

"Yeah...got a nice one," he said, dropping his rod into the rod holder. He approached me with the net. "Don't lose it."

Then I saw two flashes back to back in the same location.

"See that?" I asked, careful not to lose the fish.

"See what?" he replied, staring at the murky water, waiting with the net.

"Flashes off Gardiners Island."

Ericson never looked up. He netted the fish and laid it on the deck. "Wow...the biggest one tonight."

As he unhooked my fish, my eyes were fixed on the island.

"I saw four flashes," I said. "All at the far end."

He bled the fish, kicked it into the cooler and popped a beer. "Tonight we conquered bluefish. You've been itching for striped bass. Any stripers we catch, we're selling unless you hook a monster, which I doubt."

"Where?"

He pointed toward the stern. "Back that way. Toward the Ruins."

We packed up, pulled anchor and Ericson turned the boat around. Slowly he accelerated, occasionally glancing at Gardiners. "You said the far end?"

"That's where I saw them," I said, scanning the profile of Gardiners.

"On the island or off?"

"Couldn't tell."

He paused and checked his radios. Everything was working. "On Gardiners...back that way...there's an abandoned tower. Used to spot enemy ships during the war."

I remembered hearing about a tower during the State of the Hamptons address. "Is that the same tower Uerrman mentioned?"

"Same one. Whatever you saw might have come from that tower." He bumped the throttle and the boat accelerated.

I looked again, hoping for another flash. Nothing.

Rounding the north end of Gardiners Island, the Ruins began to take shape. We'd passed it earlier in dimmer light. Now, with the moon behind us, its crumbled mass shone. Ericson backed off the throttle. Watching his depth finder, he maintained a slow steady speed.

We entered shallower water. I heard breakers slapping on the sandbar closer to Gardiners Island. The sea became choppy, showing whitecaps. I held onto a railing, the boat crabbing sideways caught by currents moving adjacent to and across the sandbar. Peeking at his

instruments, we passed depths barely deep enough to allow the engine to operate. He brought the boat to a crawl, waves slapping the sides and splashing us, forcing the boat forward.

“Bass lurk in rough water,” he said, his words possibly meant to distract me from risk below. As the boat pitched and rolled, on the depth finder, the bottom began to fall away.

*The Ruins*, I thought, gazing at the illuminated pile of debris. “Tora mentioned Fort Tyler.”

“I only know it as the Ruins,” he said. “The sandbar under us used to be land.” He studied the orangey rubble. “Just an old bombed-out fort.”

“When was it built?”

“Around the Spanish-American War.”

“Who bombed it?”

“The navy. Target practice. Torpedoes, bombs...all kinds of things.”

It wasn't much to see, yet something drew me to the old fort. It had its own story to tell. “Mind if we stop and visit?” I asked, studying huge chunks of blown-out rock lying edge-wise in the bay, one on top of the other.

“Nobody goes there who doesn't need to,” he said.

“Seems it would be interesting to explore.”

“Not to me. Water's shallow...loaded with boulders and piles of debris. They say there's an old lighthouse on the bottom. Don't need that wrapped around my propeller. Besides...see those signs?”

I'd noticed large white signs posted on the island. “What do they say?”

“Unexploded ordinance. Live bombs.”

He swung the boat around, took his eyes off the windshield and looked at the fort. “It's a good marker for finding bass...a place that leads me to other places, but that's it...let's drop anchor.”

“Bass, not bluefish,” he said, handing me a longer rod.

As he readied his line, he laughed. “Sometimes daredevils paddle-board over there.” He paused. “Big sharks rule these waters...paddle-boarders are one fin away from disaster.”

On low throttle we motored back toward the sand bar, to the edge of the whitecaps. “Drop when I say.”

As I waited, I pondered the Ruins—its dismal history, death sentence and the violent consecration that followed.

Then I heard a distant cry. “What's that?”

He scanned the waters. “Don't see anything.” He paused. “Don't know.”

“A bird?”

He worked the throttle. “Only a bird from hell would sound like that. Could have come from Gardiners...Plum Island's too far away.”

We waited, chilled in suspense, idling our way into shallow water.

“Okay,” he said. “Drop it.”

Just as I was about to heave, I heard another faint cry...like a moan. “Sounded like that came from the Ruins,” I said, still holding the anchor.

He stopped, listened and lifted a seat cushion. From storage, he pulled a pair of binoculars. With one eye on the sandbar, he surveyed the Ruins. “Someone might be shipwrecked over there...can’t see anything.”

I laid the anchor onto the deck and asked for the binoculars. He handed them to me and shifted into reverse.

I cleaned the lens and focused, searching for a boat, something floating, anything, but the moonlight’s reflection was overbearing. It rippled on the waves making spotting finer details difficult.

“There’s something different out here tonight,” he said slowly. He cut the engine and we began to drift. “Something queer.”

“Like what?”

We began floating back into choppy water, closer to the sandbar. “Can’t put my finger on it,” he said. Ericson didn’t appear concerned, but his voice betrayed him.

“How long you been coming here?” I said.

He thought. “Since I was a teen...forty-five years.” He inhaled and leaned against the wheel. “I’d hate to leave someone in need.”

He looked at the depth finder and started the engine. Backing up, we motored into deeper water. He killed the engine again.

“Smell that?” he said, waves lapping lightly against the stern.

“Has to be fish,” I replied.

“Hell no.” He shook his head. “Isn’t seaweed either...too foul.”

The odor was intensifying.

A third high-pitched wail ran chills down my spine. At once, we both stared at the Ruins. “That was real.”

He nodded. “Too real...not a scream, definitely eerie,” he said. He walked quickly to the bow and put the anchor away. “We don’t belong out here.” He sniffed the air and began collecting his gear. “Something’s foul. Putrid. Like a sewer mixed with rotten seaweed. Let’s go in.”

“Wait,” I said. “We can’t leave someone in distress.” I turned toward the Ruins, attracted by its moon-washed landscape. “Let’s go there. Keep an eye on the depth finder and see. It’s the only way we’ll know.”

“Look...too dangerous.” he said. “Can’t chance it.”

“We both know we heard it,” I said. He didn’t respond. “If someone’s beached over there, aren’t we liable?”

Ericson was hesitant. “Sounded like a malcontent woman.”

“Got a flashlight?” I asked.

“I think so.” He rummaged through a compartment and handed me an old corroded light. “I can’t take the smell,” he said.

The light barely worked. I switched it off and moved to the bow, hoping to persuade him.

Ericson motored toward the Ruins, slowly, methodically. “Let me know if you see anything,” he said.

We heard it again, only louder. I looked back at him. He stood stoic, his eyes fixed ahead. We continued to cut water. The smell worsened.

Lit in ghastly orange, the Ruins loomed above us.

Ericson turned and we began to circle the island. “See anything?”

Nothing.

Motoring to the other side of the Ruins, with our backs to the wind the smell diminished.

We continued around the island, eyes peeled for anything. Then, between the Ruins and Gardiners, I looked up and thought I saw something move. Startled, I held up my hand. Ericson backed off the throttle.

I scrutinized every nook, gap, and stone, anxious for movement.

“What’s up?” he said.

I stared at the rubble. “I thought I saw something.”

## CHAPTER 36

### Wendigo

We'd returned to our point of origin, and back in the stench.

I moved to the stern. "I need to go ashore."

He coughed and spit over the side. "You're crazy. You don't need to do anything."

I looked back at the Ruins. "Someone's on that island. We need to know."

"Cain...damn it!" He looked over my shoulder. "You want to die?"

"We heard a moan," I said.

He walked to the side of the boat and scanned the inky black water. Then he checked the depth finder. "Any approach has to be from the other side," he said. "It's deeper and the smell isn't nearly as bad."

I smacked him on the arm and smiled. "Any place I can jump off to?"

He looked disgusted.

Ericson navigated around the island, slowed and jockeyed the boat between two mounds of rubble. Behind one of them was a sign warning of Unexploded Ordinance. "It's getting shallow fast," he said. "Stay alert."

In haste, I cleaned everything out of my pockets, placed them in a protected compartment and moved to the bow. Leaning over the rail, I waited. He put the engine in neutral.

"Okay...ready...go!" he said.

Holding to the bow, I dropped my legs into the cold water. Wet to my waist, then my chest, my shoes dangled as I clung to the boat. We drifted toward shore. Feeling madly for the bottom, my boot struck a large rock. I stood on it, pushed away from the boat, and launched myself toward shore.

"I'll throw anchor," he shouted. "Cain!" He waited for me to turn. "Look out."

Whatever he threw bounced off the rocks. It was the Wonderstick.

I left it.

"This place isn't big," he yelled. "Be quick. Look out for dark conical things. I've no idea what unexploded bombs look like."

Neither did I. I turned and walked onto what remained of the Ruins.

Remarkably, his flashlight worked for a while. Then it began to wane, the scant light dimmed to a faint glow. I smacked it on a rock and shook it. The light went dead. I thought to toss it in the sea but remembered Ericson was finicky. I slid it into my back pocket.

I heard the engine quit.

Feeling my way over blocks of debris, everything was a mass of shadows and brightened surfaces, the moon still hanging over the far side of the island. I guessed where to step, but I

couldn't miss years of layered seagull dung. Slick as grease, when my eyes adjusted I realized bird slop was everywhere. Before long, I'd reached what I thought was the middle of the Ruins.

I climbed over a few more piles of rubble and looked at Gardiners Island. Due to weak light and shadows, I was reticent to continue. I climbed a few more mounds and decided the place was deserted.

About to head back, I saw a nebulous ghost-like shape move across the end of the fort, washed in moonlight. Seemingly hopping, or flying, it settled on a rock. It stood and let out a terrible wail. It was a shrill sound, deafening and similar to what we'd heard earlier.

Immediately, what was already bad air had become downright nauseating. Smelling like decomposed flesh mixed with sulfur, I found it difficult to breathe. I tried not to inhale, but I couldn't escape the rancid aroma. Moving away, hoping for fresher air, Ericson's boat became heavy on my mind. I looked for him, tripped and fell.

Stunned, I got up and noticed its shape had grown larger, its features more apparent. Its wings folded behind it, resembling the tips of a throne. Like fluid, it slid over the rubble, slinking my way. Behind its grayish pale, a mist followed.

I stepped backwards, wedged my foot in a crevice and twisted downward. I looked up. It stopped and faced me.

Now in its shadow, it hovering over me and howled, reaching a hideous crescendo. Then it bent down, peering at me. It opened his mouth, a foul cavity reeking beyond measure, and howled again. Its scream was loud enough to deter any captain from sailing these waters again.

As it backed away, the moon lit the side of its head, its shoulders and wings. I wondered if apparitions could block light, because this thing had. Then I lost it in the glare of the moon. I put my hand up over my eyes, trying to see better. It didn't help. The creature had disappeared.

I turned and quickly moved toward the boat. Suddenly it appeared again, within arm's length, blocking my path. Much taller this time, it towered over me. Emitting indescribable odor, now in the moonlight, I could see it had long matted hair. It hung like a curtain of death.

Trembling in fear, I crouched down, trying to diminish myself—trying to hide.

It crept closer.

I retreated, feeling the rocks with my hands, trying to find a weapon. It reached out to me, a ghostly three-fingered claw controlled by an unformed pale face. I leaned away.

It began whirling, snapping like a frayed bullwhip. For the first time, it seemed to have a face. I looked into its eyes. Nothing but black holes.

Then, as though reading my mind, it slowly developed facial features. Gaunt to grotesque to beautiful, all female, all occurring in succession. Her appearance was confounding. Her hair now raven-black. She wailed loudly. I knelt and covered my ears.

She danced around me, shimmering in her own light and turning amber-gold. She beckoned me to follow as she climbed up the rubble. In her wild spinning dance, she twirled and leaped from rock to rock, moaning my name and telling me to *come*. It was the same voice I'd heard at the channel—the day I was attacked by seagulls.

She continued speaking, becoming softer. Persuasive—whispering sensually.

My thoughts changed—my fear dissolved. She was in my head, controlling me. Caught in a new revelation, she promised ecstasy. No longer eager to retreat, I was anxious to obey. I followed her, but couldn't get close. I gagged, breathing in disgusting air, because she wanted me.

*She called me from the inside out, and I wanted her from the outside in.*

Then I heard music. Hauntingly beautiful, she sang a dreadful melody, the language of which I couldn't understand.

When I reached the top of the rubble, with a loud scream she reached down and lifted a tremendous rock.

Awed by her strength, the wind came alive and grabbed me, firmly holding me in place. I couldn't move.

She threw the rock at me.

The impact broke the wind's grip and sent me reeling off the pile toward the water. I tumbled down and through what appeared to be a ghostly three-masted schooner as it sailed by, part of the ship moving through the island itself.

I dropped fast, feeling nothing, cascading through wooden decks before exiting through the hull. Immersed in freezing blackness, I crashed onto the rocky bottom. I heard a tremendous thud. The rock she threw had followed, burying itself into the seabed next to me and triggering a great billow of silt. I was pelted with sediment and shards of broken seashells.

Struggling to push off the bottom, I reached for the surface but was restrained. Paddling furiously, desperate for air, I looked down and saw her pale face in the murkiness. She was laughing, her scaly claw tightly clasped around my leg.

I tried to kick at her hand but felt nothing. About to swallow water, from above a bright and glowing hand reached down and latched onto my arm. Pulling me up hard, I felt her let go as though she had surrendered.

With a mouth full of seawater, I rocketed to the surface, gasping for oxygen.

There was no ship in sight.

I stroked my way back the Ruins, hardly making it, and collapsed onto a slab of rock. Ericson was standing above me on the pile, right where he needed to be.

"Thought I lost you," he yelled, scrambling to my aid. He looked back at the water. "How'd you end up in the drink?"

I shook my head.

“I heard two splashes,” he said. “One was huge...who else fell in?”

I pointed back at the pile of rubble and passed out.

## CHAPTER 37

### Evil Day

I heard an engine.

Opening my eyes, I watched Ericson’s boat approach. He cut the engine and gently ran the bow up onto the rocks. He threw me a line and jumped out. I reached for it. He took the line and helped me board. When I sat, he shoved off and jumped back in. By then I was feeling better, though freezing cold. The foul smell had vanished.

I put on a flotation vest and wrapped myself in a blanket. He placed one of his ball caps on my head. “Gotta stay warm.”

As we pulled away from the Ruins, miles away I saw the lights of home glistening. Ericson lay back, pushing just enough RPM to split the bay back to Hog Creek.

He turned to me. “So...what did you see?”

I stared straight ahead. “I don’t know what I saw,” I said. “Something unnatural.”

“A ghost?”

I pulled the blanket tighter around myself and thought for a while. “Maybe.”

“What I heard sounded like a woman,” he said. “Don’t think I’ll ever forget those sounds...creepy.”

“A witch is more likely.”

“Witch?” he said. “What’d it look like?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know.” I hesitated to elaborate.

He peered through the windshield. Then he looked back at the Ruins. Its orangey hue had faded. “But you saw something—”

Again I looked at the Ruins. “Oh yeah...had to have. It threw a shadow.”

“How’d you fall in?”

“It hurled...a huge rock at me.”

“You hurt?”

I felt my shoulder. No pain. “Look, Al...I don’t understand it. Any of what happened.”

We motored through the dark in silence.

Then she entered my mind again. The witch. She wouldn’t leave me alone. Her seductive voice calling me back to the Ruins. “Remember that Hamptons princess I mentioned?”

It took a while for him to speak. “The one you keep seeing?”

“This thing, whatever it was, resembled that woman. Same hair and face.” I paused. “Got a beer?”

He handed me one.

I drank most of the can in one slug. “She was a foot taller than me.”

I felt the boat veer sharply as Ericson leaned my way. “Seven feet!”

“I kid you not. You heard that tremendous splash—”

He tipped his hat back and nodded.

“That was a slab of rock she threw at me.” I started to shiver. “Must have been five feet across. Thick as a garbage can.”

He glanced at the Ruins, its mass diminishing by the minute. “I don’t know what you saw...or heard. I’ll never land on that island again.” He checked his watch. “It’s ten-thirty. I’ll have us to the house in less than an hour. Stay out of the wind. In fact, go below.”

I headed to his cubby behind the bow. “Wish I had some whiskey,” he said.

Crammed below, I rationalized I’d been tempted by a witch since arriving at Tora’s place. Then I wondered, *did bass fishing call us to the Ruins or was it the siren?*

I fell asleep.

The engine slowed.

“Cain...I need you!”

I joined him.

The night sky was clear on both sides and behind us, but ahead a light mist was rising from the bay.

“The mist?” I said.

“Yeah, this crap began forming when you went below...but my instruments...nothing’s working right.”

As usual, the weather band was blaring and the running lights were strong. The depth finder was illuminated, but it showed the bottom flat with no movement. Useless. Yet, we had electrical power. “Maybe a short?”

He didn’t respond.

Now enveloping us, the mist thickened, diffusing the moonlight. “I don’t think it’s a malfunction,” he said as he backed the throttle off.

“With the GPS out...” He tapped the compass. “And this thing not working, unless I get a visual, it’s going to be tough back-tracking to port.”

“This ever happen before?”

He slowly shook his head. “Never.” We traveled a short distance in pallid light. “I’ve never had a fog bank form out of nowhere... weird.”

I looked off to the rear and saw lights way in the distance. The mist began to envelop us. “It’s clear everywhere else. Can you pull us out of this?”

Instantly he turned hard left. We motored a while. Then to the right. No difference.

“Grab a flotation cushion,” he said. “I need you at the bow.”

The weather band radio died.

Still wrapped in the blanket, I pulled a cushion from below and moved forward.

“There’s a red buoy out here,” he said. “I don’t want to ram it, but I wouldn’t mind seeing it.” Suddenly he shouted. “My gauges have filled with smoke! The digital stuff, too—we on fire?”

How can a digital screen fill with smoke?

“The compass,” he said, his voice cracking and weak. “It’s running in a circle, the smoke churning inside.” Silence. “What the hell’s going on?”

Then the engine sputtered, the boat convulsed in rhythm with each jerk.

“Damn... the wheel’s jamming,” he said.

The fog had grown super-thick. Moisture penetrating everything. The sea and wind worsened, forming a furious charge.

“Yo, anybody got a copy?” Ericson repeated over his CB. He tried three times. In anger, he slammed the transmitter off the console.

Though it was hard to see, the bay began to boil and surge, waves striking the boat from all sides. Columns of cold water billowed up and sprayed us. White caps began forming. I was shivering.

Ericson threw a bailer at me. I started tossing water overboard.

“Mayday, mayday,” he yelled into the radio. “Anyone out there?”

Nothing. Not even static... totally dead.

He tried again.

The running lights dimmed and then quit.

“Cain!” he shouted. “Check your smartphone. Can you get out?”

I went to the compartment and pulled out my I-phone. Shaking, I tried to call Tora. Then I tried to get the weather. “Clear...no storms, it reads.”

“Bull! How can that be?” he shouted.

“What time do you have?”

“Ten forty-six...by now it should be past eleven.”

My phone indicated the same, by two minutes. He was right. Somehow time had stopped. Then my phone went blank.

I heard a gong. I leaned over the bow. It got louder. My hands on the bow railing, I tried to lower my head deeper into my flotation vest, anything to shield my ears.

“A bell buoy?” Ericson shouted. “No way...there aren’t any bell buoys out here...unless we’re entering Three Mile Harbor!” He slowed to a crawl. “Can’t steer. It’s jammed.”

Various bells, chimes and gongs began ringing in the fog. Even from behind us. I didn’t know where to look.

Straining to grip the railing, I steadied myself in the tempest. Then I looked up. A ghostly shape materialized. Then another...and even more. Grayish bell buoys were everywhere, surrounding us like oceanic debris, each one tossing back and forth, ringing and singing in the gale, no two sounding alike. It was louder than a dozen cathedrals ringing on Easter morning.

“Bell buoy dead-ahead,” I screamed, turning to him.

“Hold on!” he yelled. “Grab the cushion. We’re going to hit!”

He jammed himself into a flotation vest.

“Get back!” he said. “I’ll cut it!”

Nothing changed. The engine sputtered and kicked, but it continued to thrust us forward.

“Engine won’t die,” he shouted, as the storm pummeled us. “Cain, come back here!”

I scurried to the stern and looked ahead. Closer and closer we came, the buoy hovering over us, wider than the boat, taller by six feet and gray as a ghost.

“Hold on!” he yelled.

Braced against a railing and holding a cleat, I prepared for impact.

We never made contact. We just motored through it, as though it were a cloud, like the ship I’d fallen through at the Ruins.

I became sick from the swells and noise, but more so, from fear. The terrifying ordeal that we were going through on top of my encounter with the apparition was too much. When was it going to end?

Ericson had no idea about the witch or the ship, but there he stood, at the captain’s chair holding on, making a stand.

Like a theme-park ride, the boat traveled its own course. We passed through the shape of another bell buoy. The noise lessened, bells and gongs began to fade as we traveled deeper into the mist. Maybe we’d entered a grand illusion—a world we imagined due to some weird unknown phenomenon.

We entered a placid zone and visibility improved. Another fog bank lay ahead.

“Look!” I said, pointing across the torpid water.

We stared at what appeared to be a white castle moving in the fog. Things flew around it, coming and going out of view and making sounds like many horns.

“We’ve got to get out of here,” he said, wrestling with the throttle. “Have we entered hell?”

I looked over the side and saw rocks below the surface. “We’re in shallow water.”

He leaned over. “Can’t be.”

The water became dark and deep. Something huge developed.

“What the—”

“Looks like an eye!” I yelled.

The shape was as big as a house, looking straight up at us through the water. Something struck the bottom of the boat. Then it hit harder.

“We’ve hit bottom!” Ericson yelled.

I looked over. Black water. “Something hit us.”

All three radios crackled at once.

“Yeah!” Ericson shouted. “We’re back!” He reached for a transmitter

A voice beat him to it.

*“Though you tread through the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil, for I am with you,”* came over the speakers. It was a deep voice. I pictured an older man.

Ericson dropped the VHS transmitter. With shaky hands he dialed up the squelch on the CB. He grabbed the transmitter. “Preacher man, what’s your twenty?”

He fumbled with the CB transmitter, his eyes glued to the dial. Silence. He increased the volume. Static.

We were entered the second cloudbank.

“Preacher man...holy man...joker man, come in!” he yelled. “What’s your twenty?”

Silence.

He bounced the CB transmitter off the console. “Why that?” he yelled. “I’ll kill em’.”

“Ericson,” I said, my head spinning. “That voice...it came over all three radios simultaneously, not just the CB.”

“Impossible!” He picked up the VHS radio transmitter. “Couldn’t have.” He tried again. No response. It was dead.

With no control over the boat, we motored into an opaque fog. Visibility plunged. A hideous wailing began, getting louder and louder. It was the same high-pitched shrill. We covered our ears. The torment continued and the engine stalled.

Ericson pulled the cover and worked on the motor. Suddenly a white bird appeared. It hovered above the boat and followed us as we drifted forward. It squawked.

“A sand piper.” He studied the bird. “Never seen one out here before.”

The wailing subsided.

## CHAPTER 38

### Back

Ericson was relentless, moving back and forth from the engine to the console, shouting into different radios, trying to make contact. As we sat drenched in zero reception, the fog lightened and the mist slowly dissipated. Then we emerged into pure daylight. No fog—anywhere. A crystal-clear three hundred and sixty-degree view.

The engine kicked in, purring and throaty as ever. Ericson threw the cover on and rushed to the captain's chair.

The weather band radio blared. The VHS followed, then the CB. Static. Voices. Civilization.

The steering wheel became responsive. He laid down the throttle. The bow rose as the engine threw a strong rooster-tail. He scanned his instruments and screamed over and over, "We're back! We're back!"

He killed the engine and surveyed our surroundings. "What the—" he mumbled.

He checked the GPS and stiffened. "I don't recognize this land," he said, squinting all around. "Somehow...some way, we've entered another sea."

The depth finder was lit. He checked it. "Where the heck are we...how'd we get here?"

My mind was gyrating back and forth from the Ruins to the fog bank. Haunted by what we'd experienced, I hadn't the capacity to rationalize anything else, especially in an environment I didn't understand. A Coast Guard chopper flew across the horizon.

I checked my cell phone...it didn't make sense. "What time do you have?"

"Eleven twenty-seven am."

"What day?"

"Monday."

"Monday?" I said. "We left on Sunday."

I had multiple voice messages from Madeline and Tora. Then one from the Coast Guard. As we listened to them, another boat approached from the east. Ericson started the engine, laid the throttle down full and angled toward the boat, effectively cutting it off. Slowing, he moved broadside to it. The other boat slowed.

“Where exactly are we?” Ericson yelled.

Seemingly puzzled, the captain looked at his boat mates. Then he faced us.

“This a joke?”

“No...no joke,” Ericson replied.

“Did I hear you right?”

Ericson, already tight as a piano wire, asked, “Where-are-we?”

“Little Peconic,” the captain said with a chuckle.

Ericson shook his head, looked at the sun and pointed northward. “Is that Hog’s Neck Bay?”

“Hog’s Neck’s back there.” the captain replied with a nod. “You’re pointing at Cutchogue Harbor.”

Ericson nodded and looked behind us. “So, that’s Robbins Island.”

“Bingo,” the other captain said. Gradually, he laid down the throttle, sending us a message.

Quickly, Ericson motioned to him. He pointed at his watch. The captain cut his engine.

“What time have you got?” Ericson asked.

The captain made a smart remark. “Quarter to twelve,” he yelled.

“Monday...right?”

“All day—” He fired up and sped westward. Then he made a wide arc, returned and pulled broadside. “By the way,” he shouted, “your navigation lights are reversed. Port’s on the left.”

Ericson checked them out and waved, like he already knew that. He killed the engine and sat down. “Whoa...how’d that happen?” Again he looked at the lights.

“The Coast Guard is out searching for us.”

I noticed my clothes had completely dried.

“Presuming we’re still on planet earth,” I said, “How far is Hog Creek?”

He folded his arms. “I’d say 20 miles.” He shook his head and stared ahead. He looked pale. “The Ruins...the bell buoys...that white thing, whatever it was...now this. We’re on the far side of Shelter Island. How’d this all happen?” He began laughing, tears streaming down his cheeks. He looked at his watch. “And we’ve lost twelve hours.”

“Lost...we’ve gained twelve hours. It’s Monday, almost noon.”

It was too much for me to fathom. I knew I was the cause. Something supernatural had been following me since I’d left Glacier National park. For some unknown reason I was a marked man, but I couldn’t share that with him.

He shifted the boat into neutral, left his chair and walked to the transom.

“Don’t do anything stupid,” I said.

We drifted, the waves lapping lazily against the side of his boat, handfuls of water clicking and splashing, making a clapping sound. When he decided it was time to go, he steered us toward Shelter Island, past Sag Harbor, and on toward Gardiners Bay.

He was quiet the whole way. I called Tora and Madeline and told them we had some trouble. I'd fill them in when we returned. Tora said she'd notify both the town and Coast Guard.

I hung up. A thousand emotions raced through my mind, all divergent, yet most pointing ultimately in one direction—that I had more of this to look forward to. I had no idea why.

An hour plus later, we passed a real bell buoy at the entrance to Three Mile Harbor. Shortly thereafter, we entered Hog Creek.

Ericson started to stir. "How do I report this? You're a U.S. Marshal."

He startled me. "Report what?"

"This... whatever happened to us."

"What are you going to say?"

He stood tall, unwavering and pale.

I continued. "I mean, how do you describe what happened? Somehow we defied the laws of physics and normalcy not to mention what I saw at the Ruins." I paused and watched homes along the shore go by. "And who are you going to say it to? A state-appointed psychiatrist?"

"We gotta say something to somebody." He adjusted his GPS. "What about this?"

"Forget it."

"Why? With the GPS can prove our location change."

"How? We have no point of origin. We lost power somewhere after leaving the Ruins. It didn't kick in until a half hour ago. Then the time changed. We went backwards. How many times can you motor around Shelter Island in twelve hours?"

Silence. We motored on.

We entered Hog Creek and docked. We loaded Ericson's boat onto his trailer and climbed into his truck. Expressionless, he removed his sunglasses and hat. He wiped his face with a towel and frowned. The man was drained. So was I.

"I don't want this getting out," he said. "People will think we're nuts... but we both saw the same thing, didn't we? Lived it?"

We did, I thought, except for what transpired at the Ruins. "I understand you perfectly," I said.

Like similar otherworldly experiences I'd fallen into, these events transcended my ability to not only comprehend them, but to describe them without appearing crazy, drugged, or as a liar. Since explaining such minutia got me nowhere, I found it best to remain silent and test my own spirit for the truth. Either way, I remained ignorant.

“How do we explain this to Tora? To Madeline?” I said. “We’ve been gone over twenty-four hours.”

He pondered my questions. “Guess we’ll have to come up with something ...”

He fired up the truck and slowly drove to Tora’s.

“You read the Bible?” I asked.

“I’ve no interest in church affairs.”

“You believe in demons?”

“I know,” he said. “After this soiree, I should, huh?”

We pulled in front of her place. Ericson parked, leaving the truck and boat on the shoulder of the road. “Guess we had mechanical problems.”

“And we didn’t call in?”

By then, Madeline and Tora had left the house and were scurrying down the driveway.

“I was beside myself, worrying...dying to know,” Madeline said, hugging me. “I prayed you guys would be safe.”

Tora was harsher, belittling Ericson for not contacting her.

We couldn’t defend ourselves. We had no defense. But Ericson proposed some great excuses as to how and why his boat developed mechanical problems. Except for not calling on our cell phones, Tora bought it.

“Broberg?” I asked.

“Out with Nicky.”

Tora had dinner on the table. Before sitting down, Ericson led me to the nautical wall map. “Right here,” he whispered, pointing. “We ended up here...twelve hours later...in Little Peconic Bay.”

Meanwhile, I estimated the distance. “Depending on where we...what...left the cloud bank...” He moved in closer. “As the crow flies, I measure seventeen miles.”

I heard footsteps. “You okay?” Tora asked Ericson, feeling his forehead. “You look sick.”

He didn’t reply.

“C’mon. Food’s getting cold.”

Ericson looked me in the eye. I knew what he was thinking. I’d already decided not to elaborate. He was more elementary. He thought and spoke in simpler terms. He’d be better explaining things.

Quietly, we ate.

“Okay boys,” Tora said as we finished. “Why didn’t we hear from you?”

We couldn’t hide the truth any longer. I nodded for Ericson to lead.

He told his side of the story, albeit in plain terms with no elaboration. Both women sat in amazement, Madeline often glancing at me, seeking my unspoken expression of approval. Sometimes Tora followed. However, he did a good job. I nodded and remained silent.

“So it wasn’t mechanical problems,” Tora said.

“Sorry...I tried to play it safe.” He smirked, folded his arms on the table and dropped his head. “Once,” he said, “someone broke in over the radio. That was our only contact.”

I cleared my throat. “All three radios at once.”

“What’d he say?” Tora said.

Ericson and I gazed at each other.

“Sounded like Bible-talk. I’d heard that verse before.”

He continued. As I listened, the only thing he explained that I disagreed with was his description of the white object that moved in the fog. He said it reminded him of large ‘white and gold’ wedding cake. It was more castle-like.

Tora sipped her wine. “Where was it?”

“Looked like on the horizon, as far as we could see.”

“Sounds like a Fata Morgana.”

“A what?”

She waved him off. “Oh, a mirage caused by a witch to lure a ship off course.”

That hit home.

When Ericson finished, Tora said, “Did you eat or drink anything yesterday that could have made you hallucinate?”

“Even if we did,” I said, “it doesn’t explain losing twelve hours let alone ending up west of Shelter Island.”

She chewed her fingernail. Shaking her head slowly, she said, “All I know is—” She stopped to light a cigarette. “Last night was clear. No cloud cover, no wind...a gorgeous evening.”

“What did the Coast Guard say?” Ericson asked.

“They and the town require the owner to complete a report. I’ve got their numbers.”

He nodded.

“Have you heard anything like this before?” I said.

Tora shook her head. “Once, over S’mores and cheap wine, I heard a story about the Federal Light Siren. Don’t know much about it. Libby might.”

Ericson and I exchanged glances.

“What’s the history of that place?” I asked.

“The Ruins?”

“Is that the federal light?”

“Was,” she said. “Supposedly a lighthouse used to occupy the island.” She nodded toward Libby’s house. “She’d know more.”

I caught Ericson’s eye. He smiled and nodded.

Tora got up and peered through her kitchen window. “Libby’s lights are on. She might be in.”

No thanks, I thought. Weary, I had some final words with Ericson and left for my room. My head throbbing, I headed for the shower. I heard my room door close. It was Madeline.

I got out, put on dry clothes and sat on the bed. I glanced at the nightstand. “A new bottle of single-malt Scotch, huh,” I said.

“Yeah,” she said, followed with a kiss. “Your favorite.”

“Well, I wouldn’t have been insulted if you hadn’t,” I said. “But now that you have, how about a drink?”

She got up and poured some in each glass. It went down well.

I told her everything about the Ruins. I verified Ericson’s account and filled in the blanks. Meanwhile, we enjoyed seconds, then thirds—.

“You changed location, time...even dimension,” she said. “Know what they call that?”

I took a sip. “I do...insanity.”

She giggled. “You went through a wormhole.”

“That time-space tunnel thing?” I took another sip. “No way...we never entered a tunnel. We were in another dimension.”

She downed her drink. “I don’t agree.”

“From the deck, look at the Ruins. I tell you an evil spirit dwells there.”

“A demon?” she said, wobbling, reaching for more Scotch. “In eye-sight? Cut it out, you’re making my skin crawl.”

“I’m glad you weren’t there.”

The bottle was half empty.

## CHAPTER 39

### Lucy

The next day I saw Libby sunbathing. I walked to the fence.

“Hi Libby,” I shouted.

She sat up and cupped her hand over her eyes. “Oh...hi Cain. Come on over.”

I crossed the fence. On the way she covered her legs with a towel. “I was just wondering,” I said. “What do you know about the history of the Ruins?”

Pulling herself up square, she raised the back of her lounge, put on her sunglasses and grabbed her drink. Sipping it, she looked across the bay. “The Ruins,” she said. “Old Fort Tyler...taking an interest in local history?”

I stared at the fort. “Kinda—”

She made herself more comfortable. “Was built in the late 1800s. They say it was never occupied. Isn’t that strange?”

I thought so. “Why?”

She shook her head. “There are few documented reasons. I’d have to go inside and check.”

She swung her legs off the lounge chair and placed her feet into her sandals. “C’mon,” she said, drink in hand. She rose and walked toward the house.

“After the war, the navy used it for bombing practice,” she said, opening her door. “I remember those days...the planes from Mitchell Field, the flashes before the concussions...all that as late as the early seventies—”

“Before that?”

She held the door open for me. “Before what?”

“Was there a lighthouse?”

She thought. “In 1854 or 55, the government built one. Called it the Gardiners Point Light. In 1875, a storm knocked it into the bay.” She turned to me, sipping her drink. “Before the storm, it was connected to Gardiners Island.”

“About the lighthouse?”

“That’s about it, I mean—” She thought and shook her head, seemingly dazed at my question. “Little is known about it. It was a stone structure, I believe.” She paused and laughed. “Picked a poor location didn’t they.”

“So...was anyone lost?”

“The lighthouse keeper’s son was killed.”

I paused. “Any...women involved?”

She looked at me oddly and nodded.

I waited.

She turned her head while keeping her eyes glued to me. Then she stared at the wooden deck. "There was...his wife." She took a seat and faced the bay. "Her name was Lucy."

"Lighthouse worker?"

"No," she said, shaking her head. "From what's been recorded, at least all I could find, just before the lighthouse collapsed, she rowed a boat to the island to take her husband and son home." She hesitated. Lightly she scratched her cheek, her hand trembling. Her speech slowed. "She'd had a premonition something bad was going to happen."

Libby left me hanging. "And?"

"Well, she was right, but she never reached the lighthouse." She stopped and looked at me. "Nobody knows what happened to her. They never found her body or her boat." She gazed at the Ruins. "Why do you ask?"

I shrugged. "Are there pictures of Lucy?"

She shot me a smart look, as though she knew I was hiding something. At that point, I suspected her of the same.

"You mean...of the siren?" she asked with a smirk.

"Of what?"

"Black Lucy."

Feeling foolish, I didn't respond.

"Not that I am aware of," she said, answering her own question. "Only legend." She seemed uneasy. "Some call her the Federal Light Siren. Others call her the demon that terrorized fifteen-year old Elizabeth Gardiner. To local fishermen she's known as Black Lucy...a spectral."

"Federal light...or Gardiners Point Lighthouse?"

"Same thing," she said, "Before the storm, they called it the Gardiners Point Lighthouse. After it fell, the locals referred to it as Federal Light."

"Maybe to blame its collapse on the government?"

For a moment, we stared at each other. She rolled her eyes.

"Why do they call her Black Lucy?" I asked.

She got up and walked to a bookshelf. "Some claim they've seen, even been chastised, by a black...thing. They say it flies. Other report encountering a pale, thin, winged creature that roams the Ruins in a cloud." She turned and pulled a book. "They're referred to as sea-witches."

"Apparitions?"

She paged through the book. "Not...necessarily."

She stopped and showed me a drawing. It portrayed a sea-witch hurling rocks at passing sailors. I studied its face. The caption read 'Black Lucy'.

"What book is this?"

"Legends and Myths of Eastern Long Island."

The whale ghosts of Sag Harbor crossed my mind.

“How do they know it’s a woman?”

“Women are usually witches, but it’s the voice,” she said, putting the book away. “The things they scream. The thoughts they plant in men’s minds.” She stopped and looked away. “Over the years people have disappeared at the Ruins. They say she’s responsible. They also say she can dance, and grow huge, in a second.”

This was all getting quite heavy. Bizarre thoughts entered my mind, like she was in the room, in my head, speaking to me. “Has Ericson mentioned her?” she said.

I shook my head.

Libby searched for another book. She pulled out a box of papers. “In real life, Lucy dabbled in things people ought not to know,” she said. “She was labeled a sorceress. They say she sought those who were protected. Common, but good people, for destruction.”

“Protected?” My head was loaded. “Do you believe it?”

She laughed. “I don’t know what to believe.”

She began sorting through a stack of papers. They looked like ancient prints. Choosing one, she showed it to me.

I was shocked. It featured a half-human, half-beastly creature. It had bat-like wings and scales like a fish. Claws for hands and feet, the creature had a beautiful face and long black hair. Underneath it was written, ‘Sea-Witch’.

“Demonic, isn’t it?” she said.

I was out of questions. “Thanks Libby,” I said, handing her the print. “That’s what I needed to know.” I left her house and headed for the fence. Then I turned and went back. Before I could knock, she was standing at the glass door.

“You never told me why the fort was never occupied.” I said.

She fingered the aluminum door. “The Spanish never made it up the east coast.” She paused. “One other thing. Something terrified the craftsman. They left and never returned.”

I left again.

“Cain, there might be something to it.” She closed the door and stepped outside. “I just remembered, years ago kids from a church camp were fishing off Gardiners Island. Returning, when they passed the Ruins, they said a horned black mermaid flew over them and screamed terribly. The air became foul. The weather changed. Their boat was thrown onto the rocks, but they made it back safely. That’s how I recall it was reported.”

“Remember any names? Maybe the camp?”

She put her sunglasses on. “It was a long, long time ago. They have been other sightings...reports. Check with the Star.” She paused. “So tell me. Did you see her?”

Behind her lay the Ruins. Brown, jagged and lonely. “Yeah,” I said.

“When?”

“Last night.”

She smiled and nodded. “Welcome home.”

I thanked her and left.

Just before reaching Tora’s place, I dialed Ericson.

He answered.

“Hey man,” I said. “How you feeling?”

“Didn’t sleep all night.”

We chatted some, reflecting on yesterday’s events.

I changed subjects. “Say...ever hear of Black Lucy?”

Silence. “Heard the name. Parents told us stories about her to get us off the beach at night.”

He paused. “Black Lucy. Never thought much of it...to me it was just a myth. Think you saw her?”

Tora walked over.

“Don’t know what I saw,” I said, speaking quieter.

“I want nothing to do with whatever we ran into.”

I agreed and hung up.

“Oh,” Tora said. “Ran into a howling dervish, did you?” I shrugged. “That what Libby said?”

I glanced at Libby’s house. I didn’t see her.

“This all sounds too...outlandish.” Tora said. “Might be best to leave it be.”

Her eyes told it all. She didn’t believe us.

## CHAPTER 40

### Breakthrough

“Hey, how was the fishing?” Broberg asked.

I pulled more blanket from Madeline, turned on my side and adjusted the phone. “Caught all kinds of things—”

“Sounds good. Hey you and Madeline up for meeting us at the Cork & Bib?” Before I could answer he cut in. “Nicky has an update and I’ve unearthed something you’ll find intriguing.”

I looked at my watch. “Mysterious...I’ll get back to you.”

I hung up.

We slept in until noon. I got up, called Broberg and agreed to meet a half hour before Nicky was expected to show. Madeline decided to stay.

I pulled up to the Cork & Bib and walked inside. Broberg hadn’t arrived. I grabbed a stool and ordered a beer. Soon I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“Hey order me one, will ya,” Broberg said. He walked towards the restrooms.

When he returned he sat hunched over, and inhaled half his glass. Before he finished, he peeked over the rim. “Thirsty...been running.”

“How’s Nicky’s place?”

“Cute...just enough for two,” he said. “She’s gone quite a bit, back to her office at Suffolk County. Been there since Sunday. Tora miss me?”

I drank some and shrugged. “So, what’s up?”

He faced me. “Remember we thought we’d heard the name Bonetrager?”

I nodded.

“We did. I spoke with Lenihan. Some of the bikers we busted in the Allagash claimed to work for Bakur Traders...supposedly a subsidiary of Bakur International. All run by Helios Bonetrager. We never pinched the guy...couldn’t locate him.”

“If he’s the guy I remember, wasn’t there something about him having an office in Italy?”

“Righty-o...never found him or Bakur International. Our search ended at an abandoned bakery.” He stopped. “Bakur Traders supposedly had a Toronto address. Don’t know much about that.”

“Do we have anything on him?”

“All anecdotal. Lenihan stressed, besides possible connections to smuggling and laundering, the guy’s deep in the finances of environmental organizations worldwide. Said his name shows up on the board of directors every now and then. There’s no picture of him, no address—it’s like he doesn’t exist. Lenihan wants him for questioning, now.”

“You going in?”

He finished his beer. “I think Bonetrager’s up to something. Using the gallery thing as a front. He’s got a boat, he’s messing around a buoy, he’s allegedly associated somehow with a museum, his association with Earth Diocese is apparent—based on the testimony of Hamptons Breakwater. I want to know what he’s doing out here?”

“If Bonetrager’s a fraud, what about Breakwater?”

“He’s untouchable.”

“Why?”

“Beyond his name, his roots run deep. He’s involved in everything out here. Big money man.”

“So Lenihan wants Bonetrager.”

“Wants him? He’d be here now, personally. I talked him out of it. Told him we had an insider working Bonetrager.”

“Who?”

“Why... Madeline—”

“Whoa,” I said, taking time to think. “I...don’t know her intentions with this guy. I’ll admit, I’m suspicious, but—” I looked at him. “I don’t want her endangered.”

“To what?”

“Who knows? If we’re dealing with an underground ace, women may mean nothing to him.”

“Understood,” he said. “I’ll be there waiting outside.”

“You and me.”

He patted me. “I asked Lenihan to stay mum. Nobody, namely Peters, is going to come screaming in and blow everything.”

I ordered two more beers. “So what’s the plan?”

Broberg became tentative. “Somehow...get Madeline to find out more. Stay cool. Take our time, but monitor him.”

“Tora’s been keeping a log of whenever she sees a boat lingering at the buoy. It’s getting more frequent, but we still don’t know if it’s Bonetrager or not.”

Broberg ran his fingertip along the rim of his glass. “You’re right.”

“Regarding Madeline, I’ll see what I can do. Besides, I need to know where her head is. Moreover...her heart.” I sipped my beer, eager to change the subject. “Speaking of Peters, Lenihan mention the note?”

Broberg made a sour face. “He thinks I’ve been taken. It’s bad when your boss thinks you’ve been duped.” He looked away. “How’d the fishing trip go?”

Talk about being duped, I wish he hadn’t asked. The memories of the witch and fog were tearing me up, like anguishing after receiving a dreadful doctor’s report. I hesitated to expound. Before I could, Nicky walked in and put her arm around Broberg. They kissed. End of story.

“Want you guys to know I’ve been doing my homework,” she said, bobbing her head and surveying the room. “Let’s take a booth.”

We left our stools and followed her to a quiet corner.

“When’s happy hour?” Broberg asked.

“Not on Tuesdays,” Nicky said, sitting down. “No band either.”

She ordered a cocktail. When it arrived she opened up.

“Lots to talk about,” she said, speaking low. “Number one. Connecticut authorities, the county, the Coast Guard, we’re all getting reports of gunfire at night, ranging from Fisher’s Island to Montauk to Napeague. Most sightings have been on Block Island Sound. A few off Montauk Point. Boaters are also reporting strange flashes.”

“None on Gardiners Bay?” I asked.

“A few, not many.”

“Hither Hills?”

“The sacred sand? Dead.” She stirred her drink. “Number two. You’ve all have heard about the altercation that happened off Block Island? We arrested the lobsterman for shooting at a recreational fisherman.”

“Newspapers get it right?”

“For the most part, I haven’t read the Star,” she said. “He claimed fishermen have been stealing his lobsters.”

“Long Island guys?”

“Connecticut and Long Island. The Connecticut guy’s been charged.”

“Anyone daring to think we may have Calendar Man?” I asked.

She took two sips of her cocktail. “I wish.” She looked around. “Okay...here’s number three. It’s a big one. Ordinance. The Navy’s weighed in. After studying residue, they think the powder used on the Coecles explosion was old enough to have come from the Ruins. You know where that is?”

Broberg shrugged.

“NOAA charts title the island as the U.S. Naval Aircraft Gardiners Point Target. It sits between Gardiners Island and Plum Island, in Gardiners Bay.”

“I’ve seen it from Tora’s place,” Broberg said. “What is it?”

“A relic,” she said. “An old bombed out fort. The Navy thinks it’s the only source within miles, where it’s possible to extract vintage powder...ex-military live ordinance. And from what I hear...there might be a ton of it available. But we won’t know until we test a sample. Look for a match.”

“How you going to get one?” I asked.

“According to records, the Ruins was mine-swept forty plus years ago. There might be some still buried in the debris, but the Navy believes the best shot at locating unexploded shells would be in the surrounding water. Apparently when trainees bombed it, there were a lot of misses.”

“Wouldn’t someone have to be really good to locate, defuse, and extract enough powder to build a bomb?” I said. “And then plant the thing?”

She nodded. “Good and hate-filled. We could be dealing with a monster. Possibly a team of experts separate from Calendar Man.”

“Whose dive team?” Broberg asked.

“Ours...we’re scheduling that now. With the currents, the eroding and shifting sands, it’s weather-dependent. The place is potentially deadly.”

“Both Libby and Ericson claim there’s a lighthouse at the bottom. You know that?”

“I...didn’t,” she said, as she reached into her pocketbook. She removed a small notebook and wrote it down.

We sat in silence, drinking.

“I was fishing...off the Ruins the other night,” I said. “The island’s posted with Unexploded Ordinance signs.”

“They never thoroughly dragged the bottom. They want people to stay away.”

“Yeah,” I said, the witch popping in mind like a spring-loaded clown. “I can understand why.”

We discussed Father’s Day. It was two days away. Since the Coecles explosion on Memorial Day, there had been no incidents. Flag Day was peaceful. Everyone was beginning to think that Calendar Man had moved on. That all cases, taken as a whole, might remain unsolved. Even the press was touting that the Hamptons terror had gone dormant. Except, now we had a potential powder lead. The Coecles explosion might have legs. Legs that could lead to the perpetrator, or perpetrators. And hopefully to Calendar Man.

And then there was Bonetrager. He was mine and Broberg’s to consider, and ours only, depending on how Madeline rolled.

Dutch and Leah came over. “I really want to thank you guys for saving my butt the other night,” he said. His face was a mess. He pointed at his eye. “Orbital fracture. I’ll be all right.”

Broberg got up and left.

“Say Dutch,” Nicky said. “Have you seen or heard guns going off in the waters surrounding Gardiners Island?”

“Occasionally I hear stuff,” Dutch said, “We shoot on the island.”

“Where?”

“Anywhere, usually along the beach. The place is deserted. It’s safe.”

“What caliber?” I asked.

“Depends, we all have our own.”

“Handguns?”

He shook his head. “Aren’t they illegal?”

“Good boy,” Nicky said with a smile. “Who else shoots with you?”

“Head of security stays sharp. A few more guys like to plink.”

“Who’s the head of security?” I asked.

“You mean Gouldsby?”

“Gouldsby?” Leah complained. “A weirdo. Dresses like...Renaissance-style clothing. Leathers and coarse fabrics held together with crude stitching and different sized buttons. In college, he used to hang in Sag...even in here. Parents had money. Al-ways-creepy.” She fake-shivered. “He’d be here one moment and disappear the next. Sometimes I didn’t think he was human.”

“What’s the target?” I asked.

“Cans...plastic bottles, only on the east side of the island.” He paused. “Occasionally I see dead gulls, maybe an osprey or piper—”

“What does Earth Diocese say about that?”

Dutch wrinkled his brow. “Uerrman? He’s usually in Europe.”

Leah sighed. “That leaves about six people to tend the island. It’s under-manned.” She laughed. “Oh...but yeah...they say they’re hiring. Right.”

Nicky looked at Madeline and she looked at me.

“Who’s in charge?”

He shrugged and threw his head back. “I mean...dude, when Uerrman’s not around, Gouldsby calls the shots. When Gouldsby’s digging for water, touring, or doing his security thing, we do whatever we feel is right.” He played with a coaster, wheeling it back and forth in his hands. “With ED, there are no rules, know what I mean?”

“Excuse me,” I said. “Is Gouldsby his first or last name?”

“First name is Edward.”

Nicky seemed upset. "Dutch," she said. "Does Earth Diocese know about the dead birds?"

His eyes widened. "I haven't reported it, besides with all the killing going on, we want to remain sharp. Anyone can land on that island. Head of security? He needs to be ready."

"That doesn't condone nailing sandpipers. Aren't they threatened?"

"What'd I miss?" Broberg said returning to the table. "There's a nut shooting endangered birds?"

"Who knows?"

"Well...you should," she said. "All we need is another agency, like Fish and Wildlife, to be crawling around out here."

"Yeah," Dutch said with a laugh. "Aren't there enough cops already?" Nobody responded.

"So Dutch," I said. "Tell me about security. What do they do?"

"Right now he's operating a backhoe—"

"Only one in security...and he's operating equipment?"

"Yeah... Gouldsby. He's crazy."

"What's he digging for?"

"Fresh water. Says we need a better source on the island."

"While he's pulling levers? Who's watching the island?"

Dutch shrugged. "I don't know man, I just do my job." He glanced toward the door. "Look, I gotta go. Excuse me."

As he left I looked at Leah. "So...the security guy doubles as an equipment operator?"

"Gouldsby doesn't know any better?" she said. "A fish rots from the head down." She took our order and left.

"This Earth Diocese thing," Nicky said. "I learned they have a few private boat slips here, in Sag Harbor. Could the black boat be docked there?"

"What's the connection?" Broberg asked.

Nicky ignored him and nodded at Leah.

"Haven't a clue," Leah said. "Earth Diocese has their own boats. They're under 24-hour guard."

"What's to guard? The money's on the yachts moored at dockside. How does Dutch commute to the island?"

"Oh...he has his own boat."

"Can we get a warrant?"

"On what grounds? Circling black buoys?"

## CHAPTER 41

### Chosen

Leah returned with our food.

“Say,” I said to her. “You mentioned Dutch was a diver.” Nicky stopped eating. “Does he guide the Fish Gate Park ecotour?”

“Oh yeah, one of many.”

“I’d like to do that. Do I need certification?”

“You do but ED can certify you. They’ve got a program for beginners.”

“When are classes?”

“Don’t know,” she said. “I’ll find out.” She left.

We ate and discussed the possibility of me being able to dive, as a U.S. Marshal, with the county team. I felt a macabre sensation to want to see what remained of the lighthouse on the bottom.

“Where was most of the powder residue?” I said.

She swallowed. “Three boats were destroyed, but you bring up a good point. I’m intrigued by the recreational one...the thirty-footer. It had the most residue.”

“Not the commercial boat?”

She shook her head. “You’d think. The owner of the recreational boat said he was accosted by someone from Gardiners Island.”

I thought of shadows being cast on Sonny Augustino. “Physically?” I asked.

“Verbally.”

“What’s so strange about that?”

“Nothing, really,” she said. “The ED guy asked why he was bothering the fish.”

I laughed. “So...maybe he didn’t want anyone to have a beef with the flounder.”

“Big deal,” Broberg said, eating away. “Those people are rabid preservationists.”

“I get it...I do,” she said, “but there’s...something odd here. I mean, how could anyone claim their island’s sovereignty extends hundreds of yards offshore?”

“Did this ED guy threaten anyone from shore?”

“No...he approached them on a paddleboard.”

Broberg laughed. “You’re reading too much into this. Relax. Let’s enjoy our food.”

Leah dropped off the check. As we prepared to pay, she looked around. “That Gouldsby,” she said quietly. “He’s the ED geologist, too. I hear he’s collected a pile of bones and ivory, elephant tusks and saber-toothed tiger teeth. Some of the tusks are over seven feet long.”

“Isn’t ivory illegal?” Broberg said.

“Illegal-schmegal, what’s the difference?” Nicky added. “What’s with the archeological dig?”

“Dutch said Gouldsby’s digging for water,” Leah said. “He just ‘unearthed them’.”

“Why then—?” She stopped and scanned the room. She leaned over our table. “Isn’t there a machine over there drilling for water, already?” She made a face and looked at each one of us. “They’ve already hit a huge reservoir of fresh water.”

Nicky dropped another twenty-dollar bill on the check. “Where on the island is the geologist digging?” she asked.

“East flank of Whale Hill,” Leah said.

“I take it you have no use for this guy?”

“Hate him. Used to go out with him. Sometimes, in Europe, he’d take me clubbing.”

“Where?”

“All over. Spain, Italy, Belgium, when we were in the Peace Corps. Said he wanted to start his own country. Now he’s out to save the oceans.”

“You and Dutch tight?”

Leah bobbed her head. “Platonic—at the moment.”

She collected the check. Nicky asked for a receipt.

We finished our drinks. Nicky said she had to return back to the office. That she only came to Sag Harbor to eat, give us an update and kiss Broberg.

He dug it.

We left. At the door, I noticed Leah behind us. She walked over to Nicky. “I have to tell someone this.”

Nicky held her by the arm. “Sure.”

“The other day Gouldsby dug up some other bones.” She paused. “Human.”

“How do you know?”

“I have friends working there.” The waitress waited for a couple to enter the restaurant. “Guess they were old.” She reached for the door handle. “Gotta go back to work.”

“Wait,” Nicky said. “How would I know him?”

“Gouldsby?”

Nicky nodded.

“He wears his black locks in a flowering French cut.”

Broberg rolled his eyes.

We walked Nicky to her car. “Where’s Madeline?” she asked.

“She and Tora went to a crafts fair. Why?”

“Just thought she’d like to know that Bonetrager doesn’t own the gallery he says he does.”

I was stunned. “How’s that?”

“It’s owned by a couple living in Corsica. Bonetrager works for hourly wages. No benefits, no nothing. From what I can gather, he lives on a boat.”

Broberg gazed at me. He smiled. “Isn’t Corsica in Italy?”

“I think so,” she said. “Something else. Bonetrager was taken in for serving alcohol in the gallery without a permit.”

“When?”

“A few months ago.”

“What happened?”

“Nothing, he was promptly released. He knows people.”

“Like Hamptons Breakwater,” I said.

Broberg kicked a stone across the parking lot. “Bingo.”

Nicky kissed Broberg got in her car and took off.

“What you up to?” he asked.

“Oh...now that your baby’s gone, it’s okay to hang with me, huh?”

He fake punched me and checked the time. “I’m heading into East Hampton. Do some shopping. Maybe pick up something for Nicky. Wish Madeline was here. I could use her advice. Want to come?”

I had nothing else going. “No shopping, but I’ll follow.”

He turned and looked at the Cork & Bib. “You know, if it wasn’t for this place, we wouldn’t be in the know.”

“And you wouldn’t be living in Nicky’s apartment.”

When Broberg entered a jewelry store I left him, bought an ice cream and drifted toward the center of town.

Uneasy about what Ericson and I had gone through, and downright haunted by my encounter with evil, something powerful came over me. For the first time in my life, I tried to pray. Walking, eyes wide open, moving slowly around people and trees. I wasn’t versed on the Bible. I didn’t know how to start. What to say. What not to say. Then my free-form thoughts, the fragments of my imagination began to materialize. It was time to face the good side. I knew what I needed.

Downtown was crowded. Tourists, gawkers and schleppers—all the benches were full. I thought of walking to the duck pond. A bench opened up and I took it.

Halfway through my cone, leaning forward with my elbows on my knees, I closed my eyes and dropped my head. I don't know what I was doing—meditating—resting—retreating, it was all the same. I hoped I was praying. My head throbbed.

I returned to my cone and looked up. An elderly gentleman was sitting on the bench next to me. He was much larger than me.

He was dressed in unseasonable clothes and suspenders, wore a trimmed gray beard, and rolled a wooden cane with a silver wolf's head back and forth in his huge hands. Looking straight ahead, like a statue, I moved further away from him, as far to the end of the bench as I could. Feeling uncomfortable, I was about to leave when he cleared his throat and placed his hand on my thigh. It stretched across my leg.

"I see you've been hurt," he said, still peering straight ahead. "How did that happen?"

I was amazed. He knew of my wound without seeing it. "I ah...was gored by a buffalo while on safari in Africa. How'd you know?"

He smiled and removed his hand. "And how is it that the animal didn't kill you?"

I shook my head, ignoring the ice cream melting in my cone. "That's a...mystery."

"Did you not see the battle?" he said.

"Battle?"

"Between the spirit wanting and one protecting you?"

I turned and studied his face, his wrinkles and manicured silvery hair.

"Cain...you've been chosen," he said. "The unforgiven have instigated your brushes with death. Do you not know that?"

I turned toward the crowd moving up and down the sidewalk. People in tank tops, bathing suits and beach wear entering and leaving shops. Lovers strolling arm in arm. Some returned a passing glance, a few stared, as though there was something wrong with me. However none of them looked at the old man, a stranger dressed in wool in the middle of summer.

I faced him.

The old man had transformed into a dazzling figure—like an angel of light.

## CHAPTER 42

### Vindikis

Trembling, I turned to the crowd surrounding us. They were oblivious. Not one noticed such an immense being, sitting bright as snow on a sunny day, surrealistic as though spawned in a dream.

“Are you an illusion — or God?” I said, bowing my head, anxious to either wake up or flee.

“Do not do that,” he said, smiling. “I speak from the Good Book: ‘I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and those who heed the words of the Bible. Worship God’.”

As I feared, it was just he and I, like it had been in the Allagash, and then again on the Serengeti. The truth sank in. “I recognize you now as Vindikis,” I said. “The same one who stood over me in Africa. A guardian?”

He nodded.

I looked for Broberg. Nothing.

Still smiling he said, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”

Vindikis spoke about Broberg and me. He’d read my mind. Scared, I hesitated. Then I said, “A sea witch, a spirit threatened me...one they call Black Lucy.” I searched his frightening eyes. “Then—”

He held up his hand and cut me off. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. For your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

I wanted to speak, but couldn’t open my mouth. Passing traffic reminded me I was in the flesh, in real time. “Evil had me,” I said, my voice cracking, reluctant to look at him. “I would have drowned, but something pulled me from the bottom of the sea, out of the witch’s grasp. It saved my life. Was that you?”

“My God, in whom I trust! For it is he who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence.”

His brightness glowed, his presence undeniable. Behind me, I stared at the happy faces. Those in the material world. The vacationers. They knew nothing of my conversation.

Accepting him as a ministering spirit, I’d become calmer, engaged. “I have no peace,” I said. “My life...it’s haunting.”

“Job had no ease, no quietness; no rest, but only turmoil.”

“What did Job do? How did he find his life?”

“Job asked for God to instruct him and Job repented in dust and ashes.”

I was in wonderment. I’d never heard such talk “That’s it?”

For the first time, Vindikis looked down at me. He said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

I waited. Then I said, “What of me as a man? Does it end there?”

He shook his head. “Become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.”

“Me...?”

Vindikis nodded. “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. So that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

He was burying me with concepts I didn’t understand. “Let’s back up,” I said. “I’m to be a spectacle? Me? How is that going to happen?” I hesitated trying to find the right words to express myself. “Am I to continue enforcing man’s law? Rules I’ve grown to distrust?”

“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for conscience’ sake.”

“I can’t be a marshal. I cannot do this any longer.”

“Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority?”

“Fear?” I said, scanning the sidewalk, looking for Broberg. A shop owner walked near me. She studied my face. She left. “I haven’t the desire to return to the service. The willingness. The magic’s gone.”

“With God nothing will be impossible. Submit yourself for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

I was in over my head. I hadn’t the spiritual knowledge or the reservoir of strength to carry on. I tried to stand, to leave. I couldn’t. Vindikis looked through me.

“As each has received a *special* gift,” he said, “use it to serve one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

I dropped my head into my hands. “This doesn’t feel right. It can’t be my way! I cannot allow it.”

His voice grew louder. “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

“I know about death,” I shouted. People stared at me, thinking me psychotic. I didn’t care. “I know about fear. Look...I need relief from whatever demon or devil is chastising me. Can you hear me? Can you help me?”

A patrol car slowly passed. The officer’s eyes locked on me.

“We exult in our tribulations,” he said, “knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope, and hope, does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”

I wanted to weep. To surrender. He continued.

“You were tired out by the length of your road, yet you did not say, ‘It is hopeless’. You found renewed strength, therefore you did not faint. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.”

“Tell me then,” I said, watching him scan the sky. I paused, thinking perhaps he was observing spiritual things. An event hidden behind the curtain—a vision veiled and blind to me. “What shall I do?”

He dropped his gaze and stared straight ahead. I felt he was going to depart.

“He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity, he who rejects unjust gain and shakes his hands so that they will hold no bribe; he who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil; he will dwell on the heights, his refuge will be impregnable rock; his bread will be given him, his water will be sure.”

Emotionally I was overcome. I began to tear up. He touched me. I felt warmth, not like heat, but of compassion. A healing I’d never experienced before. Again I tried to rise.

“Incline your ear,” he said. “Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created the stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of his power, not one of them is missing. For in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you may prove yourself to be blameless and innocent, a child of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

“That’s not easy,” I said, noting that a patrol car had pulled up to the curb across the street. “Not in my line of work.”

“Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. Conduct yourself with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.”

Vindikis stood. I heard a car door slam. To the side, I noticed a police officer walking my way.

“Remember,” Vindikis said as he started to move toward the officer. “In Jesus you have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of your trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”

The officer walked right through the body of Vindikis, in similar fashion to how we motored through the ghostly bell buoys. Invisible as he was—at least to others—the angel’s towering image didn’t distort but remained solid, strong and bright. For the first time, I saw a being in another dimension. “Why me?” I said to Vindikis, pointing at myself.

“Because you’re disturbing the peace,” the officer said. He stopped to confer with a few shop owners.

Vindikis looked down and smiled. “Always show kindness to strangers, for by doing this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Then he vanished.

Finally, I could stand. I looked down Main Street, past the church, toward the pond, between the shiny Jaguars and Mercedes Benz coupes. The huge man in wool was nowhere.

“Yeah, that’s right,” I heard the officer say. “You need to move on, sir.”

I turned and smiled at the officer. *Him...an angel?* I thought.

Then Broberg caught my eye. He was strolling down the sidewalk, chipper and content. In his arm he cradled a small package.

He slid in front of the officer, walked over and sat where Vindikis had been sitting. The officer watched my every move.

“At first I thought you were singing,” Broberg said. I didn’t respond. “You don’t sing do you?”

I shook my head and smiled at the officer. He scowled.

“Singing’s for angels,” I said.

“Well,” Broberg said as he opened the bag. “I’ve got my own angel to deal with.”

He removed a small box, popped the cover and showed me what was inside. “Isn’t it beautiful? She’ll love it.”

It was an engraved gold bracelet.

“Eighteen carat.” He wrapped it up and put the box back into the bag. “So—” he looked past me, leaned in and whispered. “What’s with the cop?”

I nodded for him to follow me.

“No seriously...I have to ask,” he said, getting up. “Who were you talking to?” He laughed. “Not that you appeared mentally deranged, or anything—”

I led him past the officer back toward our vehicles. “I was on speaker phone with my mother,” I said.

At first he bought it. Then he cracked up. “Yeah...right, pal.”

## CHAPTER 43

### Delicate Delicacies

Driving back alone, I wondered if I'd entered a divine illusion. Events in which only I saw and communicated with a supernatural being. Or did something else occur? Something metaphysical?

In Africa I'd been through a similar experience. Lesser so than my strange sightings in the Allagash. Yet—as in Africa—my conversation with Vindikis was undeniable. Moreover, he didn't seem bound by any physical laws.

Then there was the old man dressed in the wool. For lack of anything better, I considered him a spiritual being, able to leak in and out from behind a cosmic veil, but I wasn't sure. *Was the old man Vindikis in another form?*

I rewound and replayed our conversation, dissecting what I could remember. “Vindikis,” I shouted in my truck, as though trying to call him to reveal the truth. I could feel him. I knew he was near.

Tora had come up from the water. Dripping wet in her bathing suit, she walked into her outdoor shower. “You ought to go in,” she said, rinsing off the salt water.

“Where's Madeline?”

She came out and toweled her hair. “She's coming.”

I heard footsteps on the wooden staircase leading from the beach. “You don't look well,” Madeline said, stepping onto the deck. “Want to go for a swim?”

I declined and took a seat. Tora and Madeline followed.

“You know,” I began. Then I stopped.

“And?” Tora said, adjusting her lounge chair.

Hungry to share my encounter with Vindikis but not wanting to appear foolish—or crazy—I resisted coming right out with it. So I tried a more cerebral approach. “If someone sees a spirit that nobody else does,” I said casually, “well...do you think that’s possible?”

“The witch and all that?” Tora said, lighting a cigarette. “Ragnar was a good man, but he was agnostic.” She looked at me. “A thinking man’s atheist. We had our share of arguments over ghosts and spirits. He told me once he saw things. Anyway, I’ve read the Old Testament. Demons...angels and all that. I think they’re real.”

Her words sank in. “That I can fall prey to spiritual beings...that I’m not hallucinating?”

Madeline smiled. “Why not? Remember the story where five thousand people ate from a few pieces of fish and bread. Nobody saw the fish and bread multiply.”

“Where is that story?”

“Somewhere in the Bible.”

I picked up the paper and started reading. After a while I put it down. “Where do people out here go to church?”

“Church? Ha! Ya gotta be kidding.” She sat down and sipped her drink. “Nobody goes to church out here. Their temple is beach.”

I went back to the paper. “How was the arts and crafts fair?”

“Oh, we had a ball,” Tora said, as though finding it hard to believe how much fun she had. “Saw Mr. Bonetrager.”

Madeline looked away.

“He’s invited Madeline and me for lunch at Roshettio’s. Told us to meet at his gallery.”

“His gallery—really?”

She nodded with excitement. “Tomorrow, but alas...I’ve already a lunch date and cannot attend. I’ll drop Madeline off and pick her up.”

I rose from my chair. “Ladies...I’m dead. Tomorrow’s another holiday.”

“Yeah...Father’s Day,” Tora said.

“Hope we don’t get hit.” I got up and left. On the way, I stopped and picked up Ragnar’s beat-up Bible from the bookshelf. I brought it to my room for some light reading.

Bonetrager this, Bonetrager that, the name was getting on my nerves. I went to my room and pulled up the biblical story of the fish and bread. Reading about how Jesus fed so many with so little—just a few fish and some bread—Madeline was right. How did the crowd not notice their

source of food multiply? I accepted it as a great mystery and in a sense, no different than how the street masses, including Broberg, never saw Vindikis—yet I did.

I heard a faint knock on my door. Madeline moseyed in.

“No need to knock,” I said as she gently closed the door.

“Hey star jumper,” she said, laying next me.

“Hey what?”

“You have this direct line to all these—intriguing creatures.” She massaged my thigh, coming on strong. We kissed. Then she aggressively started to undress me.

“Hold on,” I said. “I’m going to lose buttons.”

We rolled on the bed. She was hot, wanting it all. “These...hyper-cosmic encounters. What’s the attraction?”

“Wish I knew.”

She loved me and fell back on the bed. Immediately she told me about Bonetrager and how he helped support the arts and crafts show. That her get-together with him was ‘only lunch’.

I suspected something more serious was developing between her and Bonetrager. To the best of my knowledge, they hadn’t engaged beyond casual socializing, yet it gnawed at me ferociously. I fantasized, curious if her heart was like water in his hand. If he could channel her anyway he wanted in ways I couldn’t. I had to find out.

I sat back and watched her dress. Her gorgeous form. God-given genetics. My weakness for dark hair. Did she love me to prove something before visiting Bonetrager?

She reached into my drawer. “Where’s my brush?”

“This Bonetrager guy...he’s an art dealer, huh?”

She found the brush and slowly puckered her lips. “You know that...a proprietor.”

I waited as she combed her hair. “Wrong,” I said. “He’s a part-timer.”

She ignored me.

“Works by the hour. He owns nothing.”

She kept combing her hair. “People just get attracted,” she said with a sigh. “Don’t they?”

“Attracted? To what?”

She shrugged. “Can be anything. Appearance...money...profession...doesn’t mean they fall in love.”

“How about being wanted on suspicion for smuggling, bribery and money laundering? Possibly murder?”

She remained calm. “Where’s this allegation coming from?”

“Broberg’s boss, Lenihan.”

She threw her brush back into the drawer. “So what’s the big deal? Suspicion is suspicion—we meet for an hour, have lunch, talk—I leave.”

“Madeline,” I said. “This guy...look, according to Nicky, the gallery’s owned by a couple in Italy, not Bonetrager. He’s been lying to you.”

Madeline became unsettled. “Nicky said that?” She slipped on her shoes. “So...you’re telling me he’s a liar? How do you know Nicky’s not lying?”

“You’ve never felt...suspicious?”

“Suspicious?” She stood and gazed at her profile in the mirror. “I don’t know. I was in the moment.”

I stared at her, disbelieving her irrational response.

“So what’s your plan,” she said, her voice slowly rising. “To belittle him to death?”

She headed for the door then returned. “I’ve a few questions of my own. Tell me about Bayonne.”

“Bayonne?” I said, my mind going back to that horrible night in the ring.

“Yes sir...Mr. Mongoose.”

Mom must have told Madeline. It was so unlike her. She hated boxing. She’d have been the last one to mention it.

“I want to know about you killing someone,” Madeline said. “That’s all. You never shared that tidbit.”

“Why are you so upset?” I said. “It wasn’t intended. It just happened.”

“That’s right. Things just happen, like me running into Helios Bonetrager. Don’t plunder my mind.”

“I can’t—who told you about my boxing?”

“Does it matter?”

I pictured my old room in Queens. The posters, awards, memorabilia. She must have seen it all. “What else did my mother show you?”

She sat on the end of the bed and buried her face in her hands. Shaking back and forth, she said, “I insisted on seeing your room. You mother didn’t want to. Broberg told me.”

“My mother and now Broberg?” I said, controlling my volume. “Broberg the hedonist? Oh, he’s a fine example. Did he mention what he used to do at the beach?”

“Don’t pick on your mother like that...and don’t pick on me,” she said. “Broberg? He meant no harm.”

“He never mentioned the jetty-walk?”

She lifted her head. “C’mon.”

I walked in front of her. “You know what a jetty is right? A pile of rocks sticking out into the ocean?”

She was unresponsive.

“Yeah...Broberg’s never mentioned his ‘trial by water?’”

“Let’s drop it,” she said, throwing her hands out. “Forget I even brought it up.”

“No,” I said. “Dick would take his dates to the beach on stormy days and make them walk the jetty, clear out to the end. He wanted proof of their love, their loyalty. He’s a sick dude.”

She cocked her head, mouth wide open, and gazed at me.

“He’d make them walk the quarter mile out to sea...waves crashing at their feet knocking them silly, slippery, dangerous. Sharp rocks and barnacles.”

“I don’t want to hear it.”

“Only in a bathing suit. Occasionally that would get scraped off. He didn’t care about wind, waves, or the current. High tide, low tide...if the poor thing made it, she was in. If she flopped or fell in the drink, she was out. He’d end the relationship.”

She covered her ears.

“Talk about cold,” I said. “That was premeditated. I participated in a sport.”

Biting her bottom lip, she rose quickly and went to the door.

“If I remember correctly,” I said, “there was a light tower at the end. He’d make them climb to the top, through sea gull poop and all. Picture that! Then she had to follow him back to the beach, down the same rocky pathway. I wonder if his mother knew anything about that. Now you do.”

“I don’t believe any of this.” She stormed out and slammed the bedroom door.

## CHAPTER 44

### No License Required

Another moonless night.

Though they sparkled, he didn't think the lenses were clean enough. Obsessed, having to have things perfect, he pulled sheets from a roll of paper towels and incessantly wiped his binoculars. Finally satisfied, he brought them to his eyes and scanned the water. He focused on potential objects.

Boat traffic was low, winds were calm, and the cloak of night was working in his favor. Then he noticed a white boat. Why hadn't he seen it before? Scrambling, he focused his binoculars. He liked his chances—the timing was perfect.

Gradually he increased power to the quiet electric motor. He came closer. There seemed to be only one—a lone fisherman enjoying Father's Day off the shallows of Cartwright Island.

Maneuvering to stay undetected, he kept the blackened water at his back; savoring his luck the way a creep relishes seeing a woman enter while peeping through a bathroom knothole.

Another boat approached. He panicked, thinking he'd blown his opportunity. Relaxing his fingers on the stock of his rifle, he prepared to move deeper into the darkness of Block Island Sound. Then suddenly the boat angled away and headed for Napeague Harbor. Greatly relieved, he returned to watching the fisherman. The hour didn't matter, but the wind did.

Originally, he heard nothing, but now the slight beat of music skipped over the waves and into his ears. It came from the fisherman's boat.

As he moved closer, the wind shifted. He became angry, insulted by the sound. He considered it an affront to the ocean, an insult and a violation of his privacy. Heavy metal had no place there.

Against the sullen beat, he watched the man reel in fish after fish. He appeared to be dancing.

His temper mounted. He became enraged.

He cut the electric motor. The fisherman disappeared. Where did he go? The killer thought he'd screwed up. He became nervous. He had to have the fisherman. But the wind was churning the water and with an outgoing tide, the shallows could hinder a clean escape.

Bringing his rifle up, he laid the wooden stock on a pair of crossed sticks screwed into the edge of his boat. Steading the gun, he looked through the scope and readied himself. Anticipating, he chambered a round. Fearing that the fisherman would hear him, he waited, allowing his boat to float further downwind of the fisherman.

He calculated their boats at two hundred yards apart. Close in distance to where he'd sighted in his rifle.

Breathing slower, he steadied himself. His heartbeat pounded in his chest, the way it always did when he hunted prey. Dialing in to its cadence, he was able to tune out the music and concentrate on his quarry. He rocked in the waves, up and down, calculating his aim—the vertical degree of compensation required to overcome the motion of the sea.

The fisherman emerged from his cabin. He was still there, fishing, reeling in precious cargo.

The killer looked around. First he panned Block Island Sound. Except for the Connecticut shore, and a few boats miles away near the race, the waters were void of light. Ditto for what he could see of Gardiners Bay. To the north lay Gardiners Island. It was blacker than a tire dropped to the bottom of a camp latrine.

He held his breath and positioned the rifle better on the sniper sticks, practicing—preparing—rehearsing for his shot. Confident, he placed his right index finger on the trigger and moved it ever so slightly back and forth, teasing it, and lubricating his emotions. It had to feel right. There was no room for screw-ups.

He wondered if the salty air had clouded the glass on his scope. It didn't, but he wiped it anyway. Then he adjusting the focal length. Satisfied, he brought the rifle back on the sticks.

It felt good. He was ready.

The lights of a beach house suddenly distracted him. They seemed brighter. Hearing a bell buoy, he feared he was too close to shore, but it was too late to move. Gradually he depressed the trigger. Waiting, he felt his boat rock harder. He swore at the sea, knowing his accuracy had become more a matter of timing than aim. Again he readjusted the scope, focusing and cursing the instrument for collecting a narrow band of fog.

He knew that piercing the apricot, the medulla oblongata, would result in instant relaxation, preventing the fisherman from flying overboard as result of impact.

“Rapist,” he thought, as he pictured the fisherman slitting his catch, bleeding each one before cruelly kicking them alive into a cooler. “What did those fish ever do to you?” he thought, feeling the resistance of the trigger. “It’s my turn,” he said to himself, firmly drawing pressure. “I’m the avenger for creatures that have no say...no way out...no—”

The muzzle flared like a roman candle and kicked upward. He brought the gun back on the sticks. He saw something move. Looking through the scope, the fisherman was still alive. The killer was horrified. The fisherman activated a floodlight and began canvassing the water.

The killer stalled, unable to decide what to do. He was exposed. Light everywhere.

“Hey,” the fisherman yelled. He squinted, trying to recognize something. Anything. All he could see was a silhouette, a boat as dark as the water itself.

This was all too much for the killer. He was off script. He laid his rifle down and frantically started his main engine. Dropping it into gear, he sped toward the fishing boat. Not hearing

anything the fisherman was yelling, he watched the fisherman's silhouette move back and forth across the stern, behind the brightness of his floodlight.

The killer looked back over his shoulder. More lights were lit on shore.

Unaccustomed to pressure, he became confused. Retreat or pursue?

*No, I have to kill him.*

He steered directly toward the fisherman's floodlight. The fisherman scrambled across the deck, in and out of the cabin, and emerged with a long club.

The killer put the engine in neutral and grabbed his rifle. Feeling the bow of his boat shift with the current, he chambered the next round and aimed at the light. It was an easy target. He blasted the floodlight off his mount, hot glass flying everywhere. Quickly he chambered again and took aim at the fisherman, now positioned near the transom, stupefied and frozen in his own indecisiveness. Taking aim, the killer shot. The bullet struck the fisherman, grazing his shoulder and sending him whirling to the deck.

Knowing the only way was to board the fisherman's boat, the killer dropped his rifle and pulled on a pair of gloves. He pulled up to the fisherman's boat and lashed his own boat onto a corner cleat. Frantic, he climbed aboard.

Seeing the fisherman huddled on the deck clutching his wound, the killer finished the job with the fisherman's gaff.

Blood everywhere, he cut the running lights and started the fisherman's engine. After checking his own boat's connection, he gazed back toward the shore. The homes were ablaze in lights, people moving about on their decks. Hurriedly, he hoisted the anchor and made way northwesterly toward Gardiners Bay. He ran the fisherman's boat at full throttle.

Fifteen minutes later, while keeping his briny eyes glued to the fuel tank and depth finder, he shifted course eastward, carefully passing the Ruins and circling the north tip of Gardiners Island. He sought the broader waters of Block Island Sound.

He reduced speed.

Turning up the VHS radio, he played with the settings, picking up various conversations. Everything sounded bad. *Wrong*. He pounded his fist on the radio. Why don't they understand?

Short of the choppiest waters that lined the race, he slowed the engine further.

He dug into the cooler and threw all the fish overboard. He found a can of beer, popped it and began to drink. Then he struggled to throw the fisherman's body over the transom. He couldn't. The fisherman's arm had stubbornly wrapped itself around his neck; making him hallucinate, thinking the corpse was attacking him.

Driven to hysterics he let go, grabbed the bloody gaff and began beating the corpse. Out of breath, with the boat heading on its own toward open water, he bullied the corpse to the side of

the boat and finally managed to throw it overboard. Seeing that a large vessel was approaching from the west, he feared being picked up on radar.

He put the engine in neutral, pulled his own boat fully broadside and tied it off. He pulled a coil of rope from his pocket.

He checked the compass and pointed the fisherman's boat toward the big black gap north of the Montauk Lighthouse. Using the rope, he tied the steering wheel firm on course. He laid the throttle down, cut his own boat loose and jumped, nearly missing the bow. With one leg in the drink, he pulled himself in and started the electric engine.

He watched the fisherman's boat pick up speed and race unmanned for the open Atlantic. Soon it vanished, becoming one with the sea.

Thinking himself too small to be detected, he navigated toward the south shore, all the while contemplating his next victim and arguing with himself over what he'd have for dinner.

## CHAPTER 45

### Coin

Early the morning after Father's Day, Ericson rang.

"Just want to let you know," he said. "Shots were reported off Cartwright Island last night. A fisherman and his boat are missing."

"Cartwright?"

"South end of Gardiners Island. A glorified sandbar."

"How'd you find out?"

"Sonny Augustino just called."

"Sonny huh...you thinking Calendar Man?"

"That's what I'd say. Another holiday hit."

"What else did Sonny say?"

“There was a boat in the vicinity. Had a floodlight on. After the second shot, witnesses say the light went out. Then the running lights died. The boat sped off into Gardiners Bay.”

I pictured a boat navigating in the dark. Reminded me of the black boat at Buoy 13. “No lights?”

“That’s what Sonny said.”

“Sounds to me like the fisherman took off.”

“Reports say he never came home.”

I laughed, rejecting thoughts of the worst. “Well... maybe he’s out drunk somewhere. Caught his limit and celebrated with a .22.”

“Yeah,” he said, sounding upbeat. “Maybe you’re right, but why no lights?”

I hadn’t a clue. “By the way, you recover okay?”

Silence.

“You there?” I asked.

“I hear ya.” He paused. “Whenever those memories enter my mind, which is all the time, I force myself to think of other things. Get something to eat. Pretend like it never happened.”

“Told anyone?”

“Nobody.”

I couldn’t offer advice. We spoke about coping and forgetting and hung up.

I went to the kitchen for coffee. Madeline beat me to it.

“So,” I said. “How was your lunch date?”

She walked over and gave me a hug. “You’re right,” she said. “He’s bizarre.”

What a change of attitude. “What makes you think so?”

“Can’t say for sure.” She fixed her coffee, stirring briskly, clearly bothered. “Just the calls he took. Talking about doing deals, moving money, having meetings... nothing about art.”

“Pick up any names?”

“Not really, I was enjoying my meal, checking out the locals. Drinking his wine.”

“At noon?”

She found that humorous. “Tora was late. We were going through it. When she arrived, she helped drain a second bottle. I was feeling it... still have a headache.” She sipped her coffee. “I need some fresh air. Let’s go for a walk.”

I liked her state of mind. I felt her attention was on me, and only me. We left our cups of coffee and headed for the beach. I mentioned the gunfire and missing fisherman.

Her hair blowing in the breeze, she looked toward Shelter Island. “How odd. With Dad gone, I completely forget about Father’s Day.” She took a few steps. “Yesterday, I heard Bonetrager mention something about a hunt.”

*A hunt?* Buoy 13. Black boat. The evening sightings. It was all we had on Bonetrager. And some of that was sketchy. “What kind of hunt?”

“Maybe he’s hunting Calendar Man?”

“I don’t think so,” I said. “Tora’s been seeing more of that black boat at the buoy. Has he ever mentioned the color of his boat?”

Tight-lipped, she shook her head. “Only that he has one.”

We walked a while longer.

“Broberg says Bonetrager’s wanted, right?” she asked.

I nodded.

Her hair kept blowing in her face. She stopped, pulled it back and removed a clip from her pocket. “Fine,” she said as she tied it off. “If he’s a criminal, why doesn’t the FBI swoop in?”

She had me. Without speaking, we reached the public beach. I put my arm on her shoulder and turned her my way. “I’ll tell you why.” I gazed into her big brown eyes. “Broberg has nothing on him.”

“Then leave the guy alone,” she said. “Not that I’m attached, but fair is fair.”

“It’s Lenihan. He has reasons beyond the Hamptons. That’s his business. We think Bonetrager’s involved in something out here.”

She stared at me. “Don’t worry...I’m starting to get the picture.” She yanked my hand and began walking. “You want me to dig for information, don’t you?”

I couldn’t help but smile. “Be nice.”

Her eyes dropped to the sand. “Let’s go,” she said, yanking me forward.

We wandered, zigzagging on the beach, pulling each other in different directions and always landing in each other’s arms. She led me to the channel. Flocks of seagulls soared overhead. I looked for a raven. Any raven. There weren’t any.

Guilty in my passion, I remembered the witch. Her unspoken promise. I’d taken the bait. Chased different honey, but so had Madeline. Was there a difference? Bonetrager versus the witch? Either could be devastating. As I had the right to desire another, so did she. I contemplated love, infatuation and lust. Somewhere they overlapped. Who was I to judge?

She mumbled something.

It was indiscernible. Instead, I recalled Vindikis’s words. Did I have the courage to change? To take a stand. Set an example? “I’m not saying he advocates killing. I don’t know him.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Bonetrager.”

She watched a boat enter from the bay. “I know. Maybe you’re right. He might know something.”

I pulled her in and hugged her.

“If he is involved,” I said, “we have no time to waste. The Fourth of July’s around the corner.”

“I comprende,” she said. “Maybe we can prevent something.”

On the way back I called to inform Broberg about the gunfire.

“Heard all about it,” he said. “Seems sketchy. The fisherman’s single. Could be out partying. Lenihan’s chomping to get at Bonetrager.”

“How soon?”

“Told him it’s too early to pinch.” I tried to shield the phone from Madeline. She moved closer.

Broberg continued. “We need room to maneuver. Until we link Bonetrager with something, he’s clean.”

“Lenihan buy it?”

“For now. I won’t be able to hold him off much longer. He doesn’t know about Madeline.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“You talk to Madeline about going undercover?”

I looked at her and she looked at me. “We sort of discussed that.”

“Good. We need to indoctrinate her. Prompt her on what to ask.”

“I’m more concerned about what he asks.”

“Tell me,” he said. “If Bonetrager wises up—smells anything, she could be in danger. When she seeing him again?”

Feeling Broberg’s pressure, I covered the phone. “Heard from Bonetrager?”

She arched her eyebrows and knelt to pick up a seashell. “I’ve been thinking about you. No...I can c—.”

“Call?” I said cutting her short. “Have his number?”

“I can reach him.”

Still muting the phone, I paused.

She showed me her seashell.

I looked at it. “Broberg’s ready...are you?”

She hesitated, watching a lone gull mock us from the top of a dock piling. “Not really—” Her eyes remained glued to the gull. “Let’s get it over with—”

I uncovered the phone. The gull flapped twice and took off. “We’re on.”

“Check the email I just sent you.”

I waited for the email to arrive. I pulled it up. There was a photo attached. “Where’d you take this?”

“At the Cork & Bib. Looks old doesn’t it?”

It was a coin. Irregular in shape. Definitely handmade. It had a cross and shield on one side.

“Looks valuable. How big?”

“Size of a half dollar. Leah said there’s more.”

Madeline peeked at the phone. “A gold coin!”

“You wouldn’t believe it,” Broberg said. I switched it to speaker. “Dutch and his girlfriend were totally wasted. People drinking like crazy. Open bar.”

“The waitress?”

“Was her day off. Anyway, Dutch rings the ship’s bell. ‘Drinks on me’ he yells! *I’m rich*. The place went wild. He shows us the gold coin. ‘*Treasure*’, he said. Nicky and I took pictures of it. Check your email. I sent another picture.”

It was a photo of the backside. It was marked with a series of circles, squares and other small markings. I put the phone on speaker and showed it to Madeline.

“So,” Broberg said. “According to Dutch, Gouldsby, ED’s geologist received directions to dig in the hollow where there’s a granite marker dedicated to Captain Kidd. He was told to remove a large rock and dig for water. He did and hit a bunch of gold coins... can you imagine?”

“Kidd’s treasure?”

“Who else? Know any coin collectors?”

I thought. “Ray Constellioni says he collects ‘em. I’ll forward these to him.”

“Ray should be able to tell us something.” The line went quiet. “This Dutch guy? He ain’t right. According to him, he didn’t discover the coins but he yelled like they were his.”

“Who owns them?”

“The King of Spain, I guess.”

Briefly I contemplated the issues linked to finding treasure. Broberg was right. Something seemed wrong. “Think Dutch is our man?”

“I’m thinking a lot of things.”

“Let’s get back to Gouldsby,” I said. “Who directed him where to dig?”

“That’s a mystery,” Broberg said. “Obviously someone with knowledge of the island. Dutch said it had to be Franz Uerrman.”

Things were accelerating. My gut told me Dutch knew more—a lot more. “What else do you know about this Gouldsby guy?”

“Not a whole lot. Dutch said Gouldsby goes out at night on his paddleboard.”

“Where?”

“Don’t know. Didn’t ask...says Gouldsby’s shrewd. I heard he was an ex-Ivy League rower.”

I had no confidence in Dutch. He reminded me of a spoiled punk. “You believe him?”

“Dutch?” he said. “The kid was plowed. If I didn’t see the coin myself, I’d have doubted everything he said.”

“Beyond someone else getting rich,” I said looking at the photos. “These don’t do much for us.”

I emailed them to Ray Constellioni.

## **CHAPTER 46**

### **Captain’s Stash**

Libby was gone the following day. That evening, she returned. I visited her.

“So,” she said with a subtle giggle, as though kidding with me. “You learn more about Black Lucy?”

I shot her a dubious glance. “Check this out,” I said, as I pulled out my phone. I showed her the photo of the coin.

“Gold?” She paused and looked at me. “I’m not a numismatic expert.”

She put on her glasses. “May I?” she asked as she reached for the phone. “Where did you take this?”

“Cork & Bib.”

Her head snapped. “Sag Harbor?” She studied the coin. “Who had it?”

“An ED employee. I’m told it came from Gardiners Island. Says they discovered a bunch of them during a recent dig.”

“How many?”

“No word.”

I took the phone and showed her the second photo.

“Wow. The other side. If that’s true...this is monumental.” Her face was expressionless. “Can’t be,” she whispered, again studying the coin. “You understand me don’t you?”

She faced me and then turned to the photo. “Let’s see.”

She handed me the phone and left the room. Time passed. She returned with a folder. Slamming it down on the coffee table, she riffled through the reports, picking out certain ones. As she read them, she said, “You never replied—”

“To what?”

“What this could mean,” she said slowly, concentrating on various reports. “Some of Captain Kidd’s treasure might still exist. Why don’t we re-write history?”

Re-write history? “Or that someone just happened upon a few stray coins?”

She stopped reading and looked up at me. “C’mon...stray fifteenth century gold Spanish coins? I don’t think so.” She read some more. “Today, the equivalent might be like finding...D.B Cooper’s loot in the mountains of Washington State.”

She invited me to help myself to the refrigerator. I grabbed a soda and took a seat.

She riffled through more reports. “When did you say you’d be returning to the Marshals Service?”

I hesitated. “I’m unsure. My schedule depends on—”

“Here,” she said interrupting. “Listen to this; *‘Rumors have flown for centuries regarding Kidd’s stash. Some believe it wasn’t all recovered. Kidd was intelligent. Known for planting decoys.’*”

“You’re really thinking its part of Kidd’s treasure?”

“What else?” She made a dumb look, as though insinuating my ignorance. “We need an expert to tell us about the coin...however...that more treasure remains? How romantic, yet how deadly.” She dropped the report on her lap. “Could bring a blessing or a curse to Earth Diocese.”

She went back to reading. Turning back page after page, she came to a thinner report. It looked like a mimeographed compilation of an ancient hand-written letter.

She handled it as though it were hallowed, like a sacred document from the Vatican. She read to herself, her eyes darting left and right, some of the words occasionally spilling in whispers and soft sounds from her lips. Then she brought her index finger to one line and read aloud: “*—and we returned a second time to the Isle of Gardiners in possession of more riches’.*” She stopped and skipped a few lines. “*‘And the captain left with four, two slaves and two mates, in a long boat with ample powder, guns, tools, a wooden beam and oar. In his company were Robert Fuller, sailing master and Edward Gouldsby, master gunner. Both formerly of Her Majesty’s Navy, the first whom Kidd trusted with position and wealth.’*”

Edward Gouldsby? Leah at the Cork & Bib had mentioned a similar name. He was Earth Diocese’s head of security. He also happened to be ED’s geologist—the one digging for water.

“Gouldsby was a master gunner. What did that entail?”

She kept her eye on the page. “Oh, they controlled the cannons and ammunition, I think.” She turned back a page. “Here...I missed this. But I remember reading it before. Listen—*‘And so as to avoid fresh ground, and yet to be known by those of Sir Gardiner, it was decided by a vote of hands that the gold be placed far and away from the first, northerly and east from their house of living. That being hidden and higher on the Isle for safer keeping.’*”

“So...they buried treasure twice?”

She continued to read, nodding, busy in research.

“Why hasn’t this gotten out?” I asked.

She dropped the document on the table and shook her head. “I figured it was already known. I mean...it was in a public library. I copied this years ago. Never thought twice.”

“You forgot about it,” I said as I picked up the document. “Okay to have a look?”

Holding a tight smile, she nodded.

I read. “Says September 19, 1699.”

She sat still, lost in her thoughts. “Three months after Kidd was arrested—”

I found the document awkward in language, yet beautifully presented. I took note of Edward Gouldsby’s name. “The handwriting’s impeccable. Any idea who wrote it?”

“None.” She leaned over to look at it and smiled. “Probably Fuller. He was an educated man. Or, perhaps Fuller dictated the account to another. Maybe an aristocrat...an officer in the British Navy.”

“Hadn’t Fuller gone rogue?”

“Yes...after all, he was a pirate, but very little is written about him.”

My head was swimming with possibilities. “If this coin wasn’t found, that letter could have been construed as a hoax.”

She leaned back in her chair. “Maybe that’s why I never took it to heart.”

“Where’d you find this?” I said, placing it on the coffee table. “Could be worth a fortune.”

“Money and fortune?” she said with a warm smile. “I already have that. Wealth means nothing to me.” She picked up the document. “It was part of private collection of handwritten historical accounts long held by a wealthy family that had settled in the Caribbean. I stumbled upon it while digging through miles of microfiche in St. Thomas.”

“It’s possible that nobody else knows this exists.”

“Very.” She laughed and looked at me. “In the bowels of that library, especially in the microfiche department, there are secrets left to be revealed. I just never occurred to me. I got from that place what I wanted and left.” She looked at me. “You ever spend a whole day reading microfiche?”

Not knowing exactly what microfiche was, I shook my head. “So then. I thought pirates killed anyone who knew where they’d hidden treasure.”

She shrugged and turned more pages. “Another myth.” She stopped. Her eyes enlarged. Again she brought her index finger to a sentence. “*‘And Kidd returned with Fuller and Gouldsby, leaving the others to eternity. Yet, beyond knowing where the treasure lay, the captain had a score to settle with Gouldsby. Therefore, after securing the long boat, we sailed around the Isle of Gardiners and into a settled water, to a point of land. It was here, two hundred*

*leagues from shore, we found a rock shaped like a resting lion. Kidd proclaimed that Gouldsby was to drown at high tide in sight of where they buried the treasure. At the appropriate time, the tide being at its lowest, with much effort we chained him to the rock. Agreeable to immediately get underway, we pulled anchor and set sail for deeper water.’’*

We sat quietly, absorbed in the story.

“Deepens the mystery of Gardiners Island, doesn’t it,” she said.

“History argues to the contrary. Your letter may change everything.”

She pulled the letter off the table and tucked it back into its folder. “Maybe.”

She left with her records. “Who’s going to evaluate the coin?”

“Ray Constellioni purportedly collects coins. Figured I’d start with him.”

My phone rang. It was Broberg.

I excused myself and walked outside.

“Got some news,” he said. “Nicky says they’ve located the Father’s Day fishing boat.”

“Where?”

“Drifting in kelp twenty-one miles off Cape Cod. Gas tank empty. Nobody on board, fisherman’s still missing.” He was solemn. “They extracted a bullet from the cabin—looks like .30 caliber.”

“.30 caliber?”

“I know,” he said. “Messes me up too... won’t know more until we hear from the lab.”

“We were told .45 caliber’s all that’s been used.”

“According to Peters, yeah.” He paused. “Well... either he’s lying or we have more than one killer.”

“I’ve got one for you.”

“Go ahead.”

“That waitress at the Cork & Bib talks about a Gouldsby. Remember?”

Broberg took a moment. “The security guy moonlighting as a geologist? Yeah, I remember. He dug up the coins.”

“Guess what? One of the crewmen, a pirate on Captain Kidd’s ship, was named Gouldsby.”

I looked at Broberg. He was speechless.

“How’d you find that out?”

“Libby.”

More silence. “Purely coincidental—”

## CHAPTER 47

### UXOs

Tora invited Broberg and Nicky to the house for dinner. She said she wanted to meet ‘his girlfriend’. Knowing Tora, I felt she was more often nosy than courteous, but it couldn’t do any harm. Maybe she really missed Broberg.

“Ray called,” Tora said as she prepared dinner. “Told me to tell you he’d be out for the Fourth of July.”

“He mention anything else?”

“Just that he got your emails.”

Madeline walked in wearing a white bodysuit. “You look good in that, baby,” I said as I pinched her behind.

“It was Tora’s idea. I’ll slip something over it later.”

Distracted, Tora watched Madeline fuss over a stack of raw fish. “Be careful you don’t splatter.”

“Ericson supplied the bass,” Madeline said, gently piling them on a cutting board. “The lobsters... compliments of Sonny Augustino, who I’ve yet to meet.”

“Sonny huh?” I said as I helped her with the fish. I followed her to the grill.

She turned on the gas. “Ericson said a lobsterman found a transmitter hidden on his boat. Now Sonny thinks his boats are bugged. Guess all the lobstermen feel the same way.”

As she adjusted the heat, I wondered where the best place was to bug a lobster boat.

“That’s what Ericson said?”

She nodded as she placed half the fish on the grill. “He said Sonny’s been lobstering at night, trying to shake the cops. Guess they’re all over him.”

“They’re desperate.”

“You think Sonny’s involved?”

“Don’t know...but he’s angry.”

She left for the house. “I don’t blame him.”

A short time later, Broberg and Nicky showed up. He introduced her to Tora. After some minor fanfare, I noticed Broberg’s gold bracelet hanging on Nicky’s arm.

Madeline checked the fish and then accompanied them to the front deck.

“She seems like a nice gal,” Tora said, spying them from the kitchen window. “Could hardly tell she worked for the county district attorney.”

I helped Tora with the lobsters and left for the deck.

“... Coecles is right there,” Madeline was saying to Nicky. “Off the bow of that small sailboat.”

“Well,” Nicky said with a nod. “Someone’s come up with a creative way to use UXOs.”  
“UXOs?”

“New one for me too,” Nicky said. “Unexploded ordinance. Anyway, the Navy did their job. After performing tests, they identified a significant number of UXOs, all underwater, off the Ruins.”

“Wasn’t the county Evidence Response Team involved?” I asked.

“No,” she said. “The Navy did it all —identification, recovery, and disablement. All intact ‘misses’. They gave us samples. There are some minor variations in the explosives, depending on age and size of bomb—”

She stopped and stared at the Ruins. “The residue from that bombed-out mess matched that of the Coecles explosion. World War Two vintage. Still viable, still dangerous.”

“Were you surprised?” I said.

She shook her head. “What surprised me was how precarious that place is. In their report, they didn’t mention what they found in the rubble. Only what they discovered on the bottom of the bay. But...yeah, the place is a real hazard.” She stopped and viewed Gardiners Island. “Apparently there are some UXOs in shipwrecks off the south shore, miles out in the ‘Canyon’...where ever that is.”

“The Ruins is an easier hit.”

“Agreed.”

“Can it be purchased anywhere?”

“Not this stuff. Can only be salvaged from live munitions.”

“So then,” I said. “What type of person, or people, would know about that place, know about the bombs, dive for them, and recover live ordinance?”

Nicky pointed at me. “Let alone prepare the powder into bombs and then use them to destroy property?”

“It never occurred to me,” Broberg said, “that whoever’s responsible might have been out to kill someone. It just so happened that nobody was aboard.”

“Our lab was able to recreate a similar explosion from samples.”

We watched boats glide across the bay. Nobody spoke.

“Well I’ll tell you one thing,” Madeline said. “He’d have to be a diver, an explosives expert and have balls larger than melons.”

A year’s worth of death and destruction had gone unsolved. In hindsight, striking on holidays was brilliant. Over time, details blend, even morph in contradiction. The result can be a self-defeating mix of fact and fiction. Unless it hits home—most people forget.

What did investigators like Norm Peters do all day? It was all cold, zero sightings, no fingerprints. We had no proof the Father’s Day shooting resulted in anyone’s death. Ignoring the

so-called 'note in a bottle' that Peters claimed to have, the crimes had been perfectly planned. Exquisitely executed.

"So then," I said to Nicky. "What does that leave us?"

"How so?"

"Well...the good news is we have a .30 caliber bullet from the Father's Day shooting. The bad news is...we're dealing with multiple gun calibers.

"And, most likely multiple felons." She shrugged. "We'll break through soon. I know it."

I nodded. "We know the source of the explosives used in the Coecles explosion. Anything else?"

She thought. "An East Hampton Town spokesperson said the Father's Day shooting would have to come from another boat, though they were investigating all possibilities."

"Other possibilities? They don't know jack."

I stared at Coecles Harbor. Then the Ruins. Then back to Coecles. "Look...I know this has been studied to death but the Fourth of July's next. What's missing in our profile?"

Broberg broke the stalemate. "How about time of day?"

"Meaning?"

"When the crimes occurred? I hate to admit this, but I don't know."

From the house, Tora shouted, "Five minutes to dinner."

"What time of day did the other crimes occur?" Nicky muttered to herself, rising from her chair. She scanned the beach. "It's common knowledge...let's see...New Years and Valentine's Day...the boat fires at Montauk and Three Mile Harbor all happened that night. Earth day...the Ditch Plains shooting? A night job."

"Memorial Day," I said. "The Coecles explosion? Late afternoon. Saw that happen from here."

"Right...the two lobsterman killings on April Fools and Mother's Day...we only know approximately when they left port."

"Now Father's Day," I said. "Another night shooting. By the way, we saw flashes the other night while fishing Block Island Sound."

"We?"

"Ericson and me, at the race."

"From what direction?"

I paused. "South...yeah, near the Gardiners Island shore. Four of them."

"So it appears the favorite times are evenings and holidays. Why?"

"Time off," Madeline said.

Broberg looked at her. "Maybe...but I don't think so. Whoever's doing this wants a spectacle. Notoriety."

“A demented desire to see people grovel in fear.”

“Absolutely...gives them power. Feeds their emotional depravity.”

Madeline said, “You may be right. However, that logic disregards lobstermen and fishermen going after each other on principle, or due to grudges.”

“You’re both right,” Nicky said. “I also fear we’re dealing with multiple personalities.”

“More than one?”

Nicky nodded. “Don’t forget. Dark water’s black at night. Provides cover.”

Tora called us for dinner.

I took a step towards the house. “July has more daylight. That works in our favor.”

Broberg laughed. “What’s also unique about July Fourth?”

“Boating, picnics?”

“Try fireworks...noise...explosions.”

“You predicting another Coecles?”

He smelled the grilled bass. “I hate to predict anything but that’s where I’d put my money.”

We filed into the house and began eating.

“That black boat’s been hanging around the buoy nearly every night. Even in the fog.” Tora said.

When there was talk of the black boat or Bonetrager, Madeline looked away. It was troubling. Was I reading her wrong? Were her eyes open windows to her heart? We’d soon test her allegiance.

Dinner went unusually well. It could have been attributed to Nicky’s presence, or perhaps because Tora had laid off the wine.

“Regarding Bonetrager,” Nicky said slowly. “We got a subpoena, checked his phone records. A lot of calls overseas. Nothing suspicious though...we’re still following up.”

“How about we check his place?” Broberg said.

“Subpoena to break in?”

He rolled his head. “Yeah, remind me.”

“This ED thing...it’s asymmetrical.”

“We’ve got to hack our way through it.”

Nicky announced she had to leave. Expected at the county offices the following day, she was facing a two-hour drive home. Wanting to discuss Bonetrager, I walked them to Broberg’s Corvette.

At the car, she faced Broberg. “You’ve got to find out if Peters is jiving or if a note really—.”

“That,” Broberg said, interrupting her, “I take personally. It will be solved—I guarantee it.”

“How good is Peters?” I said.

He grinned. “Ya know...I don’t like the guy but give him credit. He’s cracked a few cases. Lenihan says they got him working on new stuff. Says Peters devotes some time to the Hamptons but not much. Got a few rookies running around.”

“Just to look good, huh,” Nicky said. “He must be watching tail on Main Street because I never see him anywhere.”

Jingling his keys, Broberg smiled. “At this stage all he can do is hope he stumbles into solving the next attack—before it happens. Otherwise the trail’s gone cold.”

“You think with so many investigators coming up empty they’re all hiding behind each other’s inefficiencies?” I said.

Nicky slapped me with a dubious look. “Easy Rippinger,” she said. “This babe’s not hiding from anything.”

Broberg shook his head. “This crime spree may never be solved. Too much water...zero witnesses...a history of hate and deceit between warring industries...too many variables. On top of it all, I agree with Nicky. I think we’re dealing with multiple sickos.”

I heard someone rushing down the wooden staircase. It was Madeline. She trotted down the driveway and pulled up next to me.

“Bonetrager called,” she said out of breath. “I told him I’d meet him at the gallery tomorrow for dinner.”

“How are we going to do this?” I said.

“Tora has plans. You’ll need to drop me off and pick me up.”

Broberg wasn’t pleased. “Can’t do it...it’ll blow everything.”

I draped my arm over her shoulder. “Look, you can borrow my—”

“Pickup! Yeah...that’ll work,” Madeline said.

Broberg glanced disapprovingly at my pickup. I’d seen the look before, like he smelled rotten eggs. “Forget it, we’ll need it.” He folded his arms and glanced at his car. “You can take this.”

Madeline spied Broberg’s Corvette. “I can?”

Nicky put her arm through Broberg’s. “We’ll follow you in the pickup,” he said. “Cain and I...to keep an eye out.” He looked at me. “Like the plan?”

Unsettled, I faced Madeline. “You’ll need to find out about Bonetrager’s boat, the color, where he moors it, what he’s doing at the buoy, anything related to smuggling, contraband, whatever...”

“Madeline,” Broberg said. “Stick to him like a barnacle. Be careful.” With a concerned face, he paused. “We’ll be with you...but in the glove box, if you need it, you’ll find a 32 cal. Beretta Tomcat. The magazine’s full. Just pull the slide and chamber a bubba.”

“Think you better tell Lenihan?”

“I... was just thinking about that.”

Nicky stepped forward, close to Madeline. “Always bluff. Otherwise, don’t worry... just be right.”

“You’re undercover now,” Broberg said rolling his eyes. “We have to come up with something soon.”

Nicky and Broberg got into his car.

“Oh... before I forget,” I said through the window. “This character named Gouldsby. Dutch and Leah both mentioned him. Was he the ED security guy or am I imagining things?”

Nicky bit her lip. “Think so. I’ll check. Why?”

Behind us through the shrubs, I could see Libby’s house. “You may find this hard to believe but over three hundred years ago, Captain Kidd had a guy on his ship named Edward Gouldsby. Apparently they chained Gouldsby to Lion’s Head Rock—that big rock near Buoy 13 we see from the deck—and he drowned.”

“Sounds like a fable,” Nicky said.

“The gold coin Dutch had wasn’t a fable.”

“Where’d you hear this?”

I shot my thumb back toward Libby’s place. “Who else?”

“Of course,” Broberg said.

They took off.

Madeline took me by the hand. “Let’s look at the rock. It’s low tide.”

We walked to the deck. She maneuvered behind me. Wrapping me tightly in her arms, she began to lick the bottom of my ear. “I’d hate to be tied to that rock. It’s ugly.”

I agreed.

“Let’s go in,” she whispered. “Get cozy.”

I faced her. “You don’t have to prove yourself to me.”

She dropped her arms. “I know.” She moved to the railing and scanned the bay. “Maybe it’s just nervous energy.”

## CHAPTER 48

### Undercover

Dressed in a matching white jacket and pants, his dark orange shirt unbuttoned halfway to his waist, Bonetrager met Madeline at the door. “Been anxiously waiting,” he said.

She mustered a smile and glanced at the highway. There was no sign of the pickup. She entered the gallery and swung around. “Love this place—business been good?”

Immediately Bonetrager offered her wine.

She accepted.

He poured himself a glass. “Indeed,” he said. “A modest investment in my future.” He raised his glass.

“Thought you preferred whiskey.”

They clinked.

“I do, my dear. It’s all—” Nodding slowly, he strained for the right words. “Acceptable. You agree?”

Trying to be bold, she drank with gusto. “Rose? Isn’t there a shortage?”

He dropped the glass from his lips. “Rubbish. A marketing ploy.”

He left for another customer who was also sipping something, though it didn’t look like wine. Showing him more expensive works kept behind the counter, Bonetrager stole an occasional peek at Madeline as she wandered through the shop.

He found her intoxicating. She reminded him of the long-legged beauties he’d seen while attending art auctions around the world. The women he’d impressed and sometimes conquered. His mind raced. He pictured Madeline in a white two-piece and heels, legs slung over the arm of an expensive chair holding a martini goblet; her thick raven hair flowing down and all around the edge of her glass.

He also visualized her dead. A bird without a cage. Vulnerable and consumable.

Sometimes Bonetrager was clever, creative. Other times he was erratic. His associates knew that. In dealing with him, they never knew what they were going to get. They always protected their backs legally, emotionally and physically. Around Madeline he kept his thoughts to himself.

Bonetrager left the customer and approached her. “The other evening I was on the water. Near Buoy 13. Which house are you staying in?”

He caught her off guard. “I...don’t know how to describe the location.”

Turning from the customer, he said, “From the house on the point...you know, the run down place...are you left or right of it?”

She kept her eyes glued to a painting. She pointed sideways. “That way.”

“I see. I’ll just have to take you there in my boat. You can show me.”

“Maybe I’ve seen your boat. What does it look like?”

“Oh...just an old wharf-runner. Not much to look at, but sea worthy.”

“Is it gray? White?”

“Ah—oh it varies. I have it painted regularly. Maintenance you know.”

“Guess you keep it at Sag, huh?”

He paused, gazing at the other customer. “I have dockage all over these waters. Perhaps I can show you sometime?”

She swallowed more wine. “I’d like that.”

Just as Bonetrager was about to speak, the customer gestured for him. He excused himself.

Absentmindedly rubbing the condensation on her glass, she gazed seemingly at nothingness, caught in one of her moments. The ones before her mind decided to take five. But she’d since wised up. She knew she was being played. It made her nervous. Drinking wine like cherry soda, she realized she had to slow down.

In the background she overheard the customer try to talk down the price. Bonetrager was adamant. “Discounts demand cash,” she heard him say.

She peeked in their direction.

Bonetrager reached behind the counter and brought out a bottle of scotch. “To make the correct decision, you might need more of this.”

The customer agreed and refilled his own glass.

Bonetrager ambled back to Madeline. “My, what a lovely suit. I apologize for not mentioning it earlier.”

“Another sale?”

He looked at her as if she were crazy. “Making tons...loving every moment. It’s the Hamptons, you know.”

“Yes,” she said. “It’s nice having friends in the Hamptons.”

“You could be my friend.”

While sipping more wine, she was unable to dismiss the hair sprouting from his chest. “How?”

“I could use a biologist to help meet my obligations.”

“What does that mean?”

He looked at the customer and whispered, “In addition to these hobbies...I have an ‘unceasing social mission to superintend global justice’.”

“Okay, I’ve decided,” the customer said loudly.

Bonetrager left her. He collected his cash, wrapped the piece and thanked the customer. After ushering him through the door, he turned the door sign to read ‘Closed’.

He dimmed the lights and put on a white fedora. "Some fine single malt?"

"Wine and whiskey?" she said, peeking out the window. No sight of the pickup. Her nervousness doubled. "I'd be deadly."

"Like I was saying...about needing a biologist. Earth Diocese is one of my financial partners. I work with them internationally procuring, developing and above all...protecting our planet."

He studied the texture of her skin. He fondled the tips of her dark brown hair. "I believe you have Moroccan blood."

Madeline listened. She'd tasted his alcohol. Chased his lure. She'd also walked the hallways of infatuation. Places where hidden closets unexpectedly sprung open, spilling disappointments across her floor. The emptiness caused her to stumble. Her life marked by lies framed by deceptive hearts. Was this, she wondered, another one of those?

Bonetrager switched to whiskey. Drinking heavily he boasted, "You realize you're looking at the next *'Lord of The Manor'*."

"Lord of what?"

He cleared his throat. "Gardiners Island."

She had more wine. "Wasn't there was a shooting there? Father's Day?"

"I heard about that." Bonetrager was casual. "I can't quibble over some scrubby fellow who disappears after menacing fish. Fishing ought to be outlawed." He refreshed his drink. "I'd rather pity a penniless commoner trying to crash the gates of Breakwater's house, than he." He took another sip. "Part of life. Take your chances and hope for the best."

"Best of what?"

He hesitated, choosing to sip more Scotch.

She continued. "I can sympathize with the whys. I want to know who."

He threw his head back, his hat firmly in place, and smirked. "So you do, huh?" He lorded over her as though she were his student. "Getting back to Gardiners...there's a fortune in wet gold sitting under that island." He paused. "I'm going to use it to solve the Hamptons dilemma."

"I don't get it."

He laughed. "Many people don't...but they will. More wine?"

"The water shortage?"

He laughed again. "We've tapped an endless supply of virgin, crystal clear New England grade water."

"So, you've been to Gardiners island?"

"Not recently. It's off limits, however I know the people running the show."

"Earth Diocese?"

"They are one of my finest clients. I'm proud to serve them."

“In the Hamptons?”

“Heavens no...worldwide. Here, they have a huge opportunity to invest in developing water. I intend to lean on them to do so.”

Choosing her words carefully she said, “What’s in it for you?”

Walking across the gallery carrying the bottle of Scotch, he gazed out the front window. “Ah, Madeline. I’m beginning to like you.” He poured himself another drink. “We’re a weak breed.” He sipped and gave a satisfied grin. “Succumbing to temptation, the path to making a fortune, it’s only for those with eyes to see.” Lightly he rolled his drink. He raised his head, chin up. “*The enlightened. They will inherit the earth.*”

“Meanwhile?”

He pumped more Scotch, aware she wasn’t buying it. “Long term dividends, consulting fees—a few bonus cuts—”

He placed the bottle on a table. Then he moved closer to her, caressing her with his fingers, running them across her cheek. She became enthralled. His style held promise of an easier, more exciting life for her. He put his drink down when his phone rang. He answered without checking caller ID.

He winced. “Yes, go ahead,” she heard. A pause.

“You’re deviating from the plan?”

“You are? Where are you?”

“And why?”

“I’ll be the arbiter!”

He glanced at her, then relaxed. “What size?”

He turned from her and dropped his head. “You know you’re not to call.”

“Sure...later.” He hung up.

Bonetrager didn’t seem pleased. When he went for his whiskey she walked to the window. “Nice sunset,” she said, pecking at her wine. “So...is art a facade for something else?”

“You must be joking. I’d kill for good art.”

He went to the till and cleaned out the cash. After shoving it in his pocket he walked over to her.

“You’re lovely,” he said, admiring how the late afternoon sun shone on her hair. “Come, bring your energy to my business office.”

She already knew but asked anyway, “And where’s that?”

“I’ve got a little space in the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum.” He smiled. “Let me tell your future. Could be our future—”

“You into astrology?”

He ushered her outside and locked the door. Checking the knob, he said, "I'm into anything that'll turn a coin."

## **CHAPTER 49**

### **Bad Outcome**

He looked at his Volvo. "Let's take yours."

"The Corvette?" she said, buying time, searching for the pickup. Then she saw it parked in a distant lot.

"Looks like more fun. Yours?"

She looked at the pickup again just to make sure. "You...might be too tall."

He strolled to the car, removed his hat and tried the passenger-side handle. "Try me."

Feeling much better, she unlocked the car and they climbed in.

"Where are we going?" she said.

"Sag Harbor. I'll direct you."

Her eyes constantly scanning the rear-view mirror, she looked at him. "You mentioned coins. Are you a collector?"

He laughed. "Why yes. I'm a collector and a spender." He looked at her. "Aren't we all?"

She hesitated. "Did you know someone on Gardiners Island unearthed a Spanish gold coin?"

His jaw dropped. "Tell me more."

"Don't know much. Someone was showing it around the bar."

"Who?"

She shook her head. "Looked like a hippie...maybe a fisherman."

"When?"

"Oh, few days ago."

"And where exactly did he get it?"

"He said Gardiners Island."

He looked away nodding or rocking slightly, she couldn't tell.

"Have a place in mind for dinner?" she said. "I love seafood."

He sat for a mile without speaking. "Seafood? On rare occasions, my dear, but not if my memory beats me to the punch."

"How so?"

Moving his fingers across the brim of his hat, his mind was elsewhere. He didn't reply. It frightened her. Her eyes returned to the pickup.

"Well...if the atrocities that occur in raping and reaping the sea's bottom come to mind, I'll go for the greens."

"So," she said. "You never answered me. Are you into astrology?"

His head snapped sideways, his blue eyes piercing hers. "You believe in spirits?"

Wary to anger him, she thought. "Yeah, I do."

Silence.

"I make a living learning from the deceased. Been communicating with historical figures for years. I conjure them. Seek their wisdom...knowledge only known to the dead."

Fearful of rushing headlong into a cosmic maelstrom, she became nervous. She giggled. "Secrets they've taken to the grave? Like where to find water?"

"Water?" he said. He was quite serious. "Much more...a common geologist can tell me that!" He gazed out the window. "I only ask of spirits what spirits can tell."

She drove a while longer, constantly adjusting the rear view mirror. "As in—?"

"Lost art...buried treasure...shipwrecks...forgotten civilizations, the locations of which they've taken to the grave." He smiled. "Mysteries to be had. And," he paused and smiled at her, "to be had with others." His face changed, becoming blank. Expressionless. "Are you prepared to meet a spirit?"

She tightened up.

"Mediumship," he said. "Be bold. Never fear."

Once they entered Sag Harbor, he directed her to a gravel parking lot behind the museum. They got out and went in the back door. He led her through an exhibit hall. She felt an overbearing presence. The eyes of painted portraits and dead whales rested on her.

They walked up a spiral staircase to his office. He unlocked the door and closed the curtains.

"Please close the door," he said.

She did but stopped the door short of latching it.

In the middle of the room were a table and four chairs. On the table stood a copper-bottomed clear globe half-filled with blue liquid. A glass tube extended up from the bottom. "Dyed salt water," he said. "The higher the water rises, the stronger the energy."

“Why salt water?”

He lit a few candles. “*We seek a sailor.*”

She stood gazing at the water, wondering how the globe worked.

He dropped his head and mumbled something. Then looked up at her. “Please sit and relax,” he said. “I’ll be right back.”

He left through another door. Time lagged. He returned dressed in antique captain’s clothing. He sat next to her, held her hand and closed his eyes.

“Sometimes I imagine I’m a Mooncusser,” he said. “I work the dark sea-swept coastline where big ships dare to wander. I’m weaving a web, waiting for them loaded with freight stolen and carried from the four corners of the earth. A contraband that will be used to destroy the very earth it was taken from and its roots shall affect you and me.”

“You’re a what?” she said. “A moon—what?”

He held her hand tighter. “I can see the mast lights. I reach into the blackness. Safety shall elude them. When the ship’s bow, proud in majesty, yearns for harbor, it shall be denied, and when the ship’s captain measures the shadows in search of a signal expecting a guiding light from which to chart, there shall be none, except for I shall provide a light in due cadence by opening and shutting a cast iron door. Yes, the Mooncusser’s flame...my flame shall beckon the ship to its doom, where it will tear and crumble and moan it a loud voice until the sea reclaims what belongs to the earth.” He paused. “Oh wandering spirit of the bay, I am thy brother.”

Still holding her hand, Bonetrager recited something in another language. He began to chant an unusual melody. His face changed constantly.

“Are you with us?” he said. Nothing. Then strange sounds. Many mouths mumbling.

Racked with fear, she thought of pulling away. Surely she could outrun him.

“We greet you!” he said. He waited and then opened his eyes, his pupils darting back and forth. He closed them. “I sent you a line of energy...yet no response.”

The table rattled. Madeline was frightened.

“Spirit... whence do you come? America?” He paused. “England? France?”

He asked more questions, seeking a positive or negative reaction. The water crept up the tube. He asked for a sighting. Nothing.

There was a thump against the wall. He held her fingers, his body quivering, eyes open wide. Something scratched the ceiling. Another noise. He released her fingers and gripped her hand, constricting it. Excited, he panned the upper reaches of the room, the old Victorian dolls on display staring back at them. She couldn’t feel her hand. It frightened her.

“Are you Benito Bonito? Jean Lafitte? Thomas Tew?” Nothing. He grew angry. “Kidd!” he yelled. “Speak! Speak to me again—” He waited. Silence. He closed his eyes and re-gripped her hand. “Francis Drake?”

Her hand numb, she watched the colored seawater rise in the tube.

He relaxed his grip.

In the corner of her eye she saw something move. She feared Bonetrager had connected with an unseen entity. She heard something drag on the floor.

“Connect with us my brother,” Bonetrager said. “For my habitat’s near the offshore reefs where the waters are shallow and the waves break into a thousand caps. Like fingers they roll to the beach. Where massive barnacled rocks sit wide on the ocean floor, reaching up as though to touch the stars but instead, snaring the hulls of boats that mistakenly draw nigh. I will be there, stoking the red-hot furnace and feeding it all the wood it can consume until the flames burn white as snow, belching forth a luminous illusion, for I am one of you—a pirate.”

He leaned forward staring straight ahead, expecting and wanting. She followed his gaze to a different wall. The room began to cool. She couldn’t believe her sight. A ghostly figure had formed, blending in with the dark green Victorian wallpaper. Floating, its face imperceptible. Ugly, yet mysterious.

“Who are you? I command a response.”

Nothing.

Bonetrager asked more questions. The tube of seawater overflowed.

“Who! I demand to know—”

The table shook, the globe shuddered as though an earthquake had struck. The table rocked harder and began to bounce out of place. The tube overflowed on to the table as the globe tipped wildly. Rattling and threatening to fall, Bonetrager scrambled to keep the globe upright, but not before the blue-dyed seawater spilled across the table and on Madeline’s lap.

He let go of the globe and it crashed to the floor, shattering into pieces.

He stood, spoke...then yelled...in another language.

It was all Madeline could take. “You’ve got the wrong woman,” she yelled as she rose and raced out the door.

“What are you doing?” he shouted. “You’ve destroyed the message!”

She fled through the hallway and down the spiral staircase, tripping and falling forward, almost getting her leg caught in the iron balusters, but she didn’t. She landed on the main floor and raced out the backdoor.

With no sight of the pickup, she jumped in the Corvette and pulled out of the parking lot. In the street she peeled out, leaving two long strips of rubber.

Racing through town, a policeman hit the lights and chased her. The pickup pulled in behind the cruiser. Eventually she pulled over. The officer walked up to the window.

“License and registration, please,” he said.

She broke down.

Broberg got out of the pickup and showed his badge.

After some explaining, the officer let her go.

Madeline sat in the Corvette drumming the wheel with her thumbs. "I've got a headache," she said. She got out and handed the keys to Broberg. "Thanks."

She looked terrible. Her clothes were wet and stained blue. She walked to the pickup. "Let's just go home."

"What about Bonetrager?" Broberg said.

"I know what you want," she said. "Beyond some drunken encounter with an apparition, no...I don't have anything on him...I just want to go home."

Broberg waved at Madeline. Staring out the truck window, she didn't respond. "If nothing else, our man has a heck of a walk back to Wainscott." He flicked his keys. "I'll call in the morning."

## CHAPTER 50

### Gallery

"Nicky found out," Broberg said over the phone. "He spells it *Gouldsby*."

"You sure? It's spelled the same in the letter. Same first name too."

"How old was that letter?"

"Three hundred years, and get this. Madeline said Bonetrager may have contacted a ghost named Gouldsby when they were at the museum."

"You're making this up, right?"

Dead air.

"He what? A dead guy?"

"She said he summons ghosts. He pulled an apparition out of the wall. The ghost of a pirate. He tries to get information about lost art, treasure, whatever from the dead. He even put on one of the museum's costumes."

"Kinky...she thinks he conjured one of Kidd's shipmates?"

I paused. "I don't know what he conjured. Libby's letter is clear. Edward Gouldsby knew where a second stash of treasure was buried."

"They smoke anything? Pills?"

"She doesn't do drugs. She said she'd been drinking."

"Booze doesn't lead to ghost sightings?"

"Guess the ghost went berserk. Knocked a pitcher of blue water off the table...soaked her. She freaked and ran out."

"That's why she was all messed up," he said. "I wondered. She learn anything about the boat or buoy?"

"Not much. He said he paints his boat regularly. He asked which house she was staying in."

"What house? That doesn't feel good."

"No...it's gotta be him we see at the buoy."

"I've got nothing to prevent Lenihan from pinching this guy," Broberg said. "Let's put a torch under his chops. See what we can find out. You up for paying ol' Bonetrager a visit?"

"If Madeline's accurate, and I think she is, we can't nail someone for conjuring ghosts, however...the coincidental connection between ED's Gouldsby and the pirate Gouldsby, and now the antique gold coins...plus the buoy thing...there's something going on here."

"I agree," he said. "I'll be over after lunch. Let's pay a visit."

"To the museum or art gallery?"

"The art gallery."

"I'll look for you."

That afternoon, Broberg pulled in with Nicky. I met them in the driveway.

"We did some research on Edward Gouldsby," she said. "He's not an employee of Earth Diocese. He's being bankrolled by a foreign entity called Bakur International."

Broberg folded his arms. "In other words, Gouldsby works for Bonetrager." He let that settle in. "Lenihan's been hounding Bakur International's trail since our diamond bust up in the Allagash. I don't know if Bonetrager kills...but he smuggles."

"Let's go," I said. "He's seen enough of your Corvette. We'll take the pickup."

Nicky stayed at the house with Madeline.

A half hour later we pulled up to Bonetrager's gallery. There were cars in the parking lot.

We walked in. Bonetrager was with customers. He looked at us. "Excuse me gentlemen," he asked. "Are you buyers or sellers?"

"Neither," I said.

Bonetrager looked at his customers. "I...will be with you shortly."

Broberg nodded. We moseyed around, looking at his art and sculptures. I saw nothing I'd hang in my house, if I had a house.

When we got to the rear of his shop, Bonetrager approached us. He seemed nervous. Broberg immediately flicked his badge.

"And to what do I owe this momentous occasion?" Bonetrager said, snidely.

"Don't get wise," Broberg said as he put his wallet away. "We have some questions for you."

"Questions? About what? West African sculptures?"

"How about the killings on Block Island Sound?"

He smacked the pockets of his jacket. Pulling out a pack of cigarettes, he lit one.

"Yes...another shooting on Father's Day." He took a long drag and blew out, his fingers shaking. "Tragic, isn't it."

I moved closer to him. "You look a little beat. Had a hard night?"

"And who are you?" he asked. "You've nothing on me. Show me your credentials."

As I removed my badge, he turned to Broberg. Then he looked back into his shop. "I'm busy with customers." He scowled at Broberg. "Why are you breaking my balls?"

He studied my badge. "I've seen you somewhere."

"On TV," Broberg said. "I understand you might know something."

He looked me up and down. "I remember now. It was at the garden party."

"Want to lawyer-up?" Broberg said.

"I don't need an attorney." He laughed. "I have nothing to hide."

"We don't want to waste your time," I said as the doorbell chimed, signaling that a few customers had left.

"You're costing me business," he said, half-smiling at a customer. "So what are you?" he whispered. "The lead investigator?"

Broberg stared at him. "What are your plans for the Fourth?"

"The Fourth?" he replied. "Fireworks and Scotch, of course."

"Mind if I ask where?"

He looked around his gallery. "We will be closed so...I'll be in Sag Harbor. Maybe on the water. Why?"

"Where?"

"Oh, probably the yacht club."

"Not the museum?" I asked.

He took a quick toke on his cigarette. "Which museum?"

"The whaling museum. Is there another in town?"

"Is it open on holidays?"

"I don't know...you tell me. You have a key."

"Excuse me," he said as he cleared his throat. He walked toward his customers.

I turned to Broberg. "We have nothing on this guy."

"I hate to back down. Let's track him."

I listened to Bonetrager's rap, trying to sell a couple a tribal mask. He spoke about purchasing primal energy, cultural authenticity and investment value. "His rap—it's a crock," Broberg said. "Stay here, keep him occupied. I'm betting the older Volvo is his. I'm going to 'geep' it."

"GPS?"

Broberg quietly left and closed the door.

Minutes later he returned and whispered, "He's got a sweet bumper for hanging things..."

I glanced at Bonetrager. "This guy's amazing," I said, after listening to Bonetrager sell art. "He could get elected president."

Broberg laughed. "That's not saying much these days."

Ten minutes later, the couple bought an African idol. They paid fifteen hundred dollars, all on credit.

Bonetrager consummated the purchase. Once the couple left, he said, "Look, coppers...I'm golden." He stared at both of us. "So...exactly...what do you want from me?"

"Tell me about Bakur International."

He looked confused. "What is that supposed to be?"

"Oh...amongst many talents, try an international smuggling ring."

He became obstinate, waving his arms and carrying on. "This art...everything in my gallery has been legally tendered and shipped. I sell with pride and humbly appreciate the opportunity to own such a fine gallery." He stopped. "Now...can I sell you something?"

We thanked him for his time and left.

"Where did you get the transmitter?" I said.

"Property of Suffolk County. Compliments of Nicky Escalante."

On the way back to Springs, Broberg checked his messages.

"Wow," he said. "Leah at the Cork & Bib called Nicky. Dutch didn't make it home last night from Gardiners."

It always happens at night, I thought.

Broberg continued. "They found his boat washed up on shore at a place called Cedar Point. No sign of a struggle."

We drove in silence.

"He was flashing that big gold coin around the bar," I said. "But why would someone wait and hit him days later?"

Broberg chuckled. “When he’d be sober and probably not carrying it.”

“Doesn’t make sense.”

“If Gouldsby discovered the coins,” he said, “what was Dutch doing with one in the first place?”

“Who knows?” I recalled what Madeline said. “If Bonetrager conjures spirits to find out where they’ve hidden things—” I hesitated to expound. “Let’s say Bonetrager found out where to dig...from a ghost, if that’s even possible.”

“Bonetrager tips off Gouldsby?”

“Uh huh.”

“A ghost told them where to dig to find the remainder of Kidd’s treasure?” He cracked his knuckles. “How will I ever explain this to Lenihan?”

## CHAPTER 51

### Land Lesson

We arrived at Tora’s with no place to park. The driveway was loaded with cars.

“Guess she’s throwing a big one,” Broberg said as we walked into the house.

“Those coins,” Ray Constellioni said, rising from his chair to greet us. “I’d sure like to get my hands on a few. Any more where they came from?”

Of course Ray was kidding. But he was right.

“So...what do we have?” I asked, noticing that Ike West, the town’s consulting attorney was also present.

Ray lifted his phone, his hand shaking with excitement, “This here’s a 4 Escudos piece. See the gold Jerusalem Cross?”

“A gold doubloon,” Tora said, looking over Ray’s shoulder at the photo.

“Close,” Ray said. “Half a doubloon. One of the largest minted by the Spanish.”

“Why’s it so crude-looking?” I asked.

“The Spaniards didn’t care how they came out. They just wanted them stamped, counted and shipped back to Spain. This one came from first mint in Western Hemisphere—in Mexico.”

“Solid gold?”

“Naw, but 92% pure.”

“How much?”

“Value?”

I nodded.

“Depends. If it’s proven to be part of Kidd’s stash, tens of thousands depending on condition. Worse case, no less than the value of gold.”

After more discussion on Captain Kidd, pirate treasure and Gardiners Island, Ike approached me.

“So...what brings you back?” I said, shaking his hand. “Out for the holiday?”

“I wish. How’s the investigation going?”

At that time, I felt we knew as much as anyone regarding the spree that had gripped the Hamptons, which wasn’t much. I remained guarded. “Well...we’re ‘Johnny-come-latelies’ to the circus,” I said. “Short of saying we absolutely know nothing, we’re slowly digging up pieces to the puzzle. How about you? Heard anything in town?”

He made an agonizing face. “Not really. Someone’s been slashing the town attorney’s tires, pimping her house, menacing phone calls...she’s going crazy. She called me in to help for awhile.” He grasped my arm. “Don’t tell anyone I told you that. Hasn’t been in the news.”

“She have any idea who it is?”

He looked around and then leaned in close. “She thinks it’s someone in town,” he whispered. “Something big is about to go down and she’s adverse to it, but...” He arched his eyebrows and held his forehead wrinkled. “That’s all I can say. At his point I don’t know a whole lot. After the Fourth—”

“You mentioned the investigation.”

He adjusted his eyeglasses.

“When I mention the name Helios Bonetrager, what comes to mind?”

He smiled. “A charlatan. Ah...art hustler, real estate manipulator, why?”

Broberg moved in next to Ike. Our eyes met.

“We just visited Mr. Bonetrager,” I said. “Did you know he has an office at the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum?”

He shrugged. “Yeah...he’s a weird guy. Heard something about that. Can’t confirm.”

“No need,” I said as a chopper flew overhead, shaking the house. “Like I mentioned, we just came from his gallery.”

Nicky whispered something in Broberg's ear. He pointed upwards. "Passenger side... underneath." She nodded.

That comment caught Ike's ear. He seemed intrigued. "Let me see if I have this right," he said, turning away from Nicky and Broberg. He searched the ceiling presumably buying time to find the right words. "Say... Bonetrager suggests a land project. Could be any piece of ground worth locking up."

"Like?"

"Like land destined for homes... a commercial project or maybe... alternative uses for farmland."

"You're moving too fast," I said, stopping him. "I didn't know Bonetrager was involved beyond the gallery."

"He is."

"He suggests developing land he really wants to preserve?"

"You're getting it, but here's the catch. He works behind the scenes locating parcels that for any number of reasons—lack of water, traffic issues, protecting species, historical reasons... are worthy of preservation." He paused. "Follow?"

"Sure, but it doesn't make sense."

"Follow me. Once he gets his ducks lined up he feeds the project to his buddy, Hamptons Breakwater—the banker. He takes the project to the city, or the county... whoever, as a candidate for a set-aside. Breakwater's the big happy guy the public sees and trusts."

"A set-aside to be shielded from development?"

Ike's head bobbed. "Sure... that works. But it's really a set-up. If the governmental agency likes his idea they mess with things like zoning."

"They just can't mess w—"

"Hold on," Ike said, cutting me off. "Or the long-range plan. There's a plethora of options when it comes to locking up land." He stopped.

"Go on."

"Okay... so we, the attorneys... we get called in... and they lean on us. Through knowledge of the law, loopholes, or however, we find out how the developer's request can be nullified."

"So you eliminate any possibility for developing that parcel of land."

"Correct. No development."

I pondered that scenario to the point of being totally confused. "Can't that cut two ways? Can't you also find ways to promote a project?"

"Don't be silly..." He laughed. "That's not the way the game's played out here. Okay... so now the land is tied up. Virtually worthless. Right?" He stopped for emphasis. "Next... the land

goes down in value, gets purchased and it goes to some foundation, a trust, or maybe to the government.”

“Condemnation?”

“Possibly...but let’s say a knight in white armor shows up with the solution for developing that piece of land. For instance...*water*. A reliable source of water would save the Hamptons. And...he’d probably get the right to develop the land through some sort of—political maneuvering—if you follow.”

“All too well,” I said.

“So,” Madeline said. “Just so I get this right...if Bonetrager can provide suitable water, then the land can be developed and gains value.”

“Bingo,” Ike said. “Value for Bonetrager!”

Tora moved in. “By then the papers are signed and the title’s been transferred.”

“Right. It gets much more complicated than this with sewers, hearings and such, but in this case, the new land owner can walk into a bonanza.”

“And he gets to develop.”

“Or sell development rights.”

“To anyone?”

Ike held up his finger. “And...the new owner can sweeten the pot by offering to build something that benefits the public.”

“That works well for everybody, doesn’t it?” Madeline said.

Ike shook his head. “It can...but it’s really a diversion. The real value, at least out here, is in the zoning and permit process. If government’s on board, it’s smooth sailing to the bank.”

“The bank being Breakwater.”

“And so it goes,” he said. “Round and round. But get this. Earth Diocese has already submitted to alter the original Gardiners Island agreement. They want more developable acreage. If we agree to let them go from developing five to ten percent of Gardiners Island, they gain what...another hundred and fifty acres of exclusive real estate...mostly with views of the water...at let’s say two to five million dollars per acre.” He paused. “You do the math.”

“This is all very interesting,” I said, “but we’re not questioning Bonetrager’s real estate prowess. We’re trying to solve these crimes. Anything shady about him?”

“I’m not really sure. He likes to illegally serve alcohol in his gallery, and you know he’s a consultant to Earth Diocese.”

“He might be more than a consultant.” I stared at Ike. “Could Bonetrager bankroll someone working on Gardiners Island?”

“Under Earth Diocese’s nose? Highly unlikely. Where’d that come from?”

I glanced at Nicky. “Ah... something I heard at the Cork & Bib.”

Ike shook his head. "He's a seasonal scammer. But he has his connections."

"Got it," Broberg said. "We thought he was more than an art aficionado."

"How long will you be working with the town?" Tora said.

"My contract starts after the Fourth of July." Ike reached for his beer. "Hope it doesn't last. I've got something lined up on Wall Street. Besides, my wife hates it here. We're city folks."

"We'll miss you."

"In all honesty," he said, "the only thing we'll miss is the feeling we get when we leave." He held his finger across his throat. "Calendar Man, the choppers, the police presence...we've had it to here."

## CHAPTER 52

### Ballistics

The next morning Broberg rang.

"Nicky's had county people monitoring Bonetrager's Volvo," he said. "Nothing he's done seems out of the ordinary. A lot of Wainscott to Sag Harbor runs with his car always parked for the night at the docks. He's also been renting a small apartment. He's never there."

I pondered Bonetrager. At least I had him separated from Madeline. "Look, I suggest we leave him to his ghosts. Just—"

"—Cain, I've got the ballistic results on the slug from the fisherman's boat."

"Father's Day?"

"Ditto...you won't believe what they're telling us." He paused.

"I'm listening."

"Class characteristics point to a British Enfield rifle."

"An Enfield? It's a relic. They positive?"

He hesitated. "I'm not sure. I have a call into our forensics department."

“Enfields were .30 caliber.”

“Tested out as a .303 176-grain bullet. Distance fired is estimated at 165 feet.”

“Can you get that ammunition?”

“That’s another point,” he said. “Maybe, but it’s a tough find. It’s been in use since 1888.”

“So...where’d he get it?”

“176 grainers? They’re postulating overseas. Afghanistan, India, Canada...someplace that was under British rule.”

I wondered about jurisdictions. “The shooting happened in New York State waters. Has the bullet been passed on to the county?”

“It has,” he said. “I’m reading from their report. The county concurs with the bureau. Guess our guys knew this stuff a week ago.”

The whole thing was coming sharper into focus.

He continued. “The county laboratory told Nicky they thought the shooter could be Canadian.”

“Canadian?”

“They said nobody except the Canadian Rangers uses Enfield rifles and even they’re replacing them with modern weapons.”

“We’re talking antiques.”

“Antiques?” He laughed. “The report says the British have been using them since the late 1800’s, so...yeah.”

“What am I missing?”

“For using Enfields? They’re accurate and durable...perfect for sniping.”

For a moment I pondered the implications. “Well...we know we can’t trace this baby to a gun shop.”

“No,” he said. “We need the barrel. Find that and we’ll find the killer.”

“Great. Still doesn’t jibe with the .45 caliber bullet used everywhere else. Anything else?”

“Let’s see...the bullet entered on an upward angle. So...the shooter’s boat was lower to the water.”

“Small boat,” I said as Ray took a seat next to me.

“Yeah.”

“Has this been leaked to the press?”

“Won’t be. Too sensitive. Too important.”

I glanced at Ray and returned to my phone. “Can I get a copy?”

“I’ll drop mine off today.”

I hung up, kicked my feet onto an adjoining chair and placed my phone on the deck.

“So...what’s the story?” Ray said nursing a cup of coffee.

“You over that coin?” I said.

Ray swore and shook his head.

“How are things going in Africa?” I asked.

“Oh...it’s quieted down considerably thought the locals are still restless.”

“Without Ragnar?”

“We’re getting by. A replacement’s due in the next few weeks. We’re all sharing duties.”

We relaxed, drinking coffee. Ray fed me wads of historical information on Spanish treasure. The guy was coin-crazy. Time passed. I was fixated on the ballistic report.

“Broberg called,” I said, now reclined, my face in the sun. “Keep this under your hat but they’ve linked one of the shootings to an Enfield rifle.”

He broke out a cigar and lit it. “Whoa... a World War vintage Enfield rifle, huh?” He took a long drag. “An old warhorse yet...we’re still using them in the Congo.”

I sat up. “I know poachers use them.”

“Yup, ordinary three-oh-three rounds to be exact.”

He turned and squinted toward Orient Point. Blinded by the glare, he glanced to the right, sweeping across Gardiners Island. His face wrinkled, straining, his eyes wary. He knocked some ashes into the salt grass. “Someone out there’s using these waters as a shooting gallery.”

I looked around. Not seeing Tora I asked, “Wasn’t Ragnar shot with an Enfield?”

He nodded. “Yes sir...that’s what the report says. Got em’ everywhere...all over Africa.”

“Why’d you have such old rifles at the Congo mine?”

“Dependability, parts, accuracy. Easy and cheap to get. Ammunition, if it wasn’t too corroded, was always available. Ragnar loved them.”

“You know,” I said. “I’ve never seen his death report. Can I see it?”

He craned his neck towards the house and nodded sideways. “Tora’s got a copy.”

Not knowing what to say, I didn’t respond. I thought about it. “Might be a little sensitive, don’t you think?”

He took a toke on his cigar and shrugged. “She’s a funny woman. She’s getting over it.”

“If not, can you get me a copy?”

“No problem,” he said. “In fact...I may be able to pull it up here on her computer.”

Madeline joined us. At her insistence we left Ray, walked down to the public beach and headed for the water. After drying off, we laid in the sun. A few hours later, Broberg showed up.

“How’d you get in?” Madeline said.

“Easy. The security arm was up.”

“Bring the report?” I said.

He laid on his beach towel. “I went to the house. Ray said you were down here so I left it with him. Didn’t want to leave it in the car.”

We all swam out to the raft and climbed onto it.

“Damndest thing,” Broberg said, kicking at the water. “Obsolete explosives and now an antique rifle. What’s the deal?”

We were stymied. Nothing made sense. We left for Tora’s place.

In the living room Ray approached me. Pale, he was holding some papers. “I gotta...we have to talk,” he said.

We sat at the kitchen table. “Tora’s not here,” he said. “But I pulled Ragnar’s death report. He took it out of a manila folder and placed it on the table. “Here it is. I’ll let her know I gave it to you.”

I perused it. It was quite short, and sad. “Thanks.”

“There’s more. I need Broberg for this.”

I looked through the glass sliding doors and saw him out on the deck. “Let’s go out and join him.”

Ray and I pulled up chairs on the deck.

“Ray has something he wants to discuss with us,” I said to Broberg.

Broberg slipped off his sunglasses, sipped a lemonade and faced Ray.

“Okay...maybe I shouldn’t have done this but I read at the county ballistic report,” Ray said, wiping his forehead with a paper towel. Beaded with sweat he continued. “For comparison, I wanted to see it side-by-side with known Enfield Ballistic reports.”

He stopped, stared at us, pulled more papers from the folder and waved them in the air. “I printed copies of the ballistic records run on Enfields used at Southern Cross’s Congo mine. Some had scopes, some didn’t. These are all .303—and they’re missing.”

Ray leaned over and showed us the county report. “Let’s start here. Look at this—”

After getting my first look at the county ballistic report, I passed it to Broberg.

Meanwhile, Ray studied ballistic reports from the mine. His hands shaking, he passed one to Broberg and one to me. “You tell me,” he said, folding his arms.

We looked them over. Broberg compared them to the county report. Ray handed each of us another report. After a while, I traded my copies for Broberg’s. Ray handed me a fifth copy. I checked it over. The reports were numbered. I handed it to Broberg.

“You say these are all missing from the mine?”

“That’s correct,” Ray said. “Stolen.”

Broberg got up and laid the five reports plus the county report, side by side, on his lounge chair. We examined them.

“Now,” Ray said. “Which one matches the county ballistic curve?”

Broberg quickly dismissed three of the reports. That left two Southern Cross reports worth scrutinizing. He removed another one.

Silence.

“You gotta be kidding me,” Broberg said lifting the remaining Southern Cross report while comparing it to the county report. He picked them up, placed one on top of the other and held them against the sky. “Let’s see...scales look identical,” he said, trying to place them perfectly to each other. “Both .303—barrel print—flight paths are close,” he paused.

We took turns peering through both sheets of paper.

“Wow...inside of the barrel, the lands and grooves, number three’s identical to the county report.”

I checked the overlay. Then the specifications. I was dumbfounded. “So...what do we know about Enfield number three?” I said.

“Look closer. What’s unique about number three?”

Broberg and I panned the charts. “We give up,” Broberg said.

“See the ‘LH’. “It’s left-handed.” Ray started to tear up. “And...that rifle, number three...it matches the ballistics of the bullet lodged in the tree behind where Ragnar was shot. The bullet that killed him.”

“How can that be?”

“We’d run ballistics on all our weapons to prove to local authorities that our guns weren’t being used in raiding native villages.”

“So...you had the data already.”

Ray shook his head. “This year we’ve lost .303 and .308 Enfields. Unless I’m missing something, this evidence is incontrovertible. One of our guns, the one that killed Ragnar, is in these waters—”

I collected the charts and handed them back to Ray, except one. The match. “Mind if I keep this? The registration number may come in handy.”

He nodded.

I folded the report. “If this is the gun, how did it leave Africa?”

Ray placed the other reports back into the folder. “I don’t know.”

“Did employees use specific guns?”

He processed my question. “No...I don’t think so. I can run a series of photos, get information on the people we’ve fired this year. Filter out those that may have confiscated our rifles.”

“How many?”

“Maybe...a dozen. I’d have to check.”

“Photos? That would be awesome,” Broberg said. “This has to remain confidential.”

## CHAPTER 53

### Unraveling

That evening, Ray went online and accessed Southern Cross's database. He produced profiles of everyone that's been fired from the Congo mine in the past year. In all, there were sixteen. He filled his folder with their papers expecting to discuss everything at Tora's. I suggested we leave for somewhere more private. He and Broberg agreed.

We got in my pickup and drove a few miles to a secluded beach call Accabonac. Gathering around the hood, Broberg and I watched as Ray pulled profiles from his folder. As he handed them to us, he told us the country they were from and their name. One by one, we studied the histories of the most likely candidates. The westerners. Of interest were their backgrounds, expertise and reason for being let go. At number eleven he read, "*Edward Gouldsby*."

"Whoa!" I said. "Say that again—"

"Edward Gouldsby."

"The last name...spell it."

"G-O-U-L-D-S-B-Y"

"Gouldsby," I said. "Like the pirate. Edward...even the first name's the same."

"Gouldsby!" Broberg shouted, grabbing at the profile. "What a coincidence...that's our man on Gardiners."

"Yeah," I said. "But maybe not."

Ray laid Gouldsby's picture flat down on the hood. "He was the strange one."

We clamored over it.

"Almost looks like an artist's rendition," Broberg said.

"It's the only photo of him I could find. I'm surprised HR didn't have more." Ray put on his glasses. "That's odd...I don't think Southern Cross took a picture of him. Or they were removed from his file." He glanced at me. "That happens sometimes."

"Where do you think it was taken?"

"Beats me." Ray groaned. "School. Driver's license. Prior job—"

Beyond his jet black widow's peak and coiffured hair, Gouldsby was nothing to look at, but it was his image that struck me. His deep set eyes, strong brow and blocky jaw reminded me of the bandits I'd seen shot dead and lining the streets of old western towns. His wide striped suspenders helped solidify my feelings. Yet—he looked familiar.

"Could be North African, Turkish...even Apache," Broberg said. "You don't need that much hair to get by."

"What about being English?" I said. "Too bad we don't have a picture of the *pirate Gouldsby*." I picked the photo up and stared at it. "You know...I've seen this guy somewhere."

“At the Cork & Bib?” Broberg suggested.

I shook my head. It was somewhere else. Possibly New York City or Montana.

“Ray,” Broberg said. “You mentioned the word ‘strange’? How?”

“He was.” Ray said. He began to read the report. “Human Resources wrote this. *‘Gouldsby has been the strangest employee. The mine superintendent claims Gouldsby was nocturnal. He’d rarely been seen sleeping, preferring night work. It’s reported he can disappear on command, though we believe this more superstition than fact. One field report states: ‘At times he appears to walk through walls’. Most workers attribute this to speed, others to illusion. This trait has made Gouldsby successful in the mine though nobody really understands him, or his ways. He’s been labeled a magician. He is unsympathetic when dealing with thieves and insurgents. His skills include handling explosives, weaponry, geology and maintaining security. Of note, he has never used our plane tickets for arrival or for leaving the mine. The reason for his firing is suspicion of stealing diamonds. He is not recommended for rehire.’*”

As Ray read, I’d checked the rest for a pictures searching for Dutch. He wasn’t in the stack.

“If I recall correctly,” Ray said. “Gouldsby was an expert pyrotechnist. Ragnar used to brag that Gouldsby was trained in incendiaries, detonators, improvised explosives, water detonation, and timers...the whole bag.”

“Wouldn’t you have to be to work in an underground mine?”

“I’m smelling Coecles Harbor,” Broberg said, reading Gouldsby’s statement of release. “Says Gouldsby’s uncle ran a granite quarry up in Vermont. That’s where he learned powder monkeying. Says nothing about being a diver.”

“Ragnar was suspect in part because of Gouldsby’s sadistic ways. Ragnar felt he suffered from a series of unchecked behavioral issues.”

“What did you think?” I said.

“I ah...had to concur with him. Gouldsby was ruthless. A brutal man.”

“Could he be described as piratic?”

“Like being a pirate?”

I nodded.

He chuckled. “Terrorizing the Spanish Main? Had it been his time, most definitely.”

“Didn’t Ragnar like that?”

“He certainly did, however, like owning a vicious dog, Ragnar wondered when the mongrel might turn—” He paused and lifted Gouldsby’s picture off the hood. “If this link leads to Gouldsby...Ragnar’s fears will have been substantiated.”

“But get this,” Broberg said, still buried in Gouldsby’s statement of release, “in all the time he worked at the mine, Southern Cross never booked a flight, in or out for him.” He paused and looked at us. “It says when he was fired, he vanished...*‘like he became one with the jungle’.*”

“Or the bay—”

“What about women?” I asked. “What was his weakness?”

“From what I gather,” Ray said. “He was always a loner. Didn’t even entertain village prostitutes.”

“What about latent work benefits? Has he claimed anything?”

“We’ve heard nothing regarding his vacation time, squaring away his retirement funds...not even about health insurance.”

“So let me get this straight,” Broberg said. “Did Ragnar like anything else about this guy?”

“For one, Gouldsby was a great shot. He also worked well in the jungle...caves...damp environments. From what I heard, he knew about things before they happened, like he was psychic or something. It’s also rumored that he’d show up deep in the mine at odd times, even when our transportation systems were down. Like he was some sort of superman...know what I mean?”

“Goes back to his penchant for coming and going at will.”

“Yeah...I think so, too.”

We reviewed the rest of Ray’s profiles. Nothing else rang a bell. Ray agreed to run Broberg and me a few more copies of Gouldsby’s photo.

Meanwhile Broberg stepped away and dialed his phone.

“Come and get him,” I heard him say.

Broberg listened.

“Yeah Bonetrager,” he said. “I think we’ve exhausted our options with him, but—” He paused. “I need a warrant to search Gardiners Island.”

He looked at me, pointed at his phone and mouthed the word, ‘Lenihan’.

“On what grounds of informed speculation—”

Quiet. He rolled his eyes.

“I don’t have more than that,” he said. “We may have a match to the Enfield rifle that’s popped up on everyone’s ballistic charts.”

He listened.

“From where? Africa. Stolen from Southern Cross. They’d run ballistics on it.”

He peered at some clambers raking the bottom of the harbor.

“They run ballistics on all their rifles. Security.”

He nodded and moved his hand quickly, as though trying to push Lenihan through the conversation.

“Affirmative. I can’t say for sure boss...it sure looks like a close match to the Father’s Day shooting—”

More listening.

“I have no idea how it got here...I know. Earth Diocese’s big. Don’t worry...we’ll be right.”

He stood, frustration written across his forehead. “Trust me...by the way. You heard anything about Peter’s note?”

Silence.

His eyes widened. “Thought so.” Broberg punched something into his phone. “I’ll get to the bottom of it. Ciao.”

He faked like he was going to heave his phone into the harbor. Red-faced, he dropped it into his pocket. “Guys...Lenihan said Peters is in the office now. I have his address. Mind if we take a short detour to Montauk?”

Off we went. It was about time. The mystery note thing had gone on too long.

Using his GPS, Broberg directed us to a non-descript trailer set on the backside of a commercial lot.

Broberg looked at me. “How about you come in with me. I might need a witness.”

I agreed. We left Ray and walked in.

Nobody was at the front desk. We strolled the hall looking for Peters. At the end of the modular, we found him sitting in his office messing around on a computer. He changed screens, punched a key and swiveled around in his chair.

“Hey buddy,” Broberg said as he closed the door. “You should be out looking for Calendar Man.”

Peters smirked. “Okay Broberg...what do you want?”

“Look pal, I don’t have much time. We’re dialing in on the suspect. I need the note you found in the bottle.”

He closed a drawer to his desk. “I’m exercising my right of non-disclosure. Internal to my office use only, besides you’re not involved in this.”

Broberg strolled around his office, hands behind his back checking papers on the wall. “Peters,” he said, honing in on a nautical map heavily marked with notes and intersecting lines. “Nobody else knows about your note. So...you putting me on?” He stared at Peters. “Making me your play thing?”

Peters flicked him off. “I told you to see Lenihan. He has access to a copy.”

Broberg looked at me. “Just got off the phone with him. Lenihan’s in the dark. Says you’re toying with me. Why doesn’t anyone in the bureau know about it?”

Peters smirked, locked his desk and went for his jacket.

“Not so fast,” Broberg said, blocking him in behind his desk. Peters tried to shoulder Broberg out of the way. Broberg pushed him back into his chair. Peters rose and grabbed Broberg by the collar. Broberg knocked Peters’ hands away and grabbed him by the throat. He

began to squeeze. "You've made me look like a chump." He squeezed harder. Then he threw Peters into his chair. "The note!"

In a mad rush, Peters got up again but Broberg shoved him hard into the chair causing it to tip over backwards sending Peters head over heels on to the floor.

He got up in a huff. "I'd been better off telling you nothing...or lying," Peters shouted.

Getting up, he stormed to his coat, pulled out a set of keys and returned to his desk.

Opening a lower locked drawer, he took out an envelope and pulled something from it.

"Here," he said handing it to Broberg.

I watched Broberg's eyes, his mind racing like a high-speed cash register. He read out loud:

*"For want of oil, ivory, and bone  
the dead will come to take you home.  
He who knows the scared ways,  
redeems the whales of ancient days."*

Broberg looked at me and smiled.

"Happy?" Peters taunted. "A childish rhyme. Meaningless. Now you can live with it!"

"I'll be the judge of that."

Peters hurried to the same drawer and pulled out a file. He searched it. He removed a clipped pile of sheets, folded back a few and handed it to Broberg. "Have your orgasm over this."

Broberg studied a few sheets. "Your photos?"

Peters nodded.

"How is that only you know about this?"

Peters pulled a rectangular brown bottle with a green label from the drawer. "When they hoisted the pot and emptied it on the deck everyone went for the human remains. I grabbed this."

"Why?"

Peters fondled the bottle. "I thought someone might confirm the brand. That would help us with identification."

"Smart. What about the note?"

Peters shook his head. "I didn't know about it until I brought the bottle here and washed it out."

"So...it's true. Only you know about it."

"Me...and now...you guys."

Broberg smiled. "Keep the original. I need a copy."

Peters motioned toward the copier.

Broberg walked over and turned it on. While waiting for it to warm up, he read more of the file. "I'll take a few copies, if you don't mind."

"Take what you want," Peters said. "After all...we're family...aren't we?"

Broberg looked back at him and smirked. "Holiday dinner...grandma's pie. Sure." He copied five pages and handed the stack back to Peters.

Peters massaged his neck and returned the file to his desk. "So...what do you think? Just some enviro-wacko poetry?"

Broberg left for the door. "It's not the words that matter. It's the source."

He slammed Peter's door shut. Halfway to the reception desk he stopped, turned around and walked back. He opened Peter's door. "Hey man," he said. "Sorry about what just happened. Sometimes I get excited. You do good work."

He saluted Peters and quietly closed his door.

As soon as we left the office Broberg leaped in the air. "Can you believe it?"

"That's the old whaler's poem etched in the back of the Cork & Bib. It's another piece to the puzzle."

"Righty-o! Which means our man's been there."

We got in the pickup and left for Springs.

Broberg called Nicky. "Say, you gotta round up Leah. Can we meet at Sag?"

He waited.

"Sure...I'll kick in a few bucks. How about an hour?"

Broberg made a tense face.

"Don't worry about it baby...you're beautiful. You'll look fine."

He looked at me and jabbed his fist.

"Because we need a list of every Earth Diocese employee that's been to the Cork & Bib."

Silence.

Broberg smiled. "Why? Because I have a copy of the Norm Peters note. You'll never guess what it says."

More silence.

Broberg read the poem. He cracked up and waited.

"Lightning in a bottle."

## CHAPTER 54

### Focused

We dropped Ray off and headed for the Cork & Bib. Nicky and Leah were sitting at a remote booth reserved for the workers. Nicky looked a bit rough.

“Hey honey,” Broberg said, kissing Nicky and sliding into the booth. He faced Leah. “Off today?”

She nodded, her face blushed red.

“Well,” Nicky said, patting Leah’s hand. “We won’t keep you long.”

“No, we won’t,” he said. “Any news on Dutch?”

Leah tightened her lips and stared blankly at the table.

“Nothing?” Nicky said trying to coax a response. She looked at Broberg and shook her head.

Broberg nodded and looked to the bar. “I could use a beer.”

“We asked not to be bothered. If you need a drink, you know where to get one.”

Leah turned to Broberg. “I know they’ve done him in...I just know it.”

“They?”

“Earth Diocese.”

Broberg glanced at me. “Why?”

“It’s just them. They’re sick. The whole movement on that island’s corrupt. It’s the pirate’s curse.”

“You don’t think fishermen or lobstermen are involved?”

She sat still. Shook her head slightly.

Nicky pushed a paper across the table. “Here’s the list. Not too may ED people.”

We clustered over the names. Broberg pointed at a name. *Edward Gouldsby*.

“You don’t much care for Gouldsby do you?”

“Hate em’.”

“How did Dutch get the gold coin?”

Mentally, she bucked the question. “I don’t know exactly.” She paused. “That creep Gouldsby found them and more. Dutch said he gave him the coin. He said Gouldsby would share the treasure with him.”

“More?”

“More coins and silver bars—yeah.”

“How can that be?” Nicky said. “Kidd’s’ treasure was recovered centuries ago.”

She scowled at Nicky. “I don’t know about that. All I know is...Dutch’s missing and there ain’t no gold coins.”

“How many coins and bars?”

She shrugged. “Don’t know.”

“Did Dutch say where they were found?”

She sighed. “He said Gouldsby pulled a rock back and dug. Then he hit it.”

“Did he say how big the rock was?”

“He figured four strong men could have moved it.”

I thought of Libby’s letter. According to it, five buccaneers with a wooden beam left Kidd’s boat with treasure. That could explain it.

“Leah,” Nicky said to the waitress. “We want to let you go home, but before we do we’d like to share something extremely confidential with you.” Nicky scanned the area. “You cannot leak this out.” She held her eyes firmly on Leah. “Understood?”

Leah nodded.

Broberg removed the note from his pocket and left the table. “Gotta be sure.”

I followed him to the back of the building. At the plaque he unfolded the note. He read the poem on the plaque and on the note out loud, line-for-line. When he finished he breathed hard and gazed up at the ceiling.

“The killer stood where we’re standing now,” I said. “We need to be where he’s standing at this moment.”

“That’ll require a warrant.”

We walked back to the booth.

“It’s verbatim,” Broberg said. “Leah, when was the last time you saw Gouldsby here?”

“Oh...a long time ago. Before he got creeped-out, he was a regular.” Her eyes darting back and forth, she seemed to enter a deep reflection. “He seemed fond of that poem. I remember seeing him standing in the back feeling the raised letters with his fingers. It intrigued him.”

“Anything good about the guy?”

“He was good looking. An environmental activist to the core. Played some guitar. Athletic. We had our...little fling. A few nights.” Her countenance dropped. “Once...I swore...I saw him walk through a wall.” She giggled. “Must have been the wine we were drinking. He swore he used the door. I don’t think he ever returned to Sag Harbor. Kinda broke my heart—”

“Walk through a wall?”

“At my place. The outside wall. Funny thing was...the door was locked.”

“You didn’t think that odd?”

“At the time...no. He was a strong lover. Satisfying. Besides...I was bombed.” Her eyes narrowed. “Maybe I should have. Once an old timer was in here pumping beer at the bar. Gouldsby walked in. The old timer turned and stared at him. ‘Don’t you ever age?’ he said. At the time, I didn’t think much of it.”

“Do you now?”

She looked out the window “I just need my man.”

“Okay,” Nicky said as she slid off the bench seat. “Why don’t you head home and get some rest. Keep me informed if you hear anything on Dutch. We’ll do the same.”

Leah hugged her and left.

“Tell me baby,” Broberg said. “Why didn’t Gouldsby leave riddles everywhere?”

“First, I think we’re dealing with a psychotic. A random thinker. And second...it takes talent to write riddles. We are dealing with a killer...not a composer.” She looked at Broberg’s hand. “Let me see it.”

Broberg handed her the note.

“For the want of—” She continued reading under her breath. “This thing about the dead coming back to take you home. How do you take that? Literally?”

“That we’re dealing with a spook taking a lobsterman home by killing him?” I said.

Her eyebrows arched. “Are today’s lobstermen considered the same as yesterday’s whalers?” She paused. “Home being the afterlife? It’s a bit heavy, don’t you think?”

“Everything about this place is heavy,” I said. “Why not? Ray and Leah both allude to Gouldsby being able to walk through walls. I hate to admit this but if we’re dealing with a ghost, he can’t be caught.”

She read the note. “What about knowing the sacred ways? What are the sacred ways?”

We sat dumbfounded.

“Worshipping the sea,” Broberg said. “Has to be...the creatures living in it.”

Nicky handed me the note.

I read the poem again. “How do you interpret the word redeem?”

“To atone for...repay.”

“It could mean atoning for yesterday’s whaling as well as today’s lobstering and fishing.”

“Look,” she said. “I’m getting the feeling this Gouldsby guy’s riding ED—this nature-loving NGO—like a horse, not caring if the animal gets shot out from under him as long as he reaches his goals, his destiny, his purpose. He doesn’t care. He can afford to be loose because in his mind, he’s playing with ‘house money.’” She became stern. “Remember guys...he’s not an ED employee. Some offshore entity named Bakur Traders is paying Gouldsby.”

“Lenihan’s looking into that.”

“Why didn’t this occur to us earlier?” she said. “Gardiners Island’s geographically located in the middle of everything. And Earth Diocese...this crime wave began soon after they took control of the island. In hindsight, it should have been impossible to ignore.”

Broberg slapped the table. “You’re both taking this ghost thing to extremes.” He made a face. “We need a search warrant. Who should get it? The county or us?”

Without waiting for Nicky's response, Broberg pulled out his phone and called Lenihan. In hushed tones he asked for an island-wide warrant. From the beginning of the conversation, things sounded awkward.

A few minutes later, Broberg slammed his phone down.

"Lenihan wants to keep Peters in the loop." With distaste he looked away, like he couldn't believe it. "Screw that. Ericson can take us to Gardiners without a warrant."

Nicky brought her hands to her ears. "I'm not hearing any of this?"

"I heard you mention Earth Diocese. What does he think?"

"He either ignored or ridiculed what I said to the extent I wasn't heard at all." He nodded at Nicky. "You've got the line on subpoena power. This is your county. What do you suggest?"

"What we should have done from the outset," she said. "Let me get it. I can line up the order and a county boat."

"No county boats," Broberg said. "No signed warrants. I don't want Peters knowing about this. This is ours. Gotta move quick."

"Who then?"

"As much as I hate being on the water...Ericson."

"Okay. I'll go for a warrant for all structures on Gardiners."

"Can you do that?"

She turned quickly toward me. "We have no idea where to look for weapons and explosives. You bet I can."

"The Cork & Bib!" Broberg said. "Imagine if this whole thing's linked to Sag Harbor."

"If Gouldsby's smart," I said. "He won't be near the Enfield."

"If he's dumb he'll be armed to take us on."

On the way out, I called Ericson. He agreed to take us to Gardiners in the morning. He mentioned he bailed Sonny out of jail. Said Sonny had gotten into it with a few Connecticut lobstermen.

That night, after downing a stiff drink on the deck, I peered at Orient Point Lighthouse. Then it dawned on me. I remembered where I'd seen Gouldsby. I went inside, took his picture out and studied it. Yes. It was at the airport in Tanzania. I was in a wheelchair on my way back to the states. Gouldsby checked his luggage and asked about Ragnar. How ironic. The man that shot Ragnar was standing beside me. Then he exited the terminal and vanished. I looked for him but he never boarded or left the plane.

## CHAPTER 55

### Boat Ride

Ericson knocked on Tora's backdoor door. "I got my running lights fixed," he said as he walked in. "The repairman...he couldn't figure it out. Said the lights were never removed."

"Boats aren't sold like that. They had to have been moved. The lenses?"

"Original. Said he had a hard time getting them off."

I regrouped, thinking of any and all possibilities, but it was more of the same stuff. Another component compounding the weirdness that had engulfed us. "How could they have been reversed?"

Broberg entered the room. He looked around and then opened his beach bag. "Check it out."

Ericson and I looked in. He was packing his .50 caliber Smith and Wesson, the engraved one that Ragnar gave him as a gift. He also had a body camera.

"I've got twenty rounds," he said. He laughed. "What do you say we poke a few holes in Buoy 13?"

"Nice camera. More Suffolk County gear?"

"Yeah...figured I'd strap it on. Might need the video to keep my job."

We had breakfast. An hour later, Nicky showed up. She made herself a cup of coffee and slapped a yellow envelope on the kitchen table. "All I could get was a warrant for the mansion."

"Not the whole island?" Broberg said.

"He grilled me. I couldn't come up with enough evidentiary value."

"That's crazy. Should have had Lenihan handle it. Gotta call him anyway."

She pasted him with an 'are you kidding me?' look.

"How long we got?"

"Three days?"

"Three days! That's all?"

"Think they cowered to ED?" I said.

"More like cowering to powerful people out here," Nicky replied.

Broberg threw down the remains of his bagel, sipped his coffee and thought. "Well...we just made it an island-wide warrant. When we get there we're searching everything."

"Look Dick!" she said, shaking her head in disgust. "This warrant's on me. Break policy in your own gym, not mine."

Broberg reached across the table and rubbed her arm. He smiled. "That's why I love you, baby."

I turned to Ericson. "Tell us about the island."

He leaned on the table and gazed out over the bay. “Used to be called the ‘Isle of Wight’. The airstrip is on the southern end of the island. I’d prefer to dock in the pond just below it.”

“How far is the mansion from the dock?”

“Don’t know. I think the shops are behind the windmill, downslope from the mansion.”

“How old is the mansion?” Nicky said.

He appeared unsure. “I think it was rebuilt after the former one burnt down in 1947, but I could be wrong.”

“So the ghosts have been burned out.”

Ericson ignored her. “Now...the windmill has three floors. I don’t know if it has any windows or openings.”

“If he gets in there with that Enfield,” I said, “short of burning the whole thing down, we’ll have to starve him out.”

Broberg chuckled. “Unless he...of course...walks through the wall and escapes.”

“What about the lookout tower?”

“Yeah...the one overlooking Block Island Sound?”

“We’d have a better shot at nailing him there.”

“If he’s there. The problem’s going to be locating him. We don’t know if he’s even going to be on the island.”

After more talk and planning—really all speculation, we left for Hog Creek marina. Loading Ericson’s boat, Broberg complained all the way.

“I hate going on boats,” he said. “After what you and Ericson went through, there’s no way I’m going out on that bay.”

He stood like a scared child on the boat ramp.

“C’mon,” Nicky said, pulling him by the hand. He resisted. “You can’t back out.”

I looked at him. “If you want to shoot that cannon, you’d better come.”

Packed tightly in an orange life vest, he shook with fear. I’d never seen Broberg so messed up. He could swim but he was deathly afraid of being on a boat. Should make for an interesting cruise, I thought.

I walked him off the pier to the canopy next to Ericson. Nicky sat on the transom, applying sunscreen.

My mind swam with doubt. The witch, the fog, Ericson and I seemingly falling through a crack in time and space, hurling through a ghost ship and the seagull attack. I had a bad feeling about everything. Was Gouldsby connected to these occurrences? Was something trying to get between Gouldsby and me? I considered the old man. Then Vindikis. The bright hand that brought me to the surface when the witch tried to drown me. It was all coming together — or was it? Did I have angelic protection? Surrounded by people that wouldn’t have a clue on angels

and demons, except maybe Tora or Libby, I was on my own. Fearing the worst, for the first time in my life, I prayed. Not to Vindikis, but to God. I prayed for our safety.

The weather was fair, the seas relatively calm. Broberg seemed under control. We passed between Buoy 13 and Lionhead Rock. Being there, between those two iconic features brought me into the moment.

“There’s something about that buoy,” I said to Ericson as I watched translucent waves of water crash, curl and foam against it. “What would cause a boat to linger there night after night? Is the fishing good?”

“Not really.” He paused, steering the boat. “Might pick up some bottom fish. Nothing big.” Broberg got brave and moved up next to Ericson.

“So...you like this cops and robbers stuff, huh?” Ericson said to him.

“Love it.” The boat came down hard on a wave. “If someday...I have kids, I’d like to hand them down something beyond my badge.”

“What do you mean?” I laughed.

“Every day I sell my mind and body. Something else, something tangible...you can’t sell a corpse.”

When I turned to see how Nicky was doing, I noticed a raven following the boat. Then it flew over us, taking the lead as though instinctively knowing where Ericson was taking us.

“What’s with the bird?” Ericson said. “I’m used to gulls, not crows.”

He slowed as we approached Gardiners Island. The bay was getting shallower.

“Never been here before,” he said, watching the depth gauge. “Why don’t you head to the bow? Look out for rocks.”

Maneuvering my way to the bow, the white windmill loomed large. I could see a cedar-shake building to its right.

We entered a channel marked on both sides with ‘No Trespassing’ signs.

Broberg threw up all over his side of the boat. As Nicky went to his aid, I grabbed a bail bucket, filled it with seawater and began washing the vomit off and into the drain.

Broberg looked terrible, his face stained with puke.

“He’ll be useless,” Ericson said. “There are some towels below.”

“No I won’t,” Broberg countered immediately, wiping his mouth with his bare arm. He stuck the arm over the side and rinsed it off. “I’ll be okay.”

Nicky gave him a bottle of water from her bag. He took a few swigs, washed his mouth a few times and spit it out over the side.

## CHAPTER 56

### Warranted

July 3rd.

We arrived at the Gardiners Island dock. A few boats were already in port including an East Hampton police patrol boat. Ericson waved at the officer and pulled in.

“Know him?” I said.

He put the boat in neutral, grabbed the dock and pulled us broadside. “Seen him before,” he said. “I’ll stay with the boat.”

Under the watchful eye of the officer we tied up.

As we were about to leave the boat, a woman with a clipboard approached. “Hey guys, you with the town due diligence team?”

“Due what?” I said.

She frowned and cocked her head. “Guys...this is a private island. Do you have a pass?”

Nicky showed her the warrant. “Is Uerrman available?”

The woman tapped her pen on the clipboard and turned toward the police boat. “Franz isn’t here.”

“Who’s in charge?”

“For Earth Diocese—” Broberg added.

The woman hesitated. “Sarah really...but she might be conducting a tour.”

“Who is Sarah?”

“The Director.”

“How about head of security.”

The woman’s eyes darting back and forth. She looked confused. “Look. Until Franz Uerrman flies in, I suggest—”

“Can it,” Broberg said. He walked past her. We followed.

“You can’t just—”

“Excuse me,” the officer in the boat yelled at the same time. “What’s your purpose?”

Nicky walked to the pier and showed him the search warrant. “I’m with the Suffolk County DA’s office.”

He nodded, though there was no way he could read it from that distance. “Nothing I can do,” he said to the woman with the clipboard.

We passed a green Earth Diocese pickup and a number of golf carts. The woman with the clipboard continued to speak with the officer.

“Why not take one of these?” I said looking the golf carts over.

“Sure,” Nicky said. “Might as well have some fun.”

With Broberg and Nicky in the lead, I followed. We drove down the main road having no idea where we were going. We gained elevation, passed a grassy airfield and a few stonewalls. Soon the lawns of the mansion came into view.

Behind us, a vehicle hummed. The woman had left the officer and was following us in the Earth Diocese pickup. I turned and waved. She didn’t respond.

Rounding a bend, I saw five people meeting in front of the mansion. Oddly enough, I recognized two of them. One was Ike West. The other—had to be Gouldsby.

We pulled up in the golf cart and got out. A woman separated from the group to meet us. Her smile was stiff, forced, like a politician’s.

The woman in the pickup parked behind us and got out. Ike, now recognizing us, waved. It was the first feeling of friendliness I felt on the island.

Nicky took the lead. She walked up to meet the woman and held out her hand. “Looking for Sarah,” she said.

“Well, you’ve found her.” Sarah, still smiling, nodded at the group she had just left. “Are you with the town’s due diligence team?”

“No ma’am, we’re not. Name is Nicky Escalante. I’m with the Suffolk County DA’s office. We’re here on other business.”

“And what would that be?” Sarah said. She didn’t wait for Nicky to reply. Instead, she looked past Nicky toward the woman that stopped us at the dock. “What’s the meaning of this?”

No more smiles.

As the ED women chatted, I studied Gouldsby. Given Ray’s photos and Leah’s descriptions, he was easy to recognize. Though he appeared different from when I saw him in the Dar es Salaam airport, the hair was the same. So was the face. His baggy green and brown clothing flying in the wind, with his wide black belt and folded-down beaten boots, he looked like he’d walked off a three-masted privateer. Appearing unarmed, he looked concerned.

Nicky unfolded the search warrant. “So...what’s the town doing here?” she said to Sarah. “I heard the words due diligence.”

Neither Nicky nor Broberg seemed to notice Gouldsby. At least they didn’t mention anything. I figured they were playing stupid. Then I saw Broberg casually lift his phone and point it toward Gouldsby. I was right.

Sarah broke into another smile. “The town moderator is here with his team to check our water supplies.”

“Getting low?”

Sarah took the warrant papers. “No...the hydrologist...water wells,” she said quietly. She read and turned a page. “Where the drillers have been.” Her smile disappeared. “Has someone here committed a crime?”

“Don’t know. We’re here to check. Where’s the head of security?”

“Edward?” Sarah said, turning to Gouldsby. “I don’t understand.” Quickly she re-read the warrant. “We have an Edward here—but he’s not the Edward you’re looking for.” Quickly she offered the papers back to Nicky. “You have the wrong individual.”

“No ma’am,” Nicky said, not accepting the papers. “You do.”

“I don’t understand—”

“We have reason to believe that Edward Gouldsby may possess a weapon of interest. So, can you please sign the warrant?”

Unsure, Sarah’s bravado diminished. Meanwhile, I watched Gouldsby. He’d left the town people. Like a cat, he crouched to remain inconspicuous while gradually making his way, almost floating, toward the mansion. No one else seemed to notice.

“I don’t know anything about this. Besides, I don’t know whe—”

Broberg interrupted Sarah. “Can you simply direct us to his office?” He lifted his phone and took more pictures. Perhaps video.

Sarah became indignant. She shoved the warrant papers at Nicky. “You’ll need to see Franz Uerrman. Only he is authorized to sign something like this.”

“His office?” Nicky asked.

“Franz’s?”

“Gouldsby’s.”

Sarah stalled. “He doesn’t have one.” She paused. “Said he didn’t need it.”

Nicky got into Sarah’s face. “If we find mud on Gouldsby, do you want to be held as an accomplice?”

Sarah pointed to an old building.

Left with the unsigned warrant, Nicky and Broberg made for the building.

“You’ll be hearing from our attorneys,” Sarah said.

Distracted by Nicky and Sarah’s exchange, I looked for Gouldsby. He had disappeared. Within seconds, Ericson called. “I’ve got Robin Hood walking along the pier in pirate shoes. I never saw him coming...what’s your man look like?”

“Six-foot. Long dark hair, brown and green leather clothes.”

“Yup...he’s making for the dark gray runabout.”

“Can’t be. No way he got there that quick.”

“He’s in the boat.”

Through the phone I heard a boat motor start. I wondered whether I should ask Ericson to stop him. I decided not to.

“Is there a tunnel from the mansion to the dock?” I asked Sarah.

Sarah casually motioned to the town due diligence team that she’d be a moment longer. “Used to be,” she said, flippantly. “I’m told it was from the basement to the bay, long bricked in, but it never went to the dock. That’s quite a distance.”

“Let’s go,” I said to Broberg. “Our man’s at the dock.”

“The dock? Can’t be—”

“Have the town policeman detain him,” Nicky said.

“No don’t!” Broberg said as we jumped into a golf cart. “Nicky...start looking around. We’ll be back.”

“I’ll need backup.”

“Stay near the town people,” he said righting himself as we careened down the gravel road. “Let the town nab this animal? No way...he’s ours’.”

At the dock I saw a boat flying across Gardiners Bay, away from us. “That Gouldsby?” I said.

Ericson began untying the boat. “If that’s who you want...it’s him.”

We got in and he jammed it in reverse.

Broberg leaned over the rail and got the policeman’s attention. “Take the time to check that Earth Diocese’s cruiser. You might find something that’ll impress your boss.”

“I haven’t a warrant,” he yelled back.

“We do.”

The officer laughed and gave a thumbs up. He climbed off the town boat and headed for the cruiser.

Ericson laid it down. Racing over shallow harbor, the bow rose as the engine hummed, kicking a sharp fountain of green and white water off the back. “He’s heading in the direction we came from...toward Buoy 13.” He looked around. “Where’s Nicky?”

“Checking the mansion,” Broberg said as he pulled the .50 caliber Smith and Wesson from his bag. For the first time, he loaded it.

Gouldsby had become a white dot below the horizon. “Is this all you can do?”

Ericson moaned something and floored the throttle. The engine roared, moving us faster as we pursued the devil himself.

## CHAPTER 57

### Liquid Mirage

The raven returned, soaring behind us. I nudged Ericson. He looked at the bird. Broberg brought his Smith and Wesson up and pointed at it. Wherever Broberg aimed, the raven dodged as though recognizing what a handgun was.

“Smart bird.”

In our pursuit of Gouldsby, mist began rising from the bay. It was similar to the fog we encountered the night we traveled back from the Ruins—when our time and location went haywire.

It became denser. Sloppy and wet. Again Mother Nature or something was tinkering with the rules. On a deeper level, I felt we were being interfered with. Something beyond our control was slowing us down.

Ericson remained silent as we negotiated a sea that was growing more turbulent. Smashing white capped and choppy waves, the bow dropped into troughs and then rose, thrusting upward and slamming again into the next mound of water. “Where’d this come from?” he said. “It wasn’t predicted.”

With one eye on his instruments and the other on the windshield, he worked the wheel. Visibility worsening, he cut our speed in half. He wasn’t content. He slowed down further, reducing speed in increments. “There are sandbars out here.”

We collided with a large wave. The boat twisted and reeled, sliding forward into the swells. One time the propeller sounded like it broke the surface of the water. Another hard hit. Then another. The waves kept coming. We hung to anything solid. Broberg almost went over the side.

Ericson began swearing left and right, holding tight to the wheel, telling us how seaworthy his boat was. His instruments still working, he held course. Then—of all things—a raven emerged out of the fog and landed on the bow rail. I couldn’t tell if it was the same one.

He slowed the engine to a crawl. “Get rid of that thing,” he moaned.

Broberg, wrapped in his orange life preserver, stepped toward the bird. Holding onto the captain’s chair he said, “What’s that?”

We stared at the raven.

Broberg tapped me. “Guys—”

I glanced at him. A dull light hung above the cabin, over my head. It seemed to float in the mist, moving up and down and in and out of sight. Crystalline and pretty, it drifted forward toward the windshield. Lured by it, I moved around the cabin trying to understand it. I wanted it.

“A diamond?” Broberg said as I reached for it.

Close enough to snatch it, as I reached, something dark appeared in my peripheral vision ahead of the boat. Shrouded behind wispy curtains of mist, I couldn't make it out. The mist parted and my heart dropped. I was looking straight into the jaws of a suspended, but monstrous anglerfish. Its mouth was wide open with rows of needle-like teeth as long as my forearm. Then it lunged. I jerked my hand back, brought my arm over my head and ducked. Cowering hard against the cabin, I waited. But it never reached me. In dreaded fear, I dared to open my eyes. Suddenly I was crouching behind someone, or something, its arms stretched upright.

I looked through the cabin glass at Ericson. He was staring ahead, steering, calm, and totally unaware of what just happened. Broberg was watching the depth gauge, as though he'd never seen the dangling light.

I rose, sliding up the moist fiberglass side of the cabin. Erect, I saw a silver wolf's head looming high above me on the end of a cane. I'd seen it before.

The being must have stood at least seven feet tall. Straining, I grabbed the railing and righted myself.

The being gazed down at me. His wrinkled face and gray beard were familiar. Then he looked forward. It was the same man that sat next to me on the park bench in East Hampton—Vindikis, the angel.

I managed to peek around him. Slathered to the bow, the anglerfish had morphed...changed its molecular structure into a black form, its body waving in the wind like a tattered flag. Then I saw its face. Bold and toothy, it still resembled that of an anglerfish. Eyes ablaze, it glared at the old man.

A disgusting stench surrounded us. In slime it crawled across the bow like a slug, waves pounding, salt water spray drenching us.

Its appearance continued to transform before us, becoming like a black mermaid with twin spiraling tusks, each like those on a narwhal.

"Instruments are still working," I heard Ericson say. "You hear me Cain?"

"What's that awful smell," Broberg said. "Can't be a pig-waste cesspool...we're in the middle of the bay—"

Trying to recall Bible verses I'd recently read, I prayed. Beyond blurting the word 'help', I hadn't a clue what to say, only requesting that something from Heaven would protect me.

The mermaid hissed and spat at the old man. He held the cane firmly and pointed it at the creature. The mermaid hissed again and growled, swinging her tusks at the wolf's head.

"Why do you hunt the pirate Edward Gouldsby?" the mermaid said, her tone masculine and deep.

Again I looked at Ericson. By his expression, he didn't seem to hear a bit of it or see any of her. Instead he worked the throttle and stared at the windshield, his eyes seeing through her into the mist. I bowed, praying for the right words.

A strong feeling overcame me. A rush of confidence and strength in knowing that my prayers had been answered. I felt an urge to speak.

"He's wanted by the law," I yelled, gutless to face her.

She howled. "Whose law?" She moved closer. "You shall not have him for he cannot be had. He's ours...but you! You...can join him." She cackled and laughed, pure evil spewing from her blackened lips.

I checked Ericson and Broberg. They were oblivious.

She slinked forward, the claws on her fins spread for ripping, ignoring the old man. "Yes...Edward Gouldsby wants you...and so—do—we!"

At that moment, I was staring at a purple and gold tunic. The old man had changed. The silver wolf on his staff came to life, snarling and growling, snapping at the mermaid.

The mermaid, enraged, reared back on her tail and threatened with her tusks.

"Return to the bowels whence you came," the old man charged, shaking the cane.

The mermaid advanced.

"Demon!" the old man shouted. "Retreat!"

The mermaid slinked forward, its tail acting as a pod.

The wolf's head had gone beyond wild, like a rabid dog growling and biting and thrusting at the mermaid.

The mermaid spat profanities and snarled back at the wolf. Bold and unafraid, she closed in. I could see her mouth—a disgusting cavity, dark red with rows of yellow teeth small and sharp.

The old man thrust his cane at the mermaid, the wolf's head surging, trying to strike.

The mermaid screamed and slinked back over the bow. For an instant, nothing. Then a raven flew up in front of the boat. The old man vanished.

"Cain, you're dozing off!" Ericson yelled. "Wake up! He's anchored at Lionhead Rock."

I opened my eyes. The mist had cleared. "Did you guys see anything strange?"

Ericson watched his gauges. "Like what? Damn raven keeps flying around."

I nodded at Broberg. He made a face and shook his head in agreement.

"But you mentioned the hanging light...the one that looked like a diamond."

"A diamond?" Broberg said. "What are you talking about?"

I backed off. I was alone again. Only I experienced what happened. Or did it happen? I was beginning to seriously question my mental state.

We motored toward Lionhead Rock.

“Okay, get ready,” Ericson said as he maneuvered his boat close to Gouldsby’s runabout. “There’s a lot of rock below the surface...you see him?”

“No,” Broberg said as he pulled his gun and went to the bow. “What’s that bluish smoke above his boat?”

Knowing I had to snap out of it, I followed, my eyes peeled for a raven. I saw the smoke. “Probably exhaust. Must have stalled out.”

“Ready—” Ericson said. “I’ll nudge close. Someone grab the runabout and pull us together.”

Seeing Buoy 13 off to our right, I went to the other side of the boat. Gouldsby’s runabout was anchored next to Lionhead Rock. Ericson brought us to it. We tied off both boats. Ericson broke out his binoculars and began scanning the bay.

It didn’t take long to realize Gouldsby wasn’t swimming, at least not on the surface.

“He’s gotta be in the water somewhere,” Broberg said.

“Don’t see anyone in the water.”

“Might be underwater holding his breath.”

We waited ten...fifteen minutes longer. Nothing. Meanwhile I’d climbed aboard the runabout. I found nothing of interest.

“Let’s check the buoy,” Ericson said. “He could be in the water hiding behind it.”

We untied and Ericson brought us to Buoy 13. Gouldsby wasn’t there.

Wondering how deep the buoy was, I followed its lines as far down as I could. Ericson announced we were going to return to the runabout. At that moment, I noticed something shiny underwater alongside the buoy. It appeared to be about a foot below the surface.

“Hold on,” I said. Quickly I reached down alongside the buoy and felt. If there was anything, it was deeper than I thought. In water up to my shoulder, I felt again. My fingers hit something hard. I placed both hands on it, grabbed and pulled. It came off the buoy with ease.

Bringing it to the surface, we gathered around it. It was a black plastic box approximately six inches square. An epoxy coated black disk was glued to one side. I laid it against the buoy and it stuck firmly. “A magnet,” I said as I pulled it off.

The box had a waterproof seal. Pulling on it, the lid snapped open. Inside was a second waterproof box. Twisting it open, there was a note inside a clear baggie. I opened the baggie and removed the note. I read it and passed it to Broberg.

“A communication box!” His eyes widened. “In one style of writing it says, ‘...*need concussion grenades delivered to buoy...*’ In another handwriting, someone wrote, ‘...*have you found more gold? No more hunting. No grenades. No longer beneficial*’.”

“What do we have here?” I said thinking aloud.

“Someone is asking for concussion grenades and someone else is saying no. Who?”

“Simple,” Ericson said. “One of them has to be Gouldsby.”

“The other?”

“Bakur Traders was paying Gouldsby,” I said. “Has to be Bonetrager. That would explain his black boat being here at all hours.”

“What about Gouldsby?”

“We were told he paddle-boarded and kayaked at all hours of the night. If they’re as dark as his runabout, who’d see him at three in the morning messing around this buoy?”

“Well,” Broberg said. “If that cop finds any explosives on ED’s boat, I’d say Gouldsby either didn’t get the message or he went rouge.”

## CHAPTER 58

### Impossible

I'd been watching Madeline. I could see her standing on Tora's deck above the beach. I called her. "Did you see anyone swimming from a gray runabout?"

"What are you guys doing out there?"

I didn't respond.

"The gray one? No," she said. "In fact, I didn't see anyone operating it. I heard it and watched it approach from Gardiners Island. It stopped short of the rock. I guess the boat ran out of gas... weird."

"Did Tora see the same thing?"

"She's in town."

I thought. "Did you see any fog on the bay this morning?"

"Who's that?" she said. "There's some kind of interference over the phone."

"What do you hear?"

"Speak louder or tell him to shut up."

"Tell who to shut up?"

"Whoever's mumbling in your phone. Sounds like an English accent—"

No one was mumbling. I was alone in the boat. "It's only me," I said. "What's he saying?"

Silence. "I don't see anyone with you but he's telling you to leave Lionhead Rock...to leave him alone."

"What are you talking about?"

I saw her drop her hand from her ear. She leaned on the rail with both hands. "Madeline, pick up the phone." I saw her bring her hand back to her ear. "I don't have a clue about what you're hearing."

She stood with her ear to the phone. "Forget it," she said. "It stopped." She paused. "You mentioned something about the weather?"

She had me all messed up. "Yeah. Was there fog on the bay this morning?"

"Not that I saw. It was clear and sunny."

I thanked her and hung up.

"Let's go back to the runabout. I'm wondering if the boat ran out of fuel," I said still wondering what she heard.

Ericson stashed the communication box below and brought us back. We tied off and I jumped back in. I inspected the gas level. It was more than half full.

"What'd Madeline say?" Broberg asked.

"Madeline? She saw nobody operating the boat or swimming from it."

He glanced at his watch. "We're at least ten minutes behind Gouldsby," Broberg mumbled as he punched his phone. He waited, still scouring the waters.

"Yeah...me. Put out an APB on this guy," he said, presumably to Nicky. "We're at Gouldsby's boat. He's nowhere to be found."

Silence.

"I guess he jumped off the boat while it was going and swam to shore. All of Springs is in immediate danger."

I wondered why he didn't mention how the runabout got anchored. It couldn't have happened by itself. That was our next mystery.

"Making any progress?" he asked.

He waited.

"No problem. We'll break it in when we get there."

More waiting.

"Creepy? If you feel that way, hang with the town due diligence people until we arrive. We'll find you." Broberg hung up. "Can we tow it?"

"Sure," Ericson said. "Where to?"

Broberg looked at me.

"I say back to Gardiners. Leave it with the town police officer."

Ericson gave the runabout the once-over. "Yeah...I'll need the anchor line. Let's pull it in."

I took hold of the galvanized anchor line and pulled. Hand over hand, slowly the line came up. Suddenly it became much heavier, as though it was tied to the bottom.

I pulled harder.

"Here," Ericson said. "Give us some line. We'll pull together."

I struggled to gain enough slack to hand to them. With me in the runabout and the two of them in Ericson's boat, we pulled in unison.

"How deep is it here?" I shouted.

"About sixteen feet."

We tugged. The runabout was leaning snug to Lionhead Rock, rubbing on it. Finally, I saw a dark brown chain covered in seaweed emerge. I pulled it into Gouldsby's boat. Somehow the anchor line was shackled to it.

"The hell!" Broberg shouted.

I reeled harder, pulling more of the old rusted chain into Gouldsby's boat. It was beyond corroded. With one hand I tried to work the shackle. No way. "I can't let go," I yelled, wondering what to do next. "Tie it off."

Ericson roped the anchor line off to a cleat on his boat.

I inspected the shackle. It was ancient. Gouldsby's galvanized anchor line had been linked to the old hand-hammered iron chain. Some of the links were nearly rusted through.

I toiled to remove the pin from the shackle. Impossible. "Got a hammer? The shackle's rusted close."

Saying that made me realize how crazy I sounded. That ten minutes prior, someone could have undone the pin sixteen feet below the surface, attached an anchor line and re-set the pin so it would rust closed—and then escape defied all levels of human understanding. It mocked physical laws and a few un-physical ones.

"Some trick...how'd Gouldsby manage to—?"

"Don't ask."

Ericson handed me a pipe wrench. Ready to pound the shackle pin free, I pulled the old chain and it snapped, reeling wildly over the side and back to the bottom.

Gouldsby's anchor line was still attached to the shackle and a much smaller section of rusted iron chain.

"I need the line," I said.

Ericson untied the anchor line from his boat. With enough slack to work it, I leaned over and placed the old shackle firm to the top of Lionhead Rock. Wrench in hand, I pounded it until it broke, freeing Gouldsby's anchor line.

I stared at the protruding ears famous for identifying Lionhead Rock. Then I looked up and saw Libby's house. In a split-second, I pondered Captain Kidd chaining Edward Gouldsby to the rock to drown. Could the old pirate still be alive, haunting Gardiners Bay?

Leaving the broken pieces on top of the rock, I turned and handed Ericson the end of the line.

"This is unreal, man," Ericson said taking it. "No way he swam to the bottom and anchored up—impossible."

Stunned, we sat in amazement, bobbing up and down. Broberg broke the silence. "I refuse to believe this is something...paranormal. Somehow it's all explainable."

He didn't sound convinced.

More drifting.

"We must have passed him," Broberg said. "He swam to shore."

I looked at him. "How'd he get from the mansion to the dock so quickly?" No answer. "And how'd this boat get anchored to that relic?" I paused. "By itself?"

Broberg waved me off. He appeared frustrated, strain tattooed across his face.

Ericson tied Gouldsby's chain to the back of his boat. At low RPM, we left for Gardiners Island.

## CHAPTER 59

### Evidence

Ericson was right. How could anyone pull off what we'd just experienced? Any mortal that is.

Once again we entered Gardiners harbor. Riding in Gouldsby's boat I started the engine. Broberg unhooked the line from Ericson's boat. I pulled it in and motored slowly to the town police boat. As I approached, the officer held up a duffle bag.

"How'd you know about this?" he said. "Got enough explosives in here to last a few Fourth's."

"Not my jurisdiction," I said, "but you'll be asked to impound this boat."

"You guys are good. Say...you think we've nabbed Calendar Man?"

*We?*

I brought the Gouldsby's boat broadside to the police boat, killed the engine and tied it up.

"You lose your boy?" the officer asked.

I waved toward the bay. "He's somewhere out there."

"In the water? The guy you chased? You didn't get him?"

By then Ericson and Broberg were docked and walking toward the golf carts.

I asked them to wait so I could check the explosives for magnets similar to the one attached to Buoy 13.

"Magnets won't work on a wooden boat," Broberg said.

"They will on an engine or prop."

The officer handed me the duffle and a pair of rubber gloves. I put the gloves on and inspected each plastic-wrapped parcel. "Three of them do," I shouted. "Same style magnets as the communication box fixed to the buoy."

I placed them back into the duffle and handed the bag to the officer. We rode the golf carts back to the mansion.

In short order, Nicky met us in front of Gouldsby's office. Nobody else was around.

"It's locked," she said.

"No problem," Broberg replied as he kicked in the door.

The room was decorated with drawings and paintings. Boats and oil rigs on fire, dead men lying on a beach, wrecked fishing vessels, renditions of wildlife from around the world and plenty of outdoor literature. The shelves were stocked with books on gunsmithing, sniping and explosives.

A long rusted antique sword hung on the wall above the workbench.

Next to the sword was a blackboard. On it was written the riddle from the Cork & Bib, the same one Norm Peters found on paper shoved into a bottle in the lobsterman's pot. On another wall was a black poster. It read, "*Kill Them All*" in red bloody lettering. Below it, someone with a black marker wrote on the wall, "*Unconditional Surrender of all Ocean Exploitation*".

We got the point.

Immediately Broberg began tearing up the place, spilling drawers of stuff onto a workbench and sorting through files.

As we searched, two guys walked through the open door. "Only Edward Gouldsby's allowed in here."

"Hey," one of his friends said, "this building's off limits."

Broberg turned to face them. "Really?"

"Absolutely...you can't do this."

"You with ED?"

They nodded.

Broberg walked over to them. "Who are you to give us guff? Face the wall, punk." They bucked. He got physical. Soon they were spread-eagled. He patted them down. One was packing a diver's knife, strapped to his inner leg.

Broberg rattled his cuffs. "Sit on the floor and don't move."

"What's your charge?"

"Probable cause."

One of them started swearing.

"Keep it up. You'll be feeling steel in the penalty box."

Nicky suggested the men sit and keep quiet. They complied.

Coming up short in that room, I grabbed the knob on a side door. Locked. One swift kick later it swung open.

A small room. No windows, just a fan vented to the outside. A series of workbenches lined the perimeter of the room. Propane tanks, welding equipment, buckets of water, numerous tools, scales, and metal pans were plentiful. Underneath one bench was an old wooden chest. It was locked.

"What do you think's going on in here?" Broberg said, tapping his fingers on one of the workbenches.

He checked a wall a cabinet.

"Bingo," he said flashing a handful of detonators.

There was a container. He opened it. "Well...look what I found. Gunpowder." In another cabinet there was everything needed to package and wire primitive explosives. Broberg carried the container of powder out to Nicky.

With a keener eye, I inspected the room closer. Something didn't feel right. "I don't know about the propane...our guy's supposedly a geologist."

Walking around the room I tripped hard into Broberg. Examining how it happened, I noticed that part of the wooden floor was sticking up. Pushing down to flatten the board, three planks moved in unison, as though they were free from the rest of the floor. On closer examination, they were. Cut into a rectangle, they formed a moveable panel.

I sorted some tools and came up with a chisel. Using it, I pried the boards up. After much effort, the panel broke free. I pulled it from the floor.

We looked into the hole and then at each other.

Hidden under the floorboards in a cardboard box sat a pile of gold bricks. Alongside them was a canvas bag. We struggled to lift it all out of the floor and onto a workbench. Broberg opened the bag. With all his might, he spilled it out. Gold and silver coins dropped into a pile.

He looked dizzy. "Treasure!"

"You okay?"

"Yeah..." He drove his fingers into the pile and paused. "How much you figure—?"

I lifted the bars and multiplied. "Couple of hundred pounds here, at least."

His eyes went to the ceiling, his mind heavy into math. He ran numbers out loud.

"Three...four million in metal value alone."

I peeked through the doorway at our friends. Nicky was standing halfway between them and us. The men, still seated, seemed as surprised as us.

"That's commodity value," I said, returning to Broberg. "The historical value would be off the charts."

"Historical value? If he melted Kidd's coins into bars, he's an idiot."

"Yeah...no wonder Kidd chained his ancestor...or him...to Lionhead Rock to drown."

Broberg paused. "I never heard you put it that way before. You really believe we're dealing with a ghost, don't you?"

"I've no idea what we're dealing with. Why would anyone melt pirate coins into bars?"

"Harder to trace?"

"Clever...still he's an idiot."

I turned on my phone, found the coin photos and compared them to the real thing. "Exactly like the one Dutch had." My eyes rested on the locked box. "This is sixteenth century treasure...maybe there's more."

I put the coin down and pulled the box out from under the workbench. I carried it to the lawn. "Get back," I said pulling my Sig from its holster. I reconsidered. "What can we use to cut the lock off?"

"I saw a grinder in the shop," Broberg said.

I carried the box back in and placed it on the main workbench. Broberg plugged the grinder in. "Watch your eyes," he said.

He positioned himself to cut.

Suddenly one of the hooks holding the sword broke free. The sword fell tip first embedding itself into the top of the wooden box, the handle and guard gyrating back and forth inches from Broberg's nose.

Staring at the sword, he slowly pulled back, gesturing for me to do the cut.

Wary of the sword, the handle and guard still rocking back and forth, I looked up. Confident that nothing else could drop on me, I ground off the lock.

I put the grinder down and yanked the sword free. It was old. The brass was tarnished and the blade pitted. Scarred and dented, a crown was stamped into the steel.

As I laid the sword on the bench behind the box, Broberg lifted the latch. The lid tipped back revealing something wrapped in a blanket. He pulled the blanket back. Sitting on it was a newer gun barrel complete with a silencer. He glanced at me and smiled. ".45 caliber," he said. He looked down the barrel. "Filthy."

He handed me the barrel and removed the blanket. Underneath was a long narrow chest covered with green felt. The words *Irish Brigade* along with serial numbers were stamped on the lid.

Lifting it out by a pair of leather handles, he laid it on the bench and opened it. Inside were a scope, tools, a sling and most importantly...a rifle. He stepped back. "Yours."

I gripped the rifle and pulled it out. It was a left-handed Enfield sniper rifle in .303 caliber. It too needed cleaning.

"Now the obvious question," I said. "Will the .45 caliber barrel fit on this rifle?"

"Let's find out."

In minutes we had the .45 caliber barrel mounted on the Enfield. It fit perfectly. "Must have been a custom job."

Another scope, along with boxes of .303 and .45 pistol ammunition, remained in the larger box.

"Pistol ammunition in a rifle?" I said.

He shrugged. "New to me."

The scope was night-vision equipped. It complimented the .45 caliber barrel. "This might explain the guy getting whacked at Ditch Plains."

"Also one of the lobstermen."

I checked my wallet for paper Ray gave me. The one with the serial number written on it. I unfolded it and searched for the gun's registration number. The numbers matched.

Overhead I heard a chopper buzzing the island.

Meanwhile, Broberg took pictures with his phone. “Gotta get somebody...the county or us here to lift prints. Check this place further.”

We packed up a few files, the gun box, treasure and powder, and loaded it all into the golf carts.

Nicky recorded identification information for the two guys we'd retained. We let them go.

Broberg's phone went off.

I noticed an older pickup sitting behind Gouldby's shop. I left the building to search it. The key was in the ignition.

In the glove box I came across a record book. Paging through it I saw the name '*Grand Ol' Gal,*' written in pencil. Something else written next to it had been erased. Below the name, almost illegibly, the word *scuttled* was written in big letters. No date.

On another page, somebody wrote, “Exploiters must pay.”

I gave the book to Nicky.

Broberg hung up. “That was Lenihan. Surprise...he's at Sag Harbor with his counterpart from the Long Island Bureau. He doesn't sound happy.”

“Is anyone happy in Sag Harbor?”

Broberg shrugged. “Guess Bonetrager's split town. He wants a briefing.”

“When?”

“Says he's in a hurry to get back to Manhattan. Wants to meet like...soon.”

I checked my watch. “How much time do we have?”

He thought. “Oh, maybe an hour or so...not much more.”

I checked my watch. “I don't think Tora would mind if he drove out to her place to meet us. Besides he can see it all from her deck.”

Broberg agreed.

I called Tora and put her in contact with Lenihan. She agreed to call him and relay directions. Then I called Ericson. He said he found a charcoal-gray paddleboard and a black kayak hidden in the salt grass near the dock.

“One plus one equals three,” I told him, and hung up.

“Let's take this pickup and tour the island,” I said. “I'm curious to find spent rifle casings.”

“You okay guarding everything?” Broberg asked Nicky.

She rolled her eyes. “You guys are doing all the good stuff.”

“True,” Broberg said, getting into the pickup. “But you'll get the credit.”

We took off, driving over dirt roads. Instinctively, I knew where Block Island Sound was. We drove easterly. Soon the sound stretched before us. Driving north, we passed a large pond. Beyond was the lookout tower. I parked there and got out.

The ground was littered with spent brass. Walking down a steep path to the beach, we found more. Mostly .45 caliber, a few .303s. Broberg picked one up. "My bet is he came here to either practice or take long-distance shots at boats. I'm sure he used the silencer just in case this here cliff behind us didn't block the sound."

"Good analysis. That's why I like you."

He snickered.

We explored the island and a few more buildings. Nothing else seemed out of the ordinary. We never encountered the town due diligence team.

It was getting late. Nicky called. She was eager to get back to her office. We rushed back and found her speaking with Sarah, the ED Director.

"We've contacted Franz Uerrman in Belgium," Nicky said to Sarah. She shook the warrant papers at her. "An Earth Diocese attorney here has already signed a duplicate set of these papers. Expect more investigators in the coming days."

We drove the golf carts to the dock. The town police boat had already left.

After loading our evidence and climbing into Ericson's boat, I turned to Nicky.

"You must have moved fast to get an ED attorney's ink on the warrant."

"Not really," she said putting on her lifejacket. "I bluffed. I think Sarah knows things. She's been put on notice."

## **CHAPTER 60**

### **More Lenihan**

Almost an hour later Ericson had us back at Hog Creek. On the way Broberg recognized Lenihan standing on Tora's deck. He waved. Lenihan waved back.

We loaded his boat onto his trailer. He had business in East Hampton so off he went.

Parked to the side of Tora's car was Lenihan's Chrysler.

Nicky had been in contact with the DA's office most of the day. As we compiled information, she relayed it to various offices in Suffolk County. Sensing a long night before the holiday, she took all the evidence and left, saying she'd return sometime the next day for the Fourth of July fireworks display. Broberg sent her off with tender words and a kiss.

We walked around Tora's house and approached Lenihan.

“Ah, Rippinger,” Lenihan said, rolling the ice cubes around in his Scotch. He raised his glass. “Broberg claims we have reason to celebrate.”

“We think so, sir,” I said.

“You have an uncanny way of being in the right place at the right time. Been in touch with your boss?”

“Michael Righetti?”

He sipped his drink. “I have. Good news travels fast. Anticipate a call from him.”

Lenihan faced Broberg. Then he scanned the bay. “Always wanted to see this place. You’ve been living like a prince.”

“That rock and buoy out there—” Broberg said.

“Tora’s already oriented me. Buoy 13 marks Lionhead Rock, Coecles, Gardiners Island...it’s all here.”

Broberg pointed at the buoy. “That’s where we found Gouldsby’s boat and the communication box.”

Broberg went on to tell Lenihan the whole story. I left for the house and found Madeline packing. She seemed cold. Distant.

“Guess all good things have to end, huh?” she said.

I knew her time was ending. I just didn’t know when.

“I think we’ve solved Calendar Man.”

She didn’t seem interested. I watched her fold clothes. “That’s good. Where?”

“Gardiners Island.”

She smiled. “I always suspected something sinister over there.”

“So...what’s your schedule?”

“I’ve got a train ticket for July fifth.”

“Where to?”

She placed more clothes into her bag. “Back to continue my research at Glacier National Park, eventually. I’m...” She hesitated. Appeared concerned. “I’m going to visit a friend first.”

I noticed the folded Long Island Railroad envelope on her desk.

I took her and held her. She was stiff. Not the same bubbly lover I’d wrapped my arms around before. We kissed but it felt hollow. Forced. I guess I expected it. I left for the deck.

Walking past the kitchen, I felt Tora’s presence. I turned. She was staring at me from the hallway. “You talk to her?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Guess I’ll see her in Montana.” I cracked the screen door and walked through it.

“I heard you guys cracked Calendar Man.”

I stopped and turned to her. “We cracked something. Still don’t have him...but I think the killing’s over.”

She opened the door and gave me the loving hug and kiss I missed in Madeline’s room—almost.

Nearing the deck, I heard Lenihan. “Naturally Peters is angry. He thinks you stole his gig. His boss has him going to Gardiners tomorrow to investigate further.”

“He told you about the note?” Broberg countered.

Lenihan finished his drink. “When you called and said you had a match with a Southern Cross rifle, one of our overseas offices went to work tracking the past year’s shipments from their Congo facility. Seems they occasionally ship in environmentally sanctioned steel containers. In this case back in February, the Enfield had to have been delivered in an Earth Diocese container box that traveled through Mali. It was never checked. So...we now suspect that some non-profits may be smuggling more than guns into the country.”

“Customs...Homeland let it slide because it was ED’s?”

“Hold on bro... The Conex was Danish. Who knows?”

Bro? I liked it.

Lenihan pulled a napkin from his pocket and wiped his forehead. He balled it up and stuffed it into his empty glass. “Now...Bonetrager,” he said. “We contacted the owners of the art gallery he worked at.”

“In Italy.”

“Yeah. They hadn’t a clue the gallery was shut down. Then we checked the museum. They said he’s left indefinitely. Nobody knows where. Said it was typical of him to come and go, especially at night. By the way, we can’t find anything—and I mean anything—on this guy Gouldsby. Never seen anything like it.”

“Find his boat?”

“At Sag we found something moored at Earth Diocese’s private slip. An old clamming boat painted black.”

Broberg pulled out his phone. “I’ve got pictures of it.”

It went over Lenihan’s head. “More moves without a signed warrant. Broberg...what am I going to do with you? Earth Diocese’s going to sue everyone from Nicky Escalante to the county to us.” He slipped his hands into his pockets and leaned against the deck rail. “I’ll need you back in the office after the holiday.”

“I figured that...but boss,” Broberg said, panning his shots. “You can’t beat the result. Here’s a picture of the black boat. Rippinger took it.”

Lenihan patted him on the back. “I know. Hopefully any disruption tomorrow has been averted.” He cranked his neck trying to see Broberg’s screen. “You said we could be dealing

with a wandering spirit—” He ended with a cocky smile. “Joking I hope. I want to see the guy that’s been terrorizing the east end. Show me Gouldsby’s photo.”

Broberg madly thumbed his phone. He stared at Buoy 13. “This is incredible. I knew I took pictures of Gouldsby. He’s not here.”

Lenihan glanced at me and made a goofy face.

“No really,” Broberg said. He moved next to me and shared the photos he took. Gouldsby should have been in them. He wasn’t. Broberg looked at me.

I pointed at one. “I remember you taking that shot. He should be right there.”

“Look boss,” Broberg said, glancing at me. “If this guy visits from the dead every three-hundred years...we’re good.”

Nobody laughed.

Lenihan furrowed his brow. “Ya gotta be kidding me—no photos? What about video?”

“I’ll check...I took some.” He fumbled for his body camera. “I know I did.”

I looked at both men. “Guys...you don’t get it.” Silence. “The Enfield, the Southern Cross connection. I believe Ragnar returned and took Gouldsby back to the other side.” They froze. “Besides...you can’t incarcerate a ghost.”

## CHAPTER 61

### Download

The following day was the Fourth of July. Nicky showed up late. Too late to see the fireworks. She looked ragged.

“Well boys,” she said with a yawn. “Traffic was awful...beyond that, we pulled an all-nighter. The town knows everything and we’ve alerted the other agencies. We may have connected most of the dots but we still don’t have Gouldsby.”

“How’d you couch that?” Broberg said.

She laughed. “Just that somehow he escaped. You know...the fog and all that.”

“But nobody else saw fog except us...what about the boat moored to an ancient chain sixteen feet down? You mention that?”

She laughed. “C’mon. I still don’t believe it. Only you guys know that. Have Ericson keep it to himself. They’ll think he’s a loon.”

“That it? No questions?”

“Sure. The story is, he anchored at Lionhead Rock and disappeared. For all we know, he may have gotten thrown from the boat and drowned.”

Broberg scowled. “I doubt it.”

She paused. “Of course they had questions and they’ll be more. We’re all still in the hunt. In fact right now we’ve got people on Gardiners Island searching with signed warrants.”

“Anyone get on you for us moving in without the owner’s signature?”

She sighed. “A little. Not much.”

“Anything else new?”

“We’ve entered a new phase—a manhunt. Our profile isn’t for a lobsterman or a fisherman. All agencies are on high alert. We’ll still have roadblocks, chopper sightings and law enforcement everywhere. Hopefully though...we’ve slowed or stopped this monster.”

We sat in silence. I knew it was all screwed up. Though we saw things and thought we knew things, we really didn’t know anything. Beyond the evidence, which was a lot, we couldn’t prove jack. We didn’t have *him*. Was that enough?

I was also glad three of us witnessed what we did. By myself it would have been too much to absorb, but enough to make me realize I’d probably gone crazy. Still I’d be crazier if I thought we could catch a ghost.

Broberg looked at me. “We’ve been on the deck all day...how’d the county boat get by us?”

“You didn’t see it?” she said. “It came in through the Shinnecock Canal.”

He shrugged. “I must have been in the head.”

“Anyway...the prints on everything...the gun, gold, explosives and those lifted by the town from Gouldsby’s runabout...they all match.”

“Can we say with one hundred percent surety we found Calendar Man?” I asked.

“Definitely...except for the two arson fires that occurred earlier in the year.” She paused. “The .45 links to the lobsterman and the surf fisherman shootings. The powder we confiscated is identical to that used at Coecles. According to the Navy, it originated at the Ruins. The Father’s Day shooting? The bullet was shot from the Enfield .303. The dismembered lobsterman was beaten, we figure. No evidence of a bullet entry.” She looked at me. “Norm Peters had the note that matched the whaler’s riddle.”

“Not much—”

“Sure, but it adds to the puzzle.”

“That puts five cases in the can,” I said.

“There’s more. The name written in Gouldsby’s book, ‘Grand Ol’ Lady’? Guess what?” She reached into her bag and pulled out a file. “Here’s a photo of the boat Grand ol’ Lady.” She passed it around. “We thought Gouldsby targeted the commercial charter boat when he detonated the explosion at Coecles Harbor. Wrong. Gouldsby was after whoever owned Grand Ol’ Lady. The owner of Grand Ol’ Lady said he had a confrontation with ‘some paddle-boarding hippie’ while fishing off Gardiners.”

“Gouldsby—”

“Had to be...the commercial boat just happened to be moored next to Grand Ol’ Lady.”

“Bad luck.”

“Back to the guns,” Broberg said. “Gouldsby must have done his own gunsmithing.”

She shook her head. “Don’t know.” She broke out another report and read it. “Say’s here he used under-powdered sub-sonic ammunition.”

“Pistol ammo...”

“That allowed him to shoot .45s accurately with minimal noise and muzzle flash.”

“Brilliant.”

“That may partially explain the night flashes appearing distant,” I said. “Suppressors reduce muzzle flash.”

“That’s what it says here.” She read more. “This guy isn’t a dummy. As for the .45...it’s sniper-accurate only to twenty-three yards. It dives after that.” She showed us the ballistic chart. “He must have gotten real close to the people he shot.”

“.45 ammo’s easier to get than .303. So...how’d he get passed ATF?”

“Don’t know...guys like him don’t care about ATF.”

“Earth Diocese should have.”

“C’mon,” she said. “If he jerry-rigged this thing himself he might not have needed to submit paperwork.” She stopped and looked through her reports. “Sarah did say that Earth Diocese referred to Gouldsby as *‘The Outsider’*.”

“He worked independently...that the point?”

She nodded. “At this time we think so. His motivation? By all indications Edward Gouldsby was against fishing and lobstering. He probably thought his acts were noble, a public service....”

“An activist envisioning himself in service to Mother Nature,” Broberg said. “Anything else?”

She sighed. “ED here’s involved in three factions, all on Gardiners Island. The first is pure and absolute preservation. Second is promoting eco-tourism with a commercial slant and lastly...eventually selling water to communities on either the south or north fork. We just learned about that communicating with the town.”

“Ah...hence the town’s due diligence mission.”

“Apparently the water’s there, but this mess will have to be cleaned up before anyone can do anything with it.”

She broke out a notebook.

“Regarding Bonetrager’s relationship with Gouldsby, according to an Earth Diocese spokeswoman, Bonetrager sold Gouldsby as a geologist, naturalist, and security expert. She called Gouldsby a “geo-logistician”. It’s believed Bonetrager and Gouldsby sought common objectives.”

“Like killing?”

She gave Broberg an odd look. “Can’t go there yet...stick with the facts.”

“I am.”

She continued, “As a likely operative for Bonetrager we feel Gouldsby’s sole reason for being on Gardiners was to help recover water that Bonetrager could sell to the Hamptons. All in exchange for increased development rights and the promise of generating significant revenue.”

“Earth Diocese must have known about it.”

“They did. How much we don’t know but...and this is where it gets complicated. One of our guys wonders if Bonetrager hurried hoping to obtain a water-use agreement with the town before Gouldsby could further disrupt the Hamptons.”

“Who’s your town source?” Tora asked.

“A consulting attorney and Lerner himself.”

She seemed impressed. “Ike?”

“Yeah...Ike West. Please keep that confidential.”

Broberg raised his hand. "The note we found at Buoy 13 obviously didn't admonish Gouldsby for what he was doing. It just told him to cease."

"We're evaluating that. We don't know if Gouldsby went off the deep end under Bonetrager's direction or if the killing spree had begun and Bonetrager was desperate to find a way out."

Madeline walked into the room.

"That's speculative though entirely possible," I said.

"Gouldsby had a softer side. Sarah said he was known for his intense and poetic paintings."

Broberg laughed. "Maybe that's how he met Bonetrager...selling them at his gallery."

Madeline stopped drinking her coffee and left.

"By the way," Nicky said to Broberg. "I couldn't find Gouldsby in any of your downloaded photos or video."

My phone rang. It was Ericson. I almost didn't answer. Then I did.

"What's up, man?"

"You won't believe this," he said. "Sonny just called. He checked his pots this morning. He found human remains inside one of them."

My heart stopped. "How old?"

"Fresh. Clothing too."

I thanked him and hung up.

"Rippinger," Nicky said.

At first I didn't hear her.

"You look pale. You okay?"

I got up. "Oh...just tired." I left the room and looked for Madeline. She wasn't in her room but her train ticket was. I opened the envelope. There were two tickets, both one-way. One from East Hampton to Penn Station and the other from Penn Station to Toronto, Canada.

*Toronto?*

Included were instructions for staying at a pre-paid Manhattan hotel during her layover at Penn Station. I slid everything back into the envelope and left it where I found it.

I walked outside looking for her. She was nowhere. Then from the deck I saw her on the beach. She was standing ankle-deep in the water, a glass of wine in her hand.

I walked down the stairs and onto the beach. I know she heard someone coming but she made no attempt to see who it was. "So...I guess I'll be seeing you in Montana," I said as I walked up behind her.

"Yeah...I'll be there, somewhere."

"Where?"

She brought the glass to her lips. "You know...either the university or at Glacier park."

I picked up a rock and skipped it across the water. “You enjoy yourself here?”

Expressionless, she gazed at the fading sunset. “Very much. I wouldn’t mind relocating here.”

I skipped another rock. “You know...since you met Bonetrager, that seemed to change things.” I glanced at her. She kicked sand and drank more wine.

I moved in closer and slid my hand across her waist. She was resistant, cold. I let go. Wanting things to be the way they were, I knew better. It was over. I left for the deck.

“Cain,” she said. I turned. I thought she was crying. “Just so you know...Tora will be bringing me to the train station in the morning.” With a weak smile that resembled a frown she shrugged and faced the bay.

“That’s okay,” I said. “She brought you here.”

## CHAPTER 62

### Welcome to Bay County

Broberg also left the next day. I’d see him again in Queens so it wasn’t a big deal.

I sat alone on the deck contemplating my future. At least we connected Ragnar’s death with Gouldsby. That solved, Tora and Ray were ecstatic. However I didn’t have the balls to mention Ericson’s phone call to anyone. If someone had stuffed one of Sonny’s lobster pots with body parts, so be it. They’d hear about it in due time.

On the downside, losing Madeline was inevitable. Some things are better left dead.

Tora returned from town with the paper.

“Well,” she said, handing it to me. “Everyone’s happy. The Fourth went off fabulously. They’ve even removed the checkpoint to Springs.” She took a seat. “Check out the first page.”

Plastered across the paper in bold letters it read, “*Hallelujah!*”

The headline read, ‘*Town Cracks Calendar Man*’.

The picture below it took up most of the page. It showed the head of police, Mitch Kragen, standing with Town Moderator Benny Lerner, in front of Gouldsby’s runabout. Kragen held the duffel bag confiscated from Earth Diocese’s boat. Huge smiles everywhere.

The short article began by saying; “...*The Town of East Hampton thwarted potential Fourth of July disturbances by intercepting the transfer of underwater explosives from a boat at Gardiners Island...*”

There was more but no mention of Earth Diocese or Gouldsby. Nothing about water supplies, Suffolk County or the FBI. I panned through it looking for word on body parts found in a lobster trap. Empty. I dropped the paper on the deck.

“Disgusting isn’t it,” she said. “The town took full credit. I didn’t see one of your guy’s names anywhere.”

“I’m fine with that,” I said. “Broberg and I were unofficial. We had no business getting involved.”

“But you did.”

“Eventually Nicky will get recognition.” I wondered about Ericson’s call. The body parts. “Want some coffee? I’m going in to get a cup.”

She declined.

On the way I dialed Ericson.

“Hey...you hear anything more about body parts in Sonny’s pots?” I said.

Silence.

“Forget what I told you. They found out it was part of a pig. Clothes were a joke. Somebody’s messing with Sonny’s mind.”

After a few laughs, I thanked Ericson and told him someday I’d be back.

Next I called Michael Righetti. He admonished me for being involved without a signed warrant.

“You’ve had your fun,” he went on to say. “Now honor your side of our agreement.”

“When and where do you want me?” I said.

“Seattle office, first of next month. Your next assignment will be at Olympic National Park.”

I was ready. We signed off.

A month later Broberg called.

He shared a ton of new information including the fact that they positively identified the handwriting on the note as Bonetrager’s and Gouldsby’s.

“Neither one of them has surfaced anywhere,” he said.

I thought of mentioning Madeline and Toronto but let it slide.

“And,” he said, “the County found an envelope stuffed with notes, presumably passed back and forth at Buoy 13. The paper and writing style were identical to the note we discovered. On one Bonetrager wrote that the ‘*Shelter Island bombing*’ was pointless. That Gouldsby needed to be concerned with treasure and water only—to forget disrupting things.”

“Were the notes dated?”

“They wish. They kept them in the order as found. Bonetrager repeatedly wrote that calling him was off-limits.”

“Really...”

“We checked their phone records. Gouldsby rarely called Bonetrager and vice-versa. That leads us to believe the magnetic box we found stuck to Buoy 13 was their primary means for communicating.” He paused. “Anonymous, inconspicuous and almost untraceable.”

“Or so they thought.”

“Yeah...the benevolent gallery owner.” He laughed. “Oh...and that’s another thing. “Those three paintings Bonetrager donated at the auction? Two were taken from a museum in the Middle East. Stolen by rebels that stormed the place. They were sold on the black market.”

“How’d they find out?”

“One of the purchasers took a picture and sent it to someone in the art community. Didn’t take long. The third one was a twenty-one thousand dollar fake. It’s all been rounded up.”

“So...the treasure angle,” I said. “How does anyone think Gouldsby knew where to dig?”

He didn’t respond.

“I can’t hear you,” I said.

“Ah...drop it Rippinger.”

“I thought so. Any word on Dutch?”

“Nothing. Nicky thinks someone did him in.”

“What do you think?”

Silence.

“It’s been what...five weeks? I concur.”

We spoke awhile longer, discussed plans for another vacation and hung up.

A few weeks later, The Seattle Times ran the following article:

*‘A group of middle schoolers arrived for an eco-tour on Gardiners Island, a private location approximate to New York’s tony Hamptons and famous for where Captain Kidd hid his treasure. While moving from the beach to an inland pond they stumbled upon a patch of freshly dug soil. Curious, one of them began digging with a small shovel. When someone mentioned finding more of Kidd’s treasure they all joined in, removing loose soil with their hands. Their digging didn’t expose gold, but clothing and then an arm. Horrified, they exposed the body of someone recently buried in the shallow grave. Investigators believe it’s that of a local fisherman who has been missing since Father’s Day.’*

## **Bible verses cited in Buoy 13 are from the King James Version**

### **Bible Verses Used in Chapter 37 – Evil day**

1. Though you tread through the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil, for I am with you— (**Psalm 23: Verse 4**)

### **Bible Verses Used in Chapter 42 – Vindikis**

2. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and those who heed the words of the bible. Worship God. (**Revelation 22:9**)
3. Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. (**Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10**)
4. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (**Ephesians 6:12**)
5. For your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (**1 Peter 5:8**)
6. My God, in whom I trust! For it is he who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence. (**Psalm 91: 2-3**)
7. Job had no ease, no quietness; no rest, but only turmoil. (**Job 3:26**)
8. Job asked for God to instruct him and Job repented in dust and ashes. (**Job 42: 4-6**)
9. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. (**Acts 16:31**)
10. Become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. (**1 Corinthians 4:9**)
11. That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. So that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. (**Ephesians 3:16-19**)
12. Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (**Romans 13: 1-2**)

13. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for conscience' sake. (Romans 13:5)
14. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? (Romans 13:3)
15. With God nothing will be impossible. (Luke 1:37)
16. Submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. (1 Peter 2: 13-15)
17. As each has received a *special* gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:10)
18. There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 16:25)
19. We exult in our tribulations knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope, and hope, does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (Romans 5: 3-6)
20. You were tired out by the length of your road, yet you did not say, 'It is hopeless'. You found renewed strength, therefore you did not faint. (Isaiah: 57:10)
21. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. (Ephesians 6:11)
22. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you. (Deuteronomy 20:4)
23. He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity, he who rejects unjust gain and shakes his hands so that they will hold no bribe; he who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil; he will dwell on the heights, his refuge will be impregnable rock; his bread will be given him, his water will be sure. (Isaiah 33: 15-16)
24. Incline your ear— (Isaiah 55:3)
25. Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created the stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of his power, not one of them is missing. (Isaiah 40: 26)
26. For in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

27. And God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (Hebrews 1: 1-2)
28. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you may prove yourself to be blameless and innocent, a child of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. (Philippians 2: 14-15)
29. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:6)
30. Conduct yourself with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. (Colossians 4:5)
31. In Jesus you have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of your trespasses, according to the riches of his grace. (Ephesians 1:7)
32. Always show kindness to strangers, for by doing this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)