

“The rhythmic rocking of the boat was hypnotizing. With glassy eyes gazing at the bottom of the raft, onto the horizon or up into the sky, the faces of the remaining nine were stamped in absolute disbelief. Heavy sighs, coughs, and painful moans were the order of the moment. Some stared ahead, others tried unsuccessfully to get comfortable in the crowded raft, and others continued to scan the sea for anything that gave them hope.

“Hopefully help should be here soon. When planes fall off the radar, the location is immediately marked and rescue teams alerted. We’re all dehydrated, and there are plenty of water bottles here,” the dapper man said. “But don’t drink too quickly or a lot fast, people. If we flew way off course, they may never know where we are, and it is going to take a long time to find us. I’d advise not drinking everything so fast. Ration it. It could be a long time before we are rescued.”

“Oh, my God, they’re not coming?” the heavy man screeched.

“I didn’t say that. It may take longer than we want, so we need to be prepared.”

“Who the hell are you to be telling us all this?” the big man blurted out, holding his right arm close to his side.

“Good question. I’m Irving. Who are you?”

“My name is Otto.”

Helen’s attention darted from staring at the floor to meet Frank’s undoubtedly quizzical facial expression. He never knew what his game people’s names really were, yet...

How the hell can they be their real names?

“My God,” Helen stated with disbelief. “Irving, Otto. Did you hear that, Frank?”

“Frank turned to the others, not saying word, yet asking their names.

“Maxine,” said the old lady.

This was followed by, “Yuto, my wife Soo Mi.”

“Kimberly. I was one of the attendants.”

All turned to the hippy guy who had not said a word, knees curled up with his arms clutching his legs to his chest. He looked up at the rest staring at him. “What. What do you want?” After a few seconds, it dawned on him the others wanted to know his name. “Homer,” he said. Frank—and clearly Helen—were totally surprised and in a quandary. They were staring at each other expecting each to have an answer, but there was none forthcoming.

“All these people have the same names we gave them in our game,” said Helen, leaning closely against Frank. “That can’t be. We don’t know any of them. How can this be? You think we’ve met them before? No, that’s impossible.”

“Yeah, I know,” Frank whispered. He faced the others and said, “I’m Frank, and this is Helen.”

“How’s this possible?” Helen whisper-screamed.

“God, it’s so weird. I haven’t a clue, but it is what it is,” Frank answered. “Well, introductions aside for now, is anyone badly hurt other than Otto?” he asked.

Helen was still staring at the passengers and back to Frank, seeking some semblance of truth to this mystery.

No one raised their hand. It was a great relief to know they did not have a medical emergency on board. Frank could not get over the fact that all the passengers’ names in the game had been correctly guessed by Helen or him. Jesus, how could that be? Clairvoyance was not a specialty of his. The amazement of this event was soon shrouded by the next question.

“What the hell are we going to do now?” Otto inquired as he winced in pain.”

“Remain calm so as not to utilize all of your strength. Breathe slowly. Sip some water but don’t gulp it.

Each one of us should keep a lookout in different directions on the raft,” Irving stated forcibly while searching the pockets and flaps of the raft.

“What are you doing?” Maxine questioned.

“Some of these floatation devices have emergency beacons, flares, emergency kits, and maybe a flashlight.”

That said, everyone but Otto started pulling down any flaps near them and looking. Soo Mi found the beacon and handed it to Irving. The honing beep responded when he flipped the switch. Maxine yelped like a little girl, holding a large flashlight, pointing the bright beam at each person.

“Easy, Maxine. Let’s not wear out the battery,” Frank said.

“Oh, yeah. Sorry.” She turned to hunt for more compartments where anything that could be of help could be hidden.”

“Kimberly had searched deeper into the pocket from which Maxine had pulled the flashlight to undercover six flares. “Flight school training. I just wasn’t thinking. I should have told you immediately,” she said, holding them above her head.

“Not that you have anything on your mind. Don’t worry about it,” Frank responded.

A calm finally came over the group with the discovery of the emergency items. All breathed a sigh of obvious relief. Each turned in a different direction as instructed by Irving and scanned the sea and sky. What Frank saw was not the serenity of a calm ocean such as one seen on television in the ads for tropical islands. What he saw was endless water and small waves seemingly multiplying one after the other as if an audience watching the raft. The horizon was flat, dead flat. The only comforting aspect of it was that the sun’s rays allowed them some warmth from the cold and damp condition they were in. There were no shadows on the water or in the sky to give them any hope of immediate rescue.”

“Initially, they all appeared focused, intently watching in a continuous fashion. However, after an hour or so, the enthusiasm waned, and people nodded and stared emptily at the bottom of the raft. As the hours wore on, only a few lifted their heads to study the water. The sound of the water beating against the raft was only outweighed by the honing device.

Beep...beep...beep...”