

Prologue

Present Day 2044 CE

Geena

The Decision

Glacial ice. Layered. Thick. Forming after the bewildering storm in her head and creeping up her spine. The courier's delivery from Joe Tink lies like a white patch of snow on her desk. Being alone in her office, she doesn't have to explain to anyone why she is waiting for it to melt. But it doesn't. Finally, with curiosity spreading like hoarfrost, she feels forced to open this unwarranted denunciatory thing in front of her. To decide if she should leave.

Your father is dead.

That's it? She's vexed. Almost angry. What's with this couriered letter? He could just as easily have called her from Bangor. Always had. They were close, weren't they? Closer than normal.

Besides, she had long hoped her father would kill himself.

But, Joe wrote more. Pages and pages.

This late-September afternoon, in some sort of unfamiliar circuitous telepathy, Geena has been thinking about Joe - *Pickled Tink Joe* - more than usual. She was reminded of him earlier by two different women in her Kansas City office asking Geena about the fall season back in New England, presuming that she knew all about New England and its leaves.

You know, Geena, how beautiful it must be!

With Geena's children out of the nest and her ex a near-forgotten fugitive from marriage, she had moved to a smaller apartment in Prairie Village, west of Kansas City, to live alone, but rarely feeling alone. Her two boys, or more probably their spouses, dependably call about visiting her with the grandchildren during holidays, and neighbors in the building complex drop in daily to see if she *needs anything*.

While early on in younger years if she had lived there in Prairie Village - if she would have had time to think - she might have found this neighborly spontaneity a bothersome lack of privacy. Now, in her fifties, she loves this place and the midwestern populace who go nowhere. No New Englander had ever seemed as outgoing and optimistic as these Kansas busybodies. And, although Geena found that the religious tethering of the Bible Belt could be a nuisance, she has several local social friends who are comfortably unbridled and who distract Geena from her shrouded pathos, often recruiting her into playing bridge on Sunday afternoons and in occasional local tournaments.

Geena would never tell any one of these people, or anyone else for that matter, how she had grown up seeing the fall season as death-and-dying. Invariably depressing. Kansas is nosy

neighbors, but still, New England is the epitome of fall presenting itself in all its dispiriting glory. In New England she had thought she smelled the dying in the rotting leaves, and she had heard death's unambiguous footsteps in Maine's ice and snow, inwardly cringing with the sound of each bone-crushing footfall in the long, dark winters.

Or maybe not. Maybe the winters are not the reason at all. Maine reminds her, in overkill, of the past, the shivers of buried darkness, ruining sleep. Anguish, grief, agony. Words that mean nothing compared to the reality.

Thus, many years ago, when offered a full-time position after temping in Kansas City during college, she decided to continue living in Kansas, away from New England. Geena is running her own construction consulting business, her towering height underscoring her authoritative presence, both for her few employees and for her clients. She has made sure her office staff have only seen her as a stoic engineer, a just but distant boss. Thus, the arrival of Joe's letter forces her to leave the office as if struck by a sudden illness, which is, in fact, substantially true. She has escaped - not remembering the drive home - to hide her soul in the bedroom corner with her mother's memories, in the few things she has kept: the cushioned chair - a maudlin carver chair she would never have bought - and the dorm-room lamp, as stringent as its droll Ikea name, that her mother bought Geena years ago.

Lost in the bedroom corner to scrutinize this bewildering letter, she doesn't remember having ever screamed before, but at the end of this letter, she has screamed. Now crying quietly, the soft reverberations of her emotional outburst, Geena feels a punishing sensation sweeping harshly over her with the intensity of a squalid wind, a punishment for all things hidden inside her.

Her kids are gone. Her ex is ex. Her parents are dead. Brother Davis is halfway around the globe. Joe, her only real friend, has forsaken her.

She and her brother are all who are left. Geena fears with fair certainty that her brother is also a murderer, that he has probably murdered at least one person, maybe more. Maybe. No, probably. Undeniably probably. Still, she regards him as her real brother, right now even more so, no matter family blood and all. She has loved him, despite her brother's cruel childhood tales, since age five or six because her mother told her to, and because her mother was everything Geena wanted to be.

Different from her father. She's crying, but not for him.

She tries to beat back the tears, to scrutinize why she is crying, but the emotion packed in her neural network that she had carried deep-frozen from Maine has liquified into a cold ocean. She sits transfixed, timelessly floating on that ocean - shards of pain from the deep - until she is slowly impelled, as only the castigation of loneliness can do, to form a determination.

The brusque taste of salt and of untenably bitter copper pervade her mouth and bring her to an awareness of the room. Blinking to try to clear her eyes, at length she gets up and, still blurry-eyed, walks slowly to the kitchen. Plucking a Kleenex from the box on the counter, she methodically wipes away the remaining tears and pats dry her cheeks, not yet aware of the black smears. Habitually she sets water for tea on the stove.

Murderer!

The word repeatedly disrupts her disordered thoughts until the teakettle's encroaching high-pitched whistle sounds its alarm.

She turns off the flame. No time for tea. No time for self-pity. Her mind is made up. Joe has written that he cannot, would not, could not make himself inform Davis about their father Kevin's death. Geena has decided she has to face Davis, to tell him personally.

Unintentionally, she exhales, "Oh, Joe." The sound surprises her and makes her body shake as she can no longer control her desolation, intensely aware that Joe was the only reason she never felt lonely. Joe's shocking desertion has evanesced into worry. Taking time off from work for her trip to see Davis in Norway, she will stop in Maine first, to see what she can discover about Joe, to tie up any loose ends. Fill in the gaps, maybe. That's her decision. Daunting. No, fucking terrifying.

Like the knock at the door.

1. Beth Purification

Sixty years ago in 1984, before Beth met Kevin Nuss and before daughter Geena was born, Beth Sturgess survived two years on prostitution, a dark, drug-filled period from which she escaped with herpes as the only permanent vestige. As a chubby sixteen-year-old, she had run away from her Newburyport, Massachusetts, home from her parents, Rob and Nor, who were so psychologically needy themselves that they had nothing to offer to each other, let alone to their daughter.

Two years later in the spring of 1986, she was discovered under an office building's porch in Provincetown in an emaciated, catatonic state by a strong young man about her age who carried her home on his back to his one-room apartment, brought her back to consciousness, fed her warm nourishment, and got her examined and somewhat cleaned up by a doctor.

While she was semiconscious, he had managed somehow to wash her old jeans, thrown away the rag she had been wearing for a shirt and bought her a new white blouse. He even bought her new white socks, but she still had her old leather high-top boots and worn-out underwear. She awoke smelling her own putrid body. He had never dared to touch her to get the sizes, or to attempt to wash her. But once she had showered, she saw he had made such a good guess that the lingerie he bought and left for her on the bed board fit just fine, and was, in fact, quite stylish.

How guilty she felt. What kind of person was this? He must have spent money that he didn't have. The first time she tried to close the squeaky, barely private door to the toilet and creepy shower, she realized that his studio apartment was so basic that he must be dirt poor. The kitchen and bathroom sink were one; the furnishings were comprised of a springless single bed and a threadbare, plaid chair leaking its stuffing beside a metal gooseneck floor lamp - all ready to assault anyone with dust allergies.

But when she first awoke and sat up in the bed, what struck her most were all the piles and shelves of books, to the extent that her first question had been to ask if he was running a used

book business. And she was startled by his oddly formal way of speaking, as if he were quoting someone.

“I have to chuckle,” he said. “But it is a bit embarrassing. I will have to clean all this up one day, I suppose. I spend everything I earn on books, used books mind you. I just like to read. Reading is my drug. Sorry to say it that way. Not criticizing you. I’m not innocent in the drug-use arena, but I eventually found it more appealing to escape through reading. I figure I can make some use of it sometime if I can ever get out of here.

“But I forgot to ask you your name.”

“Beth,” she said.

“Do you have a last name?”

“Not one I am so proud of.” She paused. “Sturgess.”

“Well, I’m Joe. Joe Tink.”

She looked at him incredulously.

“I know. You don’t believe me. My father’s name was Tinkerman, but I hated my father. And, my friends all called me Tink, so I adopted it.”

He was smiling. “And it fits well with how I like to describe myself...that I was born in a pickle jar and am so gay I’m pickled Tink.”

She felt her muddled mind slowly think about that for quite a while, and then asked, “What do you do?”

“I’m a stripper.”

Compared to Beth, he was short, but he was bullishly muscular. At the moment she was only pale skin and bones under a mop of unwashed, tangled, nondescript brownish hair. He was obviously a weight lifter who spent time on the beach plying his tan. She guessed he needed to have a perfect body if he was going to show it off. Otherwise, her sense about him was vague. Maybe it was the hard dark-brown eyes. She couldn’t read his face. He showed no embarrassment about being a stripper; it was just a statement of fact.

As she scanned the room like a trapped animal, she said, “I’m sorry I’m taking your bed. I don’t deserve this. I don’t even know why you brought me here. It doesn’t look like you’re going to torture and kill me.”

This time Joe laughed until tears made him get up from his chair to get some toilet paper to dry his eyes. Sitting again before he spoke, he said, “Thanks for the laugh. I don’t have any such plan. Or any plan.”

“But why’d you bother?” she asked. She couldn’t see the humor, but was less afraid.

He hesitated, got up again, and washed his hands. Without turning around, he said, “I saw my mother die.”

“If you can tell me where I am, I’ll get out of your way.” She began to cry out of relief, from guilt, from frailty, from loneliness. He didn’t ask why.

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Through all her guilt of taking advantage of young Joe, she knew she had no choice but to let him help her recover her strength. She couldn't help him pay for the food she ate, but she tried to neaten up his books and to clean dishes, the bathroom, the floor while he slept. But most of the time, she was too weak. She stayed in bed while he slept most of the day in the chair, when he wasn't reading. He would disappear late at night. She heard him return sometime after the sun was up.

In the dark, she tried not to want to die, the way she always felt in her withdrawal periods when the money was gone - when she couldn't buy a fix - when it would feel best to die. She would shake. But somehow he had given her hope. He had given her something that she couldn't explain. Sanity maybe. Kindness.

Conversation was sporadic, mostly because she didn't know what to say to him.

One afternoon with three books in her hands, she asked, "What're these books about?"

He was chopping vegetables near the sink and didn't turn to look at her. "Which ones do you mean?"

"These have the titles like *The Man Who Never Died*, *The Labor Wars*, and, uh, what's this one? *A Covert Life*."

Looking at his body language from the back, she could see him smile. "Well, I'm kind of a leftist, at least, by American standards. I believe human life has a value and shouldn't be left to suffer and die. I read stuff about it."

As she placed the books on a shelf in the corner, she said, "You're a stripper. I never knew men did that. Where do you work?"

"This is Provincetown. You don't know about Provincetown?"

"No, what about it?"

"How did you get here?"

"I don't know."

"Why did you come here?"

"I don't know. I don't remember anything about that. That's terrible, isn't it?"

"My dear." He had turned to look at her. "You are why I read these books."

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Joe had acquaintances, a couple named Linda and Gerry, who were willing to take Beth on board their forty-two-foot cruiser on their sail to Bermuda.

They met in the late morning at the White Porch Inn off to the left along the street from Joe's apartment. Joe had simply said they were going to meet some of his friends.

After normal polite greetings and the coffee orders were delivered to the table by a smiling young multipierced and densely tattooed girl, they all, Joe, Beth, Linda, and a Swiss guy that nobody bothered to introduce, looked down in silence seemingly meditating, but, as Beth soon discovered, they were instead just waiting in deference for Gerry to speak. It seemed like he had to work up to a speech with great effort. She couldn't tell if he was slow mentally or shy.

Without any introductory explanation and without looking at her, Gerry finally ejected, "Joe suggested that you could do the cooking and galley work onboard the *Adventure*."

His voice was much more feminine than Beth had expected. She waited. On board what? The *Adventure*? A train? A ship? "Galley" meant it was a boat or a plane, right? With nothing more forthcoming, she wanted to say something to encourage him to explain, but couldn't think what. Maybe he was actually slow. Finally, not knowing exactly to what she was agreeing, she said, "Sure. Whatever."

To her it was whatever; it was not a choice. Boat, train, bus, airplane, or horse and buggy? What else should she do?

In the next two days, Linda helped her with buying more sets of underwear and a pair of sneakers, which, Linda said, were to protect the boat deck from the old boots. Beth felt that short Linda, with her fake, thin smile - and nose-singeing halitosis - always seemed to be talking down to Beth. She overheard Linda tell Gerry that she thought Beth would be trouble on board because she was too tall. It wasn't what she said; it was how she put the emphasis on *trouble* that bothered Beth.

For Beth, Linda was one of those women sporting long straight deliberately grey hair with straight chopped-off bangs as an intellectual trademark and who were just a little too good for everyone else or, for that matter, to eat meat. Her voice even seemed to twist witchy to Beth. Gerry, lithe in his young age, was more distant, but he seemed unassuming to Beth - not pompous and definitely a man of few words. She sensed something hidden.

"I'm going to cry," Beth said to Joe when early morning on day ten, it was time to board. "How do I thank you?"

"Just be well," he said.

"Will I ever see you again?"

"Maybe, on your return. I hope so."

"How can I pay you back?"

"You have paid me back by living."

"But..." She paused. "I'm scared. Bermuda? I've never been on the ocean."

Joe stood quietly looking at her for a moment, then said, "You'll be fine. They've done this trip many times. You'll be safe and well taken care of. Bon voyage. Really. I'm jealous. I guess what I mean is, you will love it."

When the boat began to move, she began hunting through her pockets, her bag, everywhere for something to calm her fear. She cried as quietly as she could, sitting below in her designated

little forward cabin while the others prepared whatever they prepared. Her space had a bunkbed, a teak cabinet for hanging clothes, and two teak drawers. She found no drugs, not even a remnant, in her pockets. She had no money, but when she unpacked her new (Linda-purchased) little canvas bag to put things away, she found one thousand dollars in odd bills folded in the side pocket.

One thousand dollars cash - tens, fifties, even a few fives and ones - out of nowhere. Should she try to thank Linda and Gerry for putting it there? It didn't make sense for them to be secretly giving her cash, and for what possible reason? And Joe? Joe couldn't afford to stop stripping in Provincetown. If he had that kind of money to give away, he would have left long ago.

She hunted through her cabin and the bowhead to find a secret place to hide the money, deciding, for now, that the metal sink support strap in the roof of the cabinet in the bathroom had enough space with a little bending to let her press in the rolled bills.

In addition to Linda, Gerry, and Beth, the young Swiss man, Carl, said he was helping crew in order to accrue sailing hours for his captain's credentials.

He spoke with a low masculine tone in perfectly nuanced English. "I want to own a boat, but Swiss law requires a boat owner to have a captain's license. Every hour I spend sailing will qualify toward a Swiss captain's license."

Beth struggled with the thought that Switzerland had no ocean, but realized...duh...like an idiot, lakes floated boats, too, and was glad she kept that thought to herself.

While they had lunch the first day, he told her, "I own a security company in Zurich based on personal protection of business clients and important politicians from kidnappings and assaults. We drive around in little Smart cars. They're great because they are cheap and still have a kind of status."

Beth began to imagine that he must think of himself as a sort of fantasy superhero. She had to admire Carl for his seeming ability at fixing anything and everything, and all with an enthusiasm which she primarily took as gratefulness for the sailing opportunity, but also as part of his innate hyper personality.

He was muscular and agile, with perfect Germanic facial features - bright blue eyes, perfect teeth. His short stature made him even more capable at managing the boat's movement. He thought nothing of climbing the mast to fix the faulty light connection as the yacht dipped and swayed, amplifying the motion at the top where he hugged the mast as he dangled from a strap like some well-practiced circus performer. It seemed to Beth that, as opposed to her, he was always doing practical work and useful things.

He picked up after himself with such preciseness that Beth was shamed into neatness herself. She wanted to ask him, just not yet, what that quarter-sized medallion was he wore around his neck with a fine gold chain. She began to hypothesize that the captain's license was just one more badge he wanted to pin on the hero outfit he wore while he leapt tall Swiss buildings, if they had such things.

Beth felt guilty for being just a favor-granted ride while everyone else seemed to have a real purpose onboard. She felt she would have to try to earn her place, but she felt she couldn't and wouldn't be able to find important work to do. Work at what? Setting out microwaved Kraft

macaroni-and-cheese, sorting garbage, and rinsing plastic dishes was hardly work compared to the constant activity the others were doing steering, adjusting sails, and fixing this or that, all important stuff she couldn't understand.

Then almost immediately, the seasickness began. She would have felt guiltier for getting sick except she was not alone. Carl, the superman, could not withstand every attack on the human senses either. A previous storm, perhaps a hurricane for all she knew, had roiled the sea during the week before they left. Already the first day, the ocean's residual undulations, as high as multistory buildings, made the boat rise and fall and churn like an insignificant insect floating in some ungodly giant's snifter of swirling cognac, getting everyone except Gerry so seasick that he had to sail for thirty hours alone at the helm.

The next evening, the ocean had calmed. They all were feeling better and Gerry had slept some. Gerry explained, "Soon we'll be entering a giant eddy along the edge of the Gulf Stream."

"Gulf Stream? Is that...?" Beth began to ask.

He didn't wait for her question. He was obviously not nearly so reticent to speak when it concerned the ocean. Or maybe he felt it was a necessity. His voice was not only feminine, but velvety.

"The Gulf Stream is like a giant hot river without solid banks to keep it in place. So along the edges, these giant whirlpools get created with their own weather system and move along the edges of the river, so to speak. It is impossible to know exactly when we will hit one, but I think that the mass of black sky on the horizon up there in front of us is probably the eddy's weather system."

It was the longest string of sentences Beth had heard from him. And it frightened her, like maybe he was nervous about this thing they were approaching, even if he didn't sound nervous.

The sudden soft wall of the eddy's fog was so dense that even the water either side of the boat was invisible and silent. Entering the darkness, they lost the little bit of wind they had. For Beth it was an even more frightening and ghostly sensation to enter total blackness and silent calm, being all too reminiscent of the diverting narcotic smog of her near past.

Gerry said, "Because we don't have any wind, we're being dragged south and east by the currents. We can't use the sextant or LORAN, so the only way I know where we are and what's happening is from a little dead reckoning and experience, but after a few hours, the eddy will spit us out into the sunshine again."

Gerry was actually speaking without prompting. She had no way of understanding the navigation stuff, but he sounded confident and she was glad to hear about the coming sunshine. Then Gerry calmly told a story which he must have thought would comfort Beth.

"Because the ancients had, like us now, no sense of motion, no light, no stars to guide them, when finally, they came back into the sun- or starlight and they saw that they had moved great distances, the ancients could only imagine that some sort of spirit had lifted them to an unknown location and they were thankful that those spirits were gentle and benign enough not to drop them off the edge of the earth."

Still frightened, Beth was wrapped in the silent darkness of unwavering anxiety. After what seemed like an eternity to her, but was about five hours, they suddenly came out of the dark fog into the sunshine and the wind of the steaming Gulf Stream. She felt an exhilarating damp heat that she imagined was like a Finnish sauna and had to strip down, along with everyone else, to a minimum of clothing.

Then that night came the storm, while Beth was below sorting out the garbage and crushing the plastic containers. In the middle of the Gulf Stream, because the darkness disguised the approaching front, a wall of wind hit the boat without warning like a bulldozer, so hard and suddenly that Beth was sure the whole yacht was tipping over. Below deck, she was thrown against the galley cabinets and fell to the floor, while food, dishes, books, and loose items flew off their places, banging and crashing in coordinated chaos. She heard shouts and commands above, the clanking of unknown metal parts, the zipping sound of fast-moving rope, and the whole cabin shuddering. As she slid on the slanted deck to the cabin bench, she held onto it with all her strength. She screamed, being sure it must have to do with the Bermuda Triangle and that she was going to die.

No doubt hearing her cries, Carl had come down from the deck to the main cabin to sit beside her on the cushioned bench and spoke with a soft confidence. Carl, the army ant of strength and practicality, was a perfect gentleman to Beth. Maybe he acted so polite and courteous because he really had a true love back in Zurich, as he said he did. He always asked Beth first if she needed to use the toilet, “the head” she learned to call it, or the shower before he would go in. He let her have the privacy and comfort of the forward cabin while he slept, or attempted to sleep, on the main cabin bench, which had no lee cloth or harness. Therefore, not tied and without bunk edges to keep him in place, he frequently got dumped on the floor in the middle of his respite by the listing yacht. Sometimes he slept on deck where he could hold onto a railing or two.

Maybe she was not attractive to him, but, during the storm, she would have folded up in his arms if he had offered. She needed to be held. She thought he must know. She was pale, afraid, and asked not to be alone.

“It’s okay, Beth. This is a well-designed sloop. Sailboats don’t tip over and especially this one; you just have to adjust the sails accordingly and sometimes a sharp wind sneaks up on you. Right now the wind is blowing the opposite direction of the flow of the Gulf Stream so the waves feel a bit rougher than normal, but with a good captain like Gerry, this sloop has no problem dealing with such weather.”

The yacht had righted a bit, but was still clattering and clanging from the blasting wind, making Carl yell to be heard. “To me this is just fun; it is not dangerous. I work with danger, so I know. I teach my clients how to handle guns. I teach them about how to stay safe by showing them how to be as invisible and anonymous as possible, how to drive cars defensively, and how to defend themselves in the worst case. These are wealthy clients with families who can be targets for ransom.”

His deliberate confident talk about other dangers distracted Beth and she knew that was his purpose. She had been treated with such careful concern, first from Joe and now from Carl. She would never ask in a hundred years, but it made her want to be held by a real person, someone she knew.

Thirty minutes later as the front passed, they were in quiet waters, heavy rain, and a constant wind that continued all night.

Once they had finished crossing the broad, hot current of the Gulf Stream, the ocean water temperature cooled a bit and the color changed from the black cold water with which she was familiar north of the Gulf Stream to a soothing warm tropical blue water like she had seen in pictures.

Small white birds, seemingly lost and tired, began resting on the boom, and pods of grinning dolphins hunted and swam sometimes in herds of hundreds, toying with the boat by surfing in the bow wave. The enormity of the ocean's quiet offered a tranquility she would never again know.

For the next three nights, the cloudless sky was only a faded light, exposing a distant ocean horizon. The susurrus of water near the hull sparkled like Fourth of July sparklers with the miniature flashes of algae aerated by the boat's passage. As she lay on the deck at night, she picked out the satellites, the airplanes, a few comets (or meteors? Which was which?), and once each night, some large cruise ship would display its lights as it crept along the surface of the earth's curvature.

She felt the sky was wrapping her with a magnificence that her conscious mind could never describe. The stars lit an open sky, so open and endless that once it gave her an unspeakable foreboding that at any moment a superhuman leviathan with stale tentacles would reach down from that openness to violate her. But it was only for one horrifying minute.

During the day, she sometimes tried to save the ill-fated flying fish that, after gloriously escaping through the air from some unseen underwater predator, would at times land, not back in the vast ocean, but, against all odds, on the oak surface of their deck.

On the third day, a huge white ghost in the form of an albino whale surfaced so close to the yacht where she was lying that the horrid smell of its rotten fish breath made her gag. The yacht was on autopilot and the others were below deck. She was even afraid to yell for them to come see. Here she was alone with a white presence of such magnificence and magnitude, tilting its body to stare directly at her with one huge, deep, brooding pupil, evaluating her significance, deciding whether to let her exist, and then fading away without a sound making Beth feel like something remarkable had happened, an approbation of sorts, an epiphany, an awakening. She felt her body molt a soiled veneer.

After grimy years on drugs, the five-day-and-night sail to Bermuda was an adventure in purity and grace, with sunrises and sunsets she had never previously valued, alien ocean voices in the boat's wake, and tuna leaping from the surface in sea-serpent formation. The ocean light and an all-night twilight, all added details, minutiae, concepts, and emotions that had previously never been in her realm of comprehension.

Then one early evening after sundown, Gerry pointed toward the horizon where Beth could see a bright light floating on the water and said, "That is Bermuda."

"It looks like a ship," she said.

"Yes, but it's the lights of Bermuda about thirty-six hours away."

She stared in silence at the light. “It looks so close.”

“Lots of things are deceptive on the ocean,” he said.

Beth thought that was a strange thing to say.

Nearing land the next day, she heard Gerry communicating over the radio with some Bermudian official office and heard him say his boat’s name, *Adventure*, and the names of those on board, how many, and how many would be leaving onboard with him. She couldn’t hear all the details, but that’s when she understood Carl would be flying home from Bermuda. She heard her own name, too, but didn’t catch the context.

In Bermuda, after surrendering their passports at the customs wharf, they rented a slip at Hamilton’s Royal Bermuda Yacht Club, where everyone except Gerry showered in the club’s storage cellar with the sail rigging and cockroaches since the royal showers and toilets upstairs were for members only. But the friendly black staff made Beth feel she belonged.

Because her mind continued to sway with the waves for another day, it was a blissful feeling to have solid ground under her feet again.

On day two, Linda, Carl, and Beth walked the streets in central Hamilton, which, according to Gerry, were monitored by police cameras and that any drug trade caught on camera meant immediate “slammer” time. No judge, no jury.

She felt a vague, sad empathy for the prisoners. In the split second that a mind can revive and relive a drug-filled history, she felt the terror of her trip to Mexico, to Ciudad Juarez. Somebody had fixed a plane ticket and a passport for her, the same one she had with her now, in fact, with the same horrible picture that would not let her completely escape her history. All she had had to do was follow instructions. Swallow some bags of shit and shit them out later. Trip paid. And then she had had money to survive. And then she had had drugs to survive, the drugs to help her forget.

During the three days of luxury docking at the foremost Bermuda yacht club, Gerry always seemed to be off on his own. Beth tagged along with Linda and took in the touristy part of Hamilton along the main street. On day four, they had to move out, Gerry said, because the annual Newport Bermuda racing boats’ arrival was scheduled, which would mean sleek racers sailing in with tired sweaty crews, hundreds of colored pennants and flags, horns blaring loud fanfares, exhibitionist captains bragging about their boats, and lots of champagne spraying and man bonding.

Gerry, with the help of Linda and Carl, moved the boat to St. Georges Island, docking in the bay with the stern toward a stone seawall in what, Gerry explained, was Bermuda tradition, making Beth learn to take quick steps on a narrow plank between boat and wall in order to get on land. From there, leaving Gerry behind to fiddle with things on the boat, she walked with Linda and Carl to a magnificently clean coral beach, incongruently named Tobacco Bay, strictly regulated so that cigarettes were not allowed on the beach, along with straws, small snacks, and other potential trash.

Later that day hurrying back on board, she certainly didn’t mean to walk in on Carl. She just needed the head, and she wasn’t thinking, but there he was with his erection in his hand looking

at her like a guilty child. Carl had shown her consideration and concern, and now she had caught him in the most humiliating circumstance possible.

Worse, she was caught in her own turmoil. How often she had had to fake it with naked men, to make them feel like she wanted their sexual desire. It wasn't she who was in shock; she was simply confused. Confused because her initial reaction, her hard-learned instinct was an internal hate and an external mask. But she had always been drugged and, although still a teenager, maybe now a part of her brain was no longer missing as it was then.

Before it had always been a stranger, a thing, not a person; now it was Carl. Carl wasn't encroaching on anything or violating her life. She was intruding on his, and yet her only experience had been the opposite, the wrong way.

But here was Carl, the gentleman Carl, with his dick in his hand. And frozen. Frozen hard. This thought suddenly made her laugh. She laughed. She really laughed. A laugh she had forgotten, one that started nervously high on a shallow inner shelf but now exploded from deep inside her making her feel wonderfully happy.