

An Arrow
To The
Heart

Kit Cain

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INTRODUCTION

And story background

An Arrow To The Heart was originally a screenplay written as a follow-on sequel to the screenplay entitled Master Of The Welded Bead. There is a continuity to the two stories which is best bridged by reading Master Of The Welded Bead first. The stories are quite different—which is one of the main reasons for not combining them into a single continuous story. To bridge this gap of continuity in a lesser manner, however, I include here the pertinent details first presented in Master Of The Welded Bead which continue in An Arrow To The Heart in order to make the story more enjoyable.

The main theme of the two stories is the demonstration of how I feel someone—male or female—approaching the consciousness of a master of the universe handles the mundane affairs and problems of daily life. Jack Diamond is the main character of both stories and he is something of a renegade who has chosen to make his way through life on the “Road less traveled”. He is a college graduate and an ex U.S. Marine pilot who finds greater freedom and joy as a professional tradesman—particularly in the trade of welding, which he pursues as a master welder at the Morgan River Shipyard. In Master Of The Welded Bead it is his spontaneity and expanded level of consciousness—his mere presence—which enables the Shipyard to avoid bankruptcy, changing hands to become a far more synergistic and successful company. The events which bring about this change are not always the events formed in Jack’s mind, but rather originate from unusual and unpredictable events in harmony with his consciousness from some mystical source which he merely acts upon.

Morgan River Shipyard is a very large ship construction and repair facility located at the mouth of Morgan River—a fictitious place similar in nature and geographical location to a cross between the harbor of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. The shipyard’s main specialty is the construction of high-speed patrol boats for international sale to government military forces and protection agencies. The 50 or so acres of shipyard at the river’s edge consists of a very large hangar building, office buildings, wharves, and a vast spread of scrapyard ... a veritable graveyard for steel ships, fishing boats, and surplus ships’ parts of questionable value. In a far corner of the scrapyard, a scrapped steel coastal freighter sits high and dry and rusting away in the weather. This is Jack’s home, aptly renamed the “Land Lady”, and whose title is painted in large, rough letters on the bow with a wide-bristle paintbrush. A steel stairway fabricated by Jack climbs up through a hole cut in the bottom of Land Lady’s hull ... the

stairway leading upward via serpentine meanderings and hallways through the engine room and crew's quarters to the Captain's Cabin in the stern. Here, Jack has renovated and redecorated the quarters to suit his own impeccable taste and original design—even using the adjoining crew's staterooms as bedrooms for the occasional visits of his grown-up daughters.

Beyond his dealings with the shipyard, Jack has friends from all walks of life—none of them really close friends—but all of whom he interacts with in more of a constructive and altruistic way than any other. There is Marty, his girlfriend, who is a nightclub singer who is considerably younger than he and highly dependent upon him for emotional support. There is T-Bird, a full-blooded Indian and close relative of the chief of the local Indian tribe which has, by devious means, taken over Morgan River Shipyard using their considerable casino earnings and the clever manipulations of their Jewish casino manager. Along with Marty, T-Bird is about as close a friend as Jack has, both of them being interested in mechanical things and of a deeply spiritual inclination.

Jack's other friends: Sharky, Preacher, Ike, Trudy, and Beulah are like “children of a lesser soul” from the “other side of the tracks” as it would be put politely. Put not so politely, Sharky, Preacher, and Ike are winos with a capacity to laugh at themselves, laugh at life, and somehow manage to find not only fun things to do, but contribute in their own limited way to the tasks placed before them in the moment. Beulah is another of those lesser souls who has found her way into Jack's world by mysterious means, but whom Jack tries to help by inviting her to live in the Land Lady's crew quarters until she can find a place in life better suited to her talents and kind disposition.

The Master Of The Welded Bead story is primarily about Morgan River Shipyard under the helm of Don Hendrix, Jack's U.S. Marine companion from flight school. Hendrix has chosen the “path well trod” by going into business right after his tour of active duty in the service and finally, later in life, buying control of the shipyard. His reign as CEO is checkered with employee and labor union strife, and long periods without government contracts during which time workers are laid off, but executives still draw their usual high-paying salaries. Hendrix meets Jack quite by accident many years after flight school and invites him to go to work as a welder at the shipyard. Jack does so and quickly becomes a champion of the underdogs—the shipyard laborers—and battles with his old friend bitterly for more consistent employment and better benefits. Hendrix is finally unable to land more fat government contracts because of his refusal to hire minority workers. It is at this point that Jack becomes the synergizing agent in rescuing the shipyard from certain bankruptcy in a way that most certainly would be called “intelligent design”, but it is through a series of totally unpredictable, unorthodox, and unexpected events beyond Jack's own intelligent capacities.

The story of An Arrow To The Heart begins as the new controlling regime takes over management of the shipyard, hiring Jack as a sort of Carte Blanche supervising synergizer and efficiency executive at whatever level of management he chooses to move within. As part of the move to integrate minority workers into the labor force, Jack's job as a master welder has been delegated to a very attractive Swedish welding instructor named Kirsten who is herself an accomplished artist in the medium of welded steel fabrication and design, and none the less Jack's equal as a master of the welded bead and other illusions of the universe ... as we shall see!

Table Of Contents

	Page
CHAPTER 1.	7.
CHAPTER 2.	13.
CHAPTER 3.	21.
CHAPTER 4.	29.
CHAPTER 5.	37.
CHAPTER 6.	44.
CHAPTER 7.	50.
CHAPTER 8.	58.
CHAPTER 9.	66.

CHAPTER 1.

Inside the Shipyard hangar and several hours after her initial meeting with Jack, Kirsten puts the finishing touch on her welding job and starts to wash up for lunch. No sooner has she finished than the electronically amplified buzzer announces lunch break. She picks up her lunch box and heads for the employees' lunch room. Several minutes later Jack comes into the lunch room, sits down opposite her and opens his own brown-bag lunch.

"You're back in the employees' lunch room," remarks Kirsten to Jack. "I thought they'd given you a new job ... maybe moved you up to the executive lunch room."

"The food tastes better down here," replies Jack. "The company's more friendly, too."

"I can understand that. Tell me about your new job."

"They just told me to make a job description for myself ... anything I want to do that needs doing."

"That's a sweet deal," Kirsten says. "I haven't been here long enough to imagine what needs doing, so tell me."

"I kind of think the easiest thing to do at first is to keep an eye on you ... especially considering the fact that you're so easy on the eyes ... sort of make sure your welding and teaching methods are standardized."

"Pfffft! That's a waste of company money," she says.

"Well, I thought I might learn something," says Jack.

"How is it I get paid to work and you get paid to watch?" asks Kirsten.

"What's the sound of an electric arc without electricity?" Jack asks with a smile on his face.

Kirsten puts down her sandwich, looks at Jack strangely, shrugs her shoulders and replies in a matter-of-fact manner.

"I guess ... it's ... the sound of no sound."

"Very good!" Jack replies. "And where do you suppose that answer came from?"

"I don't know, but probably from the same place your question came from."

"Would it make the same sound in a dense forest if there were no-one around to hear it?"

"Of course!" Kirsten replies. "If Nothing can make the sound, then Nothing can hear it."

"This is true!" says Jack, surprised that Kirsten is so quick with such esoteric questioning.

"And if No-Thing can get you a welder's job in a hangar full of male welders, then certainly No-Thing can pay me to watch some-thing, can it not?"

"I suppose," replies Kirsten, laughing and shaking her head incredulously.

The Shop Foreman is sitting at the next table. He stops eating and looks strangely at Kirsten and Jack.

“Are you guys all right?” he asks.

“I think she’s got something in her coffee,” replies Jack.

“I’d say you’ve both been too long in the paint shed without a mask!” says the foreman.

“Now, that’s a good idea,” retorts Jack as he balls up his lunch wrappers and gets up from the table. “I haven’t checked out the paint shed for months.”

“Send me a message from the moon!” says the foreman.

The hangar loudspeaker system suddenly interrupts with instructions for Jack to please report to the patrol boat construction area.

“That’s another one of my jobs,” Jack replies looking at Kirsten. “See you later.”

Jack walks to the far end of the hangar where several patrol boats are nearing completion. He opens the door to the Job Supervisor’s office and walks in. Chris Handley, the patrol boat job supervisor, looks up from his drafting table to greet Jack.

“Hi, Jack. The architect’s office doesn’t want to make the fuel system design changes you asked for ... can you believe it?”

“I can believe it, but I’m not buying into it,” says Jack. “They’ve been too long in school, and not long enough at sea.”

“They said it would cost about five hundred bucks more to filter and draw the fuel from separate tanks for each engine,” says Chris. “They didn’t say anything about the cross-feed you mentioned.”

“And what happens when the fuel is contaminated in one tank?” remarks Jack. “Both engines stop! ... And never on a calm day when you’re tied to the dock either.”

“So, what shall I do?” asks Chris.

“Leave it the way it is for now,” Jack replies. “We need to get this first boat in the water as soon as possible so we can start testing it. I’ll write it up as a required change for the next boats. You can incorporate the change right away on number two so we don’t have to tear things apart to accomplish it. Did you re-seal the water intakes with 5201?”

“Done!” replies.

“And the running lights are working properly now?”

“Fixed. It was just a burned out fuse in the power panel.”

“I guess she’s ready to go in the water then,” Jack says

“She’s ready! Are you gonna do the test runs?” asks Chris.

“As far as I know.”

“That’s what they told me upstairs,” Chris remarks. “Do you want to be here when we start up the engines and test the pumps?”

“Definitely!” says Jack. “Do you have a time frame?”

“I think we can shoot for tomorrow after lunch,” says Chris. “Give me a call first in case we run into problems getting her into the water.”

Jack’s new job description allows him to set his own hours with the proviso that any

responsibilities he has agreed to undertake receive first priority regardless of the time of day, night, or day of the week. Since his responsibilities have been fulfilled for the day, Jack returns to his quarters in the Captain's Cabin of the LAND LADY an hour before normal quitting time, showers, and puts on clean clothes in order to head for the shopping mall to obtain his weekly food supply. He climbs in his jeep and heads out through the back gate in order to avoid the 5 o'clock shipyard traffic and arrives at the main traffic stop-light intersection to see Kirsten waiting for the bus at the covered bus stop. He pulls over to the curb and pushes open the passenger-side door.

"Jump in," he says. "I'll save you the bus fare."

"But I'm going across the river," Kirsten replies.

"That's okay. I have time," says Jack.

Kirsten climbs in the jeep and Jack pulls away just as the bus drives up behind him.

"Where are you headed?" Jack asks.

"Home," she says.

"Do you usually take the bus?"

"No. My car is in the shop being repaired."

"You live on the other side of the river?"

"Yes ... Down on the waterfront."

"The waterfront?" Jack says with surprise. "But there's nothing but warehouses on the waterfront."

"That's right!" says Kirsten.

"You live in a warehouse?"

"Um-hm, almost as crazy as the place you live, isn't it?"

"How you know where I live?" Jack asks.

"Is there somebody in the shipyard who *doesn't* know where you live?"

"I don't really know," Jack replies. "I guess it is sort of unusual when you look at it. When you live it, it's just ... well ... home!"

"It's the same with me," says Kirsten.

As Jack drives by the nightclub where his girlfriend Marty sings, Marty is just going in the club door. She stops when she sees Jack's car, notices Kirsten, gives Jack a nervous wave, and disappears inside.

"Boy!" exclaims Jack. "That's an interesting coincidence!"

"Friend of yours?" Kirsten asks.

"Yes ... girlfriend," Jack replies.

"Looks like you're going to have some explaining to do," remarks Kirsten. "Sorry about that."

"No ... I think that was more of an omen than a coincidence, but it sure makes you wonder how events are formed, doesn't it?"

Jack follows Kirsten's directions to a parking area beside an older-type warehouse that sits partially on a wharf. Kirsten unlocks the small warehouse side door and leads Jack up a long flight of enclosed stairs to a landing and a heavy steel door that's also locked. The door leads into a huge warehouse loft space with windows along the full length of one side wall as well as along the end wall facing the river. Numerous skylights add even more light to the spacious area. About two-thirds of the total square footage is allocated to steel art-work fabrication with numerous partially completed projects scattered everywhere. The remaining third of the square footage—the part facing out onto the river—is separated off by a low partition and contains Kirsten's living area. Kirsten leads Jack through the studio area, past a woodstove space heater made from two 55-gallon oil drums welded one on top of the other, into a beautifully decorated living/kitchen area with a fantastic view looking up and down the river for almost a mile in either direction. As Jack takes in the view, in walks a young girl, Elvie, 18, dressed in tight jeans and a loose-fitting white blouse. She has long hair in a braid like her mother and a breath-taking body.

"Hi, Mom," says Elvie in greeting.

"Hello, Dear. Come over here and meet Jack. Jack, this is my daughter, Elvie."

"Hi, Jack," says Elvie, walking over and offering her hand and a warm smile to Jack.

"Quite a view you live with," Jack says to Elvie.

"Yeah ... after a while you don't notice it though." she remarks.

Elvie suddenly notices the Gold Wings on Jack's leather jacket and becomes instantly excited.

"Oh ... Wow! Are you a pilot?" she asks.

"Sure ... whenever I can borrow an airplane," replies Jack with a laugh.

"Can you take me flying some time ... please?" she asks.

"Perhaps," replies Jack.

"Oh, promise, please! I want to go flying so badly."

"Elvie!" interrupts her mother. "Stop being a pest! Where are you off to anyhow?"

"Can I borrow the car to go to Anna's?" she pleads.

"It's in the shop, Love. Take a taxi. Here's ten bucks ... and don't be too late, please."

"Okay. Thanks, Mom. I'm glad to meet you, Jack. And remember ... please?"

"How could I possibly leave you behind?" says Jack. "You'd never let me forget it!"

Elvie gives Jack a childlike grin and disappears. Jack and Kirsten sit down.

"Like a drink? ... or some dinner?" asks Kirsten.

"No thanks. I have to go back to the girl you saw or she'll be so upset she won't be able to sing tonight."

"It sounds pretty serious to me," remarks Kirsten, "but she seems to be quite a bit younger than you. How close are you?"

"I guess I'd have to say that she's closer to me than I am to her," adds Jack thoughtfully.

“There’s a kind of unbridgeable gap at some other level than the physical ... if you know what I mean.”

“All too well,” she replies. “I had my chance at being a middle-American housewife. I just couldn’t shrink into it ... at least not with the man I was married to at the time. Now I have other problems, but they’re not half as bad.”

“Like what, for instance?”

“You just met the biggest one!”

“Is she hard to control?” asks Jack

“That’s not the problem.” replies Kirsten, with a long pause as though she’s hesitant to talk about it.

“Do you want to talk about it?” asks Jack.

“Oh, yes. It’s that she’s a lot like her mother. She doesn’t feel that she fits in anywhere, only she hasn’t yet found a creative outlet for all her vivacious energies. The boys her age aren’t mature enough for her, so she looks to the men who are my age to fill the gap her father might have filled had I stayed with him.”

“In what way is that a problem?”

“If you stick around, you’ll see for yourself,” replies Kirsten. “She’s very precocious. She’ll monopolize your attention if you let her.”

“Is that why you’re alone?”

“Not really. It’s a matter of finding a man who can handle the situation, and I just haven’t found one yet.”

“Scary!” remarks Jack.

“It could be,” adds Kirsten.

“If you scare easily, that is! But you could put a stop to it.”

“Oh, yes, but there’s a unique sort of “aliveness” about Elvie’s naiveté and spontaneity that’s very beautiful. I don’t want to kill those qualities in her. I’d rather have her add wisdom and sound judgment to them, and that requires allowing her—and me—to experience things that most adults put a stop to before they get started.”

“That could be dangerous!” adds Jack with a certain amount of respectful surprise.

“She’s done quite well so far,” remarks Kirsten with a smile.

“Well ... you certainly seem to have a good grip on the situation.”

“I’m never really sure. She plays with things that are always a little over her head, like I did. Sometimes the lessons are hard ... for me as well as for her. I never realized I had so many dragons hidden in the caves of my innermost being. Know what I mean?”

“Do I ever!” replies Jack with more than a little dubious concern. “I can see why you’d have to be pretty selective about the company you keep.”

Jack looks at his watch and then adds:

“I’d better run. Marty’s a sweet girl and I hate to leave her wondering who I’m with. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Nightfall finds Jack sitting at his usual table in Marty's nightclub, drink in hand, while Marty belts out her repertoire of light rock songs to a largely inattentive audience. She seems to hardly notice Jack—which is highly unusual—and when the band finishes for the night she doesn't show up at Jack's table, but disappears behind stage. Having experienced this kind of behavior from Marty before, Jack knows she's probably headed for her room upstairs until it's time for the next set. After a minute or so, he gets up and heads for Marty's room. He knocks on the door. No answer. He knocks again ... harder this time.

"Who is it?" asks Marty from inside her room.

"You'll never guess" replies Jack quietly.

Marty opens the door, half undressed. Jack goes in and sits down on the edge of her bed.

"I didn't think you'd bother," says Marty with a sneer.

"I'm beginning to wonder if I should've," remarks Jack.

"Well! ... what do you expect me to think?" demands Marty.

"More ... and better than you do!" retorts Jack in a mild voice.

"Who is *she*?"

"One of the welding instructors at the yard," replies Jack quietly. "Her car broke down and I gave her a ride home."

There's a long period of silence while Marty looks intensely at Jack, weighing his credibility and trying hard to overcome her negative response mechanism.

"I was imagining all kinds of wonderful things you might do to her," adds Marty, still unable to completely override her negativity.

"You need a rope for your imagination ... either that or a sword!" says Jack with a slight smile.

Not knowing quite what to do or say, Marty walks into the bathroom.

"What are you doing tonight?" she asks finally.

"You know where I've been most of it ... downstairs waiting for you! But maybe I'd better go home until all this negative energy's died down," remarks Jack.

Marty walks out of the bathroom dressed in nothing but a frilly pair of underpants, climbs on top of Jack and sticks her breasts in his face.

"There's nobody I know can calm it down faster than you, you big Bastard."

And it suddenly becomes difficult to determine who is making love to whom!

CHAPTER 2.

Much later in the night, the full moon shines down through the bedroom window onto Jack and Marty lying together under the covers. Jack is wide awake. Marty is sound asleep. Jack raises his head, slowly creeps out of bed, dresses, and leaves without waking Marty. He climbs into his jeep VW and heads out towards a hilly part of the town where there are very expensive homes. He knows precisely and exactly where he's headed, having followed this route numerous times on his treasure hunting expeditions. After climbing through numerous twisting turns he finally turns down a small street with a sign that says "NO EXIT" and pulls to a stop in front of two large garbage dumpster bins set back off the road and partially hidden by high bushes. Grabbing a large four-cell aluminum flashlight from between the front seats and a short boat hook from off the rear seat, he climbs up on the front bumper of the jeep to look over into the garbage bin. He rummages around for awhile, turning things over and moving them about with the boat hook while examining them with a light from the flashlight. There's a toaster oven that looks almost new! He hauls it out, looks it over, and places it gently on the jeep's hood. "Just what I need," he says, knowing he can repair whatever may be wrong with it, if anything at all is wrong with it.

Down near the bottom there ... what's that? ... looks almost like a packet of letters tied up with a colorful ribbon. Can't resist that one! He hooks the ribbon with his boat hook and hauls the packet up to look it over more closely. Having found treasures enough for the evening, he puts everything inside the jeep and heads for home and his own bed.

Next morning, Jack sits down to his breakfast with coffee, toast, jam, and the packet of letters in front of him. He takes a drink of coffee and opens one of the letters. There's a slight smell of perfume mingled with the smell of the garbage bin, but the letter is written neatly in fine feminine script. It speaks to its reader.

"Since your father's death, I've done very well managing this big house, but it's becoming more and more of a burden to me. Your suggestion of a retirement community with care is very depressing to me, so much so that I would prefer to die here with the house falling down about me. Also, I have carefully saved money for you children over the years. There's no need to give it to a rest home. You're comfort has become more important to me than my own."

Jack looks up ... a look of deep concern lingers on his face. He picks up the envelope and examines it.

"I guess she never sent that letter," he says quietly to himself. He looks again at the return address on the envelope.

“104 Forest Street. That shouldn’t be hard to find. It’s probably the next street above where the Dumpsters are located.”

Instead of driving directly to work that same morning, Jack winds his way up past the road where the Dumpsters are located and, sure enough, at the next road above, there’s a sign saying “Forest St.” and number 104 turns out to be a beautiful stone house set back from the road on a large lot with a well-manicured lawn and a number of mature oak, maple, and elm trees. Jack examines the house carefully, squinting when he sees a slight curl of black smoke issuing from the large chimney above the slate-shingled roof. Smiling to himself, he continues on his way to work.

Jack walks into the shipyard hangar just as the 10:00 o’clock break buzzer sounds. He makes his way over to his old welding station where Kirsten is instructing two Indian women in the use of welding equipment. He waits and listens patiently until she’s through delivering her final instructions and turns to greet him with a bright smile and a coy little “Hi”.

“Want to take a few minutes of your break to see what kind of boat the company’s building?” he asks.

“Sure,” she replies cheerfully, and, turning into her students, says, “At 10:30 we’ll pick up where we left off.”

Jack and Kirsten make their way through the hangar and out onto the wharf where the newly-launched patrol boat is tied up and rubbing against the wharf pylons with the slight swells from river waves and passing boat traffic. They both jump down onto the patrol boat deck and Jack leads the way to the wheelhouse which has its own business-like air from being filled with engine controls, navigation equipment, radio equipment, radar consoles, large magnetic compass, helm, and chart table.

“Ooooh! This is impressive! ... even exciting ... and we’re still tied to the dock,” says Kirsten enthusiastically.

“I have to take it out for its first test run with the mechanics and marine architect right after lunch,” says Jack, “then I have to come back, drop them off, and go out again to put some time on the engines and pumps. I’d like to have you along for the second run if you can get free.”

“I’d love to go!” replies Kirsten. “Do you have any idea what time that might be?”

“It’ll probably be very close to quitting time ... just after 4:30, I would guess. If the boat’s not back here at 4:30 waiting for you, give me a call on my cell phone. Here’s my card with the number.”

“Wonderful!” exclaims Kirsten. “I’ll see you here at 4:30 ... or whenever you get back.” Fortunately there are only minor problems during the patrol boat’s first run and Jack is able to return to the wharf by four o’clock in the afternoon. There are many people waiting on the wharf for the boat’s return: photographers, mechanics, executives, as

well as workers anxious to see how their handiwork has turned out. As soon as the boat is tied up, Jack jumps onto the wharf to confer with mechanics about adjustment of the pump drive mechanisms. Before too long there are photo-flashes going off and mechanics everywhere, checking engines, electronics ... and several hanging over the stern adjusting the trim plates and nozzle controls. Kirsten arrives promptly at 4:30, remaining on the wharf by herself until the activity subsides. Jack spots her after a few moments and motions her to come aboard.

“Let’s go below into the galley and have a cup of tea until things quiet down,” says Jack, ushering her into the patrol boat cabin and down the narrow stairway into the tiny kitchen/galley. “Since it’s quitting time, they’ll all be out of here in the next fifteen minutes.”

Coffee, tea, and doughnuts have been brought in and arranged on the galley table since the boat’s arrival.

“How did the test run go?” asks Kirsten.

“At least up to expectations so far, but we’ll have to break in the engines and pump drives before we know what sort of maximum performance she’s capable of doing,” replies Jack with enthusiasm. “You won’t believe how stable she is in high speed turns. It’s really fun!”

“Are you sure it’s all right for me to go out with you?” asks Kirsten. “It’s not exactly in my job description.”

“I told them up topside I was taking you as a navigator/trainee. Didn’t they get a laugh at that one! No one said no, so I guess you have two jobs now. Think you can handle it?”

“There’s no question in my mind about handling the first job,” she replies. “As for the second, I guess we’ll have to find out.”

The bustling activity gradually subsides as Jack and Kirsten drink their tea. Soon there is nothing but silence and an occasional creak and groan of the patrol boat hull as it rises and falls against the wooden wharf pilings.

“Sounds like they’re all finished,” says Jack finally. “must be time for us to get back to work ... or play, as the case is here.”

Jack shows Kirsten how to start the two engines, then casts off the shorelines.

“You can be the pilot for now,” he says. “Left engine forward very slowly. Turn the wheel slightly to the right—that’s starboard to a sailor—but not too sharply or the stern’s liable to bump the wharf.”

Jack carries on a constant stream of dialogue as they move out into the river, explaining everything in detail as to water depths and currents, buoys, and the dangers of debris in the water.

“Now that we’re out in the river, you can pick up your speed a bit,” adds Jack. “ ... that’s it. Can you hear the Runnnnn, Runnnnn, Runnnnn, Runnnnn sound the engines are making? It’s a beat frequency caused by the two engines running at different speeds.

Adjust one of the throttles a bit and listen for the sound. When the beat frequency disappears completely, both engines are turning over at exactly the same speed. In engineer's parlance, they're 'synched'."

The noise of the engines makes conversation difficult at best, but Jack manages to teach Kirsten several abrupt turns that one would not be able to do with a propeller-driven boat. The rest of the two-hour break-in run passes cruising up and down the river not far from where help is available in case of problems. When the patrol boat finally ties up at the shipyard wharf once again, Kirsten remarks:

"Whew! That was exhausting! I didn't think I'd worked that hard."

"It's a combination of things peculiar to life on the water," replies Jack. "The concentration, the boat's constant motion, the sea air and wind ... they each take their toll."

"It's late," remarks Kirsten, looking at her watch. "I've got to make some dinner for Elvie. Want to come back and eat with us?"

"Thanks, but I have to get some other matters straightened out first. The timing isn't quite right yet."

"Fine," replies Kirsten. "See you on Monday."

Later that evening, Jack is on the telephone talking to Marty.

"Hi, Marty," says Jack. "What are you up to this weekend?"

"Nothing planned ... why don't you come over tonight?"

"Can't ... I'm exhausted," replies Jack. "We put the new patrol boat through four hours of tests today, and I'm going to collapse in bed in a very short while. There's a dune buggy rally on the desert tomorrow ... want to go?"

"I have to sing at 9:00 PM. Can we be back in time?"

"I can have you back by then," Jack answers.

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all. How early can you leave?"

"Is 8:00 o'clock okay?"

"Great!" replies Jack. "I'll be waiting for you outside in the car."

"But ... but call me first before you leave ... okay?"

"Consider it done, Sweetheart."

By ten o'clock the next morning—Saturday—Jack and Marty turn off the freeway down a long off-ramp and onto a desert road leading to miles of sand dunes in the distance. There's a long line of pickup trucks with trailers hauling dune buggies in front of them as well as behind them. When they finally pull in to the park headquarters, there are hundreds of house trailers, pickup trucks, repair trailers, campers, hot dog stands, and an uncountable number and variety of dune buggies all congregated in a corner of a broad, dry lake-bed at the base of the sand dunes. Jack drives slowly in among them

looking for T-Bird. Finally, out near the perimeter of the temporary settlement, Jack spots T-Bird's black dune buggy parked beneath a sun tent set up for the rally. Alongside sits T-Bird's pickup truck and trailer and another sun tent shading a picnic table, chairs, and beer cooler ... and T-Bird sporting a fancy straw sun hat complete with Eagle's feather. T-Bird smiles and gets up as he sees Jack's jeep approaching.

"Glad you could make it, Jack," he says.

"Wow! What a crowd!" exclaims Jack. "There's ten times as many people as I expected."

"There's some pretty wild buggies out there. Make ours look like go-karts!" remarks T-Bird.

"Yeah, but we have more fun," adds Jack, as he starts unloading his own sun tent, table and chairs.

"They're about to have a follow-the-leader hair-raiser out on the dune's. Want to go along?" asks T-Bird.

"Nah! I'm not much of a follower," says Jack. "Why don't the two of us go out on the lake-bed and play ... unless you really want to go with them."

"Hell, I'd rather play with you any day, Jack. What d'you have in mind?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. Keep an eye on Marty while I go get us a coffee, will you. Want a coffee, Marty? T-Bird?" They both nod affirmatively, and with that, Jack disappears into the confusion of activity looking for the coffee wagon.

T-Bird sits down next to Marty.

"So, how long have you known Jack?" he asks.

"We're old friends," she replies, thinking for a moment. "I guess it's been several years now."

"You work at the shipyard?" he asks her.

"No, I'm a nightclub singer," she replies.

"Hey! Wow!" exclaims T-Bird excitedly. "What kinda music you sing?"

"It depends on the band I'm with. Pop and country, but mostly country," she adds.

"I used to have a band," muses T-Bird, looking off into the distance, "and that's what we played, too. I'm thinking seriously of re-forming the band. I'm crazy about music."

"Me too," adds Marty with a smile.

They take a long look at each other, like they're seeing each other for the first time. Marty catches herself.

"Ummm ... what instrument do you play?" she asks.

"I play the bass mostly ... sometimes the drums ... and I sing too, but I don't have the greatest range in creation," remarks T-Bird, chuckling to himself.

Just then, Jack walks up carefully juggling a cardboard tray loaded with coffee and doughnuts.

“Dig in, Gang,” says Jack, picking out a doughnut and coffee for himself. “I’ll be right back. I just ran into a guy I haven’t seen for years.”

Jack hurries off, sipping at his coffee.

“Do you write your own stuff?” Marty asks T-Bird.

“Some of it ... some of its pretty good, too.”

“Gosh, I’d love to hear it,” remarks Marty.

“Any time’s a good time for me,” says T-Bird casually. “You interested in dune buggies?”

“Not really. I just come along to be with Jack.”

“I really like Jack,” remarks T-Bird.

“I do too,” answers Marty and adds after a long pause, “but I’m afraid I’m not his type.”

“Well, who knows what’ll happen next?” remarks T-Bird with a hearty laugh.

“Yeah!” says Marty nervously.

Jack hustles up.

“C’mon, T-Bird,” he says, full of energy. “I’ll show you a dune buggy version of what happens after a Navy jet gets catapulted off the deck of an aircraft carrier. It’s called a ‘rendezvous’. Then we’ll pretend we’re two planes flying in formation.”

T-Bird climbs into his fire-spitting dune buggy wagon and in seconds it roars into life. Jack walks over to T-Bird’s buggy, now idling loudly as T-Bird straps himself in. He hands T-Bird a hard-hat.

“Here,” he says. “Use this. It has a built-in two-way radio so I can talk to you.”

Jack kneels down beside T-Bird’s dune buggy and draws in the sand with a stick.

“You’re the leader,” Jack tells him with a raised voice. “Go out on the lake-bed and make the biggest figure eight you can. Stay on hard ground. Keep your speed nailed on 3,000 RPM in third gear. Don’t pay any attention to me. Concentrate on your speed and your figure eight. Run in your same tracks as closely as you can, lap after lap. I’ll be talking to you over the radio from there.”

“What’re you gonna do?” asks T-Bird.

“You’ll see,” replies Jack with a smile.

He climbs into his Porsche-powered VW jeep, then turns to Marty and yells loud enough to be heard over the din.

“Want to go along?”

“It doesn’t sound like it,” yells Marty back ... remembering the P-51 experience all too well.

“Okay. Actually, it’ll be more fun for you to watch,” replies Jack as he and T-Bird pick their way carefully out through the crowded base camp.

Once through the crowd and out on the lake-bed, T-Bird stomps on the dune buggy throttle and the engine roars into life—flames shooting two feet into the air from out of

the vertical exhaust pipe. Jack waits at the edge of the lake bed as T-Bird feels out the white-caked surface of the dried up lake bed. White dust and caked clay fly off the rear wheels as T-Bird accelerates to 3,000 RPM.

“How do you read me, T-Bird?” asks Jack on the radio.

“Loud and clear,” replies T-Bird.

“How’s the surface?”

“It’s good and solid where I’m running,” replies T-Bird.

“Okay. I’m going to rendezvous with you,” comments Jack quietly.

As T-Bird swings by a hundred yards or so away at 60mph, Jack stomps on his VW and its Porsche engine makes the car fishtail and kick up clay as it gathers speed. Jack cuts inside T-Bird’s wide circle, making a smaller, faster track until he has caught up and is riding on the inside of T-Bird with his right front wheel even with, and about a foot away from T-Bird’s left rear wheel.

T-Bird can’t help but steal a glance, but Jack checks him with a call on the radio.

“Don’t watch me, watch your speed so it remains perfectly constant. Make all your motions slow and graceful so I can follow easily. Right now I’m in what is called ‘left echelon’ formation.”

Jack eases backed on the throttle and drops his speed slightly, sliding around to the outside of T-Bird, then adds power and speeds up until his left front tire is even with T-Bird’s right rear tire.

“This is right echelon formation,” he adds over the radio.

After half a dozen or so figure eight patterns, Jack takes the lead and T-Bird gets to try out juggling power settings so as to stay locked into the echelon position. After that they break out of the figure eight pattern and do random sliding turns at high speed in formation. Still further on, one breaks off to the right, the other breaks off to the left and they make sliding 360-degree circles to merge back into formation again.

“Having fun yet?” asks Jack over the radio.

“Hey, I love it!” comes back the reply.

“This is dune buggy ballet,” says Jack finally. “Okay, let’s head for the pits.”

Both the vehicles wend their way slowly through the crowd and back to their sun tents. T-Bird and Jack climb out, their clothing and hair drenched in sweat, and throw their hard- hats on the seat of their vehicles.

“I don’t know about you,” remarks Jack, “but I’ve got to find the portable toilets.”

“Guess we both had the same idea at the same time,” adds T-Bird.

As they walk together toward the portable toilets, Jack asks:

“You like Marty?”

“Yeah, she seems really great,” replies T-Bird. “Are you two pretty heavy together?”

“She’d like it to be, but she’d never feel comfortable with me. She’d suffocate; or else I would. And I really don’t want to hurt her by calling an abrupt end to the whole affair. She’s too sensitive and too needy to just be dumped. The whole thing started out as a friendship and I should probably have never let it go as far as it did, but she has an awfully beautiful body in addition to that gentle and kind heart.”

“We seem to have a lot in common,” remarks T-Bird. “Maybe the easy way out for all of us would be for me to take your place, Jack, but I guess you’d have to set that up with her approval and I don’t know how the hell you’d do that.”

“You can leave that to me,” says Jack. “I think she feels the end is near anyhow. But be aware, T-Bird, she likes things ‘close’ ... real close and real clingy, know what I mean?”

“That’s the way I like them, too,” replies T-Bird.

“Then give me a couple of days to broach the subject tactfully and I’ll call you with the result.”

“Great! ... and thanks, Jack.”

“If it works, we’ll both be thanking you!” exclaims Jack. “Just take your time as only an Indian can ... and give me your word you won’t run around on her. She’s too good for that kind of treatment.”

“I don’t run around any more, Jack. Rides-the-Wind trained me to think of others first ... to, like, see the end from the beginning.”

The two look intently at each other with understanding and mutual trust ... maybe the first time in Indian and White Man History that’s ever happened!

“Funny,” remarks Jack, “how smoothly and painlessly things can work when you let them unfold with pure intent, isn’t it?”

T-Bird looks over his left shoulder ... then over his right shoulder ... then up ... then at Jack, and smiles. Then both break into loud, free laughter.

That evening, after several hours of driving, Jack pulls up in front of Marty’s club—she being sound asleep in the right seat.

“Wake up there, Sweet Thing,” says Jack, running his fingers through her hair. “You have half an hour to turn yourself into a screaming ball of fire.”

“Oh, My God,” groans Marty, coming back to life slowly. “I’ll never make it.”

She wraps her arms around Jack and kisses him on the cheek.

“Thanks, Jack. It was a fantastic day.”

“It’s okay if I don’t come up with you?” he asks.

“Yes, fine. I barely have time to put on makeup and my outfit.”

“I don’t envy you. I’ll be asleep before you finish your first song.”

Marty gets out and Jack pulls away.

CHAPTER 3.

At about noon on Sunday—the very next day—a white van with no name or markings on it pulls up into the driveway of 104 Forest Street just above Jack’s favorite Dempsey Dumpster site where he found the stack of handwritten letters—letters that carried the 104 Forest Street address. Jack climbs out the driver’s door of the van dressed in white coveralls and a ball cap—having assumed the role of a furnace repairman—and walks to the back door. He rings the doorbell and waits patiently for a response. Shortly the door opens and a white-haired elderly lady stands fearlessly in the door opening.

“Yes? May I help you?” she asks.

“I don’t need any help, thank you, M’am,” replies Jack politely, “but I think your furnace might. You have an oil-fired hot water heater or an oil-fired furnace, do you not?”

“Why ... yes ... Why do you ... How do you know that?” she asks curiously.

“Ordinarily I wouldn’t know, except that yesterday it was sending a signal out your chimney. I service oil burners in this area,” Jack lies with a straight face, “and I watch everyone’s chimney for signs of malfunction or poor efficiency.”

He stops long enough for his words to sink in.

“You saw something happening to my chimney?” she asks.

“Yes, I noticed a wisp of black smoke coming out the top. White smoke or steam isn’t a problem, but black smoke means something isn’t operating efficiently.”

“Well, I will certainly have my furnace man take a look at it ... and thank you very much,” she says, starting to close the door. Jack quickly counters her move.

“I wouldn’t wait, M’am,” replies Jack quickly. “It could be dangerous. House fires do start in furnaces that are not well maintained. I’ll be happy to look at it for free and if there’s nothing wrong there will be no charge. It won’t take but fifteen minutes of my time and I wouldn’t have stopped were I not concerned.”

The woman studies Jack’s face carefully for a moment.

“Well, then, perhaps you should take a look at it,” she says opening the door once again.

“I’ll just grab my toolbox,” says Jack, turning back toward the van.

Once in the basement of 104 Forest Street, Jack sets up a bright halogen lamp clamped to the floor joist over the burner. He opens his toolbox, takes out the necessary tools, and removes the nozzle assembly from the oil burner. Removing the nozzle from its assembly, he tries to blow through it and then mumbles to himself :

“There’s the problem. It needs a new nozzle.”

Just then a piano starts playing on the floor above almost directly over Jack’s head. Jack

replaces the nozzle with a new one and, as quickly as that, the burner is repaired. But his purpose in being there has not yet been fully served. From the letters, of course, Jack is pretty sure that the elderly lady's name is Eva since she appears to be the only elderly woman living in the house, so he pulls up a garden chair and sits to listen to what he recognizes being played on the piano as a Mendelssohn concerto.

Meanwhile, in the room above Jack's head, it is in fact Eva herself (as Jack will soon come to know) who plays the piano so beautifully. As she finishes the concerto, she reaches up to open another page of music when Jack's voice comes booming up from the basement through the floor at her feet.

"Bravo! Mendelssohn would love to hear you play his concerto so well!"

Eva stops in mid reach; she can't believe what she's hearing from a furnace man.

"Yes ... yes, that was indeed one of Mendelssohn's concertos. And how do you know that?"

"Mendelssohn ... let me see ... that would have been music class in college. He's not my favorite, though. Mozart is more like the child in me."

"Ohhhh! ... You mean like this ..." and Eva plays several pieces of Mozart's lively, simple and childlike music.

In the basement, Jack listens from the garden chair with closed eyes and a smile on his face, his relaxed, crossed legs swinging in time with the musical rhythms.

"Exactly! ... Exactly!" exclaims Jack loudly enough to be heard through the floor. "I'm going to have to make a little noise down here, but don't let that stop you from playing. I'm certainly enjoying it."

"Perfectly all right," replies Eva. "Noise doesn't bother my playing."

As Eva plays more Mozart, Jack, without leaving the garden chair, picks up a hammer and taps the furnace casing lightly a few times. A few seconds later he picks up a large spanner wrench, then purposefully drops it back in the toolbox. He cycles the furnace motor on and off several times over the next few minutes, rummages in his toolbox to make a little more noise, then curses quietly to himself. Suddenly, the piano stops playing.

"Are you having problems with the furnace?" comes the elderly female voice from above with a note of concern.

"A slight one," replies Jack, still sitting in the lawn chair and about to tell a lie so he can spend a little more time at 104 Forest Street.

"There seems to be a small crack in the fire chamber that could be dangerous if it enlarges. I'll have to come back tomorrow with my welder."

Jack gathers up his tools and makes his way up the basement stairs to the kitchen where Eva is waiting.

"I'll be back shortly after five tomorrow," Jack says.

“Thank you so much,” Eva replies. “Do I owe you anything now?”

“No. We’ll settle up tomorrow. Oh, and by the way,” Jack remarks, “my name’s Jack ... Jack Diamond.”

“It’s very nice to meet you, Jack. I’m Eva.”

Jack smiles, doffs his hat very slightly, and goes out to the van.

One might wonder at this point why Jack would take it upon himself to assume the role of a furnace man, but that is an explanation not easily or logically given. For a man like Jack, the boredom of life is only defrayed by spontaneous action, and the mother of all spontaneous action is curiosity. Suffice it to say that Jack could not resist the pull of the packet of letters from the Dumpster—nor could he resist the urge to help—or avoid adjusting a furnace that he knew needed maintenance. Nor could he possibly have foreseen the mystical manner in which his spontaneous actions would affect the lives of those about him.

The master of the welded bead appears at times to be a fool—and is quite comfortable with that appearance—for experience has taught him that he is only the puppet, not the Puppeteer, and each day is a fresh new day with few problems as long as he sees himself as not performing for an audience, not pulling hard on the strings from which he hangs, and not thinking too much about the merits or demerits of the part he plays or the story in which he finds himself the performer.

After a brief stop to check out recent trash contributions to the Dempsey Dumpsters just around the corner, Jack heads for home and parks the shipyard’s white van next to his VW beneath the Land Lady’s high bow. As he makes his way up the noisy steel staircase inside the ship’s interior, he hears Beulah calling him.

“Mist’ Jack? Oh, Mist’ Jack ... dat you?”

“Sure enough, Beulah. What is it?”

“Mist’ Jack, Sharky and de boys come lookin’ fo’ you while you was gone. Dey was ver’ excited ... somep’m ‘bout a boat or somep’m. Said dey be back after dinner time.”

“Thanks, Beulah. I’ll be looking for them. I can’t imagine what they’re up to now.”

Jack turns to continue up the stairs, but just as quickly turns back to ask an intuitive question.

“Beulah, have you ever worked as a housekeeper?”

“Housekeeper! Mist’ Jack, I kep’ house fo’ a whole dam army ‘fo my place burn down. I clean from dawn ‘til dark. I wash clothes in de river. I cook. I plant de garden. I weed de garden. I pick de garden. I dig holes six feet in de groun’ an’ I build a outhouse on top de holes. I build de chicken coop. I kill de chickens...I pluck de chickens ...and I been thinkin’, you know ... I’s some dam glad dat place burn down! Yas, suh, Mist’ Jack, I’s a house keeper and a house ever’tin’ else. Why you ask?”

Jack has a good laugh before he replies.

"I'm not sure, but I may have found a home for you."

"Ain't nothin' wrong wit' dis home, Mist' Jack. I ain't been dis happy in years."

"Yes, I see that, Beulah, and I'm very happy to have you, but my life changes a lot, and it changes very quickly. If this works out, you would not only be well paid, but have a very stable home for many years."

"Can you tell me 'bout it?" Beulah asks.

"It's far from a done thing yet ... in fact, it's just an idea in my own mind so far. I just wanted you to know I'm working on it for you."

"Mist' Jack ... I do 'preciate you."

Not too many hours later, in the early evening as Jack is cleaning up his dinner dishes, he hears the DING-DING, DING-DING of the big brass ship's bell he's mounted on the outside of the gate for visitors to ring to announce their arrival. He dries his hands and heads out the door knowing full well who it probably is. Sure enough, Sharky, Preacher, and Ike are waiting nervously outside the gate. Jack walks up without opening it. He speaks to them through the fencing in a kidding fashion.

"No booze on Sunday!" kids Jack. "You know my rule."

"Now, Jack," says Sharky with a chuckle. "We ain't hit you up for booze fo' a long time! Nope ... we wants to talk to you 'bout somep'm else."

"Um-Hm ... I can see that," replies Jack slowly, quite at a loss to second-guess the situation. "And what might that be?"

Sharky becomes very nervous and can't quite get all the words out that he wants to get out.

"Why ...uh ...it's ... uh ..."

Preacher comes quickly to his rescue and interjects:

"Well ... tell him 'bout the boat! Go on! Tell him."

Sharky clears his throat, "Ahem ... ahem ... They's a li'l white boat down in de scrapyard; she jus' lyin' dere goin' to pieces, an' we was thinkin' we might ... uh ... you know ... fix her up or som'pm like 'at, you know?"

"Well ...I can't say I'm exactly clear on it yet, Sharky," replies Jack skeptically. "Which boat would that be?"

"You know ... de li'l white one ... de one wit' two ends."

"Most boats do have two ends!" Jack replies sarcastically.

Again, Preacher interjects:

"Says 'Lifeboat' on her."

"Um-Hm," replies Jack, knowing now which boat they're talking about.

"She not far from here," says Sharky, picking up the ball. "Lemme in an' I show you where'bouts she be."

Jack unlocks the big gate and the threesome make a bee-line down one side of Land Lady toward the waterfront part of the scrapyard, Sharky talking excitedly all the time.

“We was thinkin’ we could fix ‘er up, you know, and we could rescue other boats in trouble. We’d be kinda like, you know, the River Rats Rescue Team. Trudy, she can get paint and show us how to paint ‘er ... an’ ... an’ ... Ike, he already got a two-way radio and five gallons o’ gas. An’ we ... we found some other stuff in de yard, too.”

Jack has to walk rapidly to keep up with Sharky and his companions in their excitement.

“And just how did you manage to get in here to find this boat ... and the other stuff you say you’ve found?” asks Jack suspiciously.

“Aw, shit, Jack, ‘das easy. You jus’ waits ‘till de tide’s out an’ you walks right in on de rocks.”

Not a hundred feet back from the stern of Land Lady, Sharky stops next to the white, double-ended, ship’s lifeboat covered with a faded and torn canvas. It does indeed look like it’s been abandoned and left to rot the rest of its life away hidden amongst the residue of abandoned ships and parts.

“Here she be!” says Sharky pointing at the boat and looking up the Jack.

“So ... you fell in love with my little beauty, did you?” remarks Jack. “I thought you might’ve been talking about this one. It does have two ends alright.”

“Dis yours?” asks Sharky incredulously.

“Yup. It used to be the lifeboat for the Land Lady. I kind of liked it myself so I paid Hendrix fifty bucks for it several years ago.”

“Oh...darn!” remarks Sharky. “We don’t got fifty bucks, Jack.”

All three look dejected and unhappy as their dream dies. Jack looks at their disappointment.

“Welllll ... I didn’t say you had to have fifty bucks ... in fact, I didn’t really say she was for sale. But I’ll tell you what I’ll do. You start fixing her up and I’ll see how you do. If you do a good enough job I might just give you a part ownership in her. How does that sound?”

Once again the excitement mounts as it begins to look like the dream might materialize after all.

“There’s just a couple of things we have to agree to,” continues Jack. “You don’t cut or drill any holes in her hull without you ask me first, agreed?”

They all speak at once in agreement.

“And you don’t take anything out of this yard without I see it first or you put it on this boat. Agreed?”

Sharky and Preacher quickly agree. Ike looks at Jack with a frown on his face.

“That means you in particular, Ike,” says Jack firmly, knowing Ike’s penchant for claiming and disposing of anything not tied down and not too big for a shopping cart. Ike grudgingly nods his head.

“And last of all, you only work here after 5:00 o’clock in the afternoon when the shipyard is closed, or on weekends when no-one is around to see you. Agreed?”

Again they all agree.

“And if, by some long shot, someone does come out here and ask you what you’re doing, you tell them you work for me and to talk to me about it.”

Immediately, the three begin to untie the canvas cover to the lifeboat and look about for something to stand on so they can climb over the edge of the lifeboat as it sits there high in its cradle. It is not a small boat by any means, but neither is it very large, being roughly 25 feet in length. Seeing everyone excitedly engrossed in their new adventure, Jack smiles to himself and returns to the Captain’s Cabin on Land Lady where he can actually watch them at work from one of the porthole windows in the cabin.

Late Monday afternoon, after the Shipyard traffic has cleared out, Jack climbs into the borrowed van once again and heads for 104 Forest Street dressed in his white coveralls. Arriving at the house, he grabs his toolbox and a small TIG welder out of the van and goes to the back door which Eva has opened for him. After a brief greeting, he heads once again for the basement. This time, however, he first plunks himself into the garden chair. After opening the toolbox and shuffling tools around for a minute to make it sound like he’s busy, he raises his voice loudly so as to be heard through the floor.

“Feel like playing the piano for me while I work?” he asks. Eva answers from the floor above.

“Why, of course. What would you like to hear?”

“Anything you’d enjoy playing ... Mozart, Chopin, Grieg, Mendelssohn ... your choice!” Jack replies.

As Eva starts to play, Jack gets up and walks around the basement quietly collecting broken things that need repairing: a damaged stiff-tined rake; an old shovel cracked in the blade; and an iron garden chair with a broken arm. The crackle of the welding arc mingles with the smell of ozone in the basement air.

As the music stops, Jack raises his welder’s helmet to look at the welding job on the rake.

“Who takes care of your property here?” Jack asks loudly. “It must need a certain amount of care.”

“I have lots of help outdoors,” Eva replies, “But the inside is getting to be a problem for me.”

“Don’t you have a maid or a housekeeper?” Jack asks.

“No. I haven’t needed one. That’s sort of the way I exercise. But lately I’m thinking I may have to find someone.”

Jack sits down in the garden chair and shuffles his tools around a bit.

“Did you know the Hendrix family who used to live over on Cumberland Street?” Jack asks.

“No, the name doesn’t sound familiar to me.

“They’ve just moved out of the area, and they had a fantastic housekeeper named Beulah who’s now out of a job. I could put her in touch with you if you like.”

Jack makes a mental note to reprimand himself for telling white lies.

“Is she dependable?” Eva asks.

“Definitely! Hendrix was the head of the shipyard and he wouldn’t have anyone working for him who wasn’t completely trustworthy and dependable.”

Damn, Jack thinks to himself; lied again! ... but Beulah’s better than any housekeeper Hendrix ever had!

“That sounds wonderful,” remarks Eva.

Jack makes sounds as though he’s putting his tools away.

“There; that takes care of your furnace. It’s as good as new and should last for years.”

Jack carries his tools and welder upstairs and out to the van. He returns for a brief word with Eva.

“I’ll try to locate Beulah for you and we’ll talk about your bill at that time. It was an easy job and won’t amount to much.”

Jack drives down the hill toward town and spots Trudy on the Park sidewalk with her art exhibited all about her. As she works away, he pulls over, parks illegally and gets out to pay her a visit.

“Hi, Jack,” she comments.

“Hi, Trudy. I hear you’re using a new painting technique and I thought I’d take a look.”

Jack walks around and admires her painting from farther back and then up close.

“Trudy, you’re really getting good. I’ve never seen such rich, saturated colors ... and it looks a lot like impressionism ... is that where you’re going with it?”

“Not exactly,” she replies, “but you’re very close. It’s my own version of Impressionism.”

As she continues painting, she motions over her shoulder and says:

“Isn’t that your old girlfriend over there on the park bench with that Indian fellow?”

Jack looks in the direction Trudy indicates and, sure enough, Marty and T-Bird are sitting on a park bench with their backs to Jack and Trudy, obviously enjoying each other’s company.

“Yes, that’s Marty,” Jack replies. “They’re both friends of mine and I sort of set the whole thing up not knowing whether it would work or not, but it looks like it’s working. The two are much better suited to each other than Marty was to me.”

“Ah, well ... all’s fair in love and war ... and I wasn’t the one who made that statement up, heh, heh,” remarks Trudy.

“Wouldn’t you say that being replaced is a lot more fun than being dumped?” asks Jack sarcastically.

“Actually, I find my art more satisfying, less traumatic, and a hell of a lot less trouble than either of those options,”

“Lucky you!” exclaims Jack. “Where’s Sharky and Preacher?”

“Working on their new boat ... or I should say, working on your old boat; and that reminds me. I’ve got to come up with some paint for it. Any idea what kind I should get?”

“Not to worry about it, Trudy,” Jack replies. “There’s hundreds of partly full cans of ship’s paint at the shipyard. They won’t miss several gallons of leftover paint. I’ll hide it inside the lifeboat for you; I want to see how they’re doing anyhow. I better go before I get a parking ticket. See you.”

Later that evening, Sharky, Preacher, and Ike are busy working inside the lifeboat when Jack walks up with four cans of paint. The lifeboat has gone through some major modifications. It now has a large steering station with a gigantic wooden spoked wheel; a large binnacle; a short mast with three stays and mast steps leading up the mast to a small lookout seat; an old car radio antenna attached at a weird angle to the tip of the mast; a ship’s bell screwed to the mast; a big anchor hung over the bow; a strong bollard post in the stern for a towing other boats; and a seat made from an old toilet seat—well supported—that hangs out over the stern. There’s a pile of orange life-preservers and two pairs of oars stacked nearby. Two folding garden chairs act as lifeboat seats and, in fact, one is not really certain just what kind of boat this really is. Sharky is the first one to spot Jack arriving with the paint.

“Hey! ... Jack! ... Jack! ... watch this!” yells Sharky over the side excitedly, and he runs back to give the steering wheel a spin. “Is it turnin’? Is it turnin’?” he asks Jack, referring to the motion of the rudder which has actually responded to the turning of the wheel.

“Like a jeweled watch, Sharky,” Jack replies.

“An’ ... an’ ... Listen ‘dis,” exclaims Sharky. “Ike? ...Ike! C’mon over here an’ show Jack you know what! Listen ‘dis, Jack. You won’ b’lieve what you gonna hear!”

Ike lifts the wooden box cover off the little three-cylinder diesel engine, fiddles with the fuel line shutoff and turns the ignition key on. He grabs the flywheel hand crank and gives it a hefty spin. The old diesel sputters, fires, and then roars into unmuffled life. It smokes like mad, spins the propeller, and runs for a few seconds before Ike proudly shuts it down before it overheats. Sharky can hardly contain himself.

“Whatcha’ thinka’ that, Jack? I betcha’ din’ think this ole thing’d ever run agin, didja? Ain’t that Ike smart? He sure knows how to fix things up. She all ready for the water soon’s the paint dries.”

“Beautiful, Sharky, beautiful,” exclaims Jack from down below. “What’s wrong that the starter doesn’t work?”

“We don’t had no batt’ry!” replies Sharky.

“I can fix that up,” Jack says. “You’ve got to have a battery. The radio and lights won’t work without one. I’ll dig one out of my storage shed for you.”

“Okay, okay, Jack. We be here ‘till dark.”

And with that, Jack heads for his cargo container shed beneath Land Lady to look for a car battery.

CHAPTER 4.

Later in the week, Jack finds himself standing on the Patrol Boat deck holding a coil of rope in his hand as the boat approaches the shipyard wharf after its afternoon trials. Kirsten is docking the boat by herself now, very cautiously, but with more than a little expertise and confidence. She brings the bow in first, gives the wheel a spin, moves the port engine throttle to half speed astern, then moves both engine throttles to neutral as the patrol boat sidles gently against the dock. Jack jumps onto the wharf with his rope, ties it to a bollard post, and moves to catch the stern rope Kirsten throws to him. As Jack jumps back on board, Kirsten walks up to him, puts her arms around his neck and says:

“How did I do, Daddy?”

“I think I’d better watch out for my job!” says Jack in mock disgust and gives her a kiss. They walk into the pilot cabin together and Kirsten shuts down the engines.

“I have a little beach house on the ocean,” she says casually to Jack. “It’s nothing special, but Elvie and I go there on weekends, build a fire in the outdoor fireplace, cook hot dogs, read stories, and it would be much more fun if you’d join us.”

“I don’t see why I can’t do that,” replies Jack. “How do I find your place?”

“It’s off the Shore Road, just past the Lighthouse. There’s a little dirt driveway with driftwood and steel gates, and a sign that says MAXIMUM SEA-CURITY. You can’t see the cabin from the road, but you can’t miss the sign.”

“I know exactly where it is,” Jack replies. “I’ve often wondered whose place it was.”

“Now you know. Come out any time Saturday morning.”

“Want me to bring anything?”

“Just yourself.”

Jack locks up the Patrol Boat and suddenly remembers he has an important appointment that evening at 104 Forest Street. He has made arrangements for Eva to meet Beulah—an event not without a certain amount of apprehension on his part due to the fact that he doesn’t know Eva that well. He doesn’t feel that she would be racially biased, but living in the same household with someone of such a radically different background could be a cause for Eva’s concern. In fact, the entire series of events beginning with Beulah’s arrival and his discovery of the packet of letters in the Dempsey Dumpster is cause for him to marvel at the intricate interrelationships of events as they unfold in his own life. He contemplates with more than a little satisfaction his own transition from the strongly motivated selfish interest and ego satisfaction of his younger days, to an ever-increasing realization that he is not far removed at all from being a puppet hanging from the strings

of a Puppeteer whose intelligence is almost too vast to comprehend. With that realization in mind, he can easily accept that no matter how it works out, the result is positive and beneficial ... as long as he sees it as being so!

No longer needing the borrowed shipyard van or the white coveralls for his masquerade as a furnace repairman, Jack dons a clean pair of canvas workman's jeans, a blue denim shirt, and his old leather flight jacket complete with Navy Wings of Gold pinned to the lapel. He's well aware that he can't make a working tradesman look like a golfing desk-jockey—neither would it be true to his nature and expressions of power. He talks with Beulah as they drive to 104 Forest Street.

"Beulah, this lady's name is Eva Gulbrandtsen, and I told her a flat-out lie about your background so it's important that you remember what I told her ... at least until you get to know her well enough to laugh about the lie."

"I knows all about white lies, Mist' Jack. I'se had to live with them fo' years."

"I said that you had been a maid for the Hendrix family for five years and that, since they had moved away, you were available. Hendrix was the past President of Morgan River Shipyard. He was a personal friend of mine, so I know his family situation very well. He lived at 22 Cumberland Street ... and you can make up the rest from there."

"Mr. Hendrix ... 22 Cumberland ... five years ... what's his first name?" asks Beulah.

"Donald."

"He have a wife and kids?"

"Wife named Jane; no kids."

"I think I c'n remember that," remarks Beulah as they pull into the driveway at 104 Forest Street.

Inside the kitchen of 104 Forest Street, Jack and Beulah sit down at the kitchen table while Eva fixes a cup of tea and a plate of biscuits.

"Jack tells me you worked for a family here in town for a number of years," remarks Eva.

"Oh, yes ma'am. That be Mist' Don Hendrix and his wife Jane. He was president o' de shipyard down on de River. An' 'fore dat I works for de Peace Corps in Africa. I'se a dietician."

"Oh, my! That's impressive!" remarks Eva.

"Not so 'pressive, Miss Eva. Where I was, all we had was Idaho spuds shipped in by de U.S. Gummint. I c'n sure fix taters ten ways to Sunday. They's good all ten ways too!"

"I'm sure they are," laughs Eva.

While they drink their tea, Beulah talks on and on about her experiences in the Peace Corps. Both Jack and Eva are enthralled by the stories, and it soon becomes obvious that Eva and Beulah enjoy each other's company more than Jack could have hoped.

“Come with me, Beulah, and I’ll show you the rest of the house.”

Jack gives Beulah a thumbs-up as she walks out of the kitchen behind Eva.

As they drive down the hill on the return trip back to the Land Lady, Jack remarks to Beulah:

“You sure made a good impression on Eva. I had no idea you were a dietician in the Peace Corps. That was truly fascinating!”

Beulah gives a deep belly laugh.

“Shucks, Mist’ Jack. I ain’t never been out de back woods o’ South Ca’lina!”

“You haven’t?” exclaims Jack with total surprise.

“I’se just a good story teller like you. I love Africa. I watch it on TV ev’ry time they’s a show on it. Ain’t a story I cain’t tell ‘bout it. I ‘member ev’ry scene and ev’ry word, an’ you’d never know I’se never there unless I tell you. ‘Sides ‘at, when you got eight bad kids and no food but taters, you right quick learns how to make a tater taste like barbequed pig.”

“Well, I’ll say this, Beulah. You have a power and an inner joy the rest of the world would die for.”

“You’ right, Mist’ Jack. I pay de price! I pay de price and de Lawd send me all de power I need.”

“I think your gonna like your new home,” remarks Jack.

“I know I’se gonna like it Mist’ Jack ... and I cain’t thank you ‘nough.”

Late Saturday morning, Jack pulls off the Shore Rd. into Kirsten’s driveway, the entrance to which is just as she described it. On either side of the entrance to the driveway rise two vertical driftwood posts with a fancy sheet metal sign between them about ten feet off the ground. The sign has decorative steel borders and the words MAXIMUM SECURITY cut out with an oxy-acetylene cutting torch. A decorative steel gate swings from each vertical post.

Jack pulls up in a stone-lined parking area next to Kirsten’s old, but beautifully restored pickup truck—a fire engine red 1953 Chevrolet three-quarter-ton pickup truck with dual chromed vertical exhaust stacks and glass-pak mufflers. The beach cottage is a small, L-shaped, artsy camp made from old barn lumber, re-cycled muntoned windows, thick-butt cedar shake roof shingles, interior fireplace, antique kitchen woodstove, and a verandah on the front. A six-foot-high wood fence made of re-cycled barn lumber surrounds a separate enclosure next to the house. This enclosure contains a classic outhouse with a half-moon cut-out on the door and a round stained-glass window on one side. A few feet away, and still within the privacy of the enclosure, is a free-standing shower, a set of deep laundry sinks, and an old-fashioned washing machine complete with wringers.

On the other side of the property sits a scattered array of old hay rakes, plows, farm equipment, and junk used as construction material for Kirsten's welding art. There's also an older aluminum-bodied step-van with grass growing up into the wheel wells. Jack walks up the beachstone-lined path to the house and knocks on the back door. Kirsten's voice bids him come in. Jack walks through the door and takes everything in at a glance.

The cottage is one large living area with a sleeping loft. The cooking area is located in the 'L' to the rear. One end of the living area contains the fireplace, several well-worn couches, several rocking chairs, a low table, and many lamps made of driftwood and welded steel. The walls are 2X4 studs with no finish on the interior. The loft and ceilings are open beams. In the rear kitchen area, along with the wood-burning kitchen stove, is a counter with a battered porcelain kitchen sink and a bright blue handpump. The cabinets, kitchen table, chairs, and cabinets are all painted off-white.

"What do you think of my little cottage?" Kirsten asks.

"This is priceless," comments Jack, still looking around. "Did you do all this by yourself?"

"Most of it ... Elvie helped where she could, and I have friends who are plumbers and electricians, but you can see they didn't have to do much. Come outside and I'll show you around."

Jack and Kirsten walk out the front door and along the wooden verandah. Elvie is standing in shallow water wearing a two-piece bathing suit, legs apart, facing the cottage, and playing with a volleyball. When she sees Jack, the volleyball falls in the water, she catches her breath and grabs the little locket around her neck. Jack notices her behavior instantly, stops, looks at her and smiles, then moves into the back yard with Kirsten.

"This is my home-made shower. We take some hot water from the reservoir on the stove, mix it with well-water and presto, we have two minutes or so of a warm shower."

"That's clever," remarks Jack. "How did you ever teach Elvie to take a two-minute shower? I have a daughter who won't even visit me if she gets less than 20 minutes in the shower."

"You'd be amazed how quickly a teen-ager adapts when she has to work for what she gets," Kirsten says.

"Perhaps," Jack remarks sarcastically, "But I already know how long Jenny would stay around if she had to pump out the sewage tank on the Land Lady."

"Yes ... I hadn't considered your unique problems," Kirsten adds thoughtfully. "I guess unconventional living means you take what you get and be grateful for it."

"That's certainly part of it," Jack remarks, "But I don't always settle for what I get! Does the panel truck run?"

"It did when I parked it there a year ago, but it isn't registered and I haven't needed it."

“What did you use it for?” Jack asks.

“I used it to haul around my artwork and gather materials before I bought the pickup. Some day I hope to make it into a camper.”

“I was just thinking it would make a good camper,” Jack remarks. “Maybe that’s a project we can do together, if you like.”

“I was wondering how that would be taken care of,” remarks Kirsten with a smile.

“I certainly have the tools and the knowledge to do the job,” remarks Jack. “However, we can have just as much fun together looking for good used materials.”

Just then, Elvie walks up playing with the volleyball.

“Mom,” she says. “Can Jack play volleyball with me?”

“I think you’d at least give him time to relax.”

“That would make him relax,” she adds.

“Maybe he doesn’t like volleyball,” says Kirsten glancing at Jack.

“He used to play beach volleyball not too long ago,” Jack interjects.

“So, there you are. You two enjoy yourselves. I’ll be making rose-hips jam in the kitchen when you’re through.”

“Maybe I should come in and help you,” remarks Jack with a little concern.

“You are going to stay for awhile, aren’t you?” asks Kirsten.

“As long as you like,” replies Jack.

“C’mon!” exclaims Elvie excitedly. “Wait a minute! You can’t play volleyball dressed like that! Mom, do we have a man’s bathing suit Jack can wear?”

“I don’t need a bathing suit to play volleyball!” exclaims Jack.

Jack unbuckles his belt, unzips his fly, and starts to drop his jeans.

“I don’t even need to wear clothes to play volleyball!” he remarks facetiously. Both Elvie and Kirsten are staring at him with more than a little concern. It takes a minute of undressing before they realize that Jack is wearing a bathing suit beneath his clothes. Jack starts to laugh.

“You didn’t think I would ... well ... it looks like maybe you did!” says Jack, still laughing.

“Oh, Jack!” exclaims Kirsten, “You are very bad!”

“Would I come to the beach without a bathing suit?” he asks. “A monkey might refuse a banana ... but not very likely.”

Elvie is still visibly embarrassed and giggling to herself as they walk to the volleyball net set up in the soft sand in front of the cabin. They bat the ball back and forth for a few moments, both equally adept at placing the ball where they want it to go.

“Okay, let’s play a game,” says Elvie.

Jack walks back behind the rope boundary of the court and gets set to serve. He glances at Elvie who is bending forward from the hips in readiness for the serve. All Jack can see is a pair of beautifully formed, firm breasts barely covered by a bathing suit, and a pair of

equally-well-formed, strong legs with lots of daylight between them. Jack smashes the ball with his fist ... squarely into the net!

“My turn!” exclaims Elvie mischievously.

Elvie serves a very fast ball that Jack has to leap sideways for. Again he slams the ball into the net.

“Goddammit, Diamond,” Jack mutters to himself. “Get your mind on the game!”

He throws the ball back to Elvie for another serve.

Elvie slams another fast ball that just clears the net. Jack roars like a lion, leaps up at the net and smashes the ball into the sand at Elvie’s feet before she can even move. Elvie looks at Jack with a very disturbed—almost fearful—look, mouth open in awe, then runs after the ball and throws it to Jack.

Now Jack serves a fast ball. Elvie returns it expertly. Jack again jumps up at the net, roars like a lion, and smashes the ball down into the sand at Elvie’s side. Elvie stops, plants her hands on her hips, mouth again open in surprise.

“Are you mad?” she asks.

“Not so you’d notice!” remarks Jack. “I just get very serious when there’s a game going.”

“What’s so special about a game?” asks Elvie as she runs after the ball.

“Well! I’m not allowed to lose! ... especially to a woman, and especially-especially to a young one!”

Elvie giggles and looks at Jack for a few seconds as though she can hardly believe what she’s hearing.

“You’re funny.” she says with a smile.

“No, no, no, games are not funny things,” Jack says. “In a game, someone always has to lose, and I just hate to lose ... and what’s worse, I hate even more to watch someone else lose! That’s one of the worst things about this planet: somebody always has to lose ... and it’s usually a whole damn team.”

“Boy,” says Elvie, “you’re sure hard to figure out.”

“If you think I’m hard to figure out at this point, try this one on for size: in the final analysis the very final one ... everyone wins! It’s just a whole lot of hell getting there.”

Elvie shakes her head thinking maybe Jack has a few screws loose somewhere.

“But never mind. We can just volley back and forth for a while ... compete with ourselves to see how accurate we can each be, then there’s no sense of one being better than the other.”

They volley for awhile until Elvie gets bored and smashes one out of Jack’s reach. Jack takes a dive and falls in the sand. He groans and gets up slowly, covered with sweat and sand. Then, suddenly, without any warning, he gives a blood-curdling scream and charges out into the ocean. Elvie doesn’t know what to think ... or what to do. Jack stays underwater for what seems like forever. A full minute passes. Elvie becomes alarmed.

She screams:

“Mom! Mom! Jack’s”

At that instant Jack surfaces not too far away, blowing a stream of salt water into the air and smiling at her.

“You dirty dog,” she says and goes charging out into the water, jumps on his back and starts to pummel him. He throws her off, dives again, then surfaces behind her, grabs her around the waist and, with his lips on her bare back, makes a noise like a gigantic release of intestinal flatulence. Finally, Jack picks her up and carries her to the beach piggybacked on his back.

Later in the afternoon, Jack is cutting the high grass around the panel truck using a weed-wacker when Elvie dances up in her bikini bouncing the volleyball.

“Watcha’ doin’,” she asks.

“I’m gonna try to get this thing running,” Jack replies.

“What for?” she asks.

“Your Mom and I are going to convert it into a camper.”

“A camper? ... a surf wagon?” says Elvie excitedly.

“Whatever!”

“Can we sleep in it?”

“Don’t see why not ... it’ll have beds,” Jack says, putting down the weed-wacker.

Jack has his back towards Elvie as he tries to unlock the van’s rusty sliding-door latch.

“Hey! ... Catch!” demands Elvie.

Jack turns around to find himself staring at Elvie’s shapely bottom as she bends over like a football center ready to hike the volleyball to him. Jack is more than slightly distracted by the sight that greets his eyes when suddenly the volleyball comes flying back toward his face with such force that he barely blocks it with his hands.

“Why, you little devil!” exclaims Jack, moving to chase Elvie as she runs away giggling.

Jack tries his best to put his mind back on the task at hand, but he can’t help but wonder who in hell formed this event ... an 18 year-old with a body to die for, and an attraction of seemingly mutual magnitude which has cropped up in exactly the wrong place at the wrong time. Jack thinks to himself:

“Just when I was beginning to think I was in control of my emotions and mind, here comes this sweet, beautiful little thing who does nothing but make my blood boil and punch buttons I had forgotten I even had. What sort of diabolical intelligence forms the events in this universe, anyway?”

But Jack’s trial by fire is only just beginning! He finally frees the door of the van and climbs into the driver’s seat, fitting the key into the ignition switch. He gives a quick glance up

prior to twisting the key to the start position ... and freezes like a pillar of salt. Elvie is removing her bathing suit under the shower apparently oblivious to the fact that Jack can see her through the still-open gate to the enclosure ... or is she really oblivious to the fact ... or just completely without inhibition ... or consciously giving Jack a challenge he will not easily forget. Whatever it is that's forming the event simultaneously causes the key ring to open and dump all the keys on the van floor. Elvie dries herself off with a towel, never once looking in Jack's direction. Jack shakes his head like a wet dog trying to dry off and begins to gather up the keys from the van floor. The next time he looks up, Elvie has a towel wrapped around her body and walks casually into the cottage. Jack takes a deep breath, wipes the sweat off his brow, and gives the ignition key a twist. After a few flutters and false starts, the engine roars into life emitting a cloud of white smoke from the tailpipe.

"Is this damned engine mimicking my heart, or is it just my imagination?" Jack mutters aloud to himself. "I can't say Kirsten didn't warn me, but that ... that is the daughter from Hell—the devil herself in disguise! Well, Jackie boy, you've had a lot less pleasant things to deal with in your checkered past. It's going to be fun to see where this one goes."

CHAPTER 5.

Saturday, around mid-morning, one of the big rubber-tired mobile shipyard cranes picks its way through the piles of accumulated scrapyards debris along a dirt track filled with potholes of water and long stretches of muddy ruts. It pulls up alongside the lifeboat, stops, and Jack climbs down from the driver's cockpit. Sharky is the only one at the lifeboat.

"Where's all the help that's supposed to be here?" asks Jack.

"Dey be here ... dey be here." replies Sharky. "Had too much'a drink las' night. C'mon over and I show you de Rescue Headquarters."

Jack and Sharky walk along the company fence towards the water until Jack can see some kind of a structure abutting the fence on the opposite side. It resembles a very sophisticated kid's clubhouse made primarily from the pilothouse of an old inland waterway tugboat, but with additions made of plywood and canvas. A roughly painted sign nailed to the pilot house says:

RIVR RATS RESQ

"What the hell is this, Sharky?" demands Jack. "How did you manage to get that pilothouse on the other side of the fence?"

"You cain't see where de fence been fix can you? ... an' I ain't gonna tell you de res' cause you don' wanta know. C'mon in here and see what we done."

Sharky pulls back a piece of plywood that's been attached to the fence. The fence has been cut at the top and on one side, but the opposite side acts as a hinge so the whole thing functions like an invisible door into the clubhouse from the scrapyards. Scattered about the interior are various articles of furniture: several chairs, a table, and an assortment of radios—all of which Ike has accumulated in his nightly excursions. The heart of the pilot house control room is a set of battered VHF radios and scanners—some of which actually work—hooked up to an old car battery. As Sharky shows Jack around, the bell on the lifeboat begins clanging noisily.

"Oh-oh!" exclaims Sharky. "De boys has arrive! Le's go."

Once back at the lifeboat, Jack swings the crane around and picks up the lifeboat in a double sling arrangement for the short trip to the water. He has trouble with the gearshift.

"Whats wrong wit' dat thing?" asks Sharky.

"Can't figure out how to get the damned thing in reverse." Jack yells out the cab window.

"All de way over to you, den straight back," remarks Sharky without hesitation.

“How the hell do you know that?” demands Jack.

“I done drove one ‘fore!” Sharky replies.

“Yes ... and I’ll bet it was this one, too,” Jack replies, suddenly realizing how the pilothouse got transferred to the other side of the fence.

“How’d I know that ... it was dark!” laughs Sharky.

“Aren’t you going to Christen this boat thing with the Champagne I bought you the other day?” asks Jack.

“Oh! Gosh-darn! I almos’ forgit. Be right back.”

Sharky disappears quickly in the general direction of the clubhouse and returns just as quickly with a champagne bottle. Everyone stands around as Sharky raises the bottle to smash it against the bow of the lifeboat.

“I names you WEASEL,” he says, shattering the bottle into bits.

“HEY!” exclaims Jack, sniffing the air and looking puzzled. “Where’d the champagne go? That bottle was full of water, wasn’t it!”

Three sheepish faces look the other way.

“Well?” demands Jack. Finally, Sharky owns up.

“We done drank it all up las’ night. That stuff too valuable to waste on a boat.”

“Well, you could’ve at least saved some for me,” complains Jack. “

“We thought ‘bout it ... and then we thought ‘bout it some more ... and then we drank it!” laughs Sharky.

“I guess I have to forgive you for that ... and furthermore, if this thing floats and runs, I’ll buy us all some more,” says Jack.

Slowly the crane trundles to the water’s edge with the lifeboat dangling and swinging crazily from the boom. Jack lowers the load onto the sand in such a way that the next high tide will float the boat and it can be driven to its mooring just offshore.

Later in the morning and slightly before noon, Jack and Kirsten are sitting in the step van at Kirsten’s beach cottage eating sandwiches and drinking tea. Kirsten sits in the driver’s seat and Jack on a box where the passenger’s seat will eventually go. They busily discuss the future layout for the step van in its conversion to a camper.

“Probably the sink and cabinets should go on this wall here,” says Kirsten gesticulating toward the wall immediately behind her, “with the ice box on one end and the camp stove on top of the counter at the other.”

“That’s good,” replies Jack. “How many beds you want in here?”

“Three ... of course!” laughs Kirsten jokingly.

Jack plunks down his sandwich in mock disgust and stands up to leave.

“Three!” he exclaims loudly. “If that’s the case, this thing’ll never make it out of the yard!”

“I suppose you’re thinking we should have one big bed that covers the whole back end,” remarks Kirsten sarcastically.

“Well ... something like that,” remarks Jack, sitting back down.

“You wouldn’t know what to do with everything you had back there!”

“Maybe not ... but I’d sure have a helluva lot of fun trying to figure it out,” says Jack with an evil smile.

“You are really bad, Jack Diamond! Would you settle for one big bed and one small one?”

“Who gets the small one?”

“Whoever is the baddest!” remarks Kirsten in mock disgust.

“I’m not sure I can figure out who that is.” Jack replies.

Jack swallows hard. Kirsten smiles and pretends to not notice.

That evening, Jack arrives back at the Captain’s Cabin to find the telephone ringing just as he opens the cabin door. He makes it to the phone before it stops ringing.

“Hello?” he says.

“Hi, it’s only me,” says Marty’s voice on the other end of the line.

“Hi there, Sweet thing. How are you tonight?”

“I wish I was as good at explaining things as you are,” Marty explains apologetically. “I don’t quite know how to talk to you about this.”

“Try me.”

“T-Bird and I have so much in common that I feel myself drifting away from you, and ... I mean, aren’t I being awful taking up with one of your friends?”

“Marty, you’ll be much closer to T-Bird than you are to me. You have more in common with him than you do with me. Don’t let it concern you. I hate to lose you because we’ve had a lot of fun together, but all good things come to an end and who’s to say they can’t turn into better things. You and T-Bird are a much better match.”

“I sort of feel that way, but I’m very sad at the thought of losing you. I don’t quite know how to feel.”

“Marty ... you are not losing me! We are friends first and forever. I am still here for you whenever you need me.”

“But ... but I don’t know how I can still have a physical relationship with you and T Bird at the same time. I mean, it just doesn’t work that way for me. My loyalty is always to just one man and that seems to be the way I’m made. And you know what? It seems like that’s the way most women are made ... or am I crazy or something.”

“The only crazy you are is something wonderful, Marty. It’s that kind of loyalty that drew me to you in the first place. We each need to be considered special in another person’s eyes. It has to do with a whole bunch of things not easily separated-out or understood by the conscious mind. How would you feel if I were having an affair with two women? Jealousy is a word used to describe all these psyche-illogical feelings which emanate from somewhere deep inside the human mechanism. Men tend to look upon women

as a possession. Women tend to think of themselves as belonging exclusively to one particular man for security purposes in order to raise children. I'm sure three people can be as harmonious together as two, but it doesn't seem to work that way with the unbalanced souls here on Earth. There don't seem to be any rules for relationships that are hard and fast, particularly in this day and age of vastly increased freedoms and decreased responsibilities."

"I wish I could understand better," pleads Marty.

"Follow your heart, Marty. Just keep doing what you're doing and your world will stay in balance."

"I really wish things could be different, Jack."

"So do I, Marty, but if a perfect relationship exists, I have yet to see it. And assuming that a far vaster intelligence than our own forms everything that happens in this realm, the logical explanations are narrowed to a very few—and learning from experience seems to be just one of them."

"I love you, Jack."

"And I love you, Marty ... and always will. 'Bye for now."

"Good-bye, Jack." says Marty tearfully.

As Jack hangs up, his own eyes fill with Marty's tears ... but only for a few moments. Thus flow the Tears Of Power: tears of compassion, of sorrow, of joyful memories, of pain-filled lessons, of loss, and all the feelings of human experience which, in the final analysis, expand and synergize the power of love.

Late Monday afternoon, Jack stands on the shipyard wharf talking with the project supervisor. The patrol boat rolls lazily alongside the wharf, it's engines rumbling softly at idle. Kirsten unties the bow and stern lines leaving only one short line amidships to hold the boat to the wharf.

"You can run her up to full throttle for short periods today, Jack," says the Supervisor. "Keep an eye on the special temperature gauges we've installed as you do."

"We'll be late getting back," Jack replies. "If I have any problems I'll call you at home on the cellular."

As Jack steps aboard the patrol boat, Kirsten hands him the dock line and goes into the pilot cabin. Jack unties the line and moves into the pilot cabin as Kirsten engages the thrusters and the patrol boat moves slowly out into the harbor.

"Head off to starboard towards that red marker over there," says Jack, pointing. "I think we'll take the boat up Steamboat Run to the waterway. It's a little too rough here in the river to get accurate gauge readings. I'll have to take over from you when we start up the fast water."

Steamboat Run is actually a narrow but deep river that drops rapidly down from the calm, flat intercoastal waterway into Morgan River cutting off miles of travel that would

otherwise be necessary to reach the inner harbor. The water in Steamboat Run is treacherous—easily a Class II rapids with several ‘S’ turns between the top and the bottom. It accommodates one tug and its tow without difficulty, or two yachts passing in opposite directions, but the incidence of two tugs passing in opposite directions with their tows causes frequent accidents which have given Steamboat Run a reputation for unequalled danger to both private and commercial boat captains who ply the coast as part of their profession. Maneuvering the rapids going uphill against the current proves to be much easier than trying to maneuver traveling downhill with the current in much the same way that climbing up a rock face is much easier than climbing down—though for different reasons. Running downhill with a five or six knot current means having to travel at an additional speed in excess of five or six knots through the water in order for the rudder to be effective. That gives any boat running downhill with the current an effective speed of 10 to 12 knots over the bottom at each turn. No amount of training or waterway experience can replace the actual experience of running the Steamboat Run rapids in different kinds of craft as each craft handles the situation differently. Jack has traveled up and down Steamboat Run hundreds of times in all kinds of boats and is thus quite familiar with its treachery. As they round the buoy at the entrance to Steamboat Run, Jack takes the controls from Kirsten.

“Have you ever gone through Steamboat Run before?” he asks her.

“No, but I’ve heard about it,” she replies. “Is it really as dangerous as they say?”

“It is, and it isn’t,” Jack answers. “After a heavy rain or a flood on the waterway it can be too wild to navigate with anything but a kayak, in which case you either go around or wait the floodwaters out. Stand over here where you have two handles to hang onto; you’ll need them both.”

As the entrance to the Run narrows, the current increases and the water begins to roil and boil, tossing itself into wild whitecaps and waves with troughs that throw the patrol boat around like a cork. Spumes of water rise up over the bow and occasionally drench the pilot cabin impairing vision—a dangerous situation with logs, branches, and tree trunks large enough to do major damage to the hull occasionally bobbing their way through the rapids to the quiet water in the river below. Sheer rock walls rise up at every turn. The walls are so high that they seem only a few feet away. Jack has both engines above half throttle to increase the boat’s maneuverability, and the roar of the engines, violent motions of the boat, flying spray, and speed with which things are happening make the whole experience more than just a little frightening to someone who has never done it before. Jack looks over at Kirsten whose seems to not be apprehensive at all about the experience.

As the waters begin to slow and smooth at the top of Steamboat Run, the patrol boat rounds the last turn before entering the long quiet stretches of the inland waterway. Jack

eases back on the throttles and begins to relax, but the worst is far from over. Kirsten sees it first.

“Oh, my God!” she exclaims.

Two gigantic barges, one in front of the other, both loaded with gravel and pushed by an equally large waterway tugboat completely block the entrance to the waterway. Jack has about three seconds in which to choose between two options: a high-speed, 180-degree turn; or an attempt to squeeze through the small opening between the tugboat and the shoreline. He chooses the latter, figuring to take a chance on the water depth close to shore rather than do a high-speed turn which the boat has not done before. Jack’s judgment is sound based on what he can see. The opening is wide enough, and even if the water is only six inches deep it will not harm the boat’s bottom, pumps and thruster drive mechanisms.

What he hasn’t figured on is what he can’t see: the submerged log that sits on the bottom in the mud and out of sight. The boat hits the log at about 20 knots and gets thrown completely out of the water for about fifty feet. Both Jack and Kirsten are knocked off their feet and the boat makes a wild turn toward the opposite bank of the waterway. It takes Jack but a second to realize what has happened, scramble to his feet, and haul the throttles back into reverse thrust just before the boat collides with the opposite bank. He quickly turns to help Kirsten up.

“Are you alright?” asks Jack with some concern.

“Yes, I’m fine ... banged my knee a little, but other than that, no problems,” replies Kirsten. “Are we sinking?”

“I don’t know. I’ll have to go below and check. Take the controls ... and keep the boat close to the shore,” remarks Jack as he heads below.

Once below and in the forward cabin, he pulls up the floorboards—not even a dent in the aluminum hull. He looks in the engine room—no dents or damage there either.

“What are you finding?” yells Kirsten from the pilothouse.

“No water ... No dents ... no apparent damage,” yells Jack in return. “That’s hard to believe!”

Jack emerges once again into the pilot cabin and gives a sigh of relief.

“Whew! The marine architect said this hull is designed to run into floating debris with minimal damage. He wasn’t kidding!”

“Shall we head back to the shipyard?” asks Kirsten.

“Definitely,” Jack replies. “You better let me take it down Steamboat Run under these circumstances.”

Once they’re well on their way into the fast water of Steamboat Run, one of the engines begins to misfire. Jack’s face takes on a look of deep concern, but he can’t leave the

controls to go to the engine room at this point. He increases and decreases the speed of the misfiring engine and it gradually smooths out. He breathes a little easier and wipes the sweat off his brow.

“What do you suppose that’s all about?” asks Kirsten.

“Has to be the fuel supply,” replies Jack. “It could be an overloaded fuel filter or else there’s air getting into the fuel line somewhere. That pounding could have loosened something on the high pressure diesel fuel pump, but its not likely to be anything else.”

“Is that serious?” asks Kirsten.

“Enough to make me sweat,” replies Jack. “We need to have at least one engine running to maintain control in the rapids or else we’re liable to do some serious damage to this brand new boat.”

The patrol boat manages to finish its passage through Steamboat Run without incident. Once they move out into the quieter waters of Morgan River, Jack begins to breathe more easily, but the engine problem has only remedied itself temporarily. Both engines begin to skip and misfire, and within the course of a minute, die completely, leaving the patrol boat to drift silently and aimlessly without power or direction on the waters of Morgan River.

CHAPTER 6.

Sharky, Preacher, and Ike sit in the sun just outside the River Rats Rescue Headquarters on several battered, reclaimed garden chairs laughing and joking amongst themselves as they pass a single bottle of wine back and forth. Almost automatically their attention turns toward the speeding patrol boat as it emerges from Steamboat Run into the river. “That sure be some beautiful boat!” remarks Sharky, watching its progress with more than a little awe.

The others mumble their assent, and at precisely that same moment the patrol boat begins to sputter and miss. They look at each other in dismay and just as quickly re-fasten their attention on the troubled patrol boat.

“Uh-Oh!” exclaims Sharky almost to himself. “She done quit on ‘im. Le’s go boys. We ain’t gonna give nobody else the chance to get there first.”

Together they set out at a hobble and a half-run for the shoreline and their only means of transportation from the shore to the lifeboat, a badly beaten-up cork and wood life-raft just large enough and buoyant enough to hold the three of them. Using a broken-off oar and two boards chopped down with a hand-axe to look like canoe paddles, they slowly make their way out to the lifeboat. Once alongside the lifeboat, they clamber aboard and immediately set to work. Ike cranks up the old diesel engine while Preacher unties the buoy rope from the lifeboat and reattaches it to the life raft. Suddenly, the River Rats Rescue Team is off on their first mission. Sharky steers, Ike sits on the toilet seat hanging out over the stern, his feet dangling and swinging in empty space just above water. Preacher takes up his position in the bow like George Washington. Each wears a bulky orange life preserver and any sort of crazy hat representative of life on the water that each has found at the Salvation Army or Goodwill store. They gesticulate and yell to each other over the noise of the unmuffled engine and the wind.

Meanwhile, back on the patrol boat, Jack has gone below to the engine room to find out what the problem is, but doesn’t seem to be having too much success at first. Kirsten sits in the pilot seat keeping a lookout as the boat drifts with the current and without power. She spots something that looks vaguely familiar coming directly toward them.

“Jack?” she yells loudly.

“Yeah,” Jack replies with a muffled voice from the engine room.

“Can you come up here for a minute? I’m not sure I believe what I see.”

Jack emerges from the engine room stairway wiping grease from his hands with a rag. He looks where Kirsten is pointing.

“Well, I’ll be damned!” he remarks. “It’s the River Rat Rescue Team by the looks of it. If it’s not that then I don’t know what the hell it is.”

“There doesn’t seem to be any doubt about the fact that they’re headed directly for us,” remarks Kirsten. “How do you suppose they knew we were in trouble?”

“One of them must’ve heard the patrol boat engines die. When you live mostly outdoors like they do, the noises of life around you carry a lot more meaning than when you live inside the four walls of an office or a house.”

“Can that little boat tow us home?”

“Sure. An outboard motor could tow us home for that matter,” Jack remarks. “I almost have the problem fixed, but we’ll let them tow us back. It’ll give them something to talk about for years.”

“What was the problem?”

“A fuel design change I tried to make, but they wouldn’t let me. Hitting that underwater log must have dislodged something like a forgotten rag in the fuel tank and plugged the line because there’s no evidence of it in the filter itself. It’ll help my case more if we’re towed home anyway.”

In very short order the River Rats Rescue Team’s lifeboat pulls alongside the patrol boat and stops. Ike is searching frantically under seats and everywhere looking for something. He finally goes up and whispers in Sharky’s ear. Sharky yells up to Jack.

“Ahhh ... ahh ... we ain’t got no towrope,” he says, shaking a finger at Ike.

“What the hell kind of rescue boat are you with no towrope?” chides Jack.

“Ike, he been lookin’ for one, but he ain’t found one yet.”

“We’ll use one of our shore lines,” says Jack, throwing down of a coil of rope and moving to tie his end to the bow cleat.

In less time than it takes to laugh at the scene, the lifeboat named WEASEL has triumphantly weaseled its way into its first tow. As the tow rope takes up its slack and the patrol boat begins moving through the water, Sharky gives full throttle to the little diesel engine and black smoke starts to pour out of the exhaust stack to be carried across the river by the wind. It is quite late by the time they arrive at the shipyard wharf, so Jack jumps ashore, ties up the patrol boat, and bids the River Rats good-bye.

“Thanks, you guys. I’ll see that you’re properly rewarded.”

“Three big bottles o’ Hermit be jus’ fine,” replies Sharky. “Oh, an’ five gallons o’ gas.”

Jack waves and climbs back on the patrol boat to sit in the pilothouse with Kirsten.

“That’s not a very good way to end the week,” Jack remarks.

“It could have been much worse. I thought you didn’t do accidents,” comes the snide retort from Kirsten.

“That lesson wasn’t for me. That one was for the Architect. That’s why you and I and the boat didn’t have more problems than we did.”

“How so?” asks Kirsten.

“That was a ‘tap on the shoulder’ for the Architect that said, in effect, listen more closely

to people giving you advice. Last week I tried to explain to him that the fuel feed system was a problem area and needed some changes. He didn't listen. If he doesn't get the message now, the next time is liable to be a lot more serious."

"How about for you and me?" remarks Kirsten.

"Not for us because we're aware of the problem and we'll be vigilant about what can happen as a result. In other words, I'll probably refuse to take the boat out on any more test runs until the change has been made. The Architect just hasn't gotten the message yet about who has the power here."

"I don't think I've ever noticed that every problem has an immediate consequence," remarks Kirsten.

"Sometimes they do ... sometimes they don't. The reality itself is quite forgiving toward those who don't have the capacity to be vigilant, but that's how vigilance is produced. Sooner or later the hammer always falls ... and not always in a way that's easily interpreted. In most cases it's easier for an outsider to point out another person's slackness or lack of vigilance. That's why relationships are such valuable teaching tools, but no one seems to see them as such."

"Interesting," says Kirsten. After a short pause she adds: "Time for me to get back and make Elvie's dinner. Are you coming out tomorrow to help me make curtains for the panel truck?"

"Why would I want to do anything else?" says Jack, leaning down to kiss her goodbye.

Promptly at 10:00 the next morning Jack pulls in to Kirsten's beach cottage parking lot and walks in with a shopping bag full of corn on the cob. He plunks himself down in one of the easy chairs in the living area, puts the bag of corn on the floor beside him, and stretches out more like he's lying down than sitting down. Kirsten is sitting on the couch across from him. Jack sniffs the air.

"Mmmm! what smells so good?"

"Elvie's making fudge in the kitchen."

Just then, Elvie comes out of the kitchen wearing a tight pair of jeans, an even tighter T-shirt, and carrying a small plate of fudge. She walks over to Jack, puts one knee in his chair seat and swings over on top of him like she's riding a horse. She takes a piece of fudge from her plate and holds it to Jack's lips. He takes a bite.

"That's delicious!"

"Elvie!" exclaims her mother with a certain amount of exasperation. "What are you doing?"

"We need to fatten him up," she responds. "All the men his age have a big belly and a fat little wife. Here, have some more."

"Nope. My belly's just fine, thanks."

"Elvie! Will you get off Jack! You aren't five years old any more."

"Oh, Mom, he doesn't mind. I'm not that heavy," she complains, getting up.

“Go finish making your fudge ... take that bag of corn Jack brought and put it on the kitchen counter.”

“Oh, Boy! Corn on the cob! Can we have a corn boil over the fire pit?”

“If you want to build the fire.”

“I will,” she says, disappearing into the kitchen, “and Jack can help me.”

Kirsten looks at Jack apologetically.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do about that kid! But then I guess maybe she’s not really a kid any more,” remarks Kirsten.

“Every bit of that!” exclaims Jack. “But its okay. I can handle it ... I think!”

They both laugh, albeit nervously.

“At least you’re able to laugh about it!” says Jack.

“I don’t have a choice,” she replies, “Not yet, anyway.”

Jack gets up, walks over to Kirsten, leans down and kisses her.

“There is no ‘choice’ in the matter,” Jack says emphatically. “But there sure is temptation!” he adds sarcastically.

A short while later, Jack watches as Kirsten works at her sewing machine putting a hem or two in the curtain material for the camper van. She hands Jack a set of finished curtains.

“These are for the window on the driver’s side. You can start putting them up if you like.”

“Do you have any curtain rods?” asks Jack.

“I bought some yesterday. They’re in a box underneath the driver’s seat.”

Jack walks out to the van and begins installing curtain rods for the side window. Amid his hammerings and cursing small nails that refuse to be held long enough to be hammered into plywood, Elvie walks into the van in her two-piece bathing suit and sits cross-legged on the bed to watch Jack work.

“Do you know what you’re doing?” she asks.

“Only fools know what they’re doing,” Jack replies calmly.

“If you’re so wise, how come the curtains are all hanging crooked?” She taunts.

“I’m not finished yet!” Jack replies with exasperation.

“Your fly’s open.” says Elvie with a mischievous smile on her face.

Jack looks down. It isn’t open at all. Elvie laughs at him. He grabs her and starts to tickle her.

“If you’re going to be my petty tyrant, I’m going to tickle you ‘til you stop!”

As they play and Elvie giggles, suddenly her bathing suit top comes flying off. She is lying on her back on the bed; Jack is sitting on the edge of the bed. She looks at Jack and says very naively:

“Oh, my goodness!”

“Yes ... it certainly is!” Jack replies.

He starts to tickle her on her bare breasts. She closes her eyes and tries not to giggle. He explores further, putting his hand between her legs. Her body stiffens with an erotic response. After a few seconds, he reaches with both hands for her bathing suit bottom and pulls it down. Elvie suddenly sits bolt upright, hauls the lower part of her bathing suit back up, and covers her breasts with her arms and hands. She looks at Jack with her mouth open and a horrified expression on her face. She's quite unable to speak. Jack, on the other hand, has a faint relaxed smile on his face.

"You're a bit confused about what you want, aren't you?" he asks quietly.

Elvie is unable to speak. Her eyes fill with tears. Jack lovingly wipes the loose hairs back from her forehead.

"Sweet little heart," he says. "I can't help you answer that question. You'll have to figure it out for yourself. See you later."

Jack walks out of the van, climbs in his car, starts the engine, and departs down the driveway. Elvie is visibly upset. She speaks quietly to herself through her tears.

"Jack! ... don't leave! ... please!"

On Sunday, time drags on forever and the day seems never to end. Monday morning Jack goes to work early, walks by Kirsten's welding station and notices Kirsten is not there, but her two students are waiting. He walks over to the shop foreman's office.

"Kirsten late today?" he asks.

"She just called in sick a minute ago," says the foreman. "I'll have to send her students home."

"I'll take them for today," Jack replies. "Did she say when she'd be back?"

"Tomorrow, definitely."

Jack walks over and introduces himself to the two Indian women welding students and carries on with Kirsten's instructions.

Early Tuesday morning, Jack is undecided as to whether to go to work or visit Kirsten at her home on the river. He picks up the phone to call the shop foreman first.

"Hi Ned, it's Jack. Kirsten come to work today?"

"Yeah, she's here. Anything wrong?"

"Nothing serious," Jack replies casually, "At least it shouldn't be."

"Okay, Jack. See later."

Jack heads for the shipyard hangar building and his small office where he proceeds to write up a report on the engine failure and put into writing his recommendations for further changes of the fuel system. At lunchtime he walks into the lunchroom with his lunchbox and sits down at his usual table. Kirsten is not there ... and she doesn't show. When Jack finishes his lunch twenty minutes later, he closes his lunchbox and looks over at Ned. Ned raises his eyebrows questioningly. Kirsten's absence has not gone unnoticed. Jack shrugs his shoulders and goes back to work.

After lunch, Kirsten is busy at her welding station overseeing the work of one of her students. She hand-holds a helmet before her eyes to shield them as she watches the student lay down a bead. Suddenly, above the constant loud din inside the hangar, a patrol boat engine starts and adds its low rumble from the wharf just outside the hangar wall. Moments later, the second engine grumbles into life. Kirsten looks and listens in the direction of the patrol boat engines, puts down her helmet, and walks to the hangar window to look out at the wharf. Jack is at the controls of the patrol boat and one of the yard workers is on the deck coiling ropes as it moves out into the river. Kirsten turns from the window and dons her welder's helmet to hide the tears in her eyes. Her actions have not gone entirely unnoticed. Ned watches from a distance with more than a little concern.

Late that evening, Jack sits alone in his cabin. The lights are low; there is no TV, stereo, or noise. A half empty bottle of rum sits on the table beside him along with an empty coke bottle. He picks up his glass, swirls it so the ice clinks against the edge, takes a drink, puts it down, and goes to the telephone. He dials Kirsten's number and she answers it promptly.

"Hello?"

"Hi ... it's Jack."

"Oh, Jack. I'm so glad you called," she says softly.

"You want to talk?" Jack asks.

"I don't have much to talk about yet. I'm still trying to sort out my feelings and thoughts. Elvie is the one who's most upset; and that's what upsets me more than anything."

"It isn't pleasant for me, either. I have to hold in mind that this is a powerful, positive event in her life. It might take some time for her to work her way through this, but she obviously doesn't do easy lessons to herself. Will she talk with you about it?"

"She finds it very difficult."

"Keep drawing her out. Encourage her to talk ... make her reach down inside of herself and pull out all of the things she feels. If there's guilt, examine it with her in detail. We both have to provide guidance without stifling her adventurous nature."

"We?" asks Kirsten.

"We!" replies Jack firmly.

"Thank you, Jack," Kirsten replies.

"Sleep well," he adds.

"Same to you."

Jack hangs up, takes another drink, turns on a light and some quiet classical music, picks up a magazine, and sits down to read.

CHAPTER 7.

Inside the River Rats Rescue headquarters, Sharky sits on an upended wooden box next to the radios gazing out of the old tugboat pilothouse's forward-facing windows into a pitch dark night broken only by lights along the river and next to the shipyard hangar. Next to his arm a scanning radio blinks away, occasionally carrying a dispatcher's message or acknowledgment on one of the police or marine channels. Sharky fiddles with the dial of the Marine VHF transceiver, trying to bring in the weather channel. Wind velocity has picked up considerably in the last hour or so making whistling and rushing sounds as it permeates the many openings in the roughly-built rescue headquarters. He suddenly finds the proper channel and the weather forecaster's voice comes booming through:

"... completes the weather synopsis for the Eastport to Block Island area until 0600 tomorrow morning. Now here is the weather synopsis for Morgan River to Sable Island. A large, low-pressure area is moving up the coast bringing with it storm force winds and heavy seas. Winds gusting to 55 knots are forecast, with seas from 12 to 14 feet. Storm warnings have been issued for all northern coastal waters, and will remain in effect for the next 48 hours. The storm is expected to arrive in this area by midnight tonight."

Sharky turns down the volume of the VHF radio and remarks to himself:

"Sweet Momma! We goin' be busy tonight. Dat be on'y two hours from now. I better get some rest while I can."

Sharky is barely asleep in his badly-sagging, steel-spring cot when the VHF emergency channel booms in at high-volume.

"MAYDAY! MAYDAY! MAYDAY! This is the dragger Lady Elizabeth on channel 16. We have an emergency condition. Any station reading this transmission please acknowledge, over."

The emergency transmission brings the boys straight up out of their beds to crowd around the VHF radio. There's a brief pause after the emergency transmission ends. The boys look at each other, wondering whether to answer the transmission themselves ... but not knowing quite how to go about it. The Coast Guard quickly relieves them of doubt.

"Lady Elizabeth, this is Cape Sambro Coast Guard Radio. We read you loud and clear. What is the nature of your emergency, and please give us your present location, over."

"Rodger, Cape Sambro. We've lost our main engine. We are—I would guess—five miles northwest of Sheep Island. We are not in immediate danger, but we're being slowly blown ashore. Do you know of a tug big enough to tow us to port, over."

"Rodger, Lady Elizabeth. We acknowledge your condition and approximate location. The only tug big enough is from Morgan River Shipyard, but I believe she has a tow and is

waiting out the storm in port several hundred miles to the south. Please give us your exact satellite coordinates so we can plot your drift. And please switch to channel 58 for future communications. This is Cape Sambro radio vacating Channel 16, switching to Channel 58. Sambro out.”

Sharky turns to speak to Preacher and Ike, a note of urgency in his voice.

“Da’s real bad, man! Da’s too big fo’ us. Dere’s dat ol’ tug down at de shipyard. Jack had dat runnin’ las’ year, ‘member? We gots to git Jack. Dem guys needs help.”

Not five minutes later, Jack is brought straight up out of a deep sleep by the sound of a hunk of steel pipe banging against the Land Lady’s hull. The next thing he hears is Sharky’s voice yelling at the top of his lungs and coming from deep in the bowels of the ship.

“JACK! ... JACK! ... HEY, JACK, WAKE UP, WE NEEDS SOME HELP!”

Jack lands on his feet, immediately hurries to the Captain’s Cabin door, and yells out loud enough to be heard below.

“Hang On! I’ll be right there!”

He quickly breaks out his thermal long underwear knowing that whatever is going on will probably involve being out in the middle of the wild weather. He dons his foul-weather gear and rubber boots on top of his longjohns and tumbles down the several flights of steel gangway stairs as rapidly as his feet will carry him.

Sharky, Ike, and Preacher, already soaking wet, stand just inside Land Lady’s hull, suddenly blinking their eyes at the bright light Jack turns on.

“What the hell is going on that you make such a racket?” Jack demands.

Sharky is so nervous and excited at the same time that he can hardly speak.

“They’s a ... they’s a real bad ‘mergency ... ocean ‘mergency. De Lady ‘Lizabet—de big blue dragger— ‘member?”

Jack nods as he recalls the sight of the shiny new dragger with all the most modern conveniences, electronics, winches, and gear of the fishing science.

“She done los’ her engine,” Sharky continues. “Bout to go on de rocks if she drag her anchor any further. River Rover down sout’ waitin’ out de storm. You think ol’ Ocean Rover go out an’ get ‘em?”

Jack thinks for a minute as he takes the whole situation into account.

“I don’t know,” he replies. “How far away are they?”

“Five mile from Sheep Island,” Sharky answers.

“We had a real time getting the Ocean Rover started and keeping it running last year. She doesn’t have much fuel on board, either. We can try it, though. I’ll go call the Coast Guard for more details. Do you guys know how to get to the Ocean Rover at her berth?”

“Jack ... I c’n walk from one end o’ dis shipyard to de other with a bag over my head ... but on’y ‘tween midnight and fo’ AM.”

“Then meet me on the wharf. I’ll be there in about 15 minutes.” says Jack, heading back up the Land Lady’s internal stairway to the Captain’s Cabin.

His first action is to call the Cape Sambre Coast Guard Station.

“Hi, this is Jack Diamond at Morgan River Shipyard. What’s happening with the Lady Elizabeth?”

“Oh, Hi Jack. This is Dave. She’s lost her main engine. We’re plotting her drift now. Isn’t the River Rover down south?”

“Yes,” Jack replies. “She’s too far south to be much good to us. The old Ocean Rover is the only hope, and I haven’t run her for a year. Aren’t there any other tugs or big draggers in the vicinity?”

“Nothing any closer than six hours away,”

“The Ocean Rover makes about 10 knots wide open ... if she runs at all. That means about two and a half hours, plus a half hour to get her started and put on some fuel. You want me to try it?”

“There doesn’t seem to be any other choice,” Dave replies. “There’s no-one else out there in this storm. Why don’t you give it a try and call us as you go along. We should have a better feel for the Lady Elizabeth’s drift rate and direction by the time you get started.”

“Rodger ... I’ll call you on the VHF—providing it works—or otherwise the cell phone.”

“Good Luck!”

“Thanks; I have all I need.”

Jack hangs up and starts to move towards the door, then stops. He smiles to himself, goes back to the telephone, and dials Kirsten’s number. The phone rings, and rings, and rings. Finally a sleepy Kirsten answers the telephone.

“Hello?”

“God you’re slow! Damn good thing your house isn’t on fire!”

“Oh, Jack ... what in the world is going on?”

“There’s an ocean emergency. One of the big new draggers has lost her engine in this storm and she’s being blown ashore. I’m going to crank up the old Ocean Rover and I need a first mate. That’s you, in case you haven’t realized it by now.”

“You’ll need more help than me,” Kirsten adds quickly.

“Sharky and the boys are already there waiting.”

“The weather on the river looks really scary!”

“If you’re scared, stay home.”

“Schatze, your first mate does not scare easily. I’ll be there as fast as I can.”

“Hurry! I’ll have the main gate open for you.”

Jack hangs up and heads out the door.

The Ocean Rover is a medium-sized coastal tug built of wood in the early fifties. She's in reasonably good condition for a tug that's worked hard for fifty or more years, but her old Fairbanks Morse, air-started diesel badly needs an overhaul. Like the P-51, she was one of Don Hendrix toys, but he chose to leave her with the company when he left. Sharky, Ike, and Preacher are already at the wharf, huddled in the dark next to a storage shed to protect themselves from the wind and rain. Jack opens up a wharf power box and turns on floodlights that light up the wharf, the whitewater waves of the river, and the Ocean Rover rolling and tugging at her lines. They all clamber aboard as Jack unlocks the entry door to the cabin superstructure.

"Sharky," Jack yells over the wind. "Go down into the engine room and see what we have for fuel. Ike, you and Preacher haul the fuel hose out of that shed over there and bring it aboard next to the towing winch."

Jack hurries up the stairway to the wheelhouse, removes his jacket, and hangs it on a wall hook. He takes his portable satellite navigator and hand-held VHF radio from his jacket pockets, then starts throwing switches and circuit breakers. Running lights come on; radios come on; the radar screen lights up; and brilliant floodlights illuminate the fore and aft decks.

Running down the two flights of narrow stairway to the engine room, he calls Sharky to him and starts explaining the procedures for operation of the air-start mechanism as he performs them. He squirts some ether into the huge air filter, opens the fuel line, sets the throttle, and twists the lever on the air pressure line's ball valve. There is a great hissing of air under pressure and the big diesel begins to turn over, and over, and over, but doesn't seem to want to catch. Jack runs up and squirts more ether into the air filter. Suddenly the engine backfires, roars, shakes and vibrates into life. Sharky lets out a cheer, and Jack raises a fist in victory.

"How much fuel in the tanks, Sharky?"

"She 'bout a quarter full," Sharky replies.

"That's almost enough to get us there and back," says Jack. "We'll take on fuel until Kirsten gets here."

As Ike and Preacher add fuel to the port and starboard tanks, Jack looks anxiously out to the wheel house windows into the wind and driving rain. No sign of Kirsten. Five minutes pass. Jack looks at his watch impatiently.

"Can't wait any longer," he mutters to himself. He picks up the microphone to the outside loudspeaker to talk with the boys down on the deck, but when he clicks the mike nothing happens. He frigs with the amplifier, switching it on and off, and still nothing happens.

"That's a sign from somewhere," he mumbles to himself. "Guess we'll just wait!"

Not a full minute later, a pair of headlights comes tearing around the corner of the hangar

and out onto the wharf. Kirsten jumps out in her rain gear and hurries to climb aboard the Ocean Rover. On an intuitive hunch, Jack decides to try the loudspeaker system again. He switches on the amplifier and talks into the mike.

“Test, test, test, One, two, three, four.”

The external loudspeakers blare out with Jack’s voice.

“Well ... what do you know about that?”

“About what?” asks Kirsten climbing up into the wheelhouse.

“I’ll explain later. What are you carrying?” Jack asks her.

“Food, sustenance ... what else do you think women are for?”

Jack looks at her, smiles, and gives her a quick kiss.

“I’m glad you came. Make yourself at home while we try to get this old crate under way.”

Over the loudspeaker Jack tells Preacher and Ike to put the fuel hose onto the dock and release the bow and stern dock lines. As they do so, Jack rings the engine room telegraph for slow speed astern. Black smoke pours out of the Ocean Rover’s exhaust stack and water boils up under her stern as she moves slowly out into the river. Inside the wheelhouse, Jack switches off the incandescent lights and turns on the low-voltage red night lights bathing everything in a dim red glow. Kirsten sheds her wet, rain-gear jacket. She’s wearing a tight-fitting turtle-neck sailor’s sweater under her yellow, bib-overall, foul-weather pants. Jack looks her over with a smile on his face.

“It’s easy to see where Elvie got her body,” he remarks easily.

“Mine used to look like that, too, when I was 18.”

“You look just as good at 40 as she does at 18. The difference is character, and the fact that you’ve made the effort to take care of yourself.”

“Thank you!” says Kirsten flushing slightly but unobviously in the dim red light. “I brought some coffee and rolls for everyone. There’s also several bottles of wine, but I wasn’t sure whether to bring those or not.”

“Very good thinking! What’s good for the Fox isn’t necessarily good for the Goose! Isn’t that the way the saying goes?”

“Well, I haven’t heard it put that way before, but it’s certainly true.”

“Here,” Jack says. “You take the wheel and follow the lighted buoys out to the mouth of the River like I’ve showed you. Move the engine-room telegraph to full speed ahead. I’ve got to somehow set up a course on the navigation equipment that’ll take us through this wild weather and darkness straight to Sheep Island.”

“My God its black out there!” remarks Kirsten.

“Just follow the flashing red and green buoy lights. You know the rules. God help anything we run into. This thing’s built like a Sherman Tank.”

Jack notices that the radar is not reading correctly. He switches it on and off and tries adjusting the various controls.

“Radar’s friggid up,” he remarks.

“It looks like it’s working,” says Kirsten.

“It only reads to our stern. It must be hooked up to my life; the only thing I can see is where I’ve been! Oh, well, that’s good enough. We can tell a little bit about where we’re going by looking at where we’ve been, but it sure gives no warning about what we’re liable to run into.”

“Where d’you suppose *that* radar came from?” asks Kirsten, laughing.

“I don’t know, but it certainly wasn’t the Salvation Army.”

Minutes later, Jack picks up the VHF microphone, tunes it to Channel 16, and adjusts the squelch.

“Cape Sambro Radio, this is the tug Ocean Rover on Channel 16. Radio check. Over.”

“Rodger, Ocean Rover, this is Cape Sambro radio. You’re loud and clear on 16. Please come up on Channel 58 for further communications. Cape Sambro switching to channel 58 now.

“Cape Sambro, This is Ocean Rover on Channel 58, over.”

“This is Cape Sambro, go ahead.”

“We left the shipyard wharf 10 minutes ago and we’re approaching the mouth of the river at present. This ship has no navigation equipment except a compass which may or may not be accurate, and my portable, hand-held satellite navigator. We have no charts, no depth sounder that works, and a radar that only scans 90 degrees off the stern. Can you give us waypoints to the Lady Elizabeth? Over.”

“Affirmative. We’ll start working on that now. How much fuel do you have on board? Over.”

“Enough to get there and part of the way back, over.”

“Sounds like you have more hope than help,” replies Cape Sambro radio.

“We’re okay. I went to Sheep Island once when I was a kid,” radios Jack jokingly in return.

“Well, I’m sure you’ll find it then. I don’t think it’s moved. I’ll have some data on Lady Elizabeth’s drift rate for you in a minute, over.”

Jack acknowledges the call and switches off the powerful xenon floodlights that illuminate the fore and aft decks leaving Preacher standing tall in the bow, his oilskin-covered frame barely visible in the dark. An occasional wave breaks over the bow drenching him with wind-borne water as he clings tenaciously to the forward rail. Ike stands a short distance behind him wedged between the flanges of a winch drum for support, his arms folded in defiance.

“Look at those crazy guys down there. They’re probably drenched to the bone by now,” Jack comments to Kirsten. She looks down into the darkness from the wheel house.

“Are you making them stay out there?” she asks, looking at Jack.

“Not on your life!” Jack replies.

“Then why in the world are they still out there in this wild weather?” she asks. Jack laughs.

“I guess you’d have to be male to understand that,” he says. “They’re feeling the tremendous power of the storm and the sea from the vantage point of their own safety on the boat. They’ll come in shortly ... after they get cold enough.”

“Men!” she remarks. “Does anyone understand them?”

“I don’t know, but I can sure tell you that my mother had a time trying to understand me!”

“You don’t need to tell me that!” she remarks, laughing.

Just then the VHF radio booms in:

“Ocean Rover, Cape Sambro, over.”

“This is Ocean Rover, go head,” Jack replies into the VHF microphone.

“Your first waypoint is 44 degrees, 42 minutes, 30 seconds North; 62 degrees, 34 minutes, 21 seconds West. That will keep you well clear of any rock ledges. Steer roughly 037 degrees magnetic from the bell buoy at the river mouth. Call approaching the waypoint and we’ll give you the next one, over.”

“Rodger, I have it,” says Jack. “How does the drift look on the Lady Elizabeth? Over.”

There is a long pause, broken suddenly by Cape Sambro radio.

“Hurry! ... Over”.

“Rodger! Ocean Rover out.”

“What does *that* mean?” asks Kirsten anxiously.

“It means there’s a good chance she may be onshore by the time we get there.”

“Then we’re too late?” asks Kirsten.

“Its only too late when she has a hole in her bottom. Just hold in mind that we’ll be there in time. By the way, how is Elvie doing?”

“She’s far from her usual self,” says Kirsten.

“That’s a good sign,” Jack replies. “She needed to think some things through.”

“Why did it have to be you who precipitated this event?”

“Better me than probably anyone else you know ... and furthermore, I didn’t exactly precipitate it.”

“Why didn’t you stay and talk to her? That upset her as much as anything else.”

“I think I was more than a little surprised and disturbed over the whole event, and particularly my own actions and thoughts—or rather lack of thoughts. Whatever it is that forms the events in this universe sure put a classic one together here for all of us! I didn’t take her bra off; it just flew off like: Whoops! Here it is! If you look at it closely, an act is

worth a million words to Elvie. In fact, it's doubtful in my mind whether words would have changed her attitude at all."

Suddenly, a rogue wave comes aboard the Ocean Rover. There's a great crash as dishes rattle in the galley, chairs slide, and loose articles go flying.

"Here, take the wheel, Mate," says Jack with no small amount of urgency. "I've got to check the engine room and get those crazy guys off the forward deck before we lose them altogether. Be right back."

Jack fairly flies down the steel engine room stairway and makes his way around the maze of machinery to look at the fuel gauge. It is down to almost an eighth of a tank.

"She goin' down fas'," remarks Sharky.

"I see that," says Jack.

"Whatch we goin' do if she run out?" asks Sharky.

"You know how to swim?"

"Ain't never tried," says Sharky.

"Things get more interesting by the minute, don't they Sharky?"

"If you ain't worried, I ain't," says Sharky shrugging his shoulders.

CHAPTER 8.

As Jack comes up into the wheelhouse from the engine room, Kirsten remarks to him: “I think I heard the Lady Elizabeth trying to contact the Coast Guard. Their transmission was very broken up.”

“I’ll see if I can raise them.”

Jack takes down the mike for the VHF and speaks into it:

“Lady Elizabeth, Lady Elizabeth, this is the Ocean Rover. Do you read me? Over.”

A return transmission comes back faint and garbled.

“Ocean Rover, this is Lady Elizabeth. We can barely read you, over.”

“Rodger, Lady Elizabeth. Same here. How critical is your situation? I repeat: how critical is your situation? Over.”

“...getting into shallow ... Over. We’re ... into shallow water ...”

“Rodger, understand you are in shallow water, over.”

By means of repeated transmissions back and forth, Jack gradually understands that the Lady Elizabeth’s anchor is dragging over the hard sand and smooth rock bottom. He tells them that he is still 20 minutes away— 20 minutes that drag on interminably until finally the Lady Elizabeth’s brilliant deck lights become obvious through the rain and wind-blown mist. As they draw closer, radio transmissions become clearer, but Jack and Kirsten are both horrified at what they finally see.

“My God,” exclaims Kirsten. “They’re almost on the rocks!”

Jack picks up the radio microphone.

“Lady Elizabeth, how much water below your keel?”

“The sounder says 6 ft., but we just bumped bottom a minute ago.”

In the background of the Lady Elizabeth’s radio transmission, Jack can hear the constant Beep, Beep, Beep of the depth sounder alarm. Jack continues to talk over the radio.

“I’m coming in bow first so we don’t foul our propeller in your anchor cable and so the bow can touch bottom first if it’s going to. We’ll fire a line to you with our rope cannon. The rope’s strong enough for you to winch the tow cable off our cable spool. Do you have a winch that works without your main engine? Over.”

“Roger, I have several that work off the generator. Man ... you better hurry! That shoreline’s almost close enough to touch! I’m winching in the anchor chain as we speak, over.”

Ocean Rover moves in as close to Lady Elizabeth as Jack dares. Ike is on the forward deck holding the rope cannon. He looks at Jack for the signal to fire. Jack’s voice booms out over the loudspeaker.

“Fire when ready, Ike.”

Ike takes careful aim and adjusts the elevation. The rope cannon fires off with a loud

explosion and a cloud of white smoke. The weighted “Monkey-fist” with its light manila rope arches high in the air over the Lady Elizabeth to drop in the water on the far side. A perfect shot! Crew members of the Lady Elizabeth scramble to grab Ocean Rover’s line, feed it through the hawse-hole in the bow, and wrap several turns around the already-turning winch drum.

Jack puts the Ocean Rover into half speed astern and water boils up under her stern as she backs slowly out of shallow water and swings around so the tow cable can pay out over the stern rollers. It seems to take forever for the tow cable to reach the hawse-hole in the bow of the Lady Elizabeth. Jack keeps glancing nervously out the rear windows of the pilothouse. He drums his fingers on the ship’s wheel.

“C’mon, c’mon!” he says to himself nervously, and then to Kirsten. “I don’t know how strong this rusty old tow cable is. It’s way past its useful life.”

“Perhaps you should just ease into it very slowly,” she suggests. “Don’t you think?”

“I’ll do that, but there’s still going to be a lot of strain getting that size boat to move.”

Finally, the call comes they’ve been waiting so long to hear.

“Okay, Ocean Rover. Take her away easy.”

Jack rings up slow speed ahead on the engine-room telegraph. The tow cable lifts up out of the water and tightens like a guitar string. The winch brake begins screeching and squealing like a wild Banshee as the brake shoes grind years of rust accumulation off the brake drum. Jack picks up the loudspeaker microphone and his voice booms out over the din of the winch brake.

“Ike and Preacher, move into the cabin immediately! If that cable breaks, it’s liable to take your head off!”

Hanging up the loudspeaker microphone, he speaks softly to Kirsten.

“Move over here where I’m standing in line with the exhaust stacks. I’ve heard some wild tales about the damage that snapped tow cables can produce. If it snaps ... duck!”

Jack picks up the VHF mike.

“Lady Elizabeth ... are you moving yet?”

“Not yet!” comes back the nervous reply.

Jack rings up half speed ahead on the engine-room telegraph. All eyes are glued to the taught tow cable. Water boils and froths from beneath the Ocean Rover’s stern. Again Jack’s voice booms out over the loudspeaker.

“Winch brake’s too tight, Ike. Slack it off two turns.”

“Is your anchor line all the way in yet, Lady Elizabeth?” Jack asks over the VHF radio.

“She’s vertical now and coming up,” comes the reply. “We’re moving slowly now. Ooops! ... we just bumped bottom again! That’s a little too close for me.”

“Whew!” remarks Jack with a sigh of relief. Then, suddenly alarmed, he exclaims:

“Oh my God! The fuel! ... Kirsten, take the wheel and just head out to sea. Stay slightly off the wind to minimize pressure on the tow line.”

Jack leaps down the engine room gangway three steps at a time and goes over to where Sharky is watching the glass fuel gauge.

“We outa’ fuel, Man!”

“Shit! We can’t run out of fuel right now, Sharky. It just ain’t gonna happen!”

Jack looks desperately around the engine room.

“The generator! It has its own fuel tank.”

Jack runs over to the generator fuel tank gauge.

“Three quarters full! That buys some time. Let’s see, there has to be a small transfer pump around here somewhere to fill this tank from the main tank.”

“Here ‘tis!” exclaims Sharky. Jack studies it carefully.

“Sharky, we gotta reverse these two hoses. Shut those two valves off first, then put this hose here, and this hose here. Tighten down the hose clamps. Turn the two valves back open, and start the pump ... if you can find the switch, that is. There it is ... on that post over there.”

As Jack heads back up the engine room gangway, he stops and yells back to Sharky.

“Screwdriver and pliers are on the workbench over there,” he says, pointing.

As Jack emerges into the wheel house, he looks out all windows to appraise the situation.

“How’s the tow cable feel to you?” he asks.

“You probably noticed the change in the engine speed,” Kirsten replies. “I throttled back a bit after the Lady Elizabeth started moving.”

“Good for you, Mate,” he says, picking up the VHF mike.

“Cape Sambro, This is Ocean Rover, over.”

“This is Sambro. Good God, Man, what’s happening out there. You left us hanging.”

“Sorry about that! It’s been rather frantic. We have Lady Elizabeth in tow, but I’m extremely low on fuel. Lady Elizabeth, are you there? Over.”

“Roger, go-head Ocean Rover,” responds the Lady Elizabeth.

“Is there any way we can get fuel from your ship into ours?” Jack asks.

“Standby one,” replies the Lady Elizabeth. “I’ll ask my engineer.”

After a few moments pause, Lady Elizabeth comes back on the air.

“Ocean Rover, we’ve got an inch and a half wash-down pump that we can jury-rig to our main fuel tank and enough hose to reach your deck if you’re alongside, but it’s too wild to do anything out here on the open ocean. Any suggestions? Over.”

“You know this area better than I do,” replies Jack. “Can we get enough shelter in the lee of Sheep Island to haul alongside each other? Over.”

“Definitely,” replies Lady Elizabeth. “I know that area like the back of my hand. We fish all around the island. The bottom falls off to four or five fathoms very quickly. What kind of navigation equipment d’you have on board? Over.”

“A hand-held satellite navigator and the ship’s compass. No charts. This old beast has

been out of commission for the past five years ... the company president's toy. Getting this far has been a minor miracle. Over."

"Oh, Jesus!" retorts the Lady Elizabeth's Captain. "You done good, Charlie Brown! Head one eight three degrees from here. I'll navigate you, over."

"Rodger, thanks," Jack replies, and then to Kirsten: "You get the heading?"

"We're on it now," she replies.

"I've got to get back to the engine room," says Jack. "The fuel problem still isn't completely solved."

In the engine room, Jack goes immediately to the generator tank fuel gauge.

"Cain't git no more out'n dis tank, Jack ... not less'n we squeeze it," says Sharky.

"It's good enough, Sharky."

"We mus' be outa danger now, huh!"

"Well, I don't think you're gonna need a swim lesson."

"Aw, shucks. I was hopin' we'd have some 'citement."

"Then stop hoping, will you! We've had enough excitement... and it's not through yet. Look around for cans of engine oil or any other kind of oil."

They both go to work scouring the far corners of the engine room, storage cabinets, and the ship's hold.

"Here one!" exclaims Sharky, hauling a heavy, tightly-sealed, five-gallon black bucket out of a closet and carrying it over to where Jack can see it.

"Hydraulic oil," Jack says reading the label. He opens the cap and pours a small amount into his hand. "...and that's what it is. Pour this into the main tank too, Sharky."

"This ol' engine run on that stuff?" asks Sharky.

"Mix it with diesel oil and it will," replies Jack.

Once into the comparatively calm seas on the lee side of Sheep Island, Ocean Rover reels in the tow cable and swings around until she's lying alongside the Lady Elizabeth. The wind still howls in the rigging and the seas are far from calm despite the protection offered by Sheep Island's rocks and spruce tree forest cover. But the heavy truck-tire fenders on each side of Ocean Rover keeps the hulls from damaging each other as they rub together. As Preacher and Jack tie the ships together, Ike hauls the fuel transfer hose aboard. Suddenly, the Ocean Rover's engine begins to die, picks up again, and starts to run rough. Jack rushes to the engine room as fast as his legs will carry him, flies down the engine room stairs like a bullet and hits the electric fuel shut-off switch before air can get into the engine fuel system. Sharky is somewhat amazed at Jack's display of speed and the sudden shutting off of the engine.

"What fo' you done dat so quick?" he asks.

"Once air gets into the system, we'd have to bleed the injectors and fuel pump on this monster and God knows how long that would take."

“What woulda’ happen we run out ten minutes ago?” asks Sharky.

“If we were gonna do that, I’d never have left the dock.”

“Oh! ... Well ... Sure!” says Sharky with a puzzled look on his face. “I c’n see dat now.”

As Ike, Preacher, and Sharky attempt to get fuel moving into the Ocean Rover’s main tank, Jack and Kirsten relax in the tiny ship’s galley over coffee and rolls. The galley door from the deck opens and Sharky sticks his head in.

“We got fuel movin’,” he says, ducking back out and closing the door behind him.

Kirsten quickly picks up the conversation with the subject of greatest concern to her.

“Getting back to this situation with Elvie, you say that you didn’t precipitate the event ... but you didn’t put a stop to it either,” she says.

“Oh, I most certainly did,” Jack replies emphatically. “I probably didn’t handle it the way you might have handled it, or the way you might have preferred that I handle it, but I handled it in the way that is most like my basic nature: that of curiosity and fun. I took it as far as Elvie wanted to take it and then stopped. That means that my first consideration was for her.”

“But would you have taken it further if she had wanted to?”

“I don’t know. I might well have. The excitement of the moment often cancels all rational thinking in both males and females. Sex is a very powerful motivator in people who are attracted to one another. Besides, you’re the one who allows Elvie to go as far as she does in playing with dangerous things. You have to be prepared for the consequences ... which is what this event provided.”

“Well, I’ve certainly had these feelings before, but I’ve never really hauled them out and looked at them closely.”

“We should all do that, you know,” Jack replies. “That’s one of the things relationships are all about ... understanding ourselves through interaction with others.”

“I don’t understand how sex has so much power over our feelings,” remarks Kirsten.

“I don’t either,” replies Jack, “But if you see it from a high enough perspective, sex just isn’t a very big thing. The introduction of birth control has made it even less of a big thing. Experiencing sex defrays curiosity ... levels the playing field for rationally-made realizations and long-term decisions.”

“But where has morality gone ... I mean ... you can’t just go around screwing anything that looks good, can you?” asks Kirsten.

“I don’t know about you or anyone else, but there isn’t much on this Planet that makes me want to make love to it physically. When I do find something, it makes it very difficult for me to refuse ... and you both are powerfully attractive to me emotionally and physically. Mentally ... well ... that’s another matter. Elvie and I are miles apart mentally, but you and I are not. It takes more than the spur of the moment to put a mental handle on powerful physical and emotional events. That’s one of the challenges of Planet Earth.”

“What if you had an attractive son and there was a mutual attraction between us. How would that make you feel?” Kirsten asks thoughtfully.

“You want to know the honest truth?” Jack replies. “I can tell you right now you aren’t going to like the answer! I would love both of you enough to let you have whatever experiences the two of you desire—even encourage it— because the happiness you both have is more important to me than my own. I know from my own past experiences that you both will arrive at the mental level sooner or later. Even if you stayed together and the bond was strong mentally, emotionally, and physically, I know that the universe is benevolent enough to provide me with more and better of what I am and what I have if I can enjoy it and release it unselfishly. It’s when I cling to what I have for fear of losing it that what I have feels imprisoned and seeks its freedom.”

“But that’s a very big order, Jack!” complains Kirsten. “The Universe doesn’t always respond that quickly. Who do you think can see beyond the pain ... I mean ... are you so insensitive that the situation doesn’t bother you?”

“Not at all!” Jack remarks. “Pain is a natural consequence of loving deeply, but pain is not what controls my life. My mind and soul are my sources of control. Life here in the worlds of duality was never intended to be a continuous orgasm or anything even close to it. Seeing someone you love with someone else, and seeing that they love the other person as much or more than they love you is painful, but it only hurts for a little while. And if permitting it to happen is your conscious choice, you have to keep reminding yourself that it’s your choice. If it’s not your choice, you have to learn to deal with rejection ... and that’s probably the biggest hurdle humans have to overcome.”

“Yes ... it is, isn’t it,” Kirsten muses. “I wonder why that’s so.”

“I don’t really know for sure, but I’ll tell you what I think and feel. It’s because when the human soul finds itself on Planet Earth, it feels that it’s been rejected ... separated from its Source and made to function in a garden of immense beauty, but a game arena of overwhelmingly negative proportions in relation to its intelligence, experience, or its imagined reality. Rejection is what we experience subconsciously from the moment we come slithering into the world naked, wet, cold, and screaming. It happens again when we have to stop nursing. It happens when a brother or sister is born. It happens when there’s never enough parental attention. And then comes the journey through hell in adolescence. We have moments, days, years—even lifetimes—of relative happiness, but what goes up must inevitably come down just as far.”

“Boy! You sure don’t paint a very pretty picture of life on Planet Earth,” remarks Kirsten.

“Do you have anything good to say about it?”

“Well, certainly! But it’s more like being grateful that cows don’t fly. In the final analysis ... when all is said and done and your term on earth is finished, the real you, the part you don’t see in the mirror, is more beautiful, powerful, wise, and free than words can describe. Planet Earth is a pathway to the Gods.”

“Do you really believe that?” Kirsten asks in earnest.

“What else is worth believing?” replies Jack emphatically. “What are ‘believing’ and ‘imagining’ all about if you don’t take them both to the limits of your capacities? Look

up into the heavens at night and contemplate what you see. Just remember that you're looking up from the bottom of a deep, dark well."

"I guess I've got some ..."

Kirsten's voice is drowned out as the door to the deck bursts open once again and through it comes the roar of the wind, a squall of rain, and a soaking wet Sharky.

"Jack, de Cap'm de Lady 'Lizabet wantsa talk to ya'. He right here."

No sooner has Sharky spoken than the doorway is filled with a very large man in yellow oilskins carrying something tube-like wrapped in plastic. He struggles through the doorway, slams the door against the wind, and sticks out a huge, powerful hand in greeting.

"Hi there," he says in a loud, deep bass voice. "I'm Darrel Mooney."

"Jack Diamond, Darrel,"

"I'm not likely to forget you for the rest of my life, Diamond! I'm indebted to you and the shipyard for a helluva lot of money. There's no way I could replace the Lady Elizabeth for her insured value, especially with a hold full of fish. Here's a chart with some waypoints marked on it for the shortest way back to Morgan River if you need it."

"Thanks, but I'll be okay now that daylight's breaking. Do you want to go back to the shipyard for repairs?"

"That's as good a place as any. Can we get fish trucks on the wharf?"

"Plenty of room. I'll call and make arrangements with the front gate so they can be there when you arrive."

"Excellent! Any the other problems?" Darrel asks.

"Just that rusty old tow cable ... but it seems to be holding up to the strain."

"If it parts, I've got half a mile of inch-and-a-half braided nylon rope that'll stretch to the moon before it breaks."

"That's reassuring," chuckles Jack. "We should have enough fuel in a few minutes. I'll go down and look at the gauge."

Jack heads for the engine room as Darrel makes his way back to the Lady Elizabeth.

Within half an hour the Lady Elizabeth is once again in tow. The wild storm has begun to slack off as the dawn light creeps over the horizon, and all that remains of the return journey is several hours of rolling from one side to another and smashing through an occasional breaking wave. Jack is steering as Kirsten comes up the wheelhouse stairway with two cups of tea balanced on a tray, all the time trying to keep her own balance in the tug's unstable world. She braces herself in a corner, hands Jack his cup of tea, and then takes her own.

"I was thinking, you know, it's too bad we couldn't have met fifteen or twenty years ago. I looked a lot like Elvie then."

"Time has not done bad things to you, Kirsten. You're very beautiful to me. Besides ... you wouldn't have put up with me back then. It's bad enough now!"

"What do you mean?" she asks.

“I had too much of an unfinished agenda which precluded any real possibility for a long-lasting relationship. I was really only interested in one thing.”

“I suppose that was sex ... as it is with most men.”

“That’s a safe assumption,” chuckles Jack, “But it’s actually not true—believe it or not. I was more interested in experiencing as much of life in its more adventurous aspects as I could. That involved avoiding as much responsibility as I could avoid. I was running as far away from the essential prerequisites for a long-term marriage and successful career as I could run. It was as though I was here on the Earth for the last time, had experienced responsibility up to my eyeballs in a thousand past lifetimes, and just wanted to be free to do anything my rambunctious, energetic spirit found placed before it this last time around.”

“You mean to tell me sex wasn’t a main topic of your thoughts? That would make you a most unusual man if true.”

“I can’t say that it wasn’t on my thoughts a lot, but it carried with it too great a risk factor for losing my freedom. And there was another problem of even greater consequence.”

“I can’t imagine what that would be,” Kirsten replies.

“In a manner of speaking, I can’t dance unless the music is just right. The women I found attractive when I was younger were attractive enough to get what they wanted—which was a nice home, a husband with a secure job, a position in society, and kids. Those girls were not born beautiful to sell themselves cheaply. As for me—all I could see was the road over the horizon. The sun was never going to set on Jack Diamond. What woman wants to work on an oil rig in the North Sea or in Alaska?”

“Lots of women would have gone with you.”

“They never showed up, so I had to go it alone.”

“That’s not such a serious problem as I was imagining,” remarks Kirsten.

“Well ... we don’t know, do we? We haven’t jumped that hurdle yet!”

“That’s certainly a first for me,” says Kirsten. “You’re the first man I’ve ever met who has a hurdle at the foot of his bed!”

“I don’t think you’re going to find that hurdle a problem at all,” Jack replies. “I’m going to learn a lot from you and Elvie.”

“About what!” exclaims Kirsten with feigned concern.

“I really wonder about your mind sometimes,” remarks Jack facetiously. “What I’m talking about is love, friendship, and power.”

Kirsten walks up to him, puts her arms around him, and kisses him.

“Just checking,” she says with a smile. “I think you’re teachable.”

“You’d be too good for me if I weren’t.”

CHAPTER 9.

It being a holiday when the Ocean Rover arrives at Morgan River Shipyard's wharf with the Lady Elizabeth, there is no one to greet them except two large tanker trucks to unload the Lady Elizabeth's fish catch and a number of cars belonging to the families of the Lady Elizabeth's crew. Jack and the Ocean Rover's crew tidy up the ship and prepare to disembark.

"You guys certainly made us a good crew!" Jack says to Preacher, Ike and Sharky. "Here's 30 bucks to go buy yourselves some food and whatever else you want. I'll be in touch with you again on Monday."

"Thank ...you ... Jack!" says Sharky emphatically. He gives a little bow to Jack and the three of them go dancing off the wharf—headed for sure to the liquor store first. Jack then turns to Kirsten and says:

"Thanks for coming along. You made it a pleasure instead of a job. What are you doing with yourself now?"

"I just talked with Elvie on my cellphone. Her girlfriend is picking her up in a few minutes and they're going surfing for the day. Want to come to the beach?"

"I think I just want to sleep," Jack replies. "Why don't you come home with me?"

"That sounds good to me. Do you have a place where I can rest too?"

"I have a big bed with a hurdle at the bottom. Will that do?"

"That'll do just fine."

"Then jump in your car and follow me," says Jack, helping Kirsten onto the wharf. "We'll take the long way 'round. I don't think your little car would like the mud and potholes going through the scrapyards."

Once inside the Captain's Cabin, Jack shuts the door while Kirsten looks around admiring the furnishings and the trappings for the first time.

"I can't believe you did this all yourself," she says.

"Pretty amazing what gets thrown away and recycled in this part of the world, isn't it?"

"This is recycled stuff?" she asks.

"Almost all of it," he replies. "Want a drink?"

"No thanks. I'm too tired. Where's your bathroom ... and bedroom?"

"Around the corner there."

"Do you have a nice big shirt I can wear. I don't feel comfortable trying to sleep in these dirty clothes."

"I'll get one for you," says Jack, leading the way into the bedroom area.

Jack hands her a long crimson and blue plaid flannel nightshirt. She goes into the

bathroom and starts to shower. Jack undresses to his underclothes, climbs into his bed and breathes a deep sigh of relief. Before Kirsten is out of the bathroom, Jack is sound asleep and snoring. She closes the window curtains, blocking out the early morning daylight, and climbs into bed alongside him. He wakes up just long enough to put his arm around her and pull her close, then both fall into the deep, sound sleep of the totally exhausted.

Hours later, Kirsten wakes up feeling herself to be alone in the bed. She looks over and Jack is gone. She climbs out of bed to find out where he's gone. The bathroom door is open so he's obviously not in there. She walks into the small kitchen and it's also empty. Suddenly Jack leaps up like a jack-in-the-box from his hiding place on the far side of the counter, roars like a lion, and tears around the end of the counter as though to grab her. She screeches like Elvie and takes off running back into the bedroom—Jack in hot pursuit—leaps on the bed and rolls herself up in the down comforter. Jack jumps on the bed with her and she pulls him in next to her under the covers.

“Funny that you run to the bed for protection!” Jack remarks with a chuckle.

“It's a clever woman who knows that her bed is her throne, her mind is her crown, and her heart is the jewel of her soul.”

Jack looks at her with semi-detached amazement.

“You sure said a mouthful there, Sister!”

“I thought you'd abandoned me and gone to work,” she says, feigning sadness.

“I just got up to put the coffee on,” he replies.

“You also scared the hell out of me, you rat!”

“Your little heart feels like it's going to jump right out of your chest!”

“What do you mean ... it's a very big heart!”

They lie there quietly caressing each other while the coffee pot boils and perks noisily in the kitchen. Kirsten is scratching Jack's back ... an indulgence that feels so good to him that he quickly starts to snore.

“Don't you go to sleep on me!” Kirsten demands, giving him a slight shake.

“Sorry,” Jack says groggily. “I'm enjoying it too much.”

“Aren't you going to make love to me?” she asks coyly.

“Nope!”

“What do you mean ... Nope!” she says feigning anger.

“That's not the way it works with me.”

“What do you mean?” Kirsten asks.

“You haven't passed your test yet.”

“What test!” exclaims Kirsten pulling away with feigned disgust.

“I can't tell you what the test is or your mind will get in the way and screw it up.”

“Then give me a clue.”

“Can’t do that either or it’ll give it away,” replies Jack with a smile.

Kirsten turns her back to Jack in disgust.

“Kirsten! Don’t get mad and don’t get frustrated. Just leave it alone and let it unfold. It’s more fun this way, believe me. Get your mind out of the way.”

Jack caresses her and kisses her until she finally turns back to him.

“I love you. I’m not rejecting you,” he says softly.

“It sure seems like you are,” she says, “ ... or else it’s that damned hurdle!”

Kirsten leaps out of bed, lifts up the sheets and blankets at the foot of the bed, looks underneath the bed, and then exclaims to Jack:

“Where is that hurdle, anyway!”

They both start to laugh. Kirsten hauls the covers off Jack.

“C’mon,” she says energetically. “Let’s go to the beach.”

As Jack and Kirsten walk up the path to the beach cottage, Kirsten notices that the back door is open.

“Elvie must be home,” she remarks. “I can never teach her to close the back door.”

As they walk into the living area, Elvie is looking out one of the front windows dressed in her two-piece bathing suit. She is deliberately not noticing anyone.

“Hello, Dear,” says Kirsten. “You’re home from the beach early.”

“Um-hmh,” she mutters.

“Any problems?”

“No.”

“Hi Elvie,” says Jack cheerfully.

“Hi,” says Elvie glumly. She walks quickly out the front door to the beach.

“Well, we know how Elvie’s doing,” remarks Jack sarcastically. He looks at Kirsten intently, and then adds:

“I think I’d better go out and try to untangle some knots in the other part of our communication line,”

Kirsten nods her head in agreement.

Jack jogs up the beach to catch up with Elvie who is walking glumly along the water’s edge, hands behind her back, kicking at a piece of driftwood or seaweed with her bare feet every here and there. He does a ridiculous little dance alongside her, then dances completely around her, humming a little nursery tune at the same time. She tries not to laugh; half-scowls at him.

“Go away! Leave me alone!” she says, not really meaning it.

“You don’t leave me alone. Why should I leave you alone?” Jack taunts.

He keeps dancing and humming, dancing and humming. Suddenly he stops right in front of her, pulls out her bra strap and looks down as though into her heart.

“Uh-Oh! There’s something in there!” he says, looking at her with wide eyes. “Something

that wants to come out badly! It looks like ... ooohh! ... it looks like a big black worm!" Elvie turns away abruptly, bewildered, and starts to cry. Jack moves around in front of her, puts both arms around her and pulls her close to him. He continues to hum the nursery rhyme "Here we go 'round the mulberry bush" and rocks her from side to side like a baby. She cries for a moment, then stops, but does not try to get away. Jack finally releases her.

"I have two ears," he says, "And right now they're both for you."

Elvie turns and walks down the beach, not knowing quite what to say next.

"Why did you put the make on me?" she asks finally.

"Is that what I did?" asks Jack with surprise.

"You certainly did! You were playing with my breasts, and everything, and then tried to take my bathing suit off."

"Oh My God!" screams Jack, feigning anguish and horror. "Bad Jack! What a son-of-a-bitch! Why in the world do you think Jack did that?"

"You wanted to get screwed, just like all guys want. I was hoping you'd be different."

"Oh ... how disappointing! And you don't think I'm any different than the rest?"

"Not any more, I don't," Elvie replies.

"Well, you know what? You're right!"

"I thought so," she mutters with disdain.

"About ... maybe ... twenty percent!"

Elvie stops cold and looks at Jack.

"What do you mean?"

"There are a lot of things like sex that are never all black or all white. Twenty percent of my action was out-and-out desire to play ... and eighty percent was carefully controlled curiosity to see just how far you'd go ... before ..."

"Before what?" she asks.

"Before I discovered what you saw in an older man—if anything—or whether you were just a young, easily-stimulated nymphomaniac."

Elvie, visibly set back, starts to cry. Jack takes her hand and continues to walk down the beach.

"So what do you think of me now?" she asks after a few moments of thought.

"I think you are a very special, wonderful jewel that needs some polishing here and there."

"Should I stop playing with you like I do? I mean ... you're the one who put your hands on me. I didn't put my hands on you."

"Hands are used to touch things that are advertised. Know what I mean?" asks Jack

"I just don't know what to think," Elvie remarks in dismay.

"If you want me to help you with your thinking, all you have to do is ask, you know."

Elvie looks at Jack like a poor lost puppy.

“Help!” she says softly.

“Both ears open?” Jack asks.

Elvie nods her head. They turn around and start to walk back down the beach towards the cottage.

“You need lots of attention—more than most people—and you compete with your Mother for it. Because your Mother is who she is, that’s not a problem. With other mothers it would be a huge problem. You use your body to attract attention to yourself. That can be a problem. You use your sexuality to attract attention to yourself. That can be a very big problem!”

“But other women have beautiful bodies, too, and it doesn’t get them in trouble.”

“Beauty is a two-edged sword, Elvie, and you have more than most. You’re beautiful enough without advertising the sexual parts of your body. This Planet is overloaded with men who have less self-control than some animals. Watch your mother closely ... the way she dresses and the way she doesn’t dress. Ask her about “eye contact” and how important that is in avoiding making contacts with people you don’t want to meet. She’s very attractive and lives in a world of men ... and the men she works with are rough, very basic men. Handling men is like a science—like the lion tamer’s art. An angry response constitutes rejection and can easily lead to heavy problems. Unless properly used, anger engenders no respect ... and respect is a basic building block and requirement for the highest forms of love.”

“What is it about sex that makes it so powerful, anyway?” Elvie asks.

“Damned if I know,” Jack replies, “But it seems to be built into the basic physical matrix of being human. The more physical a person is, the greater the sex drive and the less discrimination involved. You have no idea how powerful and confusing sex can be when it gets out of hand. I had a friend named Katie who had a body like yours and who dressed in tight jeans and tight T-shirts. She walked into a bar one night looking for attention and she found it, though not in the shape or form she wanted. She met a small, wiry, very strong ex-soldier who decided to take what she was advertising. Four hours of sex later, she had two broken ribs, a badly wrenched shoulder, and an emotional scar that’ll never go away. The confusing part is that, through all the pain and emotional trauma, she was having an endless chain of orgasms.”

“She was? Ooooh ... how horrible!”

“What she couldn’t understand was why violence and pain produce a greater emotional response than love.”

“How can that be?” Elvie asks naively.

“I didn’t make the rules. And you can’t come out of that game without a few bad scars, but you don’t have to play with the dragon if you know what he looks like, either.”

“I hope she learned a lesson.”

“She didn’t learn a thing!”

“She didn’t?”

“She wasn’t far enough along to realize that she herself is the cause of everything that happens to her because of her thoughts and actions. Instead she called it fate or bad luck. Remember, Elvie, if you advertise lollipops and cookies, you’d better have lots to hand out because there’re dragons that grab them and eat them without checking with you first.”

“Am I asking for trouble to be dressed like I am around you?”

“What’s going on in your imagination?”

Elvie looks straight at Jack, smiles, and cringes.

“Do I have to tell you?”

“I think I know. And that’s why I asked the question. Change that and you can dress or undress any way any time you want around me. Don’t imagine something you don’t want! And when you’re in public areas, wear loose jeans and a Coleman tent.”

“Do I have to?”

“You have to! Others less beautiful than you need to advertise everything they have. Beauty is a silent dragon, Elvie. Don’t ever forget that.”

Elvie looks intently at Jack and gets an evil smile on her face.

“And what if I’m a nymphomaniac?”

Jack looks at her sideways, knowing she’s back to playing with him.

“Welllll ... then”

Jack lunges for her. She runs away. He chases her.

“We’ll just have to find out!”

Jack catches up to her, snaps the back of her bathing suit bottom. She stops, hands on her hips, scowling at him. He walks up to her, puts his arms around her, and smiles into her face.

“You’re scary!” she says, looking up at him.

“You play with scary things!” he replies.

“I know. I can’t help it.”

“You’re very powerful, you know, otherwise you wouldn’t do that; your fear would control you. You’re becoming a little over-confident, though. That’s one of the reasons this whole thing happened the way it did. The pathway to mastery gets narrower the more power you have. With us—you and me and your Mother—there’s a cliff on each side of the path. How come you don’t have any handsome young men in your life?”

Elvie dances free, picks up a stone from the beach, and hurls it out into the waves while she thinks up an answer.

“I can’t find anyone like you.”

“Elvie, read my lips. Men like me are made by women like you and your mother ... and vice versa. The challenge is to make your choice carefully and intelligently. Find a man who makes a good friend first. Fall in love last ... not first.”

Elvie starts to hopscotch as she walks along beside Jack.

“So ... do you still like me, then?” she asks.

“Very much,” Jack replies

“As much as Mom?”

“Just as much.”

As Jack and Elvie walk into the living area of the beach cottage, Kirsten is sitting on the couch reading.

“Well, Mom, he passed,” comments Elvie.

“You think?” replies Kirsten looking up from her book.

“Um-Hmh,”

Jack, puzzled, looks first at Elvie and then at Kirsten

“What are you two talking about?” he asks suspiciously.

“She says you passed the test!” remarks Kirsten.

Jack, flabbergasted, looks straight at Elvie and then reaches to grab her.

“You little devil!” he exclaims as she runs out the door, giggling, to the beach.

“Just when did this test start?” Jack asks Kirsten.

“The day you came over to my welding station and introduced yourself,” she replies.

Jack walks over behind her as she sits on the couch, bends down to put his head next to hers, and slides his hand down the inside of her shirt to rest it on her breast.

“And just what d’you think you’re reaching for?” she asks with a smile.

“Your heart.”

“That’s not my heart!”

“It’s closer connected than you might want to admit.”

“Nobody would understand that better than you!”

“That’s right!” exclaims Jack standing up. “I’m going out and build a fire in the outdoor fireplace for tonight. Want to come help?”

“Sure,” Kirsten replies, getting up to go with him.

Hours later, as the sun has long gone over the horizon and darkness settles over the beach, a warm fire made of driftwood crackles in the stone enclosure of the open fireplace giving off enough warmth to keep away the chilly evening air. Kirsten and Elvie sit on a large driftwood log on either side of Jack. A Y-shaped stick on either side of the fireplace supports a steel rod from which is hung an enamel corn-boiling pot. Elvie gets up, grabs the salad bowl, a plate of garbaged corn cobs, and goes into the cottage.

“Are you planning to stay for the night?” Kirsten asks Jack.

“I don’t think I better,” Jack replies.

“Know what these are?” Kirsten asks, holding up Jack’s car keys and dangling them playfully.

“How did you get those?” asks Jack with a smile.

“Out of your car.”

“Are you trying to tell me something?” Jack asks.

“We’re sleeping in my bed tonight where there are no hurdles or you’re going to walk home,” says Kirsten in a whisper.

Jack bursts into a fit of laughter.

“So you finally figured out what your test was,” Jack says.

“I don’t understand,” replies Kirsten, puzzled.

“Back at my place, you asked me if I was going to make love to you. Love is a two-way street, Sweetheart, and the hurdle is there at the foot of my bed as a figurative check on my natural male impulses. I just want to make sure we’re both on the same wavelength with the same volume before I make any moves. I’m here for the long term ... with *you!*”

“We’re on the same wavelength,” Kirsten replies. “As for the volume ...”

“What’s going on out here?” asks Elvie, coming back to the fire from the cottage.

“Oh, your mother passed her own little test tonight,” Jack replies.

“Jack!” admonishes Kirsten, “will you shut up!”

“She just learned how to weld two pieces of high-carbon steel with a perfect bead,” Jack continues.

“That’s good,” replies Elvie, not at all interested in the implication. “Can we start roasting these marshmallows?”

“As long as your mother doesn’t catch fire,” mutters Jack.

“My God,” says Kirsten to herself. “What will it be next?”

“Who knows?” he replies.

The End

If you enjoyed this story....

There are others by Kit Cain at your local bookstore

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The first three chapters of each book can be read for free on the above website and they are available as Paperback Books or E-Books in Adobe .pdf format.

Leaves In The Wind: a story of diffident origin about a biker who formed his own major motorcycle club in L.A. and Vegas ... and lived to tell me his story.

Master Of The Welded Bead: a fictitious short story comparing the lifestyles and attitudes of two men: one who chooses to live a whimsical and humorous life on the “road less traveled”; the other who chooses to live a life of selfish interest on the road too-often traveled. It is an entirely personal idea of how I imagine a disinterested Master Of The Universe might lead an unusual yet entertaining life in a predominantly negative and otherwise boring world.

The Chasm Crossed: an autobiographical story about the unusual experiences and events of my 70 years of spiritual journey from youth to present.

Ride the Wind Laughing: An Illustrated autobiographical story describing the mystical events and experiences which contributed in major ways to my building a 51-foot sailboat in my mother’s back yard in rural Nova Scotia— an event which began with no money in an effort to test the Laws of Manifestation and prove to myself the efficacy and practical value of my years of spiritual training.

Soul And Man: is a major work attempting to define and describe the parameters of the word “Soul”— particularly as it applies to the human soul. The very nature of its perspective brings together the various schools of Religious, Scientific, Philosophical, Spiritual, and Mystical thought suggestive of a unified frame of reference and vocabulary for all. This book is not easy reading. It can be discomfoting and thought-provoking for those new to the Spiritual Journey. I wrote it primarily to further define and synergize my own thinking ... and for the benefit of those compelled—as am I—to journey into areas of the unknown, uncertain, and impossible to define.

On Pegasus’ Wings: is a collection of personal poems and song lyrics begun in 1962 solely as a means of inner expression and never intended for the eyes of the world. Only in later years have I realized that in their number and variety there might be at least a single poem among the many for each person. The knowledge of such would give me great satisfaction.

The Tears Of Power: is a fable for all ages from ten to eternity about a mouse named Victor who lives in Edgeville—which is at the edge of everything: the river, the fields, the forest, the mountains, and the sky. Edgeville quickly becomes too small for his adventurous soul so he ventures out into the world of the great unknown, learning to pilot tugboats, fly helicopters, and meet some unusual friends like Oddie the Otter, Mo the musical Mole, and Minkie, his flight instructor. It is Eagle, though, who finally tells him what the tears of power really are. 24 great illustrations by illustrator Scott Peck.

Flying The Yukon's Bush: is the recounting of my adventures as a helicopter bush pilot in the Yukon Territory in 1962. Part 1 is the story in writing, and Part 2 is a slightly different story in pictures. Both parts can be downloaded from my website for free.

Perfect Health For Dogs And Cats: First wife Ann loved animals and so we always lived on a farm surrounded by dogs, cats, chickens, goats, and horses. Her dedication leaned toward the health and healing of animals by natural means, while mine leaned in a similar direction with humans. Contained in this small booklet are the simplest principles of health and healing for dogs and cats supported by our own experience and that of a major research foundation.