

SAILING MARIETTA

Book One

THE LAKE

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A Novel

Dave Cochran

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This novel is a work of fiction based on some, but not all and unfortunately more than a few of personal experiences the author personally has or hasn't had. References to historical events, some real songs, some real movies, some real people, living or dead, or to real locations are intended only to give the fiction a setting.

While most names, characters, places and incidents are the product of the author's imagination, a few of the sailors name's and their sailboats are real friends of the author and they are used with permission. For example:

The Marietta is the author's real sailboat.

The Pegasus is really Mitch & Denise's boat.

Katherine doesn't have a name for her boat, but says she likes Caribbean Breeze.

London Pride was Richard & Laura's boat, but it wasn't blown up. They got a new one.

The Gallatin is a real US Coast Guard Cutter and yes, Mitch really did serve aboard.

Rolling River Lake is fictional. The inspiration comes from the real Smith Mountain Lake in Virginia, which we hope doesn't have a BIG mystery buried below it.

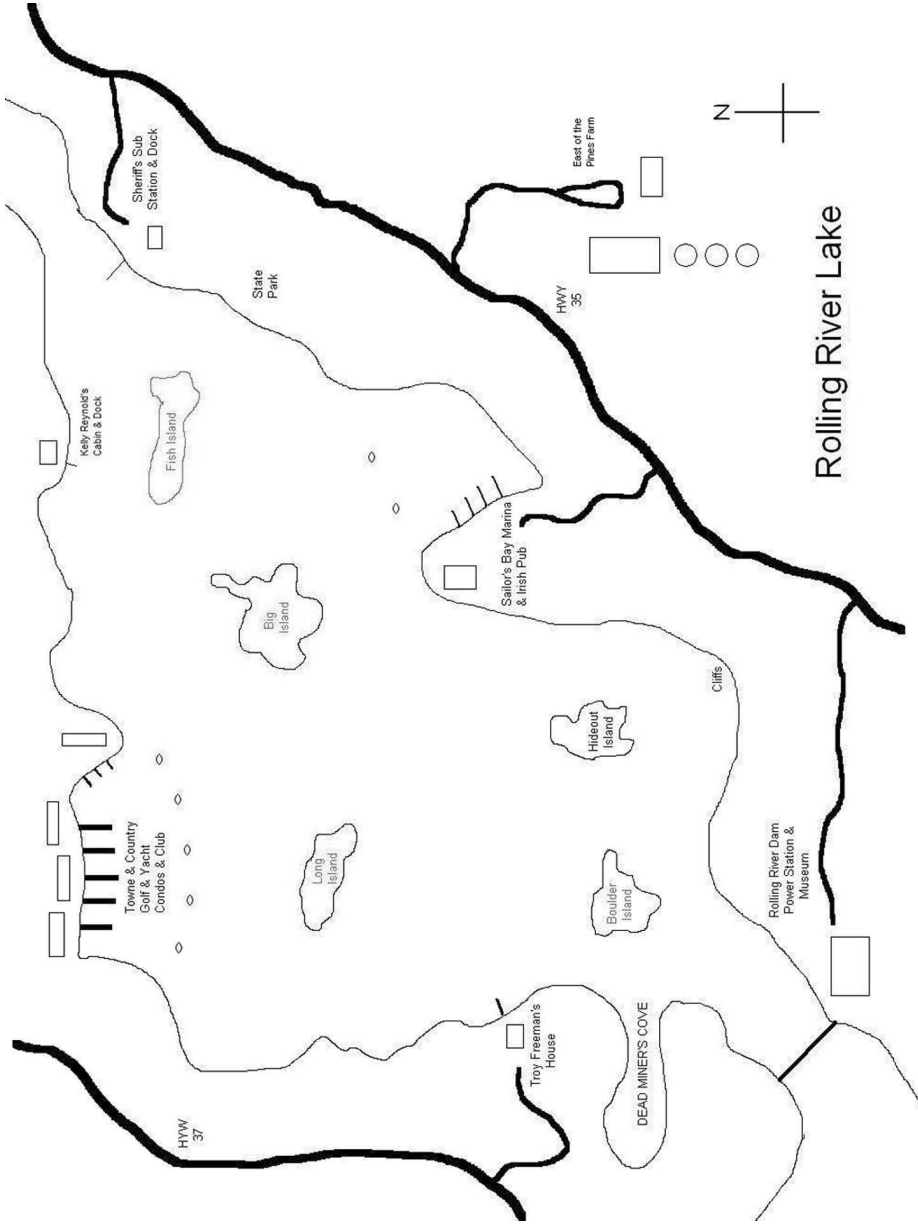
3rd World Dog is a real song and is used with permission. Dave and Tom are real singers who play around Smith Mountain Lake in Virginia.

For:

My Mom, My Dad & My Sister

&

My Sailing Friends



C H A P T E R 2



THE RACE

CIRCLE FOR TAKEOFF

The back deck of the Irish Pub at Sailor's Bay Marina had a great view of the cove and most of the lake too. The deck was full of spectators who came from all over the state for the annual race and the dinner party that followed. The deck had several levels, so everyone had a bird's eye view of the annual Pub Race. Looking down on the water, the 23 boats that would be taking part in the race were either coming out of their docks or motoring in a slow circle, waiting for the horn that would start the race. The rules were simple. When the horn sounded the boats could cross the starting line, which are the two "no-wake" buoys at the mouth of the cove. Beyond the buoys, captains must immediately cut the motor and rely on wind power only.

The sounds of several different stereo systems and the voices of happy people filled the air as the boats slowly circled each other. The largest boat in the marina was The Pegasus. Mitch and Denise were lounging next to the wheel in the back of the boat as Johnny Cash's greatest hits CD played through the open door of the cabin.

A smaller boat with the name Gipper painted on the stern was slowly passing The Pegasus. On board, Captain Mac and his grandson were sorting through the sail halyards while NPR's Car Talk played on a small radio on deck. Music by Jimmy Buffett played from most of the other boats.

“Hey Mitch!” called Captain Mac. “Don’t you think it’s time to start pulling the sails up? The race is about to start.”

“No,” Mitch called back. “It’s too early. You just can’t rush things on a boat.”

Denise looked past Captain Mac’s boat to a smaller boat circling by itself at the far end of the cove. The Caribbean Breeze’s sails were up and ready to go. The boat’s sole occupant, Katherine, had just tossed a bucket overboard. It was attached to a rope and she was hauling it back aboard, full of water. Katherine looked over at the other boats, smiled, waved and then started doing something with the bucket of water no one could see.

“What’s Katherine doing all by herself over there?” asked Denise.

Mitch had seen Katherine hauling the bucket of water aboard too and said, “Probably just washing some dirt out of her cockpit. You know how dirty a boat can get.”

“Tell me about it,” said Denise who spent quite a bit of her time helping to keep The Pegasus ship shape. She took a longer look at Caribbean Breeze and said, “She doesn’t look like she’s washing anything.”

“Hey Mitch!” called a different voice, a voice with a British accent. “We’ve got about two minutes to go. You better haul your main sheet up.”

The voice with the accent came from the skipper of London Pride. Richard and Laura had been regulars at the lake for years. The boat was named after Richard’s favorite brew from across the pond.

“You know, if you’d actually put the sails up, then you might make it past the starting line,” Richard taunted.

“It’s not whether you win the race, it’s how cool you look while you’re racing that matters,” replied Mitch.

“So it’s all about style?” asked Richard.

“You got it!” replied Mitch.

Just then, three short blasts came from the official race boat, signaling two minutes to the start of the race.

“Okay,” said Mitch. “I guess we can haul up the main sheet now.”

With that, he grabbed a line and started pulling. Denise took the wheel and pointed The Pegasus into the wind. As soon as Mitch had the main sail up the mast, he cleated off the line, loosened the traveler and the sail flapped uselessly in the wind.

“Time to head for the starting line,” Mitch said. “Let’s do one more, slow circle and then head for the start at full speed.”

“Don’t you think we’ll get there too soon?” said Denise. “We don’t want to get disqualified.”

“No, we’ll be fine,” said Mitch. “But be sure to watch out for Jerry on 19th Hole.”

As Denise started making her last turn, she looked back over at Katherine on Caribbean Breeze and saw her lift a big clothes basket filled with what looked like brightly colored clothes up on deck and into the sun.

“I guess Katherine was doing her laundry,” Denise observed.

A LIFETIME MEMORY

The Marietta slowly inched away from the dock as the two-minute warning sounded. Some light, classical music was playing on the boat’s radio. Taylor looked at the floor of the cockpit which was completely covered with a brightly colored mix of ropes which Roger called halyards. It looked more like a bowl of spaghetti. Before they left dock, Roger had pulled the main sail cover off the boom and tossed all the ropes onto the floor.

As the boat slowly motored into the center of the cove, Taylor asked if there was anything she could do to help.

“Grab the end of that white rope and get ready to start pulling,” Roger said.

“What’s it do?” asked Taylor.

“That’s the one that pulls the main sail up,” answered Roger. “Here we go, I’m going to point The Marietta into the wind now.”

Roger pushed the tiller in one direction and the boat started slowly turning into the wind. Most of the other boats were all heading in the same direction too and most of the sails were slowly creeping up the masts.

“Okay, start pulling,” said Roger. “Pull it all the way to the top and then cleat it off the way I showed you.”

Taylor started pulling and the shiny, white sail started making its way up the mast. Since the boat was heading into the wind, the sail flapped uselessly in the wind. Once Taylor got the sail to the top of the mast, she tugged on the line, then circled it around the metal cleat on the deck. She ran the line around the cleat in a figure 8, flipping the line under itself on the last loop to lock it into place.

“Is that right?” Taylor asked.

“You did that like a real pro,” said Roger. “How do you like it so far?”

“Well, getting away from the dock looked a little dramatic,” said Taylor. “But I suspect it’s going to get a lot better.”

“You’re right about that,” Roger answered. “In fact, I think its time for me to warn you about something.”

“Warn me?” asked Taylor. “About what?”

“Well, if you’re anything like me, you’re about to have a life changing event in the next few minutes,” answered Roger.

“A life changing event?” Taylor asked. She remembered back a few weeks as she sat at her desk in New York City and wished she could be anywhere else but there. “I think I could do with a life changing event about now.”

Just then, the horn from the committee boat sounded one long, final blast starting the race.

“Here we go,” Roger said. “Come back here by the motor.”

Taylor carefully stepped over the mess of halyards strewn all over the floor of the cockpit and sat down by the motor as Roger said, “See the black lever and the red button on the motor?”

“Here and here?” Taylor answered, pointing at the button and lever.

“That’s them,” said Roger. “The second we pass those buoys, shift the lever into neutral and hold that button down until the motor stops. After that, grab that green line and start pulling.”

As Roger turned the boat toward the starting line, the main sail boom swung from one side of the boat to the other, narrowly missing Roger’s head by just a few inches.

“That was a close one,” Taylor observed.

“I’ve been clobbered by the boom several times,” Roger replied. “Eventually you learn to either duck.”

As each of the boats approached and passed the starting line, the sound of motors being cut off could be heard across the water. As the sound of the motors diminished, the peaceful quiet of the cove returned. Shouts of “good luck”, “happy sailing” and “see you at the finish” came from the spectators up the hill at the pub.

As The Pegasus crossed the starting line, everyone in the cove could hear Mitch shout, “Remember everyone, safety first!” He looked up at the pub and shouted, “Don’t drink all the beer while we’re gone!”

“Hey Mitch!” called Jerry Spaulding on The 19th Hole. “Think you can keep from running aground this time?”

“Sure, if you stay out of my way!” Mitch called back.

The banter between captains and crews continued as the boats continued toward the starting line. As The Pegasus approached the starting line, the music from the big boat’s speakers changed from Johnny Cash to The Peter Gunn theme from the Blues Brother’s soundtrack.

“That Mitch is quite a character,” said Taylor.

“He’s the marina fun guy and a pretty good sailor too,” said Roger. “He’s also the best friend I have.”

Taylor looked back at The Pegasus and saw Mitch finish tying off the main sail and quickly rig the lines from the headsail. He then swung down into the cockpit and onto one of the long benches that lined each side of the boat.

“He looks like he knows his way around the boat,” she said.

As The Marietta approached the starting line, Taylor saw Roger reach for the radio’s remote control. As she looked up, Taylor saw a huge smile growing on Roger’s face. He looked at her and said, “Ready to go?”

Sensing Roger’s building excitement, Taylor found herself getting excited too and said, “Yeah, I guess.”

As The Marietta slowly passed the no-wake buoys, Taylor cut the motor and started pulling the rope. Roger hit a button on the remote and the classical music that had been playing on the radio changed to an up-beat, almost childish tune that Taylor vaguely recognized. As she pulled on the line, the wind started to fill the main sail and she could feel the boat picking up speed.

“What are we listening to?” Taylor asked.

“Most of the boats here have their own theme song,” Roger answered. “Mitch has Peter Gunn, Amanda & Gary play Jurassic Park. I thought this tune would be fun. Do you recognize it?”

“It sounds real familiar,” said Taylor. “But don’t tell me. I wanna guess.”

As she continued pulling on the line, Taylor searched her memory. She was sure she'd heard the tune before but just couldn't place it. Then Roger started singing along with the song. "Yo, ho, yo, ho a pirate's life for me."

"Its Pirates of the Caribbean!" shouted Taylor. "That's my favorite ride at Disney World."

"Mine too," smiled Roger. "Now cleat that line off and grab the blue rope and start pulling that one."

As Taylor started pulling the blue line, another sail in the very front of the boat that had been rolled up like a croissant started to unroll. As more of the sail came free, it became harder for Taylor to hang on. The Marietta continued to pick up speed and she could feel her excitement growing, keeping beat with the music on the stereo.

Once the sail completely unrolled, Roger said, "See those red and blue streamers up on top of the sail?"

"Sure do," replied Taylor.

"Keep pulling on that rope until they're both blowing parallel to each other, then cleat it off," said Roger.

"What do they do?" asked Taylor.

"They're called tell-tales. When they're blowing in a straight line, it means you have the sail shaped to work the most efficiently with the wind," answered Roger.

As Taylor pulled the line, she saw the two brightly colored streamers start to blow in a straight line. She cleated it off, sat back and noticed for the first time how quiet things had gotten. As she looked around and saw the boat's speed was increasing, Taylor felt one of the biggest adrenalin rushes she'd ever experienced.

She then realized she was smiling as big as Roger.

For the next few minutes they just sailed along, the music playing in the background, the sound of the water rushing by the hull, the sound of the wind whistling through the sails. For Taylor, it was a moment frozen in time. It was a moment of pure freedom. A moment she knew she'd never forget.

"You were right," said Taylor. "I think this is a life changing event."

"You want to know the best part?" asked Roger.

"Yeah," she said.

"That feeling, when you turn off the motor and the sails first catch the wind," began Roger.

Yeah," said Taylor.

"It doesn't go away," Roger smiled.

FIRST TURN—LONG ISLAND

"Is anyone getting close?" Gary asked.

"Richard and Laura are looking pretty good," Amanda answered. "Katherine's coming up behind Mitch. Roger and that new girl are breaking out of the pack, too."

Amanda and Gary were far ahead of most of the boats in the race. It wasn't that The Connection was faster than the other boats. In fact, their boat was more of a cruiser than a racer. But they had two secrets. First, Amanda and Gary worked very well together and were considered expert sailors. Second, they had a secret strategy that Amanda was surprised no one figured out yet.

"I think Katherine may be on to our blast-off secret," said Amanda. "Her car was full of junk and I spotted her in the water early this morning."

Gary and Amanda always arrived a week before race day. Most people assumed they arrived early so they could start the party early which was partly true. But they also spent the week taking most of the junk off the boat to make it lighter. They also took a few moonlight dives with a big brush to make sure the

bottom was as clean as possible. When asked about the secrets of their success, Gary and Amanda would always say: "We always arrive a week early so we can get an early start on the race party."

"I'm going to swing a little wide around Long Island 'cause of the wind," said Gary.

"Yeah, all those trees will bust up the wind and slow us down," added Amanda. "We gotta figure out when to flip the sails, too."

Looking back, Gary saw most of the boats were bunched up as they made their way out of the cove. The Pegasus with Mitch and Denise was starting to break out of the pack along with Captain Mac and his grandson on Gipper. But it was Richard and Laura on London Pride who were coming up fast.

"We may have a little competition from London Pride," said Gary.

"Roger has been practicing a lot too," Amanda added.

"Okay, time to swing around the island," Gary announced.

"When do you want to flip the sails?" Amanda asked as the boat started turning past Long Island.

"What do you say we try and get close to the haunted mansion, then come about?" asked Gary.

"Sounds like a plan," Amanda smiled. "But wait a minute! I think we forgot the most important part."

Gary thought a moment and then said, "The blender!! How could we forget that?"

"Cause we were spending too much time talking with Roger and that new girl, what's her name again?" asked Amanda.

"Taylor," answered Gary.

“That’s it,” said Amanda. “Good thing you have the memory for names.”

“Take over here,” said Gary pointing at the tiller. “I’m going below to hook up the blender.”

“Don’t take too long ’cause we have to turn soon,” Amanda smiled as she climbed down from the deck by the mast. “And don’t go nuts with the tequila this time. We don’t want to get plowed before we tie up at the dock.”

“Not a chance,” Gary smiled as he released the tiller. Amanda grabbed it with one hand, and as they exchanged places in the small cockpit, Amanda’s free hand reached out for Gary and pulled him in close. The kiss that followed lasted quite a bit longer than a few minutes as The Connection sailed on past Long Island and straight at the lake’s far shore.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

Troy Freeman walked out onto his porch which looked out over most of Rolling River Lake. The large stone house had been built as soon as work on the dam had been completed. Troy’s wife Donna was an Art Deco nut, but the house looked more like a gothic mansion. As Troy walked over to a large deck lounge, he slipped the six pack of beer he’d been carrying into a cooler, cleverly hidden in the lounge’s armrest. He then set a phone and two-way radio on the table.

Troy’s porch was the perfect spot to watch the race. He could see the starting line and all of the islands. But the race and the surrounding beauty of Rolling River Lake didn’t even register on Troy’s radar. He was there to keep an eye on the small strait of water between Dead Miner’s Cove and Boulder Island.

Every year, Troy watched the boats going round the island, by the cove and then back out into the lake. He would count each boat as it passed out of view, behind the island. If any boat failed to come out of the mist that rolled out of the cove, he’d radio his waiting security team. If a boat managed to make it past a certain point in the cove, the team would apprehend, question and then kill the trespasser. The unlucky boat’s hull would have a hole or two smashed below the water line and it would be towed over to an empty spot in the rocks where it would be discovered a few weeks later by a passing sheriff’s deputy who was also on the payroll. The unlucky captain’s body, mysteriously, was never found.

As Troy looked out over the lake, he counted 23 boats coming out of the marina across the lake. He looked down at the boat in the lead. Even though Troy knew nothing about sailing he could see it was coming a lot closer to the shore than most boats. His gaze drifted to the back of the boat, where a man and woman were fully engaged in a long, deep kiss. They didn't seem to know the shoreline was coming up fast.

"This'll be good," Troy thought to himself as he decided he wouldn't warn the boaters and let them run aground. Then, with just a few yards to go, the woman loudly shouted: "Coming about!" and the boat turned sharply away from the shore. The man quickly loosened the rope holding the main sail and grabbed two more ropes. As the boat swung around, the sails flipped from one side to the other. The man tightened down the ropes and turned back to the woman. They laughed loudly and waved up at Troy as they started heading back out to the middle of the lake. The man then headed towards the open door of the boat's cabin and disappeared. The boat sailed down to Boulder Island.

RUNNING WITH THE PACK

"Hey Mitch!" called Katherine. "Where are you?"

"He's down below!" Denise called back.

"Well, he needs to come up on deck for a minute," yelled Katherine.

"Is anything wrong?" asked Denise who was thinking Katherine was coming up just a little too close on the right.

"Nothing big, he just needs to come up on deck before I pass you," said Katherine.

"Mitch!" yelled Denise. "Katherine is passing us and needs to talk to you. She's getting a little close to us, too."

Denise started edging the wheel of the big sailboat to the left as Mitch emerged from the cabin with two bottles of beer, some chips and guacamole.

"How can Caribbean Breeze be about to pass us?" said Mitch. "She was way back in the corner of the cove when the race started."

“Doesn’t matter ’cause I’m passing you now!” yelled Katherine.

Mitch turned and he saw the bow of Katherine’s boat quickly passing The Pegasus. As he looked back toward the Caribbean Breeze’s cockpit, Mitch was suddenly drenched by a series of large water balloons.

“Gotch-ya!” yelled Katherine as her boat quickly moved past The Pegasus and out of range.

“Good work Katherine!” yelled Mitch. “It was getting a little hot anyway.”

“Any time!” Katherine yelled back.

“What was that all about?” Denise asked.

“It’s one of those race traditions someone started a few years ago,” Mitch answered. “In fact, you’d better keep an eye on Bunny and John on Therapy, too. Richard and Laura used to fire off a few salvos, but I think they’re too busy trying to win the race.”

“Therapy?” Denise asked.

“In Lieu of Therapy is Bunny and John’s boat,” Mitch explained. “Actually, it’s a pretty good name for a boat.”

“How did the water balloons start?” Denise asked.

“I think someone had balloons aboard their boat for a birthday party and it was one of those race days that was real hot,” Mitch explained. “One thing led to another, it got hotter and hotter and someone started throwing balloons.”

“She’s got pretty good aim,” observed Denise who only got a few splashes. “You’re soaked, but I’m pretty dry.”

“She doesn’t know you that well,” said Mitch. “Give it time and you’ll get soaked too.”

Denise pointed to Long Island, "We're passing the first island."

"Yeah, get ready to come about," Mitch said.

Mitch looked back and saw that Roger and Taylor on The Marietta were coming up fast, too. Then he noticed The Pegasus seemed to be slowing down just a bit.

"Whoa!" said Mitch. "We got too close to the island and it's killing our wind."

"Why is that Captain Mitch?" Denise asked doing her best impression from the movie they watched last night.

"Well Captain Ron," said Mitch keeping with the flavor of the movie. "The wind is coming from the southwest. The trees on the island are deflecting the wind up and over our sails."

"Wait a minute," said Denise. "Katherine was pushing us toward the island. When she came up on the right, I thought she was getting a little close, so I started turning left to miss her. Then she fired off those balloons and I turned even more to the left. She pushed us too close to the island. The balloons were just a diversion."

"Nicely done, Katherine!" yelled Mitch.

"Hey Mitch!" called a voice behind them. "How did you get so wet?"

Mitch and Denise turned to see Roger and Taylor on The Marietta coming up fast behind them.

"Watch out for Katherine!" called Mitch. "That wasn't just a water balloon attack. She got us to turn into the island and we lost our wind."

"I thought that basket was a bunch of clothes," said Denise. "Apparently she's using those balloons for more than just some cool fun."

"I think she's going for the gold this time," said Roger. "Didn't you see her over in the corner of the pub last night with the map and the weather forecast?"

“She’s still got to get past Connection and London Pride,” called Mitch.

“We’ll see you when you catch the wind again,” Roger called back as The Marietta started the turn around Long Island.

TAYLOR TAKES THE TILLER

“Get ready to come about,” said Roger.

“What do I do now?” Taylor asked.

“Why don’t you take the tiller,” said Roger. “You’ll need to turn the boat to the left when I tell you.”

Taylor took the tiller as Roger started sorting through all the lines that coiled around the floor of the cockpit. He tugged on the line to the front sail that Taylor had secured when they left the marina.

“Okay, get ready,” Roger said. “We’ll turn in just a few seconds now.”

“How do you know when to turn?” Taylor asked.

“I’m sure some expert sailor could give you a better answer than this,” Roger explained. “But I turn when it feels right. See, we have to get around the island and then head to the right of Boulder Island down there.” He pointed to what looked like a barren pile of rocks off in the distance.

“See that other island off to the left?” Roger asked.

“Yeah,” Taylor answered.

“That’s Hideout Island,” Roger said. “We have to go between the islands, and then we turn around Boulder.”

“Hideout Island?” Taylor asked.

“Hideout Island,” Roger said. “There’s a little cove behind the island and cliffs on the opposite shore. If you’re looking for complete privacy, you won’t find a better place to hide out.”

“So when do we turn?” Taylor asked.

“Right about,” Roger paused a few seconds, looked over his shoulder then said, “Now! Push the tiller all the way to the right.”

The small boat started turning as soon as Taylor pushed the tiller. Roger then let go of the blue line that controlled the head sail. The huge sail flapped loudly in the wind. As the boat turned, the wind slowly filled the opposite sides of the sail as it moved to the other side of the boat. Just then, the main sail boom started its move to the other side of the boat. It missed Taylor’s head by inches as Roger ducked at the last minute.

“Wow!” said Taylor. “That was fast.”

“If you stay by the tiller, you’re just out of range of the boom,” said Roger. He then started pulling the green line as the headsail started falling back into shape. He pulled on the line until the two tell-tails started blowing parallel, and then cleated it down.

“Very nice,” Roger said. “Now we keep this set up until we pass Boulder Island.”

Taylor looked around and realized that she was actually driving the boat. She looked at Roger and smiled.

“You know, less than a week ago, I was sitting in an office, halfway up a skyscraper in New York City,” Taylor said. “I was burned out, mad at the world and wondering if all I was going to do was write advertising campaigns that made other people rich. Now I’m here on a boat and I feel like the weight of the world is completely off my shoulders.”

Roger looked up and smiled at Taylor.

She smiled back and said, “And then there’s you.”

Roger smiled back and said, "And there's you."

"I think Amanda was right," Taylor said. "These boats really can change lives." They both fell silent, enjoying the sights, the sounds and the fresh air.

After a few minutes, Roger broke the silence and asked, "Ready for some iced tea?"

"Sure, want me to get it?" Taylor asked.

"No, you're doing great right there," said Roger. "I'll be right back."

Roger disappeared into the boat's cabin. Taylor looked around the boat and saw that she was alone and in command. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and opened her eyes as another big adrenaline rush hit. She laughed out loud and pointed The Marietta directly between the two islands where they'd make their next turn. For the first time in a long time, Taylor Freeman realized she was in the right place at the right time. For the first time in a long time, she felt like she was right where she belonged.

IN FIRST PLACE

Gary emerged from The Connection's cabin with two large, frosty mugs filled with the first margaritas to come from the new blender. As he handed one to Amanda, she took a look at her mug and said, "Look at the size of this thing. Are you trying to get me drunk there sailor?"

"Just taste it," Gary said.

Amanda looked at Gary suspiciously, took a small taste then smiled.

"Is there any tequila at all in this?" she asked.

"Just a little," Gary answered. "Enough to give it a some taste, but not nearly enough to cause problems."

"You know what would be good right now?" Amanda asked.

“I think I know,” said Gary as he reached into the cabin and pulled out a tray filled with chips, salsa and guacamole.

“Perfect!” said Amanda. “It’s a boat party.”

She reached for the radio’s remote control and hit the ‘on’ button. The sound of island music drifted back into the cockpit from the cabin speakers.

“Anyone catching up?” Gary asked.

Amanda looked back and said, “Looks like London Pride and Caribbean Breeze might catch up after the next turn. Marietta and Pegasus are looking pretty good, too.”

“Is that Gipper coming around Long Island?” Gary asked.

“Sure is,” Amanda replied.

As they enjoyed the chips, salsa, guacamole and near virgin margaritas, Amanda and Gary both looked up at the wind-x high atop the boat’s mast. The small wind vane continued to show the wind coming out of the southwest.

“I think we may have to get a little closer to the haunted cove before we flip the sails again,” Gary said.

Amanda looked over at Boulder Island and said, “That cove fog is about as thick as it always is,” Amanda observed. “We’re going to have to really watch all the rocks over there.”

“We could go a little closer to the dam, flip the sails and try to skim the island instead,” Amanda said.

“That’s the plan,” Gary said.

“I wish they’d change the route and let us go around Hideout instead,” Amanda said. “That fog really makes me nervous.”

“But then we wouldn’t be able to fake out that creepy old guy in the haunted mansion,” Gary said. “Think he bought it this time?”

“As always, he was keeping a close eye on us,” answered Amanda.

“Looks like all he does is sit on his porch and drink beer,” said Gary.

“I’ve talked to him a few times at the pub,” Amanda said. “I think he’s more sad than creepy.”

“I’ve never seen him there,” Gary said.

“He usually comes in early in the afternoon, downs a few beers and leaves,” Amanda said.

“What’s he do?” Gary asked.

“He says he’s retired, but he takes a lot of business calls on his cell phone,” Amanda replied.

“Maybe he’s doing that investment thing,” Gary observed.

“Actually, I think it’s about time for us to start doing our thing,” said Amanda.

“We don’t have time for that right now,” Gary teased. “But I like your thinking.”

“I mean the sailing thing,” said Amanda. She paused and looked off to her left. “You know, Hideout is right over there.”

“How many times have we won this race?” Gary asked.

“Kelly said three times in the skipper’s meeting,” Amanda replied. “But it’s more like five.”

“I don’t think we really need another 10 minute penalty do you?” Amanda smiled.

FROM FOURTH TO THIRD

Taylor looked up after taking her iced tea from Roger and saw The Connection suddenly veer off course, heading away from Boulder Island.

“What’s going on up there?” Taylor asked.

Roger looked up and laughed. “Looks like Amanda and Gary have decided to give the rest of us a chance.”

“A chance at what?” Taylor asked.

“At winning the race,” Roger replied.

“They’re just giving up?” Taylor asked.

“Yeah, it looks like they’re heading over to the cove on Hideout Island,” said Roger.

Just then, the peaceful quiet of the lake was shattered by the sound of a boat horn. Taylor looked back and saw Mitch standing on the front of his boat blasting the horn and pointing at The Connection. She looked over at Amanda and Gary’s boat and saw them waving back. As she watched the scene before her, a small smile formed on the corners of her mouth. She looked back at Roger with more than a slight twinkle in her eye and playfully asked, “Does that happen often?”

“Sure does,” Roger answered. “Amanda and Gary are what you might call the healthiest couple at the marina.”

“I think good health is important,” said Taylor.

“So do I,” agreed Roger.

“But maybe we should try to win this race first,” Taylor suggested.

“It would definitely give us something to celebrate,” said Roger. “But don’t get your hopes up. London Pride is one fast boat and you saw how Katherine pulled ahead of Mitch.”

“So we try for the top three?” suggested Taylor.

“Deal,” said Roger as The Marietta sailed on towards Boulder Island.

BOULDER ISLAND FOG

Troy Freeman had been talking on his cell phone when the silence of the lake was suddenly shattered by the sound of a boat horn. He looked up and saw one of the boats had suddenly turned away from the island. As Troy watched the small boat sail away from the others, he wondered why the 1st place boat had suddenly given up the race.

As he grabbed his binoculars, Troy quickly figured out what was going on. The couple had settled in the back of the boat as it slowly sailed toward Hideout Island. Troy was able to see a platter of chips on the small cockpit table. The man and woman each held a large mug in one hand and each other in the other hand. It was pretty easy to figure out what would be happening on that boat soon.

Troy sat back, thought about his own love life and how, long ago, it turned cold and distant. Looking back, Troy was able to tell exactly when his life changed and not for the better. Life was great after high school where Troy got good grades. His favorite classes were science and history. He never tired of studying military history either. Troy quickly developed a deep respect for the military and a strong sense of American pride. He’d chosen the military early in his life and pictured a long career of service and honor.

But everything changed when he met up with some very ambitious officers who were very high up in the food chain. Those officers had civilian support even higher in the food chain. Troy had quickly proven himself intelligent, creative and reliable. He was just what they wanted. As it turned out, they were the people who ruined Troy’s life.

They called themselves The Bridge Group, even though none of the members ever played the card game. The Bridge Group consisted of high ranking military

officers, senators, congressmen and scientists all committed to winning the Cold War with power ... Nuclear power.

Back in the 1960's, the United States was still mired in the atomic standoff with the Soviet Union. Widespread nuclear power plants were still far off in the future, but the people Troy met were going to make it happen and happen soon. He often ironically said he was the right person in the wrong place at the right time.

When it comes to nuclear power, one of the most important things needed is water. Tons of water. Nuclear reactors use water to stay cool. When a reactor gets too hot, it literally melts down and the result is a nuclear catastrophe. There is plenty of water in the ocean, but past experience proved salt water clogs, rusts and corrodes pipes fast. A big, fresh water lake had millions of gallons of just what The Bridge Group needed.

Troy didn't know it at the time, but The Bridge Group had their eye on him since he graduated from West Point. He was assigned to The Corps of Engineers and his first test was to find a spot for The Bridge Group's new fresh water lake. It would be sold to the public as a watershed and source of hydro-electric power. But as the dam was being built, just a few miles away, a larger secret project was underway.

The first phase of the scheme was to clear the valley of all civilians. That proved to be the most difficult for Troy, because he'd chosen his family's home for generations as ground zero. He had been totally caught up in the moment and didn't think about the project's impact on his family's way of life. In the end, Troy's choices had cost his family their home and the lives of his mother, father, brother and sister-in-law. Once Troy had figured out just what he had done, it was too late. Both he and his family were in just the wrong place at the right time.

He had married his high school sweetheart, Donna, the day after he graduated from West Point. The first five years had been just what they planned. But soon after Troy realized that he alone had destroyed his own family, guilt and surviving that guilt drove Troy into a stony silence. Since then, Donna had her own life and career in Chicago as a historian at the Museum of Science and Industry. They divorced a few years later. The last time Troy saw his children, they weren't even able to talk.

As Troy looked at the happy couple sailing away, he longed for the life that could have been. He'd given up blaming other people for his troubles. The only person responsible for destroying the Freeman family was Troy and Troy alone. Still, he wished there was some way, some thing he could do to bring it all back. To somehow make it all better.

Troy allowed himself another longing look as the small sailboat turned into the cove behind Hideout Island. When the boat disappeared from view, Troy shook his head violently as if to shake the painful thoughts of the past out of his mind. He then turned his attention to the boats still in the race and noticed several boats had already disappeared in misty fog of Dead Miner's Cove. Reaching for his radio, Troy said, "Team one, go to condition yellow. You have two boats in the fog and a third just entering."

His radio clicked twice as the team leader deep in the cave keyed his microphone button. Troy watched as the blue sailboat with the name Marietta painted along the side began its turn into the fog.

IN THIRD PLACE

"Where does all this fog come from?" Taylor asked.

"It's actually one of the mysteries of the lake," Roger answered. "If it was advection fog, it would be all over the lake, but its only here in this cove. That's when warm, moist air moves over cool water. It isn't steam fog either 'cause that usually happens right after it's been raining."

"Thank you for the weather report," said Taylor.

"Sorry," said Roger. "I used to do the weather on TV."

"Oh God," said Taylor. "Not another one. My best friend back in New York is a TV type, too."

"That's former TV type thank you," said Roger. "I was kicked out about a year ago."

"Kicked out?" asked Taylor.

“Yeah,” said Roger. “Things were going pretty good until the company brought in new managers and they wanted to jazz things up. I wasn’t jazzy enough, so they made life miserable hoping I’d leave. I left.”

“My friend, Ashley, says she sees that happening all the time,” said Taylor. “But she’s really popular so they leave her alone.”

“It’s happening all over the place,” said Roger.

“Wow!” said Taylor. “Look at the size of those rocks!”

“Yeah, try to keep in the middle of the channel,” said Roger. “If you have to, you can use the compass. Just keep it pointed right there at 010 degrees.”

“So if it isn’t Advil or whatever kind of fog you mentioned, what is it?” Taylor asked.

“I’m still not sure,” said Roger. “I’m wondering if it’s not some kind of geological fog like the steam from a geyser or natural spring.”

“I don’t think so,” said Taylor. “If it was geological, wouldn’t it have that rotten eggs smell, like at Yellowstone?”

“You’re right,” said Roger. “There would indeed be sulfur or the rotten eggs smell. This stuff smells cleaner, like bleach.”

“Whoa!” exclaimed Taylor. “Look at that boat wreck!”

“Pretty scary looking isn’t it?” said Roger. “I haven’t spent too much time here, but there are supposed to be a whole lot of boat wrecks in this cove. I’ve also heard talk about some kind of cave. But I’m just not that interested in taking the boat in there to find out.”

“I think there’s another boat right in front of us,” said Taylor.

“You’re right,” said Roger. “I think that’s Katherine. We’ve been making good time.”

Just then, three brightly colored water balloons splashed onto the floor of the cockpit drenching Taylor and Roger.

“You guys don’t want to get too close,” yelled Katherine. “We wouldn’t want to have a boat accident in all this fog.”

Katherine had been slowing down as her boat drifted between the shore and Boulder Island. All the boats slowed because the channel was narrow and the surrounding trees deflected the wind up and away from the water. Even The Marietta was slowing down.

“Hi ya, Katherine,” yelled Roger. “I don’t think you’ve met Taylor yet.”

“Hi, Taylor,” called Katherine. “Welcome to boat race. Hope you didn’t get too wet.”

“No problem,” Taylor called back. She remembered what Mitch had said when he got drenched and said, “I was getting a little too hot anyway.”

“That’s the spirit,” said Katherine. “How do you like the race?”

Taylor thought a moment, looked at Roger and said, “Life changing, thanks. How about you?”

“I got hooked a long time ago,” said Katherine. “It gets better every day.”

“Looks like we’re breaking out of the fog,” said Roger. “The wind will be picking up any minute now.”

“Tighten up your sails now and you’ll pick up some extra speed,” yelled Katherine. She was already winching down her head sail with one hand while tugging the line from main sheet with the other. The tiller rested against her leg as she nudged the boat away from the rocks.

“Wow,” said Taylor as she watched Katherine. “She’s good.”

“She’s done a little sailing in the Caribbean,” said Roger.

“You’ve got to be in pretty good shape to sail,” observed Taylor. “Looks like you’ve got to be pretty coordinated as well.”

As Taylor watched Katherine expertly handle her boat, Roger sorted through the lines and started tightening his sails too. As he looked up, he saw the Caribbean Breeze break completely out of the fog. Moments later, The Marietta was out of the fog and into the bright sunshine.

“See you guys at the finish,” called Katherine as the wind filled her sails and the Caribbean Breeze took off. Moments later, the wind filled The Marietta’s sails and Roger and Taylor chased after Katherine.

Just then the sound of Mitch’s boat horn broke the silent peace of the lake. Roger and Taylor looked behind them to see the bow of the much larger Pegasus just a few feet off The Marietta’s stern.

“Looks like you both ran into Katherine,” yelled Mitch.

“Yeah,” said Roger. “She’s just ahead.”

“You shouldn’t let other boats get so close,” said Mitch. “Remember, safety first.”

“We’ll remember,” said Roger.

“How’s it going, Taylor?” yelled Denise.

“It’s a whole new world,” Taylor called back. “You?”

“Not bad,” said Denise. “But I’m ready to make Captain Safety First here walk the plank if he doesn’t stop honking his horn.”

“Boys with toys,” said Taylor. “What can you do?”

As The Marietta’s speed increased, the Pegasus started to fall behind. “See you at the finish,” yelled Roger.

“We’ll be catching up in a few minutes,” called Mitch.

“So what’s next?” asked Taylor.

“Watch this,” Roger said as he started letting the lines on the sails slack off. As he let more line out, the main sail swung 90 degrees off the left side of the boat. As soon as he got the line cleated down, Roger loosened the line of the head sail and then began pulling the line on the opposite side of the boat. Soon, the head sail caught the wind and was now on the opposite side of the boat. Like the main sail, it was hanging almost 90 degrees off the side of the boat.

“The wind is now behind us and this is called wing and wing,” said Roger.

“We have to go back up the lake and go between Long and Big Islands. We then turn back for the marina and the finish line.”

Taylor looked back at The Pegasus and saw Mitch and Denise were setting up their sails to wing and wing, too. She then looked ahead and saw that Katherine’s sails were set the same way. Further off in the distance, she saw the boats further back in the race were now coming right at them.

“Won’t we run into the other boats that were behind us?” Taylor asked.

“Yep,” said Roger. “The first big challenge in the race is getting through all the fog. The next is here in the center when the boats in first place and last place meet. We call it the ‘Big Mixer’ and yes, there have been a few boat crashes, too.”

“Do you want to take over?” asked Taylor.

“You’re doing fine,” said Roger. “Just watch out for boats.”

“Let me guess,” smiled Taylor. “Safety first?”

“Safety first,” said Roger.

“Earlier, why did Denise call Mitch Captain Ron?” asked Taylor.

“It’s from a movie,” answered Roger. “Captain Ron came out in the early 90’s. It’s about boats and it’s everyone’s favorite movie here at the lake.”

“Never saw it,” said Taylor.

“I’ve got the DVD,” said Roger. “Want to go to the movies after the race?”

“Sure,” said Taylor. “I haven’t been to a good movie in years.”

“It’s a date,” said Roger. “Here come the other boats.”

“I like that one,” said Taylor pointing to one boat. “The one with the two masts.”

“That’s Bunny and John’s skipjack,” said Roger. “Did you catch the name?”

Taylor squinted as she looked at the name. “In Lieu of Therapy,” she said. “Now that’s clever.”

“It’s true too,” said Roger. “You can spend thousands of dollars on a therapist or just buy a boat.”

As the boats passed, Bunny and John waved. Taylor noticed part of the boat’s cabin was wet and the remains of some water balloons were stuck to the side.

“Looks like Katherine has been by,” observed Taylor.

“She’s really catching up with London Pride,” said Roger.

Taylor then looked off to the left and was surprised to see the bow of another boat coming right for The Marietta.

“Look out!” yelled Taylor as she pushed the tiller to the right.

The Marietta’s bow turned to the left moving the stern out of the way of the approaching boat. Taylor watched as the boats passed within inches of each other. She then pushed the tiller in the opposite direction and The Marietta continued heading up toward Big Island.

“Nice to see you fine folks,” said Jerry Spaulding.

The cockpits were so close that Taylor could reach out and shake the captain’s hand. The boat’s name, 19th Hole was painted on the side along with what looked like a golf ball and tee flag. A small boom box was sitting on the cabin of the boat with the unmistakable sound of Bob Marley & the Wailers coming from the speakers. Taylor’s nose twitched as she caught a whiff of a smell that took her back to the clubs of New York.

The Captain of The 19th Hole was lounging in the very back of his boat. His foot rested on the boat’s tiller. He waved toward Taylor as he took a puff of his marijuana.

“Nice to see you too Jerry,” said Roger. “How are you enjoying the race?”

“Nice day for a race,” said Jerry. “I see you folks seem to be a little damp.”

“Katherine is in charge of the water balloons this year,” said Roger.

“Don’t think I’ll have to worry about that,” said Jerry. “It’s one of the perks when you don’t care about winning.”

Taylor looked at the boat’s name and the picture painted on the side of the boat and said “Nice day for golf.”

“Yeah,” said Jerry. “I used to play a little, but my golf game wasn’t much better than my sailing. At least I can relax and enjoy the music here.”

“True enough,” said Taylor.

Jerry then coughed, took a toke of his joint and said, “Lemme tell you something about golf Missie. The reason they call the game golf is because all the other four letter words have been taken.” He then laughed loudly and coughed a few more times.

Roger and Taylor found themselves laughing along with Jerry. The gap between the boats was ending the conversation when Roger said, "We'll see you at the party, Jerry."

Taylor waved, then turned to Roger, "He's quite the character, but isn't it a little bold to be smoking pot out in the open like this?"

"That's what I thought, too," said Roger. "But no one seems to bother Jerry. He's been around for years and always seems to be smoking."

"I never got into it much myself," said Taylor.

"Me either," agreed Roger. "Never did anything for me. I'm happiest with my Guinness."

"Guinness?" said Taylor. "That stuff tastes like motor oil to me."

"Did you ever drink motor oil?" asked Roger.

"Yeah I like the 10-W-40 myself," joked Taylor.

They both laughed together and the conversation continued. Taylor turned and took one last look as Jerry's boat started its turn around Boulder Island. She waved to Jerry, who waved back as his boat disappeared into the fog.

IN LAST PLACE

Jerry Spaulding coughed again as his boat entered the fog. He took another hit of his pot, and then crushed the butt in the ashtray. Reaching for the radio, he changed the CD to a bootleg copy of a Grateful Dead concert. As he looked up, he saw Boulder Island coming straight out of the fog.

"Whoa!" yelled Jerry as he jammed the tiller hard to the right. The small sailboat's bow started turning to the left, but the turn wasn't quick enough. The bow and the right side of the boat bounced off one of the bigger rocks. Jerry could hear the rock scraping down the right side of the boat as it headed away from the island.

“Sorry old girl,” said Jerry as he patted the side of his boat. “That was close.” He decided he’d better head below and quickly check for damage. He tied the tiller so the boat would head straight, then crawled through the cabin door and worked his way forward. The boat’s cabin seemed dry, so he worked his way back to the cockpit. As he emerged from the door and looked forward, he saw the boat was heading for more rocks. Jerry pushed the nose of the boat even further to the left, thinking he hadn’t missed Boulder Island after all. He looked behind him, but all he saw was mist.

“We gotta figure out where we are old girl,” said Jerry to his boat.

He released all the sails and the boat coasted to a stop. As the boat drifted, Jerry looked down at his compass, looked at the bow of the boat and then went below to get his chart of the lake. As he rummaged around the cabin, he felt the boat bump up against another rock.

“Again?” he said as he grabbed the map and headed back up on deck.

THINGS THAT GO BUMP OUTSIDE THE CAVE

The security team inside the cave heard the boat bump up against the rocks, too. Bob had been sitting in the boat with the others. He looked up, then reached for his radio and quietly called Troy on the hill.

“Team one to lookout,” said Bob.

“Go ahead team one,” said Troy.

“We heard something outside of the cave,” said Bob. “Can you confirm?”

“Negative,” said Troy. “Hill spotter, come in.”

A third voice appeared on the radio and said, “A 20-foot day sailor just turned into the cove.” The voice paused, “Looks like he’s lost in the fog.”

“Has he crossed the line?” asked Troy.

“Negative,” said the third voice.

“Everyone, stay on station,” said Troy. “Out.”

Bob turned to the others and shook his head no. Stevens, one of the new men sitting on the small boat nudged his partner and raised his hands indicating he didn't understand what was going on. The man next to him quickly put his finger to his mouth, and then pulled out his map of the cove. He pointed to the entrance to the cave and the rocks at the mouth of the cove. He then traced an invisible 'X' on the map and silently mouthed the word *target*. He then drew an invisible line on the map, pointed at it and drew another invisible 'X'.

Stevens looked up, nodded that he understood. He then turned to look at the other new man on the squad to see if he understood too. As the other new man reached up to wave at Stevens, the semi-automatic rifle he was cradling on his lap fell to the floor of the boat and went off. The sound of the gunshot reverberated around the cave and out into the cove.

PASSING BIG ISLAND

The sound of the gunshot reverberated out of Dead Miner's Cove and across Rolling River Lake. From the back deck of the Irish Pub, to the boats on the water, to the dock of the Sheriff's substation at the opposite end of the lake, everyone stopped what they were doing and turned to look back toward the southwest.

“Did you hear that?”

“What was that?”

“Sounded like a gunshot.”

For the next few minutes, questions filled every corner of the lake. On London Pride, Richard and Laura were nearing the final turn and the race for the finish line. As they looked back toward the sound of the noise, they saw Katherine on Caribbean Breeze approaching fast.

“We'd better make this a good turn,” said Richard.

“No problem,” said Laura. “We'll pick up some speed once we break out from behind the island.”

A few boats back, Roger and Taylor had just turned back from looking toward the sound of gunfire that had come from the other end of the lake.

“What was that?” asked Roger.

“That sounded like gunshot,” said Taylor. “Probably from an automatic rifle.”

“How do you know that?” asked Roger.

“You pick up on things like that when you live in a big city,” said Taylor. “Even the small time hoods have a semi these days.”

“I guess it was someone out hunting,” said Roger.

“You don’t hunt animals with a gun like that,” said Taylor. “That’s the kind of gun you use to kill people.”

“Oh,” said Roger.

Taylor pointed to the bow of the boat and said, “Maybe we should change the subject for now.”

Roger looked as Big Island passed behind the boat and said “You’re right, it’s time to head for home.”

“Prepare to come about?” said Taylor. “Right?”

“That’s right,” smiled Roger as he reached for the sail lines. “Anytime you’re ready.”

Taylor started turning the boat toward the marina and the finish line. Roger tugged on the lines and the sails fell neatly into place with the wind coming off the starboard side of the boat. The wind was picking up too and the deck of The Marietta started heeling over.

The deck of the Caribbean Breeze was also heeling steeply as the wind blew across the lake. Katherine had studied the weather closely the night before and

knew the wind was forecast to pick up late in the afternoon. The stern of London Pride was just a few yards off Katherine's bow and she knew she had a chance to win the race. Even though Richard and Laura's boat was bigger, Katherine had two things going for her.

First, she had cleaned everything she didn't need off her boat the night before. The Caribbean Breeze was now very light and very fast. Second, she knew a way that might slow the London Pride down just enough to allow her to inch ahead and win the race. She tested her theory with Mitch and The Pegasus and now planned to try the same thing with London Pride.

"I've got to get between them and the wind," thought Katherine.

WRONG TURN

Jerry patted the side of his sailboat and said, "We have got to get outta this cove old girl."

He reached back and opened the vent on his fuel tank and started the motor. As Jerry's motor started, he heard the sound of a much bigger motor starting. Jerry tapped the gearshift into reverse and started motoring away from the rocks. As the boat started to pickup speed, Jerry kept a close eye out for the boulders he hoped would be appearing any moment. He snuck a quick look toward the bow and heard the sound of a motor being kicked into gear and revving up.

Jerry looked back and saw the same boulder he hit emerged from the mist. He knew it was the same boulder because he recognized the streak of green paint his boat left on the rock. Jerry slowed the motor, shifted into forward and slowly started motoring away from the rocks. He kept the boulders just in sight and off to his right while looking at the compass. Jerry hoped he'd break out into the sunshine at any moment. Just as the fog started getting thinner, Jerry looked back and saw the bow of a black boat filled with men coming after him. He quickly reached for the motor's throttle. As Jerry gripped the throttle, the sharpshooter in the front of the black boat fired off one shot.

Jerry yelled out in pain, as his hand grabbed the throttle which he turned just enough to make the small boat surge ahead. The bullet hit Jerry dead center, severing his spine and piercing his heart. As the boat completely emerged from the

fog and out into the sunlight, Jerry fell back in his seat. His hand reached for the tiller and pointed the boat into the middle of the lake.

High up on the hill, Troy sat frozen on his balcony watching as the last sailboat in the race emerged from the fog. He was on his radio demanding information about the first shot when he heard the sound of the second shot and saw the captain of the small sailboat hit by gunfire. He then saw his black boat beginning to emerge from the fog. Troy looked out into the middle of the lake, and then made a quick decision.

“Abort, abort, abort,” he said quietly into his radio. “Keep our boat out of the sunlight. We’ll get the target later.”

The radio clicked twice as Bob silently acknowledged the instruction.

Troy looked at the boat that had just emerged from the fog. He held up his binoculars and saw the man driving the boat had been badly wounded by the gun shot. Blood covered the back of the boat. Troy watched as the boater seemed to be nodding off.

Troy keyed the mic and said, “The target was hit and is losing a lot of blood. He’s heading north into the middle of the lake at slow speed. If he doesn’t get help in the next few minutes, he’ll be dead. Team One, stand down and secure. Team leader, report to my office immediately.”

Troy listened for the double click of the radio as he watched the small sailboat begin a slow turn toward the Irish Pub.

“*He’s trying to make it to the marina,*” thought Troy. But the boat continued the slow turn past the pub and toward the cliffs. Troy looked through the binoculars one last time and saw all signs of life had stopped. There was no movement at all.

“*That’s it,*” thought Troy as he turned and headed into the house.

STEALING THE WIND

Mitch and Denise were just about to start their final turn past Big Island. As she looked back, Denise pointed out to the middle of the lake.

“Look at Jerry,” said Denise. “I guess he’s giving up and coming in with his motor.”

“He probably doesn’t want to miss the party,” said Mitch. “Free beer is the best beer.”

They both turned and summed up their chances. The Pegasus was slowly closing in on The Marietta, but the real battle was between London Pride and Caribbean Breeze.

“Let’s see if we can beat Roger,” said Mitch as he tightened his grip on the head sail’s lines.

Up on The Marietta, Roger looked back just as Mitch tightened the lines on his sails.

“Mitch is trying to beat us,” said Roger.

“We said we have to come in 3rd,” said Taylor. “So what do we do?”

“Just keep it pointed toward the middle of those two buoys,” said Roger as he tightened down The Marietta’s sails. Both boats surged ahead toward the finish line. But even with the sails set as tight as they could be, The Pegasus was slowly gaining.

“Can I try an idea?” asked Taylor.

“You’re at the tiller,” said Roger.

“Let’s just hope that Mitch doesn’t remember that Katherine already did this to him once,” said Taylor as she edged the boat off to the right.

Up on Caribbean Breeze, Katherine could see the race would come down to just a few inches. Both boats were running at full speed as she caught up to London Pride.

Over on the bigger boat, Richard looked over and saw Katherine was coming up fast. He looked at the wind-x on the top of the mast, looked at Katherine and smiled.

“I think she’s got us,” said Richard.

Laura looked back and saw that Katherine was slowly coming up on their starboard side. Further back, Laura saw that a similar battle was brewing between The Pegasus and The Marietta. Just as The Pegasus began passing The Marietta, the smaller boat’s sails disrupted the flow of wind into Pegasus’ sails and the bigger boat slowed down.

“Looks like big and fast is going to lose to small and crafty today,” said Laura.

ON THE COMMITTEE BOAT

At the finish line, Kelly, Preston and Wesley sat on the old pontoon boat as the battle for first place came down to the last few yards. They’d positioned the committee boat right at the finish so they could declare the winner.

“Look at that!” shouted Kelly. “Do you believe what you’re seeing?”

The knife edge bows of both London Pride and Caribbean Breeze cut through the water, as Katherine’s boat pulled up alongside Richard and Laura. When they were parallel, the sails of the smaller boat disrupted the flow of wind into the bigger boat’s sails. London Pride began to slow as Caribbean Breeze pulled ahead and across the finish line.

Preston reached for the boat horn and noticed Wesley had been snapping pictures on a small, digital camera. Kelly noticed the camera too and said, “Wes, you’ve got some great sailing in that camera.”

As Preston started blowing the boat horn, cheers erupted from the deck of the pub. But the biggest cheer came from the Captain of The Caribbean Breeze. Katherine released the sails, looked over her boat and realized she had just won the race in the most exciting finish in the Irish Pub’s race history. As Katherine cheered her victory, she looked back and saw the bow of The Marietta cross the finish line just ahead of The Pegasus.

On board The Marietta, Taylor and Roger looked at each other and smiled. Roger released the sails and the boat coasted to a stop near Caribbean Breeze.

“3rd place,” said Taylor.

“3rd place,” said Roger.

“Come here,” said Taylor. What started as a victory hug became closer and passionate and before they knew it, they found themselves in a long deep kiss that went on, and on and on until a hail of water balloons brought them back to the present.

As the first four boats to cross the finish line inched to a stop, the calls of congratulations began between the boats. Sails started coming down and the sound of motors cranking up could be heard. When Roger let go of Taylor to start taking The Marietta’s sails down, Taylor pulled Roger back for one last kiss.

“Nice to meet you,” she said.

“Nice to meet you, too,” said Roger.

As Roger made his way to the base of the mast to drop the main sail, Taylor looked over at Caribbean Breeze and said, “Way to go Katherine. That was an amazing finish.”

“Thanks,” said Katherine. “I saw it a few years ago when I was sailing down in the B.V.I.’s and I’ve been dying to try it out.”

The Pegasus eased up next to Katherine and Mitch said “Well done Katherine. That had to be the best finish this race has ever seen.”

“Nicely done Katherine,” called Richard. “I think you’re ready for the America’s Cup.”

All four boats slowly made their way into the marina and the docks. Mitch hit the button on his stereo and started the Peter Gunn theme again. Over on The Marietta, Roger started Pirates of the Caribbean.

Richard disappeared into the cabin of his boat and re-emerged with a glass of wine for Laura and a big bottle of London Pride for himself. He also had an empty wine carafe. Taylor looked over and saw Richard dump the whole bottle of beer into the carafe and started shaking it up.

“What are you doing that for?” called Taylor.

“You Americans have too much carbonation in your beer,” explained Richard. “Back home, we don’t drink this stuff nearly as cold or bubbly as you do.” He held up the carafe and said, “This makes it a proper tasting pint.”

Taylor looked back as Roger cut the motor and The Marietta slid into the slip. Roger quickly jumped off and caught the stern before it bumped into the dock. As he walked back to the cockpit of the boat, he cleated off several lines securing the boat to the dock. He then tossed an electrical cable aboard and climbed aboard himself.

“What’s that for?” asked Taylor.

“Shore power,” said Roger. “It’s how we power the stove, recharge the batteries and watch movies.”

“That’s right,” said Taylor. “We’re going to a movie tonight aren’t we?”

“Sure are,” said Roger. “But first, we’re going to a party.”

“What about the guest of honor?” asked Taylor.

She pointed out to the middle of the cove where Caribbean Breeze was slowly circling.

“I think she’s taking a few victory laps,” said Roger.

Onboard the Caribbean Breeze, Katherine sat back as her boat lazily circled the cove. Katherine owned her own landscaping business and the week had been long and hard. She’d been looking forward to the race for weeks. Like the other boaters, Katherine was here for the fun and the friends. But winning the race did make the day sweeter.

It was time to head to the dock and the victory party. But she decided to take just a few more minutes and enjoy the moment. As Katherine laid back against the tiller of her boat, she looked up at the sky and thanked God for the gift of what she and her friends called the healing waters of Rolling River Lake.

C H A P T E R 3

A PARTY & A MOVIE

HIDEOUT ISLAND COVE

The cockpit of The Connection had been turned into a small bed. An hour ago, Amanda anchored the boat while Gary pulled a specially cut board up from the cabin and placed it over the floor of the cockpit. Amanda disappeared into the cabin and re-emerged with seat cushions, pillows and the pitcher of margaritas. Now, about an hour later, the couple lay under the sun, sipping what Gary called a “fully loaded” margarita.

Gary was nearly asleep.

“That was nice,” said Amanda nudging at Gary.

“Sure was,” said Gary waking up. “That was a great idea you had.”

Amanda snuggled closer to Gary as the sailboat slowly rocked back and forth in the light breeze. The Connection was anchored in a small cove of Hideout Island. The cove was completely hidden from the rest of the lake. Jagged cliffs lined the opposite shore ensuring complete privacy. Complete privacy that is, until friends happened to be passing by. Amanda called them sail-bys.

Over the years, a lake etiquette had evolved about Hideout Island. Once a boat had dropped anchor in the cove, it was considered occupied and only close friends were welcome. Others were supposed to quietly turn around and find

another spot to drop anchor. But even a few of Gary and Amanda's friends made a fast getaway when they found The Connection anchored in the cove.

As far as the couple was concerned, the privacy of Hideout Island was good for one thing and they took advantage of that privacy often. Once they arrived, they discarded the biggest inconvenience of their relationship, their clothes. They left them discarded until they decided to weigh anchor and re-join civilization. It was something a few of their friends were just a little too uncomfortable with.

"You know we're going to miss the party," said Amanda.

"It'll be a nice night," said Gary. "They'll all be out here in a few hours."

"Yeah, just as soon as the free beer is gone," said Amanda.

"You hear that?" asked Gary.

Amanda listened as the sound of a small boat motor was getting louder. She pushed herself up so she could see over the cabin of the boat and out into the cove.

"I don't see anything yet, but it sounds like someone is getting closer," said Amanda.

"We were here first," said Gary as he pulled Amanda back down onto the make-shift bed. "And I'm not in any hurry to go."

"I'm getting hungry," Amanda announced. "Want anything?"

"I'm fine," said Gary.

As Amanda disappeared into the cabin, Gary noticed the sound from the approaching boat's motor appeared to be getting quieter.

"I think our guests have decided to find another cove," said Gary.

"Good," said Amanda. "I'm just not dressed for company today."

“But your hair looks great,” said Gary chuckling at Amanda.

“Did you catch Roger docking last week in the storm?” Amanda yelled up from the cabin.

“I heard the crash,” Gary said. “What about it?”

Amanda appeared in the doorway of the cabin carrying a plate of sandwiches.

“It was his attire, or rather the lack there of,” said Amanda.

“Not much?” asked Gary.

“Not at all,” said Amada and she reached for the pitcher of margaritas. “It was the night of that big storm. I’m thinking he started his morning with a swim, and then got caught in the storm before he had a chance to get dressed.”

“And we care because?” began Gary.

“Because,” said Amanda. “He may not be the type to do a quick turn if he finds us here.”

“Oh,” said Gary taking a sandwich.

“The more I think about it, I guess it’ll probably depend on Taylor,” said Amanda. “She says she’s from New York, so I’d suspect she’s seen it all. I’m thinking she won’t have a problem.”

“So, you’re thinking we may have some company before long,” said Gary as he took another bite of his sandwich.

“That’s about it,” said Amanda as she reached for a sandwich. Gary acted like he was going to grab it, but grabbed Amanda instead.

“As long as they know when to head back to their own boat,” he said.

“When would that be?” smiled Amanda.

“They’ll figure it out,” said Gary.

SAILOR’S BAY IRISH PUB

The crowd on the deck of the marina’s Irish Pub had more than doubled after the boats arrived. Mitch, Denise, Richard and Laura were camped out at one table. Captain Mac and his grandson were sitting with the rest of the family at another. The three tables that lined the back of the porch were covered with platters of food and pitchers of beer. It was pretty much standing room only.

“Time for another soda,” announced Mitch who got up, heading for the door to the pub.

“There’s beer out here,” called Richard.

“Yeah, but they keep the good stuff inside,” Mitch called back.

Kelly Reynolds and the sheriff were sitting at the bar talking with an older woman who’d been watching the race from the deck. She’d just entered the pub and ordered a concoction called a Snakebite.

“You did a good job of losing that extra weight you put on Kelly,” said Nicole.

“Turned out to be mostly job stress,” said Kelly. “Once I gave up working for this guy, I trimmed down.”

“If there’s too much stress in your life,” said Nicole, “then you ought to order a few of these things.” She took a sip of her drink. “These Snakebites will cure just about anything that ails you.”

“It’s the affliction you deal with the next morning that I’m trying to avoid,” said Kelly. “There is something about mixing hard cider and New Castle that knocks me out quick.”

“See,” said Nicole. “You can’t be stressed if you’re knocked out.”

“Stress had nothing to do with it,” said Preston. “He lost weight because his supply of free doughnuts got cut off when he handed in his badge.”

“And here I thought it was just a myth that law enforcement officers would enjoy the occasional doughnut,” said Nicole.

“Occasional doughnut?” said Preston. “When it comes to this guy, I think the street term is free basing.”

“Hello gentlemen,” said Mitch turning to Nicole. “Good afternoon, I’m Captain Mitch of the ...”

“Of the fine sailboat Pegasus,” interrupted Nicole. “Congratulations on your 4th place finish Captain Mitch.”

“Nicely done Mitch,” said Kelly.

“And how about Katherine’s photo finish,” said Nicole. “Wasn’t that the most exciting thing you ever saw?”

“I think it’s the most exciting race we’ve ever seen at this lake,” said Preston.

“This one came down to just a few inches between 1st and 2nd place.”

“It was pretty crafty of Katherine, breaking up London Pride’s wind at the last minute,” said Kelly.

“That’s what Roger and Taylor did to me,” said Mitch.

“Taylor?” said Nicole innocently. “Who’s Taylor?”

“I don’t know her very well,” said Mitch. “She was on Roger’s boat during the race.”

“I saw her there, too,” said Kelly. “The Marietta pulled ahead of you the same way Katherine pulled ahead of London Pride.”

“I’d like to meet Roger and Taylor,” said Nicole to Mitch. “They sound like interesting people.”

“Roger’s okay,” said Mitch. “He’s been here a few years and seems to be catching on to sailing fast.”

“They should be here any moment,” said Kelly. “By the way, where’s Katherine?”

“She took an extra victory lap,” said Mitch. He walked behind the bar and helped himself to a fresh pint of Bass then started for the door. “See you all outside,” he said as he left the bar.

“So, your niece took a boat ride,” said Kelly.

“More than just a ride,” said Nicole proudly. “I saw her at The Marietta’s tiller when she beat Mitch.”

“Pretty exciting huh?” asked Kelly.

“You should have seen her,” said Nicole. “She broke up the wind flow into his sails, the same way Katherine beat London Pride.”

“Katherine stole Mitch’s wind early in the race, too,” said Preston. “We saw her when she passed him at Long Island.”

“Sounds like a rash of wind theft is sweeping Rolling River Lake,” said Nicole. “You will be sure to make all of your arrests properly so as not to further bog down the court’s already busy docket with long-winded appeals.”

“Of course Madam Justice,” said Preston.

“Long-winded appeals?” moaned Kelly. “I hate to say it, but your sense of humor has not improved over the years.”

“Take my job for a few weeks and we’ll see what happens to your sense of humor,” said Nicole.

Just then, cheers rang out on the back deck. “I think it’s time to move this party out to the veranda, gentlemen,” said Nicole.

As the three friends walked outside, Nicole saw that Katherine had just arrived and was given the table of honor. The group looked out over the lake and saw all the boats but one had returned. A single boat was slowly circling out in the middle of the lake. The group turned their attention back to Katherine and the winner's table.

"Taylor seems to be fitting right in," said Nicole.

Katherine waved Taylor to the seat next to her. A man Nicole had recognized as a relative newcomer to the lake sat down next to Taylor. The group all looked like old friends.

Nicole walked up behind the group and said, "Taylor, sweetie, when I invited you to the pub, I didn't mean you had to make a big splash in the race, too."

"Aunt Nic!" exclaimed Taylor as she jumped up and gave her a big hug. "I completely forgot about meeting here. You won't believe the day I've had. Roger, this is my Aunt Nicole."

Roger stood up and politely held out his hand. But Nicole gave him a quick hug and said, "Don't worry, Roger, I won't bite and I think we'll be good friends before long. I'm just so happy to see Taylor is making friends. It looked like you two had a nice time during the race."

"You saw us?" asked Taylor.

"Sure did," said Nicole as she winked at Taylor. "I always show up for this race, but have never been asked to crew on a boat before. How did you manage?"

Taylor looked up at Roger and said, "I don't know. I went out for a run this morning and a few hours later, well, it all just seemed to happen all on it's own."

"Well, it looks like everyone had a good time," said Nicole as she turned to Katherine. "Looks like you had a pretty good day, too."

"Not bad at all," said Katherine.

"Where did you learn to bust up the wind like that?" asked Kelly.

“I’d seen it done in several races when I was in the Caribbean,” said Katherine.

As the conversation turned to racing strategy, Nicole touched Taylor’s arm and whispered, “Let’s go over here a minute.”

A REAL MESS

Troy Freeman wasn’t a shouter. He never got angry when things went badly because that just made things worse. After years of dealing with minor problems, Troy had learned that blowing up only delayed figuring out the best solution. And Troy needed a solution to this problem, fast. There were still three hours of daylight before his team could recover the boat and the body under cover of darkness. That means over three hours that someone might notice the captain of a small sailboat circling out in the middle of the lake had been shot dead.

The team from the cave had assembled in Troy’s office except for Stevens, the new kid. He’d changed into a flowered boat shirt and sat on the porch keeping an eye on the lake and the slowly circling sailboat. He looked through the binoculars for what must have been the hundredth time. There was still no movement from the boater who’d been shot over an hour ago. The boat continued the slow circle. Stevens noticed the wind was beginning to die down for the night and wondered how much fuel was in the boat’s tank.

Inside, Troy started the conversation by saying, “Gentlemen, I don’t care what happened in the cave. I don’t care about what went wrong. Your team leader will deal with what went wrong. What I care about is securing the present situation as soon as possible.”

Troy sat down, looked at each man and said, “You all know the situation. Who’s got ideas?” The room remained silent for a few minutes before one of the men spoke up.

“Why don’t we just speed out, pick up the boat and drag it back to the cove?” said one man. “So what if someone sees us. We’ll be out and back before anyone has a chance to do anything. Then, once we get the boat back in the cave, it’s another Dead Miner’s Cove mystery.”

“Problem is, our first priority is always maintaining project secrecy,” said Troy. “Dealing with the boat is a problem, but we never want to risk exposing our bigger secret. Besides, right now, it just looks like a boater is taking a lazy cruise. The minute we got out there, everybody starts looking our way and then someone starts asking more questions when that boater turns up missing.”

“Is it still just circling?” asked the man.

Troy looked at Bob who said, “I’ll take a look.”

As Bob turned to leave, Troy said, “Let’s all take a look.

Troy pointed to a closet and said, “Why don’t you guys trade your black tactical shirts for some happy clothes, then come on outside.” As Troy started to leave the room, he turned and said, “Everybody except you two. I want you guys back in the cave and standing by in case we need to make a move.”

“Yes Sir,” said one man as he grabbed the younger man by the arm and started walking toward the door.

As the pair started walking down the hill to the cave, the younger man whose gun had gone off in the cave spoke up, “I was sure I’d get barbequed.”

“We don’t do that here,” said the older man. “This project is too important for petty punishment. The old man knows mistakes happen and what happened today was a big one. The trick is not letting it happen again.”

As the two men started walking into a grove of trees, they looked back at the house. The small deck was filling with guys in brightly colored shirts. Someone had turned on some country music. It looked like a bunch of friends had gotten together after a round of golf.

“This is definitely like no job I’ve ever had before,” said the younger man.

“Every day is a new experience,” said the older man as the two disappeared into the trees.

CHANGES IN ATTITUDES

Nicole and Taylor walked over to a corner where Wesley Barnes had set up a computer and printer. A stream of digital pictures from the race played on the computer screen and a few were printing on the printer. Nicole picked up a picture of Taylor at the tiller of The Marietta just before she crossed the finish line.

“Looks like you’re a natural when it comes to handling a boat,” said Nicole.

“Who would have known,” said Taylor. “That really was the first time I was ever on a boat like that, much less at the controls.”

“We were all wondering what happened when you didn’t show up for breakfast,” said Nicole. “I knew you liked to run and was hoping you might find your way down here. The family can be a little rough on the nerves and you needed a break.”

“We both did,” said Taylor. “But I never expected all this to happen. It’s definitely been an interesting day.”

“What’s been the best part?” asked Nicole as she looked down at the computer screen. It had just changed to a picture of Taylor and Roger kissing the minute after they crossed the finish line.

Taylor’s brown eyes flashed a look of surprise as she looked up at her aunt. “That,” she said, “was one of the day’s high points.”

“Just one?” smiled Nicole. “There’s more?”

“Sure are,” began Taylor. “The minute we turned off the motor and the sails filled up and we took off. Aunt Nic, there’s just no words to tell you what that’s like.”

“Actually, I completely understand,” said Nicole. “I remember when Kelly first took me sailing. It was a few years after the lake filled up. It’s always an exciting moment when the sails first catch the wind. Kelly said it would be a moment I’d never forget. He was right.”

“Roger said the same thing,” said Taylor. “Is Kelly that guy from this morning’s skipper’s meeting?”

“Yes, Kelly and I go way back,” said Nicole. “We were friends in high school and have never lost touch. I’d always hoped to come back here after college, but my career took things in a different direction.”

“Speaking of different directions,” began Taylor. “It’s too soon to make anything definite, but I’m sure thinking about a change in my direction.”

“Such as,” began Nicole.

“Such as leaving New York and that creep I have for a boss,” said Taylor. She paused for a few minutes. “And, and, well, moving back here.”

“To be with Roger?” smiled Nicole.

“Maybe,” Taylor smiled back. “But it’s more than that. I just really like it here and I definitely want to spend more time on a boat.”

“Well, this is where your family’s from,” said Nicole. “The Freeman family has been in this valley since the early 1800’s. Our original family home is just a few miles from here.”

“It’s not on the farm?” asked Taylor.

“Oh no, our original farm house is just right over there,” said Nicole pointing out into the middle of the lake. “Of course you can’t see it anymore because it’s at the bottom of the lake.”

“Really?” exclaimed Taylor, her eyes growing wider. “I never knew about that. What was it like?”

“We should really get back to the party,” said Nicole. “There’s plenty of time for that later and the story would take us till midnight.”

“I definitely want to hear it before I go back to New York,” started Taylor. She paused and looked at her aunt. “Except,” she paused. “Aunt Nic, I really don’t want to go back to New York.”

Nicole smiled at her niece, looked at the computer as the picture changed from Taylor and Roger’s kiss to a shot of Katherine with a huge smile. She gave Taylor a big hug then looked her in the eye and said, “Then don’t go. If I had it to do all over again, I wouldn’t have gone back to Washington DC.”

“I guess that’s why you didn’t want me to go to law school.” said Taylor.

“Yes,” said Nicole. “Careers like ours can consume a lifetime. If there’s one thing I’ve learned, there’s just too much living to do and some careers can sap the life out of you.”

Just then, the song on the pub’s music system changed to a marina classic. Taylor instantly recognized Jimmy Buffett’s Changes in Latitudes and Attitudes.

“I’ve listened to Buffett for years but never really understood that song until now,” said Taylor.

“Looks like you’re going through the change in Attitude,” said Nicole as they made their way back to the party. “Now we need to work on changing our Latitude.”

The pair laughed together and Taylor said, “Let’s do it together, Aunt Nic.”

“Deal,” said Nicole as they walked back to the group. “Now, tell me all about Roger.”

“Well,” began Nicole. “You’ll never believe how we met ...”

DECISIONS ON THE HILL

“What’s he doing right now, Bob?” asked Troy.

“Still slowly circling out in the lake,” said Bob. “It doesn’t look like anyone’s interested either.”

“How much longer before the fuel runs out?” asked one of the other men.

“Those small motors can run forever at low R.P.M.” came the answer. “If he filled the tank, it could run all night.”

“So, unless someone decides to go investigate, we stay put until dark,” began Troy. “How long will that party at the pub go?”

“Probably until after midnight,” said Bob. “They usually have a band and the beer is free, so no one will leave anytime soon.”

“Maybe someone should go to the party and keep their ears open,” suggested one of the other men.

“Oops, we just said the magic word,” announced Troy to the group. “Old Steve here heard ‘free beer’ and now he’s at the top of the volunteer list.” The whole deck broke out in laughter.

“Gentlemen, I think we have the matter well in hand,” said Troy. “Bob, you take a few guys inside and put together some steaks and beer. I’ll get the grill started. It’s supposed to look like a party here, so let’s make it a good party.”

Troy turned to Steve, handed him a cell phone and said, “Good idea, Steve. You take the phone and this new guy here and go join the party. Call if you hear anything we should know about.”

“Over here, boss,” said Bob. He was standing by the rail, looking out at the lake.

“You hear that?” he asked.

“No,” said Troy. “What am I listening for?”

“Nothing at all,” said Bob. “It’s gotten even quieter out there. The engine just ran out of gas.”

The men on the deck stopped to listen. Sure enough, the sound of the motor was gone and the small sailboat was slowly coasting to a stop.

“We’ve got to go right now,” said one of the men.

“Actually, that’s probably a good thing,” said Troy calmly. “Having that boat out there slowly circling was bound to catch someone’s eye. Now it looks like the boat is just drifting around.”

“But won’t one of his friends want to stop by for a chat?” asked the man.

“Normally, yes,” said Bob as he was heading for the door. “But tonight, the party is at the pub and they’re all getting pretty tanked. Most of these guys won’t take their boats out when they’re drunk.” He looked at Troy and said, “I agree, this is a good thing.

“So, now we have a party,” said Troy. “Steve, get going to the pub. Bob, where’s the steaks?”

“On the way,” answered Bob.

Troy walked over to the grill, turned on the gas and looked out over the lake. The small sailboat had drifted to a complete stop. The early evening wind had become just a small breeze. Barely enough to move the boat, but Troy could see it was slowly drifting toward Hideout Island.

“So guys,” Troy began. “Any of you take Bob up on his football pool?”

FULL OF COFFEE?

“Hear Ye, Hear Ye, Hear Ye!” shouted Richard of London Pride. His British accent cut through all the other conversations and the noise on the back deck of the pub quickly disappeared. “At this time, the captains, crews and spectators of the 18th annual Sailor’s Bay Pub Race are gathered here to crown this year’s champions.”

The crowd erupted into loud cheers as Kelly Reynolds and the sheriff made their way to the corner of the deck by the band. Kelly carried a big bag filled with prizes, Preston carried a big silver cup full of ... coffee.

“All right, settle down everyone,” called Kelly. “Over the years, several traditions have grown up around this race. The first tradition is handing out the prize for last place. You all know what that prize is, don’t you?”

“No!” yelled Mitch. “Why don’t you tell us?”

“Why thank you Mitch,” said Kelly. “The prize for last place is this quart ...”

He paused and with great fanfare, nudged the sheriff then continued, “I said the prize for last place is ...”

The sheriff reached into the bag and pulled out the prize.

“... this quart of motor oil which the captain, after receiving a special permit from the E.P.A. is allowed to smear on the bottom of his boat so it’ll go faster.” The crowd laughed again as the sheriff attempted to display the prize as if he were on a TV game show.

“Good work there, Vanna,” said Kelly. “But you could have been a little quicker on the draw.”

“I’m just warming up there, Pat,” said Preston.

“When can I buy a vowel?” asked Mitch.

“I’d like to solve the puzzle,” said Richard.

“Ladies, Gentlemen,” shouted Kelly. “And yes, you too, Mitch,” the crowd laughed again. “We don’t have time for this pointless banter; there are prizes to be awarded, food to be enjoyed and music to be played.”

“And beer to be guzzled,” said Mitch.

The crowd cheered. A few people said, “Hear, hear!” and “Right On!”

“The prize for last place goes to,” announced Kelly. “Jerry Spaulding from The 19th Hole.”

The crowd cheered, then became silent when no one went up to collect the quart of motor oil.

“Anyone seen Jerry?” asked Preston.

“He’s still out on the water,” came a reply from the back of the porch.

Everyone looked out into the lake and saw The 19th Hole drifting in the breeze. The boat was so far away, it looked like Jerry was taking a snooze in the back of his boat.

“Looks like Jerry is attending a party of his own,” said Kelly. “So let us move on.”

The crowd’s attention turned back to Kelly and the awards ceremony as Preston said, “I guess old Jerry’s puttin’ in a little overtime trying to maintain his lock on last place.”

The crowd laughed again as Kelly continued with the awards, “Winning the bronze medal in only his second race here at the pub is: The Marietta. Roger, why don’t you and that fine looking lady you had on your boat come on up for your prizes.”

The crowd clapped loudly as Roger and Taylor made their way up to Kelly and Preston. They shook hands as Kelly continued, “Roger here has been out practicing hard these past few weeks. In fact, I hear tell that he was out practicing in the middle of that big thunderstorm last week.”

“This is just a polite suggestion, but it might be better to avoid sailing in the middle of thunderstorms,” said Preston.

“That is definitely part of the plan,” said Roger.

“I’m just glad he decided to change his attire for today’s race,” said Mitch as the crowd whooped and ooh’d. Mitch looked at his friend and said, “Sorry, buddy, but pretty much everyone here has heard the ‘naked’ facts about your nocturnal docking technique.”

The crowd continued whooping and laughing as Roger turned several shades of red.

Taylor looked up at him and very quietly said, “Think you’ll ever show me that docking technique there, captain?”

As Roger looked at Taylor, she surprised him by pulling him close for a big, public kiss. The crowd whooped even louder.

“All right, settle down, all of you,” yelled Kelly. “I’m sure nothing of a questionable nature took place at this marina as everyone here is such an upstanding citizen. But we do have a nice suggestion for this young man.”

With that, the sheriff pulled out a new pair of swim trunks. The crowd laughed even harder as the sheriff put up his hand for silence.

“Now then, we can’t forget, Roger here had some help today,” Kelly continued. “Thanks to our good friend Judge Freeman over there, we were able to find a little something for the very able young woman who was at the helm of The Marietta at the finish. Here you go, Taylor.”

Preston reached into the bag and pulled out a brand new bikini. The crowd cheered loudly as Taylor blinked at the very skimpy bikini. She looked over at her aunt who smiled, waved and winked at her niece.

Roger looked at Taylor who was eyeing the new bikini. She looked up at Roger and said, “Good thing I’ve been working out. This has got to be the smallest little nothing I’ve ever owned.”

“You’ll look great,” said Roger with a big smile.

“Sure,” said Taylor. “If I keep working out and stop eating.”

The crowd continued to cheer as Roger and Taylor made their way back to their table. Mitch stood and shook Roger’s hand as Taylor got a big hug from Denise. Taylor turned toward her aunt, held up the bikini and said, “Tell me you didn’t pick this out.”

“I went with Kelly right after the race,” said Nicole holding up her hand. “He asked about your size then did the picking all by himself.”

“I thought so,” said Taylor. “No woman who’s ever had to squeeze into a bikini would ever pick out something like this.”

“Don’t worry sweetie,” said Nicole. “You’ll look fantastic.”

“Settle down everyone, we’re not finished up here,” shouted Kelly. “We’ve still got some important business to take care of.”

“Are we up to 1st place yet?” asked Preston. “I’m ready for a beer.”

“No, you’ll have to wait just a bit longer,” said Kelly. “In second place we have Richard and Laura from London Pride!”

The crowd went wild again as Richard and Laura made their way up to Kelly and Preston. Preston reached in the bag and looked up at Kelly.

“We all know Richard has special tastes when it comes to his brew,” Kelly began. “So the race committee is proud to present you with this bottle of London Pride.”

The crowd cheered as Richard looked over the large imported bottle of beer. Kelly continued, “We know Laura likes that Shiraz wine, so Richard, you’ll find the rest of the case of that beer and a few bottles of Shiraz for Laura inside, behind the bar.”

Preston spoke up, “But that’s not your official prize.”

“That’s right,” said Kelly. “As all of you know, the traditional prize for second place is a small, battery operated fan.”

Preston pulled the fan out of the bag. “Please accept this prize with our best wishes that the extra blast of wind from this fan will propel you into first place in the next race.”

The crowd cheered as Richard and Laura made their way back to the table. As people congratulated the winners, attention turned to the table where Katherine sat. The crowd became silent as Kelly reached for the big silver cup full of ... coffee.

“Well, Preston, I guess its time for 1st place,” said Kelly.

“I gotta say, this is one 1st place award I’m really happy to help award,” said Preston. “In all my years, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a more exciting finish than the one I saw today.”

“Wesley, bring that thing up here,” said Kelly.

Wesley had been hiding in the shadows of the porch. He reached behind him and made his way to the front of the crowd carrying a large picture frame. No one could see the picture because it was covered with a large, black pirate’s flag.

“Folks, as you know, young Wesley here was on the committee boat with Preston and me,” began Kelly. “He brought his high-tech digital camera with him and just got back from the photo store in town. Would you all like to see today’s photo finish?”

The crowd answered with a sprinkling of “sure”, “yeah” and “anytime.”

“I said,” said Kelly. “Is there anyone here who wants to see this fine photo?” A much louder, “Yes!” was shouted back.

“Let’s take a look then,” said Kelly. Wesley held the picture frame high and then dropped the skull & crossbones flag. The photo showed Katherine steering the Caribbean Breeze the moment it crossed the finish line, her shoulder length blonde hair blowing in the wind. Her eyes were hidden by a set of sunglasses, but the smile on her face told the story. It was a once in a lifetime picture any captain would pay a fortune for.

The crowd on the deck yelled and clapped and congratulated Katherine as she walked up to get a closer look at the picture. She shook hands with Kelly and Preston, and then took another long look at the poster.

“Three cheers for Katherine!” yelled Mitch.

“Hip, Hip!” he said.

The crowd answered with a loud “Ho-ray!”

“Hip, Hip!” called Mitch.

“Ho-ray!” answered the crowd.

“Hip, Hip!” yelled Mitch.

The crowd then responded with a long, loud, “Ho-ray!”

As the cheers died down, Kelly said, “We’ve got one last thing to take care of before this party can get started.” The crowd was completely silent as Kelly reached for the silver cup on the table.

“It’s traditional that the winner of the race is awarded this fine silver cup full of beer. Now you all know Katherine and you all know that she really likes her coffee. In fact, I think if we did a blood test, you’d find that stuff from Starbucks running in her veins.” The crowd laughed. “So, Katherine, we have a special pub blend of Starbucks just for you.”

Kelly handed her the big silver cup and said, “You know the rules. Once you take a sip, you’ve got to keep chugging. Once you stop, you have to put the cup on your head and turn it over. If it’s not empty, then anything that’s left over becomes your next batch of shampoo.”

The crowd laughed and started shouting go, go, go as Katherine started chugging. The shouts of go, go, go got louder as Katherine continued chugging. The shouting and the chugging continued as the big, silver cup slowly emptied. After what seemed like quite a lot of chugging, Katherine put the cup on her head and turned it over. Not a drop came out and the crowd cheered even louder.

“See you next year everyone!” shouted Kelly as he and Preston moved out of the way to reveal Dave and Tom. They’d picked up their guitars, tapped the microphones and started singing their official song ...”

*I'm a 3rd World Dog and my name is Spike!
I'm not the kind of canine you're gonna like!
I've got fleas on my back, I've got ticks in both ears
I'm a mangy, mean old mongrel, wrote the book of fear!*

The crowd then joined in ...

*I'm a 3rd World Dog!
You treat me like a 3rd World Dog*

The crowd paused while Dave sang ...

And I don't give a damn ...

The crowd joined in again ...

3rd World Dog!

The party at Sailor's Bay Irish Pub was now under way.

Katherine took the empty cup and poster back to her table and was joined by the other winners. Nicole watched as her niece talked with Katherine, Roger and the other sailors. She looked over at Kelly and said, "I really should have moved back here a long time ago."

"It would have been nice to have you back," said Kelly. "But then again, I'm not so sure that would have been the best thing for you."

"You mean after what happened to Phil?" asked Nicole.

"Partly," said Kelly. "There have definitely been a lot of little things that go on up here that never get explained and I think you might have gotten caught up in it. But I also think you needed to do what you went to school for."

"You're probably right about the career, Kelly," said Nicole. "But just look at Taylor. Can't you just see how well she fits in around here? I think some great adventures are ahead for that girl."

"No reason why her aunt can't have some fine adventures of her own," said Kelly.

Nicole looked at Kelly and smiled, “You still have that nice little cabin behind Fish Island?”

“Sure do,” said Kelly. “I just put in a dock, so we can take a nice moon light boat ride if you’d like.”

“Now that’s the best idea I’ve heard all day,” said Nicole. “Think we can sneak away without drawing too much attention to ourselves?”

“Let’s go,” said Kelly. As the couple started down the stairs to the docks, Nicole looked over at Taylor who looked back and waved. Nicole waved and thought to herself that both she and Taylor were indeed about to enjoy some major changes in their lives.

Taylor smiled as Nicole disappeared down the stairs and headed toward one of the docks. She got up and walked to the corner of the porch to watch her aunt as she hopped aboard a boat with Kelly Reynolds. As the boat slowly motored out of the marina and out into the lake, Taylor looked across the water and took a deep breath of the clear, night air. Looking across the lake, she noticed some bright lights on the opposite shore. Taylor looked even harder and realized the lights were coming from a big house. As she looked over the house, she saw about 10 guys gathered around a grill. One guy was standing by the rail, looking out over the lake toward the pub.

Taylor shivered as if a cold breeze blew across her shoulders. It looked like the one guy by the rail was staring right at Taylor.

STEAK, SALMON & SURVEILLANCE

Troy walked over as Bob stood at the porch rail looking over the lake. The small sail boat continued to drift closer to Hideout Island. Off in the distance, the two men could clearly see the back deck of Sailor’s Bay Irish Pub. Most of the people were dancing in the middle of the deck, but one woman stood alone at the end of the deck.

“I should have pulled rank on Steve and gone to the Pub,” said Bob. “Check out that hottie across the way.”

“That’s definitely one of the perks of a job out here,” said Troy. “When the weather warms up, the cute ones come out of hiding.”

“How come your cutie never comes out of hiding?” asked Bob.

Troy stood there in silence.

“I’m sorry, Sir,” said Bob quickly. “I shouldn’t have gone there.”

“It’s okay, Bob,” said Troy. “You’re the closest thing I have to a friend out here.”

The two men continued to watch the lake in silence. The other men in the group were getting food off the grill and making their way to the tables.

Troy turned to Bob and said, “The thing is, this job is a privilege. It’s an honor to serve your country. But it requires a lot of us, Bob. We all make sacrifices and the higher up you go the more sacrifices you have to make. Sometimes all it costs is a weekend fishing trip, other times it costs you a lot more.”

“You’re not telling me Donna stays in Chicago because you have to work weekends,” said Bob.

Troy looked away and said, “No, she stays in Chicago because some sacrifices leave big scars. Sometimes the cost of doing business is family and friends.” Troy paused a moment. “She stays in Chicago because we divorced many, many years ago.”

“I never knew that,” said Bob.

“My family and I haven’t spoken in years,” said Troy.

“That’s why you never go to the farm?” asked Bob.

Troy stood in silence for quite a while. He shuffled his feet a few times before saying, “Yeah.”

“Come on, Sir,” said Bob. “The guys have cooked up some really good stuff.”

Troy turned back to Bob and said, "Thanks for not asking more questions. You're a good guy." He looked over at the grill and asked, "So what's for dinner?"

"Cajun surf and turf," said Bob. "We found steak, salmon and a box of that dirty rice. Put some spice on it and you've got a New Orleans feast."

As the men walked to the grill, the food's aroma only grew stronger. Bob grabbed a plate and loaded it up. When it was Troy's turn, he looked at the food and realized he hadn't had a bite to eat all day. After loading up his own plate, Troy wandered over and joined his men at the table. As the conversation and the meal continued into the evening, Troy found himself thinking more about his conversation with Bob.

"He's a good man," thought Troy to himself. *"He's dedicated to the project and a good second in command."* Troy looked over at Bob and decided it might be time to start letting him share more of the load. That would give him time to think about all the loose ends his life and career had produced.

"Looks like we may have some company," announced one of the men. Just then, Troy's phone rang.

"Go get that, Bob," said Troy, and all the men looked out in the lake. A small power boat was inching away from the dock. All the men watched the boat as it motored out into the lake. Then Bob returned.

"That was Steve," said Bob. "Wants us to know that a boat is leaving the marina."

"Do we know who they are?" asked Troy.

"Sure do," said Bob. "It's Kelly Reynolds and Nicole Freeman. Reynolds has a house up by Fish Island, so they probably won't be heading south."

Bob stole a glance at Troy as he mentioned his boss' sister's name. Bob had been watching his boss closely for years and knew Troy never reacted much to anything. But he could tell hearing Nicole Freeman's name wasn't comfortable

for Troy. As all the men's attention turned to the boat leaving Rolling River Marina, Bob took another look at Troy.

"The man has got some serious issues," thought Bob to himself. *"And that could mean BIG trouble."* He then turned his attention back to the boat and then up to the woman standing by herself on the pub's porch.

"And that could be BIG fun," thought Bob as he admired the view. Just then a man walked up behind the woman and gave her a big hug.

"Aww, man," thought Bob.

MOONLIGHT CRUISES

Taylor looked back to the party just as Roger walked up and gave her a big hug.

"What are you looking at?" he asked.

She pointed down to the boat leaving the marina and said, "I don't think Aunt Nic will be heading back to the farmhouse tonight."

"I've seen her with Kelly before," said Roger. "You can tell they've been friends for a very long time."

"I know," began Taylor. "She wishes she'd come home to Rolling River Lake a long time ago. I told her I want to do that, too."

"What about your home and job in New York?" asked Roger.

"Aunt Nic says she thinks there's more to life than a job and career," said Taylor. "She says some careers can consume a lifetime and there's too much living to do."

"It's taken more than a few years for me to learn that lesson," said Roger. "I guess I started catching on when I bought The Marietta."

"Where did you find her?" asked Taylor.

“Right here,” said Roger. “I’d just been dumped by a girlfriend who wanted to go to Hawaii. I had a job in town and stayed. A few weeks later, some friends from work brought me up here for a boat ride.”

“Anyone I know?” asked Taylor.

“Bunny and John on Therapy,” said Roger. “As we were walking down the dock, I asked about owning a boat. John started explaining a few things when Mitch walked by. He told me a few more things then showed me around his boat.” Roger paused. “Then, he took me over to The Marietta.”

Taylor and Roger looked down the hill to the docks. The blue hull of his sailboat was easy to pick out among the dozens of other white hulled boats. Roger had left the cabin lights on. The golden glow of the lights made the boat even easier to spot.

“Mitch just walked aboard the boat like it was his,” said Roger. “He showed me around then told me to just stay aboard for a while and look it over by myself. I remember being a little surprised that he’d leave me alone on someone else’s boat, but he knew exactly what he was doing.”

Roger paused, looked down at Taylor who was looking out at the docks and boats. He reached for her hand as the pair’s eyes met for one of those long, special looks. After more than a few minutes, Taylor broke the silence, “So what happened after that?”

“I went back to Mitch’s boat,” continued Roger. “He gave me the name and number of the owner. I called, and three days later, I was writing a check. Turned out to be the best money I ever spent.”

“So, The Marietta changed your life just like Amanda and Gary say their boat changed theirs,” said Taylor.

“That’s pretty much it,” said Roger. “Some people call a boat a big, giant hole in the water where they pour all of their money. But I don’t.”

“A hole in the water,” repeated Taylor. “That’s a good one.” She paused, looked away and said, “So what happened to that girlfriend?”

“Never heard from her again,” said Roger as he looked back at Taylor. “Later, I realized that was another lucky break.”

“I’d say,” said Taylor. “Lucky for both of us.”

The sun had completely set and the moon was on the way up. Darkness had fallen over the lake and the running lights from Kelly’s boat were about to disappear behind Fish Island.

“Where are they going?” asked Taylor.

“I think Kelly has a cabin on the other side of Fish Island,” said Roger. “They’ll probably head up the creek for a cruise, and then head back to his place.” He turned toward Taylor and said, “Perfect night for a moonlight cruise.”

“Any chance we could slip away for a cruise of our own there, captain?” asked Taylor.

“That is a definite possibility,” said Roger. “That full moon will make the lake extra special. The water is nice, too, so we’ll get a chance to try out our new swimwear.”

“From what I’m hearing,” began Taylor. “You’re not that well known for wearing swimwear.”

Roger laughed, held out his hand and said, “Shall we?”

Taylor took his hand as they started down the pub’s stairs and out to the waiting sailboat. Up on the deck, Mitch leaned over to Denise and pointed toward Roger and Taylor. Denise looked down toward the boats, then back at Mitch and nodded.

Mitch waved to Katherine and pointed to the docks. She nodded, looked over at Richard and Laura and pointed. They nodded and waved at Captain Mac who pointed to the whole family.

“Not enough room on the boat for all these people. How about if we all meet at T and C’s tomorrow for breakfast?” said Captain Mac.

“Sounds like a plan,” said Laura, who got up and started heading for the bar. “I’ll grab our winnings and meet you at the boat.”

Denise got up to leave when Mitch said, “Let me get us some to-go sodas and we’ll be off.”

About ten minutes later, The Marietta motored out of the marina followed by a stream of other boats. Roger and Taylor had changed into their new swimwear. As soon as they passed the no-wake buoys, Taylor turned the boat to the north toward Fish Island.

A few minutes after that, The Pegasus followed.

Then Caribbean Breeze.

Then London Pride.

As the boats left the marina, they all began turning for various islands around Rolling River Lake.

A ROMANTIC BOAT CONVENTION

As Troy and the men watched Kelly and Nicole’s boat disappear behind Fish Island, one of the other men pointed back to the marina and said, “Wait a minute, here comes another one.”

“Are you kidding me?” said Troy.

“What the ...” said Bob.

Sure enough, another boat was passing the no-wake buoys and heading out into the middle of the lake.

“Look over at the docks,” said Bob. All the men looked at the dock where another couple was boarding their boat. “I’ll bet those guys are heading out, too.”

“But I hear the band playing,” said one of the men. “Why’s everyone leaving?”

“Oldest reason in the book,” said Troy as he looked over at Bob who nodded back. “I think we’re about to witness multiple romantic rendezvous.”

“Of all the nights,” said Bob. “Just when we thought we had this thing sewn up and now we have this romantic boat convention.”

Troy walked back to the grill, opened up a cabinet and pulled out a coffee pot.

“Over here, gentlemen,” he said. “It looks like it’s going to be a longer night than I’d expected. Any of you have any beer left, dump it over the side.”

He pointed at one man and said, “You, get over here and start making the coffee.”

He pointed to another man and said, “You, go into the den and get that map of the lake off the wall and bring it out here. Pick up the box of chess pieces on the table by the door, too.”

Bob pointed at one of the other men and said, “You load up two plates of food and take them down to the cave. Let those guys know they’re in for a long night.”

Troy nodded at Bob and said, “Why don’t you call Steve at the pub. Tell those guys to stop drinking, get some dinner, then report back to the cave.”

“Will do,” said Bob.

“The rest of you, pick out a boat and keep an eye on it,” said Troy. “Don’t let it out of your sight. While you’re doing that, try to figure out the name of each boat and how many people are on board. Everybody with me?”

Everyone nodded.

“The let’s get going,” said Troy. “We have a romantic boat convention to keep an eye on.”

The group laughed then split up. Most were heading to the railing to pick out a boat; the others went inside to get the map and chess set. Troy watched as his team smoothly went to work, identifying boats and people.

“I’ve got that little blue one,” said one man.

“How about that big black one?” said another.

“I think there are only two people on each boat,” said a third.

Troy then chimed in saying, “Imagine that, two people on each boat. I guess we’re not having any three-somes tonight, huh guys?”

The team laughed, but kept their eyes glued to the boats leaving the marina.

“*Gotta keep the men happy,*” thought Troy to himself.

“Here’s the map Sir,” said the man leaving the house with a big, framed map of the lake in one hand and a box full of chess pieces in another.

“Bring it over to the table,” said Troy.

He reached into his pocket and brought out a small pad of paper and a pen.

“Now, I want each of you to sound off with the name of your boat, how many souls are aboard and where it is. You stand by that map with the chess pieces.” Troy paused and said, “Okay, first boat.”

“I’ve got a small blue sailboat,” started one man. “Name on the side is Marietta and there are two people aboard. They’re leaving the marina and heading north toward Fish Island.”

“Okay,” said Troy. “That’s going to be the white castle. Put it on the map and put two pawns by it.” Troy looked up at the man making the report and said, “It’s now your job to keep an eye on the boat and move your chess pieces with it. Got it?”

“Got it,” said the man.

“Let’s keep it going,” said Troy. “Who’s next?”

Each man, in turn, reported on their boat. Troy noted each boat’s name and the boat’s corresponding chess piece on his note pad. Before long, the map was filled with chess pieces. Every now and then, a man stepped from the rail and updated the position of the chess pieces. Troy and Bob stood back and watched the team work.

“Looks like everyone’s heading north,” said one of the men as he walked over to update his chess piece. “But no one’s going south.”

“Most people like to avoid our foggy cove,” said Bob as he pointed to Hideout Island. “But I’ll bet there’s a boat we haven’t seen at Hideout.”

“Sure is,” said Troy. “I saw it break out of the race and headed over to the island.”

“Lemme guess,” said Bob. “It was The Connection. They were in first place, two people on board?”

Troy nodded. “That’s them.”

“Yeah, they’ve done that before,” said Bob. “And that’s why everyone’s heading north,” said Bob. “Once someone has the cove at Hideout, everyone else is supposed to move on.”

“They’ve been there for hours so I don’t think they’re moving,” said Troy.

“Stick a black bishop and two pawns over by Hideout. Everyone, once each boat gets anchored down for the night, swap the chess pieces from white to black.” Bob nodded his agreement.

“Pegasus just went around the corner at Big Island,” said one man. “There’s a nice cove on the other side of the island. So I’ll bet we’ve got two spending the night at Big Island.”

“Fine,” said Troy. “If they don’t come out the other side, switch the chess piece to black. Once all the pieces are black, we can figure out which way to go when we head out to pick up our boat.”

“Nice little tactical display you’ve got there boss,” said Bob.

“Don’t tell the gang in Washington about this one,” said Troy. “We’d put half the high tech industry out of work overnight.”

“You know,” said Bob quietly. “Most guys in our racket would still be trying to figure out what to do. You came up with this less than 30 seconds after you saw the boat’s leaving the dock.”

“So?” asked Troy.

“You were talking about the sacrifices you had to make in this job,” said Bob. “But the accomplishments and, well, a job well done have got to count for something.”

Troy looked at Bob then looked out at the boats and down at the map. “Thanks, Bob,” he said quietly. But Troy knew no amount of clever solutions would ever make up for everything the past had cost him.

MOONLIGHT CRUISE

“Start easing off on the motor,” said Roger, who was all the way forward in the bow of the boat. “That’s great. Now get ready to slip it into neutral.”

Taylor reached for the small lever on the side of The Marietta’s motor. The boat was slowly moving into a cove on the south side of Fish Island. Taylor and Roger had spent the past few hours cruising along the North Shore of Rolling River Lake. Roger let Taylor follow her nose. They went past Kelly Reynolds’ cabin, waved at Nicole and Kelly, then continued west to a huge resort.

“That’s Towne and Country,” said Roger. “They have some very high priced condos for sale, a club house and an overpriced restaurant. When you buy a condo, you also get a slip for your boat.”

As The Marietta cruised by, Taylor could see the brightly lit marina was populated with various types of power boats. The one thing she didn't see was a single sailboat mast. "No sailboats?" she asked.

"No sailboats," said Roger. "You generally don't see sailboats and power boats mingling very much. We call them smoke wagons. They're loud, belch smoke, go way too fast and create huge wakes that toss sail boats around."

"What would they say about you?" asked Taylor.

"They'd say we go too slow, get in the way and think we're superior," said Roger.

"I can think of one way that sailing is superior to power boats," said Taylor.

"What's that?" asked Roger.

"No matter what's happening around the world, I don't think there's a way they can ever raise the price of wind," said Taylor with a big smile.

"I like that one," said Roger. "You know some of those boats in that marina will set you back \$300 in fuel and that's just for the weekend."

"Ouch, that's gotta hurt," said Taylor. "There isn't any real animosity is there?"

"Not that I've ever seen," said Roger. "Some of us get a little irritated when one of them kicks up a big wake, but it's nothing serious."

"How's the food?" asked Taylor pointing at the big restaurant.

"Not bad," said Roger. "We'll all probably meet there for breakfast tomorrow morning."

"All?" said Taylor.

"Didn't you see all the boats leaving the marina behind us?" said Roger.

“No,” said Taylor.

“See Mitch and Denise down by Big Island?” said Roger pointing in the opposite direction. “I think Richard and Laura are over at Long Island and Gary and Amanda have been at Hideout since this afternoon.”

“Where are we again?” asked Taylor.

“Fish Island,” said Roger. “We’re dropping anchor in the southeast cove. That way we can keep an eye on Mitch and he’ll watch over us.”

Taylor looked over and saw The Pegasus had suddenly changed course and was heading directly for a cove at Big Island. She could see Mitch walking up to the bow where he opened a compartment and pulled out a big anchor. Mitch stood up and looked right at The Marietta.

“Looks like Mitch is about to drop his anchor,” said Taylor as she waved to Mitch.

DROPPING ANCHOR AT BIG ISLAND

Mitch waved back at Taylor then turned his attention to the island that was coming up fast. He was almost ready to yell back to Denise to cut the motor when the motor suddenly went into neutral. She called out, “65 feet!”

“Good,” Mitch called back. “Call out 25 feet.”

Denise watched the electronic depth gauge as she expertly pointed the bow of The Pegasus into the center of the small cove. “Get ready,” said Denise.

The big 33 foot boat continued coasting into the cove when Denise suddenly called, “That’s it, 25 feet!”

Mitch waited a few more seconds and then threw the anchor off to the right side of the boat. The chain and line followed as the anchor made a big splash. The line quickly disappeared into the water as Mitch kept an eye on the bright, yellow streamers tied to the rope. Each was tied off at 10 foot intervals. When 4 streamers passed, Mitch cleated the line off. The boat shuddered slightly as the anchor dug into the mud.

“Get ready,” called Mitch. Denise grabbed a smaller anchor and stood by the back rail as the boat’s forward momentum swung the stern around toward the island. When the boat had turned 180 degrees, Denise tossed the stern anchor out as far as she could. The smaller anchor made a noisy splash into the water. When the line stopped paying out, Denise gently tugged on rope to ensure it had taken a good bite into the mud then cleated it off. Mitch then pulled the boat forward a few feet and re-cleated the forward line.

“Excellent work,” said Mitch as he joined Denise in the cockpit.

“Did anyone tell Roger and Taylor about breakfast,” said Denise.

“Don’t know,” said Mitch. “Let’s try them on the radio.” He reached for the marine radio microphone and called out, “Marietta, Marietta, Marietta this is Pegasus, come in.”

DROPPING ANCHOR AT FISH ISLAND

The peaceful silence of the lake was shattered when the radio in the cabin crackled to life. Both Taylor and Roger jumped as Mitch’s voice suddenly appeared on the boat’s radio. Before Roger had a chance to race back to the cabin and grab The Marietta’s small walkie-talkie radio and answer, Mitch called again, “Mariette, Marietta, Marietta this is Pegasus, come in.”

“Hello Mitch,” said Roger much less informally.

“Hey there Captain Roger,” said Mitch. “Just wanted to let you know we’re all meeting at T and C’s for breakfast.”

“We’ll be there,” said Roger. “You all settled in for the night?”

“Yeah, time for a swim,” answered Mitch. “Catch you two tomorrow.”

“Later,” said Roger as he turned his attention to the approaching island. “Get ready to put it in neutral.”

“Ready,” called Taylor.

The blue sailboat continued motoring as the island got bigger and bigger. It was covered with trees, but had several sandy beaches scattered around. A few of the beaches had small, black fire rings. Someone had even built a small picnic table at one of the bigger beaches.

“Okay, we can coast from here,” Roger called back. Taylor slipped the motor into neutral as the boat continued straight for the island. She kept the bow of the boat pointed directly into the center of the cove. Just then, Roger picked up the anchor and tossed it overboard.

Roger watched the anchor line pay out into the water. When it slowed, Roger waited a few moments more, cleated it off and hurried back to Taylor in the cockpit. Once there, he opened one of the seats and pulled out a smaller anchor and rope. Roger looked at Taylor and said, “We’re still going a little fast, so there might be a little bump.”

The boat stopped suddenly as the line ran out and the forward anchor dug deep into the mud. The deck tilted as the boat’s momentum swung the stern around toward the island. Roger and Taylor bumped into each other as the deck tilted.

“Whoa!” exclaimed Taylor. Roger and Taylor hung onto each other as the stern continued its swing. Roger then let go of Taylor with one hand and reached down for the small anchor. After waiting a few more moments, he tossed it toward the island. Still holding onto Taylor, he grabbed the rope and cleated it down, bringing the boat to a stop with the bow pointed out in the middle of the lake.

“That was pretty impressive,” said Taylor. She looked at the two anchor lines and said, “So why do we have it set up like this?”

“Two reasons,” said Roger. “First, when boats pass by at night they’ll kick up a wake. If we have the bow pointed into the lake, we don’t get tossed around as much.”

“What’s the other reason?” asked Taylor.

“Having the front door facing the island gives us a little privacy,” smiled Roger.

“That’s nice,” said Taylor as she reached for his free hand. “So what do we do now?”

The sound of a distant splash made its way across the lake. Both Taylor and Roger looked in the sound’s direction when they saw another splash. The Pegasus was anchored at Big Island and Denise had just jumped overboard to join Mitch who was already in the water.

“Ahh,” said Roger. “The evening swim.”

“That looks like a real good idea,” said Taylor.

“Hang on a minute and I’ll get some refreshments,” said Roger as he disappeared into the cabin. A few minutes later, he returned with two large mugs of Guinness. But Roger stopped in his tracks when he looked up and saw Taylor. She was leaning next to the back of the boat. The two pieces of her new swimsuit were neatly folded on the captain’s seat by the tiller.

She looked at Roger, smiled mischievously and said, “I hear this is the official swimwear of The Marietta.”

Roger just stood there for what turned out to be quite a while before Taylor broke the silence and said, “Hello, anyone home?”

Roger blinked then started to smile but was only able to say, “Wow!”

“Thank you,” Taylor smiled back and said, “But there is just one problem here.”

Roger blinked once then said, “What’s that?”

“You’re not properly dressed for this swim,” said Taylor. She turned, stepped onto the side of the boat and dove over the side.

Roger set the two mugs of Guinness near the swim ladder and dove over the side.

His new swim trunks were folded neatly next to Taylor's.

WAITING FOR A BREAK

Bob put his binoculars down, exhaled loudly and slowly walked over to the bar on the deck of Troy's house. He opened the refrigerator, pulled out a can of beer, opened it and took a long slug.

Troy looked up and smiled at Bob. "I think we need to keep a clear head tonight there, Bob."

Bob walked over to Troy and said, "It was either a cold beer or an even colder bucket of water in the face."

"Bob has been on swimsuit patrol again," Troy announced to the group.

After everyone laughed, Bob announced, "Yeah, except there weren't any swimsuits involved in this sighting."

"Well, since Bob is performing his duty above and beyond the call, I guess we'll have to allow him this one beer," said Troy. "That okay with you boys?"

"No!", "Forget it!" and "Beer for everyone!" came the various replies.

"Sorry, Bob," said Troy. "No more beer. But seriously guys, it looks like things are starting to settle down. We'll give it a few hours then head down to the cave. Meantime, once the boat you're keeping an eye on drops anchor, pass it along to young Stevens here then head inside and catch some sleep." Troy looked at his watch then continued, "Let's be ready to move out at 0200. Any questions?"

Each man remained silent. Troy waited a few seconds then added, "Okay, that's it till 0200." Troy paused, then said, "And Stevens, why don't you take over monitoring Bob's boat. I'm concerned the strain may be too much for him."

The team laughed again as they turned to check on their boats.

“Bob,” said Troy. “See you a minute.”

Troy started walking into the house. Bob followed and they ended up in Troy’s study.

“Thanks for helping me keep things on the light side out there, Bob,” said Troy. “We’ve asked these guys to take on a dirty job today, and it’s going to get a lot nastier when we get aboard that boat.”

“Honest, Sir,” said Bob. “She wasn’t wearing a thing.”

“Just one of the hazards of working here,” said Troy. “I’m going to catch some sleep. You keep an eye on things and make sure everyone gets a break. Since Stevens won’t get a break, send him home when you guys wake up.”

“Will do,” said Bob as he turned to leave. Troy started heading upstairs as he heard Bob mumble to himself, “Not wearing a thing.”

SWIMMING NEAR BIG ISLAND

Mitch paddled over to the side of The Pegasus to retrieve two fresh bottles of beer from a bucket he tied off the side of the boat. As he started to paddle back to the float Denise was lounging on, he looked across the lake toward The Marietta just as Taylor turned around, stepped up on the side of the boat and dove into the lake. When Denise saw the expression on Mitch’s face, she turned just as Roger stood on the side rail and dove in.

“Whew,” said Denise as she looked back at Mitch who completely stopped swimming and still had a blank look of surprise on his face.

“Hey,” said Denise. “You’re about to spill the beer.”

Mitch shook his head and continued swimming the beer over to Denise and the float. “It’s going to be a hot time on the old Marietta tonight,” he said.

“You better watch out,” said Denise. “Roger may be about to steal your marina badboy image.”

“Not a chance,” said Mitch as he handed Denise her beer.

They both floated in the water for a few minutes working on their bottles of beer. When the beer was almost gone, they both looked back toward The Marietta. Roger had climbed most of the way up the swim ladder, grabbed something from the cockpit then settled back in the water.

Denise looked back at Mitch and said, “Okay, that’s it.” She finished off her beer, kissed Mitch and slid off her float. “Ready?” asked Denise.

“Ready,” said Mitch as they started swimming back to The Pegasus. Mitch deposited the empty beer bottles in bucket, and then tossed the float up onto the deck. When he turned to Denise, she tossed her wet swimsuit onto the deck above and started up the ladder.

As Mitch started up the swim ladder, Denise looked down and said, “Don’t even think of coming aboard this boat dressed like that.”

“Yes, Admiral,” said Mitch as he settled back down into the water. As he tossed his trunks up on deck, Mitch looked back toward The Marietta and said, “Well done Roger.” He started up the ladder.

SWIMMING NEAR FISH ISLAND

Roger settled back in the water and handed Taylor her mug of Guinness. She looked at Roger and said, “For someone with your reputation, those are some pretty noticeable tan lines.”

“I don’t have a reputation,” said Roger.

“Trust me on this one,” said Taylor as she swam closer to Roger. “You’ve got a reputation. But don’t worry, I really don’t mind.”

They both looked over at The Pegasus as Denise and Mitch climbed up the swim ladder and disappeared into the boat’s cabin.

“Looks like they’re trying to steal some of your reputation,” said Taylor.

“Maybe it’s time to start making it ‘our’ reputation,” said Roger.

Taylor smiled at Roger, held up her glass and said, "I'll drink to that." She then took a big sip of her Guinness, scrunched up her nose and made a big show of swallowing it. The look on her face was the look you get from a child having to swallow a dose of nasty tasting medicine.

"Yuck!" said Taylor. "This stuff is awful."

"It's Guinness," said Roger. "This stuff has been filling mugs since 1759."

"Yeah," said Taylor. "This stuff tastes like something that's been sitting in a mug since 1759. You don't really enjoy it do you?"

"Cheers!" said Roger as he took a big chug.

Taylor tried another drink, scrunched up her nose and said, "It'll have to grow on me." She paused, "Well, we've had an interesting day."

"Yes we have," agreed Roger.

For the first time since they met, an uneasy silence fell over the conversation. Roger and Taylor looked out into the lake as the silence continued. A small fishing boat sped by. The small, white running light was shining above the back of the boat, like a small star. It took a few minutes for the fishing boat's wake to arrive in the cove. When it did, both Roger and Taylor bobbed up and down a few times.

Taylor turned to Roger and said, "Things got quiet."

"Yes they did," said Roger.

"I've been here before," said Taylor. "And I'll bet you have too."

"Yeah," said Roger. "The uneasy silence when a new couple's brains are moving as fast as their hormones. Too much thinking. Too much excitement." He paused, "Too many expectations."

“Yeah,” said Taylor as she moved closer. “So how do we get past this, get what we want and still like each other tomorrow morning?”

“As geeky as it sounds, I guess having this conversation is a step in the right direction,” said Roger as he moved a bit closer to Taylor.

“Mmmmm,” said Taylor. “I just hate awkward moments like this.”

“Me too,” said Roger. “Or, if you really want awkward, we could change the subject to safe sex and birth control.”

“Oh, now that’s always one of my favorites,” Taylor laughed. She took a sip of her beer, looked away, then laughed out loud. She turned back to Roger, gave him a fast kiss, then laughed again.

“What’s so funny?” asked Roger.

“Us,” said Taylor. “Look where we are. We met, what, not 24 hours ago. We’ve shared some very nice, very hot kisses; we’re here in a big, public lake, drinking beer, or really, well, motor oil. We’re floating not two or three inches away from each other and we’re completely naked.”

Now Roger was smiling.

Taylor took another sip of her Guinness and continued, “So, why are we letting things get all serious and awkward?”

Roger laughed, chugged from his mug of Guinness and said, “Good question.”

“So what’s next there, captain?” asked Taylor.

“Well, now that we’ve decided not to let things get awkward,” began Roger, “Now’s probably the best time to pay the price for living in the age of AIDS and all the other stuff that makes our lives complicated.”

“Ahh,” said Taylor. “The conversations our parents never had to have.”

“So I’ll start,” said Roger. “I’m tested and clean. I also have protection aboard.”

Taylor took another sip of her beer and said, “This stuff is still awful.” She then dumped the beer into the water between them and tossed her mug onto the float. The cold beer made its way between them in the warm water giving them both a little chill. As she looked back at Roger, she said “I’m tested and clean too and I’m on the pill.”

Roger dumped the rest of his beer between them sending out another chill. He tossed his mug onto the float. As their bodies came together, Taylor looked at Roger and said, “So, are we done with the awkward conversations for the night?”

“Unless,” said Roger. “You want to talk religion or politics.”

“No,” Taylor laughed. “Let’s save them for another night.”

As the couple looked into each other’s eyes, the sound of music began floating across the lake. Roger and Taylor looked in the direction of the music. It was coming from the cabin of The Pegasus.

Taylor looked back at Roger and said, “Folsom Prison Blues?”

“It’s Mitch,” said Roger.

Taylor rolled her eyes and said, “Whatever!” She gave Roger a fast kiss and said, “Race you to the ladder.”

As Taylor took off, Roger reached for the float and towed it behind. After Taylor climbed aboard the boat, she disappeared into the cabin. Roger tied the float to the back of the boat, grabbed the mugs and started to climb the ladder. As Roger climbed into the cockpit, Taylor emerged from the cabin with a big towel, a bottle of wine and two glasses.

Roger reached into the cabin for some large pillows and the chips and dip.

After drying off, Taylor reached for the wine glasses and handed one to Roger.

“Let’s try something that maybe we both can enjoy.”

“What to?” asked Roger as he held up his glass.

Taylor thought a minute then said, “To changes in latitudes and attitudes.”

“And to our chance meeting on a country road,” said Roger.

“Cheers,” said Taylor.

“Cheers,” said Roger.

After a small sip of wine, Roger and Taylor settled comfortably together in the back of the boat. As they looked out over the lake, Taylor said, “Funny how things happen. I never thought anything this wild and wonderful would ever happen to me.”

Roger gave Taylor a hug and said, “I never thought I’d meet anyone like you.”

As Taylor and Roger talked quietly on the boat, the music coming from The Pegasus changed to some old, romantic Sinatra.

“Oh,” said Taylor. “Now that’s better.”

“Yeah,” said Roger as the conversation came to an abrupt end.

ACROSS THE CHANNEL

Forty-five minutes after she climbed out of the water, Denise came up from the cabin of The Pegasus with two glasses of wine. Mitch was cooking brat dogs on the boat’s grill.

“We need to drive into town sometime tomorrow,” began Denise. “We’re starting to run outta stuff.”

“We need diesel for the motor too,” said Mitch.

“Probably should try to get there before church gets out,” said Denise. “You know how long the lines are at the store after noon.”

“Not much chance of that happening,” said Mitch. “Remember, we’re all meeting for breakfast and that probably won’t happen until 10.”

“Those almost done?” asked Denise as she walked up behind Mitch and gave him a big hug. “You know how sex tends to wear me out.”

Mitch snapped off the grill and handed Denise her big brat dog.

“Done,” he said.

Just as Denise was about to take her first bite of the brat, the silence of the lake was broken by the unmistakable sounds of a couple at the height of passion. She dropped the brat dog on her plate and looked at Mitch. “It’s bad enough that we all get to listen to Amanda and Gary at the dock, now we have to put up with them, too?”

Mitch started to reach for the boat horn when Denise said, “NO!”

As they sat looking at their hot brat dogs, Denise asked, “We don’t make that much noise do we?”

“I don’t know,” said Mitch. “I’m never listening.”

“Yeah, I could say something about that listening part,” said Denise. “Is the laptop charged up?”

“Sure is,” said Mitch. “I remembered the DVDs, too.”

Denise picked up her plate and wine glass. “Great, so it’s movie night, again,” she said as she started for the cabin door.

Denise stopped, turned and slowly said, “Which DVDs?”

Mitch silently gathered up his wine glass and plate, then looked up at Denise and smiled.

“Great,” said Denise. “Captain Ron again?”

“Always stand clear of the ladder, boss,” said Mitch quoting from the movie.

Denise rolled her eyes, disappeared into the cabin muttering “always stand clear of the ladder, boss.”

Mitch turned to check that the gas on the grill was shut off and started for the cabin.

“Lucy, I’m home,” he said quoting another line from the movie.

“Shut up,” said Denise from inside the cabin.

WHERE IS THAT BOAT?

Bob looked at his watch, and then closed his eyes again. “2:45,” said Bob to himself. “Fifteen more minutes till two.” He laid there silently for a few seconds, and then his eyes popped wide open. He jumped off the couch and ran out to the back deck. He didn’t have 15-minutes to sleep. He’d overslept by 45 minutes. As he got to the back deck door, he looked and saw the new kid Stevens still sitting by the rail.

Bob walked up to the rail and said, “Everything still quiet out there?”

There was no reply.

Bob looked down at Stevens who was fast asleep.

“*This is just great,*” thought Bob to himself.

“Hey, Stevens, wake up,” he said aloud.

The kid jolted awake and nearly fell out of the chair. Stevens looked up and said, “Oh my God, Sir, I’m sorry, I, I ...”

Just then a voice appeared behind them, “Good evening gentlemen.”

Bob and Stevens turned around to find Troy standing in the doorway.

“Looks like we all overslept,” said Troy. “No harm done, we all probably needed the rest.”

Troy walked over to the rail and said, “So, where’s our boat?”

Bob and Stevens looked out over the lake.

“He was drifting toward the pub,” started Stevens. “But, wait a minute ...” his voice trailed off.

“I don’t see it anywhere,” said Bob.

“Wake everyone up,” said Troy. “We meet in the cave in ten minutes. Be sure to bring our map and don’t move the chess pieces.” He then turned and walked inside.

Bob turned to the younger man and said, “Go get everyone up and out of these party clothes. I’ll get the map.” He carefully picked up the map, then turned and started for the door.

“I’m sorry about losing the boat Sir,” Stevens called out.

Bob stopped, but didn’t turn and said, “Good.” He then continued into the house.

Stevens turned and scanned the lake. Not seeing the boat he was supposed to keep an eye on, he then headed into the house.

GUINNESS AND A MOVIE

Roger and Taylor were propped up against some big pillows in the back of the boat. They were looking up at the stars when Taylor said, “That was really nice.”

Roger gave Taylor a big squeeze and said, “It’s never been that good before.”

“It must be the boat,” smiled Taylor.

“Must be the boat,” echoed Roger.

Taylor stood up and said, "I actually think I'm ready for a mug of Guinness."

Roger got up and said, "Sounds good."

As they walked toward the cabin door, Taylor looked over at The Pegasus and noticed a blue flashing light coming from the cabin windows.

"What's going on over there?" asked Taylor.

"They're watching a movie," said Roger as he continued into the cabin.

"Hey, you promised me a movie," said Taylor as she joined him in the very small galley.

"Yes I did," said Roger. "Go up to the front of the boat and get the backpack. It's got the laptop and movies."

"Can we watch it out on the back porch?" asked Taylor.

"Sure," said Roger. "Set it up on the captain's chair."

Taylor gave Roger a quick kiss as she made her way forward to pick up the backpack. It was propped up next to an old wood box by the 'V' berth. A nice lamp was sitting on the box. Taylor sat down on the bed for a moment and looked around. Everything was neatly in its place. It wasn't big, but seemed comfortable. She ran her hands across the comforter on the bed, and then looked up at the small window directly over her head. The stars were shining brightly as the full moon was disappearing behind a mountain.

Taylor looked back down at the box, the lamp and the bed. She thought back over the day's events, took a deep breath and smiled.

"This can't be happening," she thought to herself.

Taylor looked over at a small bookshelf, read through the titles and even recognized a few authors like Pat Conroy and Steven King. Most of the books were about sailing by authors she never heard of. She pulled out one book called *The Sailing Life* by some guy named Bob Bitchin'. A magazine tucked inside the book

fell face down on the bed. Turning it over, Taylor came face to face with a large photo of a very attractive woman wearing a hot bikini and sitting on the bow of a big sailboat.

“You’ve got some interesting magazines up here,” said Taylor.

“Which one?” asked Roger and he poked his head into the “V” berth cabin.

“This one,” said Taylor with a big smile. “Your dream girl?”

“I’m looking at my dream girl,” said Roger. He smiled at Taylor and said, “Remember your toast earlier this evening?”

“Yeah,” said Taylor.

“Look at the title,” said Roger.

Taylor read the title, and then looked up at Roger with a big smile. “Latitudes and Attitudes,” she said.

“You’ll like it,” said Roger. “It’s all about people who spend a lot of time on their boats.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Taylor as she leafed through the magazine.

Roger reached for another book called *Maiden Voyage* and handed it to Taylor.

“Ready for your first sailing book?” he asked.

“Sure,” said Taylor as she looked back at the book shelf and pointed to another title. “Thanks for not handing me *Sailing for Dummies*.”

“Actually,” began Roger, “That’s my first sailing book and it’s pretty good.” He pointed to the book Taylor had in her hand and said, “That’s by Tanya Aebi and it’s one of the few books that I just couldn’t put down.” He turned and went back into the main cabin.

Taylor read the back of the book, and then set it on one of the pillows. She turned and looked at the opposite side of the cabin and saw several hangers of clothes hanging in a closet. A mirror was bolted to the cabin by the closet. Taylor looked at herself, then smiled. She grabbed the backpack and headed back up on deck to find Roger waiting with a big smile and two mugs of Guinness.

“Ready for a movie?” asked Roger.

“That movie you were talking about earlier today?” said Taylor.

“Captain Ron,” said Roger as he started setting up the computer. He popped the DVD in the drive, punched a few buttons on the computer and sat down by the big pillows.

“All set?” said Roger.

“All set,” said Taylor as she sat down on Roger’s lap and gave him a big kiss.

They picked up their mugs, tapped them together and said “Cheers!” just as the movie began.

LET’S FIND THAT BOAT

“Gather ’round men,” said Troy.

The entire team was now dressed in black tactical gear. The map and chess pieces were set up on the dock by the boat.

“We know where all the boats are except the one we want,” said Troy. “So we’re heading out to find it. Once we find it, we tow it back to the cave. Because there are so many people out tonight, we’ll run slow and silent. Questions?”

The men nodded no, so Troy continued, “I suspect most everyone is asleep by now, but let’s still be very quiet. No unnecessary talking.”

Troy pointed to the map and continued, “There are five islands to loop around. Once we check the islands, we’ll run the shoreline. Remember there are some guys out night fishing, so everyone keep your eyes open.”

Bob started moving toward the boat and the rest of the team followed. Once everyone was aboard, Bob fired up the motor and signaled for the lines to be untied. Once the boat was free of the dock, it started moving toward the mouth of the cave. A few minutes later, the black boat emerged from the fog and started heading up to Long Island.

“The moon is going down,” whispered Troy.

“That’s good and bad,” Bob whispered back. “It makes us tougher to spot, but it’s also tougher to spot the target.”

“Keep your eyes open,” said Troy.

As the boat started going around Long Island, they came across two boats anchored near each other in a cove. The larger boat had *London Pride* spelled out in big, black letters along the side. The smaller boat was anchored closer to shore and had a palm tree painted on each side of the bow. Except for a small, white light at the top of each mast, the boats were silent and dark.

“One down and four to go,” whispered Troy.

“Let’s head up past Big Island, and then do a figure-8 up to Fish,” suggested Bob. “We can catch the north shore and marina before heading south.”

“Good idea,” nodded Troy.

The black boat made a sharp turn to the left and headed up to Big Island. Once past the edge of the island, they turned into a cove shaped like the letter L. Once into the cove, they turned north again to pass the top part of the island. After clearing the L, they turned east to find two boats anchored in their path.

“What’s going on up there?” asked one man.

“Shhh!” said Troy and Bob at the same time.

“Looks like all these guys are up,” said Bob.

“From the looks of those flickering blue lights, I’d say they’re watching movies,” said Troy. “You better knock that motor all the way back to keep it quiet.”

Bob reached back and twisted the throttle all the way down. The black boat slowed, but continued between the two islands and two boats. They passed The Pegasus first. As they passed, the sound of the movie wafted out of the cabin’s open windows.

Bob looked over at Troy as the big sailboat passed behind them and gave the thumbs up signal. Troy nodded as they both turned toward the smaller blue hulled boat anchored across the channel. It was anchored with the bow pointed toward the middle of the channel. A couple was sitting in the back of the boat; a flickering blue light meant they were watching a movie of their own. As the black boat got closer, Bob reached back and switched off the motor. The black boat loaded with heavily armed men floated silently past The Marietta.

As they passed, Bob and Troy looked back at the sailboat where the couple could be clearly seen. Bob reached back to restart the motor. Once the motor was going, Bob looked at Troy and said, “Doesn’t anyone wear any clothes around here?”

“Shhh,” said Troy as their boat continued up past the sheriff’s sub station then back around the north side of Fish Island.

THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

Aboard The Connection, Amanda looked over an island in the South Pacific. She knew it wasn’t an island at Rolling River Lake because the water was crystal clear with a slight tinge of blue. The water in the lake was more of a brownish-green. Gary was up front securing the anchor and Amanda shut down the motor. A few minutes later, they were both lounging in the back of the boat on their make-shift bed.

“I’m sure glad you bought that new blender,” said Gary.

Amanda took a taste of her margarita and said, “This just hits the spot after a long day of sailing.”

They dozed the afternoon away. Amanda was barely aware that it was getting dark, but the warm, Pacific breeze and slow rocking of the sailboat kept her asleep. She woke up again when she heard something thumping up against the hull of the boat. Amanda opened her eyes, looked over the side and saw some driftwood had floated up and the waves were pushing it up against the hull.

Reaching over, Amanda grabbed a boat hook and shoved the drift wood away. She fell back asleep, but the thumping returned. Without opening her eyes, she reached again for the boat hook, but it wasn't there. Amanda opened her eyes and saw that *The Connection* wasn't anchored at an exotic island in the Pacific, but in their usual spot behind Hideout Island at Rolling River Lake.

She looked at her watch. It was almost 4:30 in the morning. Amanda smiled and turned over to go back to sleep when she heard the thumping again.

"That's only a dream," said Amanda who really wanted to go back to sleep. But the thumping continued. Amanda opened her eyes and turned over. It wasn't a piece of driftwood that was thumping the hull of *The Connection*. It was another sailboat.

Amanda sat up and nudged Gary.

"What's up?" mumbled Gary.

"We have a guest," said Amanda quietly.

Gary started to wake up, looked at his watch and said, "At 4:30 in the morning?"

"See for yourself," said Amanda.

Gary looked up and saw two sailboat masts bobbing back and fourth in the small waves. The bow of the visitor was pointed into the cove; *The Connections'* bow was pointed out into the lake hiding the cockpit from Gary and Amanda.

"It's Jerry," said Amanda.

"Hello. Jerry," called Gary.

There was no answer.

“Ahoy 19th Hole,” said Gary again. “Jerry, are you awake?”

“You don’t think he passed out do you?” asked Amanda.

“Looks like it,” said Gary as he got up and started walking toward the bow. Amanda got up to join him, but they froze in their tracks when they looked down into the cockpit of The 19th Hole. Jerry was seated in his captain’s chair. His hand rested on the tiller. His eyes stared straight ahead. The captain’s chair and most of the cockpit was coated with blood.

WE INTERRUPT THIS MOVIE ...

“Pegasus, this is Connection,” crackled the radio. “Come in.”

Both Mitch and Denise jumped as the radio up in the cockpit of The Pegasus crackled to life. They were sitting together up in the ‘V’ berth of the big boat. The laptop computer was set on a table Mitch had built so they could comfortably watch movies in bed.

“Just when we were getting to the good part,” said Mitch as he made his way out of the forward cabin and up to the cockpit.

“You say that about every part of this movie,” said Denise.

“This is the best boat movie you can get,” said Mitch as he left the cabin.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” said Denise. “There are other movies about boats you know.”

“Connection, this is Pegasus,” said Mitch. “Come in.”

“Mitch, we’ve got a problem,” said Amanda. “Have you got your cell phone?”

“Always,” said Mitch.

“We need you to call 9-1-1 and have them send the sheriff’s boat down to Hideout Island as fast as you can,” said Amanda.

Without asking questions, Mitch reached for his cell phone, dialed the number and keyed the radio’s microphone, “Dialing now.”

“9-1-1 Emergency,” said the operator. “What is the nature of your emergency?”

“This is the captain of the sailboat Pegasus; we’re anchored near Big Island at Rolling River Lake,” said Mitch. “We just received a call from the sailboat Connection anchored at Hideout Island. They asked us to call you and have the sheriff’s lake boat sent to their location as fast as possible.”

“Stand by Pegasus,” said the operator. Mitch could hear the dispatcher calling the sheriff’s lake substation on the police radio.

Denise came up from the cabin and asked, “Is everything okay?”

“I don’t think so,” said Mitch. He then keyed the radio’s mic and asked, “You two okay?”

“We’re fine,” answered Amanda. “But Jerry’s boat drifted into our cove. He’s been shot, Mitch. There’s blood all over the place.”

“Pegasus, this is the 9-1-1 operator,” said the voice over the phone. “The sheriff’s boat is under way. Instruct the other boat’s captain to tune their radio to channel 16 for further communications.”

“Will do,” said Mitch as he hung up the phone and keyed the radio’s mic.

“Switch to channel 16 and call the sheriff from there.”

“Will do,” said Amanda. “And Mitch, would you come on down here too?”

“We’re on our way,” said Mitch into the radio.

Denise immediately left the cockpit, quickly shut off the DVD and grabbed some clothes. Mitch hit the ignition on the Pegasus, and then started forward to haul up the bow anchor. Denise made her way back up on deck and started hauling up the stern anchor. Mitch started pulling on the forward anchor. Once the anchors were aboard Denise took hold of the big boat's wheel and slipped the engine in gear.

Mitch walked back to the cockpit as Denise pointed the boat out into the channel. As the boat started making way, Denise pointed to a pile of fresh clothes and said, "We'd better get dressed."

As The Pegasus picked up speed, it sent a fairly good size wake toward the bow of The Marietta.

CAPTAIN RON GETS INTERRUPTED ... AGAIN ...

Martin Short had just fallen in the water when Kurt Russell dropped the swim ladder on his head. "Always stand clear of the ladder, boss," said Captain Ron.

Taylor laughed and said, "I always liked Kurt Russell, but never knew he did a boat movie."

"It's the most popular boat movie up here," said Roger just as the boat started rocking.

"Whoa, it's pretty late for that kind of wake," said Roger and both he and Taylor stood up. The stern lights of the Pegasus were shrinking in the distance.

Taylor looked at Roger and said, "Isn't it a little late to be taking off?"

"Sure is," said Roger as he reached for the boat radio and turned it on.

"Hey Mitch," called Roger. "Where are you going?"

"Down to Hideout," said Mitch. "Amanda and Gary say someone shot Jerry."

"They shot him?" said Roger.

“Yeah,” said Mitch. “You guys probably shouldn’t stay out alone like this. Better get under way and follow us.”

“Will do,” said Roger as he handed the radio to Taylor. “I’ll get the bow anchor. Can you get the motor started?”

“Sure,” said Taylor as she turned to the motor.

Roger made his way forward and started pulling up the bow anchor. Once the anchor was on deck, Roger came back to find Taylor had the motor started and was hauling up the stern anchor. Roger smiled as he closed the laptop and stuffed it into the backpack.

“Way to go,” said Roger as he turned to the motor, put it in gear and grabbed the tiller. The small blue boat started picking up speed as *The Marietta* began following *The Pegasus*.

“Does this happen here often?” asked Taylor.

“Never,” said Roger. “There have been a few hunting accidents, but no one on a boat ever gets hit.”

“Should we clean up all this?” said Taylor pointing to the food, beer and cushions.

“Probably,” said Roger as he stopped to look at Taylor. “I hate to say it, but we should probably put something on, too.”

“Yeah,” said Taylor as she gave him a quick kiss. “Got anything clean below?”

“Look up in the ‘V’ berth,” said Roger.

Taylor made her way into the cabin and came back a few minutes later with some shorts, shirts and a big trash bag. After a few minutes work, the cockpit and cabin were all cleaned up as Roger and Taylor started sorting through the clothes.

“*Marietta*, this is *Pegasus*,” called Mitch on the radio. “Keep an eye out to port. A sheriff’s boat will be passing in a few minutes.”

“Will do,” said Taylor into the radio. She then pointed off into the distance and said, “There it is.” A smaller power boat was coming up behind them from the channel between the shore and Fish Island. Its bright, blue and red rotating police lights stabbed the darkness as it picked up speed. Roger noticed that Mitch was turning away from Hideout Island.

“Where are we going?” asked Taylor as Roger pointed The Marietta in the same direction.

“We’re getting out of the way,” said Roger as the sheriff’s boat sped by. As soon as it passed the Pegasus, Mitch turned his boat back toward Hideout Island. Roger pushed his tiller over and The Marietta followed.

WHERE IS EVERYBODY?

The black boat was heading south from Towne and Country Marina after checking the north side of Fish Island. As the boat cleared the marina’s no-wake buoys, one of the men in the front of the boat waved his hands and started pointing to the empty coves where they’d passed two sail boats a half an hour ago.

Troy looked over at the islands, and then looked back at Bob. “Bathroom trip?” he asked.

“No, those boats have onboard cans,” said Bob.

The two men paused to think about other options. As they thought, the same man who spotted the empty coves started waving and pointing again, this time further south between Big and Long Islands. Bob and Troy looked over and saw the sheriff’s lake boat speeding by the two missing sailboats with the emergency lights blazing.

“I think this party is over,” said Bob.

“Yeah,” said Troy. “Someone found our boy.”

“What do we do now?” asked Bob.

“Head down to our cove and drop these guys off,” said Troy. “Then you and I will sneak back for a look-see.”

“Roger that,” said Bob as he turned the boat for Boulder Island.

“Who’s on duty tonight at the S.O.?” asked Troy.

“Our guy,” said Bob.

“Good,” said Troy. “Give him a call and maybe we can still keep this thing under control.”

SOMETHING IS JUST NOT RIGHT HERE

Amanda and Gary watched as the sheriff’s deputy climbed aboard The 19th Hole to check on Jerry. The deputy slipped on the blood and fell with a loud thump onto the floor of the cockpit. As he stood up, his entire backside was covered with blood. The deputy bent over to feel for a pulse, and then reached down to shake the fuel tank. The deputy looked up and asked, “Did either one of you come aboard the boat?”

“No,” said Gary.

“And how did you say you discovered him?” the deputy asked.

“We were sleeping when Jerry, I mean his boat, drifted into us,” said Gary.

Just then, the deputy’s cell phone started to ring. “Sheriff’s Department, Deputy Ranger speaking.”

Amanda looked at Gary and mouthed, “Ranger?”

“Shhh,” said Gary.

“Yes Sir,” said Deputy Ranger. “We do have a dead body here at Hideout.” The deputy paused then said, “Yes Sir, I’ll check.” He walked over to the side of the boat and looked at the name painted on the side. “Affirmative, it is The 19th Hole.” He paused again then said, “Not yet, there are still some civies here.” He

listened a few seconds more, then snapped the phone shut and said, "Okay, I need you to untie your boat and head back for the dock."

"Is that it?" asked Amanda.

"Yeah," said the deputy. "We see these kinds of things all the time. Hunters just shoot at anything these days. But I need you guys to take off now, okay."

"But," started Amanda.

"Okay," said Gary as he steered Amanda to the cockpit. "Get the motor started and haul in the aft anchor. I'll get the bow."

Amanda looked back at the deputy, then turned to the boat's motor. A few minutes later, The Connection was motoring away from the cove and toward Pegasus that had just arrived. Mitch had made a slow circle so the bow was now pointed away from the police boat.

Amanda looked back at the deputy standing in the cockpit of Jerry's blood soaked cockpit. She reached into the cabin and grabbed a rather large camera bag.

"What are you doing?" asked Gary.

"Just keep going," said Amanda. "I want some pictures of this nonsense."

"At this time of night?" asked Gary. "There's no light and he'll see the flash."

"Remember all the money I spent on the new digital camera?" said Amanda as she pulled out a camera. "This little baby will get the shot."

As The Connection came up beside Pegasus, Mitch tossed a line at Gary. "You two okay?" called Denise.

"We're okay," said Gary. "But Jerry is dead. He was shot in the back."

"Shot?" asked Mitch. "Who's playing with guns at this time of night?"

“Deputy Ranger over there said it was a stray bullet from a hunter,” said Amanda with a very sarcastic emphasis on Ranger.

“No way,” said Mitch. “I’ve been hunting around the lake for years and nothing is in season right now.”

“Get this, he never asked Jerry’s name,” said Amanda. “Then someone calls him and he has to look at the side of Jerry’s boat for its name before ordering us away.”

“Something else,” said Gary. “The guy never asked our names. You’d think he’d need them for some kind of report.”

“That’s right,” said Taylor as The Marietta motored past the other side of Pegasus. “You’re witnesses to a crime. He’s got to have your names for the report.”

Everyone looked at Taylor as The Marietta continued toward the island. “When you live in a big city, there’s a good chance you’ll witness several crimes,” she said. “It’s one of the perks.”

Amanda maneuvered herself behind Gary and started snapping off pictures. “Just stay still, Honey,” she said. “I don’t want him to know he’s on candid camera.”

Roger continued on toward the police boat when the deputy shined his bright spotlight at The Marietta. “This is a crime scene,” shouted the offer. “You need to leave the area and tell those other boats to take off with you.”

Roger pushed the tiller over and The Marietta turned back toward the other boats. When he arrived, the boats were all pointed away from the sheriff’s boat. When the three boats were floating just inches from each other, Roger said, “The officer told me to leave and told me to tell you guys to leave, too.”

“Then we’d better get going,” said Gary as he reached for the motor.

“Hang on, Gary,” said Amanda. “I want to see what he does and take some more pictures.”

“Sorry, Sweetie,” said Gary. “Be we’ve been told to leave and he’s got a badge and a gun.”

“He didn’t say how fast we had to leave,” said Mitch. “Let’s start moving, but then slowly throttle all the way back after a few minutes.”

“Sounds great,” said Amanda. “I just think something’s not right here.”

“Okay everyone,” said Mitch. “Make a lot of noise with your motor. Let’s all stay close too.”

“Might want to stay off the radio too,” suggested Taylor.

“Good idea,” said Amanda. “Hey Mitch, can I hop on your boat. It’s more stable and I can hide behind your bimini while I’m taking pictures.”

“Sure,” said Mitch. “I’ll just hold a steady course. Gary, you steer up on my beam.”

“Here we come,” said Gary.

Denise started to make her way forward to the heavy steel cables that kept the main mast from falling. “Come over up here,” said Denise. “I can hang onto the stays and catch you when you cross.”

Amanda grabbed her camera bag and started up to the middle of The Connection. As the boats inched closer, she looked down at the water passing between the boats, then up at Denise who reached out her hand. Amanda looked down again. The boats were now less than an inch apart. She looked back at Gary and smiled.

“Good steering, Captain,” said Amanda.

“Watch out for your new captain,” said Gary. “I hear he’s got a rowdy reputation.”

“Safety first,” said Mitch.

Amanda looked down again, then reached out for Denise's hand and stepped over to *The Pegasus*. Once she was on the other side of the safety lines, Gary inched *The Connection* away from *Pegasus* and then reached back to slowly reduce the throttle on the motor. Mitch reached for his throttle, then looked over at Roger and Taylor.

"Start slowing down now," said Mitch. The three boats began slowly reducing speed.

"I'll keep an eye on Deputy Ranger back there and see if he gives us any nasty looks," said Amanda as she took up a position in the stern of *The Pegasus*. Her camera was nearly hidden by the safety railing and grill. Amanda looked through her telephoto lens, snapping a picture every now and then.

"It's starting to get real dark out there," said Amanda. "If we get too far away, I won't be able to see a thing even with the night gain set to high. Any chance we can just idle with the motors on for a while?"

"Sure," said Mitch as he reached for the gearshift. All three boats motors shifted into neutral at the same time.

"We're going to start drifting before long," said Roger. "Let's run a line between the boats to keep us together."

"Good idea," said Mitch. "Denise, toss that line to Taylor and tie it off on the side cleat there."

Gary tied his tiller so it wouldn't move from side to side, and then made his way up to the middle of his boat with another line. He tied it off then tossed it over onto the *Pegasus*' deck. "Grab that when you can," said Gary as he hurried back to the cockpit and took control of the tiller again.

"That's just too weird," said Amanda as she snapped more pictures. "Deputy Ranger back there has wrapped Jerry up in a bunch of towels and has him laid out on the deck. Now he's washing down the cockpit."

“Wrapped him in towels?” said Roger as he turned to Taylor. “Ever see anything like that in the big city?”

“No,” said Taylor. “They usually don’t touch the body until they photograph the crime scene.”

“Maybe he’s planning to use my pictures,” said Amanda.

“Just keep outta sight,” said Gary.

“No problem,” said Amanda. “Mitch’s grill is big enough to hide a full sized TV camera.”

“Is that another boat?” asked Taylor. She was pointing away from the sheriff’s boat, toward the shore. Amanda quickly swung her camera toward the shore and started snapping pictures.

“It sure is,” said Amanda. “It’s a small Boston Whaler, all black, and no bow number.” She kept snapping pictures and said, “Try to hold this thing steady Mitch. I’m zoomed in on the two guys in the boat and don’t want blurry pictures. They’re both dressed in black and ...”

Amanda paused while she snapped off a dozen more pictures.

“And what,” said Mitch.

“And they’ve got automatic rifles,” said Amanda looking up.

“That’s it,” said Gary. “We’re outta here.”

“Agreed,” said Roger as he reached for his motor. He looked at Mitch who nodded.

“Here we go,” said Mitch. “Let’s all start off slow and gradually throttle up.”

“Good plan,” said Gary as all the boats started inching ahead.

“Untie those boats,” said Mitch to Denise. She was still sitting near the mast and quickly untied the lines and tossed them onto the decks of the other boats.

“Hey Mitch,” said Roger. “I’ve got a crazy idea.”

“I’m thinking the same thing, buddy,” said Mitch. He nodded toward Taylor and said, “Think she can get The Marietta home?”

“Sure she can,” said Roger as he smiled at Taylor.

“What’s going on?” asked Taylor.

“Mitch and I are going to take a swim once we pass outta sight from those boats,” said Roger. “You stick with these guys and take The Marietta home.”

“What about you?” asked Taylor.

“Mitch and I will take some P.F.D.’s, and swim over to the island,” said Roger. “We’ll watch what happens, then swim home.”

“I’ll have these pictures downloaded to the computer by the time you get back,” said Amanda. “Question is, what do we do with them?”

“Call Kelly,” suggested Taylor. “He used to work for the Sheriff.”

“He could be in cahoots with Deputy Ranger,” said Amada pointing back to the sheriff’s boat.

“I don’t think so,” said Taylor. “He’s friends with Aunt Nic.”

“Aunt Nic?” said Mitch. “That lady at the bar?”

“That’s her,” said Taylor.

“I’ve seen her somewhere before,” said Denise.

“Probably in a picture of the current Supreme Court Justices,” said Taylor. “She’s been on the bench for about 8 years now.”

“Talk about friends in high places,” said Gary.

“Okay,” said Mitch. “We’re about to turn past the island. You guys know what to do?”

“No problem,” said Denise as she took the wheel from Mitch. “We’ll keep an eye on Taylor.”

Taylor looked at Roger and said, “You really going to just swim away and leave me with The Marietta?”

Roger pulled Taylor over for a big hug and kiss then said, “I’m sure you’ll take care of her like she was your very own.”

“I don’t want to scare you away,” said Taylor. “But I already feel completely at home with you on this boat.”

Roger and Taylor held each other’s eyes for a few minutes when Roger said, “You didn’t scare me, and I’m glad you feel at home here.”

“Let’s go buddy,” said Mitch as he stood up on the very back of The Pegasus.

He tossed a life jacket over board, looked over at Roger and said, “Don’t forget to jump well past the motor.” With that, Mitch did a racing dive off the stern of The Pegasus.

Roger kissed Taylor and said, “Toss me that P.F.D.” He then climbed up on the stern of The Marietta and dove off. Taylor tossed the life jacket at Roger, then gripped the tiller and kept pace with the other boats. She looked back only once and saw Roger and Mitch swimming toward the island.

“You doing okay?” said Denise.

“I think so,” said Taylor. She looked over at Denise and said, “This weekend has definitely taken some interesting turns.”

“Well, we don’t usually have friends murdered up here,” said Amanda.

“Just like home,” said Taylor. “But without the traffic or rude taxi drivers.”

The three women laughed as the boats continued on toward the marina. Gary kept looking back to keep an eye out for the sheriff’s boat. “You’d think the deputy would be towing Jerry’s boat back to the substation by now,” he said.

“Something’s definitely not right,” said Denise. “I just hope our guys stay outta sight.”

“How long before they show up back at the marina?” asked Taylor.

“It’s going to be a long swim home,” said Gary. “Probably not for a few hours.”

“Once we get to shore, I’ll get these pictures downloaded,” said Amanda. “Then I’ll make some copies and hand them out.”

“Hey, Taylor,” called Gary. “Why don’t you hang back once we get to the marina, let us get docked, then we’ll bring you into your slip.”

“I think I’ll be okay,” said Taylor. “I docked it after the race and there’s not much wind to blow me around.”

“You’re catching on fast,” said Denise.

“Looking good,” said Amanda.

“Once the guys get back, I think we all better turn in for a while,” said Denise. “Let’s meet back on Pegasus around 9 for coffee.”

“Then you can call your aunt and try to figure some things out,” said Amanda.

The marina’s no-wake buoys appeared off to the right and Denise said, “Let’s start slowing these things up.” She reached for the throttle and started to slow down. Taylor and Gary started slowing down, too, and the boats slowly coasted by the buoys and then split up to turn into the docks.

“See you over on our boat after you get tied up,” said Gary.

“Be there in a minute,” said Denise.

“See ya,” said Taylor.

She gripped the throttle and slowed the motor so the boat was slowly moving into the docks. After passing The Marietta’s dock, she slipped the motor into reverse and pushed the tiller hard over in the opposite direction. The Marietta began slowly backing up and the bow swung around. When Taylor had turned the boat 90 degrees she centered the tiller and watched as the boat slid into the slip. When the boat was a few feet from the main dock, she slipped the motor briefly into the forward gear, and quickly gunned the throttle before moving the lever to neutral. The Marietta stopped inches from the dock.

Taylor stepped onto the dock and reached down for the stern line she and Roger had left when they began their moonlight cruise. Taylor thought back to the party on Irish Pub’s deck and the wonderful evening she had shared with Roger. After finding one of the marina’s sailors shot dead, that magical evening seemed hundreds of miles away. As Taylor finished tying off the stern, she walked to the end of the dock, picked up the bow line and slipped it over the forward cleat. She started back for the cockpit, grabbing the third line laying on the dock and slipped it over the spring line cleat.

“Nice job,” called Denise as she was fixing the dock line on Pegasus. “Why don’t you hook up your shore power then come over and check out Amanda’s pictures.”

“Be right there,” said Taylor as she picked up the heavy yellow shore power cable and stepped back aboard The Marietta. After hooking up the line, she killed the motor, then reached into the cockpit cabinet and twisted the fuel shut-off valve. Taylor thought over everything she saw Roger doing when they docked after the race. After deciding the job was complete, Taylor walked up to the bow of the boat and stood by the head sail which was rolled up around the mast’s front steel support cable.

As Taylor stood by the head sail, she wrapped one arm around it and leaned her head against the fabric. Looking out into the middle of the lake, Taylor

thought again about everything that had happened since her run began early that morning. After several minutes, Taylor's thoughts were snapped back to the present.

"You coming?" asked Denise.

Taylor looked over at Denise and said, "I was just thinking about everything that's happened today."

Denise stepped aboard *The Marietta* and sat down by the boat's mast. "You've got lots to think about."

"Yeah," said Taylor. "Everything happened real fast." She paused, "I don't understand how it's happened. But I'm real happy that it has happened."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Denise. "You're lucky. Roger is a great guy."

"What can you tell me about him?" asked Taylor.

"He used to be on TV," started Denise. "He did the weather for years, but things changed at his job and he's been out of work for a while. They've got him managing things here at the marina and the pub right now."

"Really," said Taylor.

"He and Mitch have been pals since he bought *The Marietta* a few years ago," said Denise. "Mitch says he thinks Roger's happier now than when he was on TV."

"I have a friend back home who's on TV," said Taylor. "She's not that happy with her job either. Too much pressure, too much drama."

"That's how Roger describes it," said Denise.

"All I can say is I love this boat and I love being out here," said Taylor. She paused for a while. Denise didn't say anything. Taylor looked back at Denise and said, "And as crazy as this sounds, I think I love Roger, too." She paused, "Is it possible that I could really be in love with Roger after just one day?"

“Stranger things have happened,” said Denise.

“Hey you guys,” called Gary. “Come check this out.”

“Coming,” said Denise as she got up to leave. When she got to the end of the dock, she looked back at Taylor who hadn’t moved. “Coming?” said Denise.

“Yeah,” said Taylor who seemed reluctant to leave the boat. “I guess so.”

NEXT TIME, BRING SHOES

When Mitch and Roger jumped off the boats for their swim to Hideout Island, they took P.F.D.’s and thought they had everything they’d need. As soon as they reached the shore, they discovered the one thing they should have brought.

“Next time we decide to swim ashore,” said Mitch. “We need to remember our shoes.”

“It’s only going to get worse,” said Roger as he looked up at the island. “See all those rocks, weeds and tree stumps?”

“That’s going to hurt,” said Mitch as he climbed out of the water and walked up on the beach.

“Let’s get into those trees,” said Roger.

“I hope the bugs and snakes leave us alone,” said Mitch.

“Snakes?” said Roger. “Nobody said anything about snakes.”

“Sure,” said Mitch. “They’re everywhere in these old woods.”

Roger stopped at the water’s edge and looked carefully into the island’s trees.

“Come on buddy,” said Mitch. “That guy could be coming around the island any minute now.”

Roger stared toward the trees and said, “I really don’t like snakes.”

“If there were snakes here,” said Mitch. “I would have found one by now.”

Once Roger was in the trees, the pair moved deeper into the island. Mitch was walking slowly, carefully watching where he placed his feet.

“You don’t have to go that slow,” said Roger. “I’ll get over the snake thing.”

“I’m not worried about snakes,” said Mitch. “These rocks and trees can really cut up our feet.”

“Yeah, right,” said Roger.

“We’re getting close,” said Mitch. “Wait here for a minute.”

As Mitch moved slowly ahead, Roger looked around. The island was covered with trees, weeds and fallen branches. The perfect place for snakes to hide, then strike out as boaters with bare feet walked by. But the island was quiet and still. As Roger continued to wait, he thought back over the events of the day. If someone had told him that he would meet the girl of his dreams, take her sailing and fall in love, all in the same day, Roger would have said, “Get real.” But it was starting to look like that was exactly what was happening.

“Pssst,” said Mitch.

“Yeah,” whispered Roger.

“Come on up here,” whispered Mitch. “Crouch down low ’cause the trees thin out pretty fast up here.”

“Coming,” said Roger.

As he started to move forward, Roger crouched closer to the ground. Looking down more than he looked up, he ran right into a tree and almost fell into a bush loaded with dry leaves. As Roger looked at the bush, he thought he saw something move.

“There aren’t any snakes,” said Roger to himself. He moved past the tree and saw a big log ahead. Mitch was crouched down behind that log.

“Find any snakes?” asked Mitch.

“No, but a tree almost took me out,” said Roger. “What’s happening up here?”

“Lots of stuff,” said Mitch as he pointed to the cove.

The 19th Hole and the Sheriff’s power boat hadn’t moved since the three sailboats started motoring away. What had changed was the addition of the long, black power boat tied up next to the sheriff’s boat.

“That’s a Boston Whaler,” said Mitch.

“I can’t see any bow numbers,” said Roger.

“That’s because there aren’t any,” said Mitch.

As Mitch and Roger continued to survey the three boats, they turned their attention to the men working in the back of The 19th Hole. The Sheriff’s deputy had been joined by two other men who were dressed in black. One of those men stood apart from the others who were tying dock lines around something wrapped in a bunch of towels. Even though the men were talking softly, their voices carried across the cove and right up to Mitch and Roger.

“Hurry up guys,” said the man standing apart from the others. “We need to get this show on the road.”

“Go get that anchor from the bow,” said one of the men tying up the towels.

“We can use it as a weight.”

“That’s not enough,” said the first man. “What’s in the cabin?”

“I’ll check,” said the Deputy.

“You do it, Bob,” said the man. “Your shoes won’t track a bunch of blood into the cabin.”

“Yes Sir,” said Bob.

After a few minutes of rummaging around, Bob returned with a small gas powered generator.

“How’s this, Colonel?” asked Bob.

“Perfect,” said Troy. “Tie that to the other end of the body and let’s get underway.”

After a few more minutes, the man walked onto the Sheriff’s boat and started the motor and said, “Get over to our boat, Bob.” He pointed to the Deputy and said, “You stay there and start washing as much blood out of the cockpit as you can. Then get out of those bloody clothes, put them in a bag and tie them to the body.”

“The body?” Roger whispered to Mitch.

“Shhh,” said Mitch.

The man at the controls of the Sheriff’s boat put the motors in gear and all three boats started moving out of the cove.

“Follow me,” said Mitch. “And stay low.” The two men slowly melted back into the trees.

“That was not right,” said Roger.

Mitch nodded and said, “They’re going toward the dam. Let’s go to the other end of the island and see what happens.” Mitch started to move off, and Roger followed.

“Watch out for snakes,” said Mitch.

“Safety first,” said Roger.

After walking for about 5 minutes, the two men made it to the southwest corner of Hideout Island. The small black boat had separated from other two and was hovering in the middle of the channel leading to the dam. As the other two boats slowed, the Sheriff's Deputy, wearing only his under shorts walked up on the deck, grabbed the rope holding Jerry's body and stuffed a bag into the towels. He then stood up and looked over at the driver of his power boat. A few minutes later, the man on the Sheriff's boat waved and the deputy heaved the generator over the side. The body, wrapped in towels quickly followed.

Mitch and Roger looked at each other in surprise, and then turned back to see what happened next. The driver of the small black boat opened up the throttle. The small boat leapt out of the water and sped off around Boulder Island and disappeared into the fog. The Sheriff's boat and Jerry's sailboat followed the same path. It took a bit longer, but they, too, disappeared into the fog behind Boulder Island.

"We just saw a major crime go down," said Mitch.

"Why did they dump Jerry's body there?" said Roger.

"Because that's the deepest part of the lake," said Mitch. "I was out fishing there once and my cell phone went overboard. When I looked at the depth gauge, it said 157 feet."

"That's deep," said Roger. "Who were those guys?"

"I don't know," said Mitch. "But I'll bet Amanda has a few pictures."

"Let's get back to the marina," said Roger.

As the two men took off back across the small island, Mitch said, "Once we're in the water, we've got to keep an eye out in case one of those boats comes back."

"We can probably get back faster if we swim directly across the channel, then walk across the parking lot," said Roger.

"Not over those rocks," said Mitch. "They'll carve up our feet like steaks."

“Good point,” said Roger.

Once they arrived at the shore, Mitch and Roger grabbed the P.F.D.’s they’d stashed under a rock. As they put them on, they thought about what they’d just seen and realized they’d witnessed a major crime and a cop on the take.

“I thought things like this only happened in movies,” said Roger.

“Then today’s the day for things that only happen in movies,” said Mitch.

“What do you mean?” said Roger.

“You and Taylor buddy,” said Mitch patting his friend on the back. “Tell me stuff like that happens on any ordinary old day.”

Roger looked up and smiled, “You’re right.”

“Ready for a swim?” asked Mitch.

“Let’s go,” said Roger.

“Keep an eye out for that sheriff’s boat,” said Mitch.

“Safety first,” said Roger as the two men scanned the horizon for boats. Once they made sure the coast was clear, Mitch and Roger started down the beach and into the water.

LOOK AT THESE PICTURES

Amanda stared at her laptop screen as the digital photos downloaded from her camera. The first few shots were darker than the others because Amanda hadn’t turned up the digital gain on her new camera. Once she passed those first photos, the results were surprisingly bright. Even though the digital gain made the pictures a bit grainy, Amanda could clearly see the face of the Deputy as he walked around Jerry’s boat.

“Deputy Ranger,” said Amanda sarcastically to herself. Two pictures clearly showed the Deputy wrapping Jerry’s half naked body in the towels. The next

showed him tying dock lines around the towels. But it was the next photo that surprised Amanda.

“What’cha looking at?” said Denise as she walked into the cabin. Taylor followed close behind.

“Come round here and look at this,” said Amanda proudly.

When Taylor and Denise walked around the table and looked at the monitor, they both gave each other a surprised look. “Those are some awesome pictures,” said Taylor.

“That’s one good camera,” said Denise.

“Look at the detail,” said Taylor. “You can clearly see their faces and look there.” She pointed to the corner of the screen. “That looks like a pile of guns in the corner of the shot.”

“They sure are,” said Amanda as she looked up at Denise. “Recognize those losers?”

“Sure do,” said Denise. “That older guy comes into the pub during the afternoon, watches TV, drinks beer and talks on his cell phone.” She paused and looked at Amanda. “You know that younger guy don’t you?”

“Yep,” said Amada. “Gary almost knocked his block off when he came into the pub, walked up to the bar and pinched my ass.”

Taylor laughed, “I thought I’d left all the stupid men back in the big city.”

“No way, honey,” said Denise. “You’re in the country now and they grow ’em pretty stupid here.”

“You suppose these guys know Deputy Ranger,” said Amanda with her usual sarcastic emphasis on the name.

“Yeah, they’re all playing for the same team,” said a voice from the cabin doorway.

“Roger!” said Taylor who ran up and gave him a big hug.

“Hey there, Captain Mitch,” said Denise. “I take it you guys saw a few things on your swim.”

Amanda reached behind her and tossed a few towels at the men who were still dripping wet. “So you say the men in the black boat were pals with Deputy Ranger.”

“You like that name don’t you,” said Taylor.

“I think it’s the stupidest name for a cop I’ve ever heard,” said Amanda looking up at Taylor.

“I once knew an Officer Law,” said Gary as he walked aboard the boat. “See anything cool?”

“Sure did,” said Roger.

“Hey,” said Mitch. “Is that your new blender?”

“Leave it to Mitch to sniff out the booze,” said Gary. “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll give you all a demonstration.” He pushed by the three people squeezed in the tiny door of the boat’s cabin and started making a pitcher of margaritas.

“No free drinks!” said Amanda. “You gotta tell us what you saw out there.”

Mitch looked at Roger and said, “So where do we start?”

“Let’s see,” said Mitch. “We could talk about them dumping Jerry’s body in the deepest part of the lake or the one guy in the small black boat giving orders to the Sheriff’s Deputy.”

“I knew it,” said Amanda. “I knew that guy was dirty.”

“What did they do with Jerry’s boat?” asked Gary.

“They towed it off behind Boulder Island,” said Roger. “We lost them in the fog.”

“Did you hear them say anything?” asked Taylor.

“Sure did,” said Roger. “They called one guy from the black boat Bob.”

“They called the older guy Colonel,” said Mitch.

“You remember Bob, don’t you sweetie,” said Amanda to Gary.

“Don’t think so,” said Gary as he poured the margaritas into mugs.

“Take a look at this,” said Amanda as she spun her computer around.

“Oh yeah,” said Gary. “I remember him.”

“So do I,” said Mitch. “That was a few months ago up in the pub.” He turned to Roger and said, “It’s the closest thing we’ve ever had to a real bar fight in years.”

“Bar fight?” said Taylor as she took her margarita from Gary.

“It wouldn’t have been fair,” said Gary. “There were five of us in the pub at the time.”

“Yeah, well all those guns mean it won’t be a fair fight this time,” said Amanda. “What are we going to do?”

Taylor looked at her watch and said, “I think we should try to get some sleep then call my Aunt Nic tomorrow morning. She’ll know what to do.”

“Nothing we can do tonight,” agreed Mitch.

“So, let’s enjoy margaritas, get some sleep, then call Aunt Nic,” said Gary.

As Gary handed Mitch his margarita, he said, "Hang on a minute, Mitch." Once everyone had a drink Gary held up his glass and said, "We've got a lot ahead of us before we'll be able to properly say goodbye to Jerry."

Gary paused and the boat suddenly got very quiet. It was so quiet you could hear the tiny fan on Amanda's laptop computer. "For now, let's just raise our glasses to Captain Jerry and promise to find out why he was killed."

Gary paused again and Mitch broke the silence, "To one of our own, to Captain Jerry."

"Captain Jerry," said everyone in unison. After passing the toast around the cabin, each took a drink of their margarita.

"Good night, friends," said Roger as he and Taylor turned to leave.

"Good night," said Taylor.

"Coffee on The Pegasus at 9," called out Denise.

"See you then," said Mitch as he walked to the cabin door.

Denise followed close behind leaving Amanda and Gary alone.

Amanda went to the door and called out, "Hey you guys, let's button up our boats tonight." She paused, "No telling who's going to be walking the docks up here."

"Will do," said Roger.

"Good idea," called Mitch.

Amanda stood in the doorway watching her friends climb aboard their boats and shut the cabin doors. As she looked out over the marina, her eyes stopped at the spot where Jerry docked his boat. After a few minutes, Gary appeared behind her. She turned and said, "We're gonna catch these guys, right?"

“Sure we are,” said Gary as he put his arm around her. “Guys like these always get caught.” He paused, “Eventually.”

As Amanda and Gary stood in the doorway of their boat, the rowdiest couple at the marina silently walked inside the cabin, closed the door and quietly went to sleep.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Thank you for reading my first book.

I hope you had as much fun reading as I had writing.

Thank you to my family and friends who read along while the book was being written.

Special thanks to Admiral Spell-Check who helped with ediding, (oops) editing the numerous spelling and grammar mistakes out of the first edition.

Special thanks to Katherine, Denise, Mitch, Laura, Richard & Audrey (and their boats) for appearing in the story.

Guess what? Taylor, Roger, Amanda, Gary, Nicole & Kelly will all be back.

So will Denise, Mitch, Laura, Richard, Katherine & Audrey.

So will Bob, Lt. Dee, Tricia and Troy!

The adventures of *The Marietta* will continue in the next book, *The Bay*.

Progress reports on the next book, *The Bay* are on-line at: www.marietta-books.com.

You'll also find 'official' Marietta gear and a podcast.

You can also add your comments and suggestions.

CHEERS!

Ver: 1.2.