

Word Count -1,902

## In the Middle of the Ocean

I had no problem with her taking a bath. I encouraged it, thought maybe it would sober her up. I did have a problem with her locking the door.

“Please, open up,” I said, standing outside the door, listening to the water run.

“Go away.”

“It’s not safe for you to be alone in there. Not in your condition.”

She said I was a bigger drunk than her. I figured, as long as she was talking, she wasn’t drowning.

“I don’t need your permission to take a bath.” She’d been yelling so much that night she barely had any voice left. “You’re so controlling. I’m not like my mother. I will not let a man treat me like this.”

I went to the mini bar to fix myself a drink. On the way, I checked the digital clock on the nightstand, next to the bed. It was a little under an hour before sunrise. If I didn’t make it to bed before sunrise, I had no chance of getting any sleep.

When I returned to the bathroom, all was quiet. I held my ear to the door. I called her name and got no answer.

I put my drink down and tried not to panic as I searched for something I could use to break-in. I thought of the fire axe out in the hallway.

In the closet, I found a wire coat hanger. Growing up, I used to break into my sister's bedroom. It's simple. There's a hole in the doorknob. You insert a coat hanger and poke around. When you hit the right spot, the door unlocks.

She was asleep in the tub. The water was pouring over the side, collecting on the tile floor. I held my hand under her nose to make sure she was breathing. Then, I turned off the water and unplugged the drain.

I lifted her from under her arms. She was ice cold. As I was trying to wrap a towel around her, she woke up.

"Get your hands off me." She ran out of the bathroom.

"Slow down. You're going to slip and break your neck."

"Stop telling me what to do." She was over by the mini bar, trying to unscrew a bottle of Heineken, naked with soapsuds dripping everywhere.

"That's a pry off," I told her.

She found the bottle opener and took it out to the balcony. I waited a couple of minutes and, when I was sure she wasn't coming back, I went out after her.

She was reclined on the lounge chair, her beer propped up next to her. Her eyes were closed and her skin was stretched tight against the cold.

"You're going to freeze to death." The wind, coming off the sea, was like ice. When

I got close, I saw her lips had gone blue. "You have to come inside." I leaned in and touched her shoulder. Like a zombie, she came to life.

She waved her bottle at me, spraying beer in my face. When all the beer was gone, she threw the bottle. I ducked just in time. It shattered against the wall behind me.

She walked through the broken glass and into the cabin, slamming the sliding door shut. She tried to lock me out but she was too drunk to work the lock. After a few failed attempts, she went to the mini-bar, got another beer and settled on the couch.

I leaned over the railing and looked out into the water. On the horizon, the sun was starting to come up. Soon, we would be in Mexico. Around dinnertime, we passed Cuba. Jessica and I stood on deck, drinking rum and watching the island nation as we moved past it. It seemed like such a long time ago.

Jessica passed out on the couch, still clutching her beer. I slid the bottle out of her hand then took the comforter off the bed and laid it on top of her. I went into the shower and turned the hot water on. I stayed in there for half an hour, letting the water fall on my back. When I was done, I put on a pair of shorts and a white t-shirt and set out for the dining hall.

There was a father and son staying in the cabin next to ours. When I walked past, the son appeared in the doorway.

"Here he is, dad." He wore only a pair of swim trunks. He was tall and thin. His chest hollow, like a bird. "Come get a look at this guy," he said to his father.

I put my head down and kept walking.

“We heard you this morning,” he called after me as I was getting in the elevator.

“Does it make you feel like a big man, beating up on a woman?”

There was a woman in the elevator with me. She grabbed her daughter and held her close. I kept my eyes on the floor.

I stopped on deck to have a cigarette, then went to the breakfast buffet. I filled my plate with eggs, bacon, hash browns and pancakes. A waitress came around with a pot of coffee. I drank three cups and left the food untouched.

There were a couple of security guards eating at the table next to me. As I walked out, I gave them a nod. My brother went on a cruise with some friends from college. They drank too much and got into a fight with some frat guys from South Carolina.

On a cruise, there's no judge or jury, just a holding tank in the bowels of the ship. My brother and his friends spent two days locked up down there. He got seasick and spent the better part of forty-eight hours with his head buried in the communal toilet.

After a couple more cigarettes on deck, I walked to the back of the boat and watched the crew guide us into port.

When I booked the cruise, I signed us up for a snorkeling excursion in Mexico. The brochure had a picture of a young couple floating on top of the crystal clear ocean. The woman wore a tiny bikini that showed off her ass. Her man swam next to her, a big smile on his face.

There was a long line of people waiting to get off the ship. Once they had it docked, they opened a small footbridge and the line started pouring out. I spotted my friend and his father from the cabin next to ours.

The father was much bigger than the son. He wore a green camouflage shirt with *Semper Fi* printed across his chest. Even from up on the deck, I could tell he was made of stone.

I made a whistling sound that really carried. When they looked up, I smiled and waved. The son stuck his middle finger up at me. I flicked a cigarette butt in his direction then headed for the pool.

I found an empty lounge. I'm not sure how long I was out but, when I woke up, my skin was on fire. To cool off, I went to the bar and had two beers. Then, I went back to the dining hall. They had cleaned up after breakfast and set up a sandwich bar. Next to it, there were plastic cups filled with iced tea. I made two turkey sandwiches and grabbed a couple iced teas.

When I got back to the room, Jessica was still out. I set the sandwiches and drinks on the coffee table. I got a beer from the mini-bar and sat on the edge of the bed and drank it.

When I was finished, I crushed the can and threw it against the wall. Then I moved to the foot of the couch. I lifted Jessica's legs and put them in my lap. There was a shard of glass in the bottom of her foot. As I pulled it out, she woke up.

The comforter had fallen to the floor. She wasn't wearing any clothes. She grabbed me from around the neck and pulled me on top of her, kissing me deeply.

Before we left, Jessica tried to back out of the trip. She made up all kinds of excuses. She told me she was too busy at work. She told me she didn't want to leave the dog for so long.

The thing about a cruise ship, you can't just get up and leave. If things turn bad, you're stuck, floating in the middle of the ocean together.

Most times, afterwards, I would lay with Jessica. But, that afternoon, I went right to the bathroom to clean myself with a wet towel. When I came out, Jessica had the comforter wrapped around her shoulders and she was eating one of the turkey sandwiches.

"You should try this tea," she said. "It's good. I feel like shit. I don't remember a thing about last night. I hope I wasn't too terrible."

I walked over to the mini-bar and got the last beer. I popped it open and held my head back, finishing it in one, long sip.

"I don't know how you could possibly drink," she said. "I don't think I'll ever take another drink again." I put on my shorts and t-shirt. "Where are you going?"

I walked out into the hallway and knocked on the cabin next door. The son answered. He was wearing the same swim trunks with a bright yellow t-shirt. He started to say something but, before he could get it out, I sunk my fist deep into his stomach. He was so thin I bet you could've seen my knuckles coming out the other side.

For such a big guy, his old man had some speed. I tried to duck but he was just too damn fast.

When I came to, I was sitting in the hallway, propped up against the wall. My hands were bound behind me with zip chord and I was surrounded by half a dozen men wearing uniforms and carrying batons.

Jessica was standing in the doorway. She still had the comforter wrapped around her. She didn't say anything. She just watched as the security team pulled me to my feet. My head felt like it had been knocked out of place. Everything out of my left eye was fuzzy.

They drug me down the hall and put me in the elevator. One of them pulled out a key, which granted us access to the bottom most level. Before the doors closed, I poked my head out. Jessica was still standing there. I mouthed a goodbye to her. She kissed her hand then blew it my way.

Once the elevator door closed, the security guards began talking in a foreign language. They didn't seem upset with me. I guess, for them, it was just another day at the office. I couldn't tell what nationality they were. Their skin was light brown and, when they spoke, it sounded like Bob Marley.

The one who seemed to be in charge put his hand on my shoulder and asked me if I wanted to know where they were taking me. I pretended like I didn't hear him. I stood, facing forward. I wasn't worried. I figured, wherever they were taking me, how bad could

it be?

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