

As Uta looked out over the water, clouds were gathering slowly from the north. Chesapeake Bay darkened.

“Wow!” she yelled. A jagged ribbon of gold-silver streaked from the clouds into the water.

Loud, scattered pings began peppering the roof and balcony.

“Must be hail.” I moved to the window next to her and looked up toward the dark sky.

“If this foretells next week you’re in for rough sailing,” she said.

“If this continues into next week I doubt any of us will go out,” I extended.

“But haven’t you already paid for the charter and there’s no refund?”

“Yeah. I guess we’ll go and sit on the boats and hope the weather clears. Won’t that be fun?”

I said with a sardonic tenor.

A loud crack punctuated my remark.

“Maybe it’ll clear. Let’s check the forecast.” Uta hoped for me.

The weather did clear but not until the day after eighteen North Carolina sailors drove through pouring rain to gather at Solomons Island about a quarter of the way down the western side of the Chesapeake Bay. Through the heavy rain we stowed food enough for six days on four Jeanneaus. The Jeanneau is a beautiful, sleek keelboat first built by Henri Jeanneau in his shipyard in France in 1957. The first boat he built of this line won him his first race. This

inspired him to evolve his craft into the boats we chartered for our cruise. The boats have two steering wheels and two rudders, handy for changing helmsmen and maneuvering through obstacles in the water, like the numerous crab pots which populate the Bay.

We chartered the boats from Solomon Sails, owned and managed by Jeff Spears. Jeff was a stout physical man of forty-some years with a sparse blonde crewcut . He was friendly and courteous, but his rapid speech and energetic movements projected undertones of “don’t mess with me” and “get it right”. He moved from one boat to another with such efficiency I was glad I wasn’t responsible for the mandatory safety and inventory checks he demanded.

We were all members of The Community Sailing Club from which four captains were chosen. Three boats, Freandease, Windhoven, and Allora each held a captain and four crew members. I was assigned to help crew the fourth boat, Serenity, which had only three crew and Tyler March, the captain. I knew only a couple of the members who were on the other boats. The rest were complete strangers to me, including everyone on Serenity.

We awakened the morning of our valediction to a surprisingly clear day. The sky was a deep blue with a few wisps of white fluff floating from southwest. The rippling water reflected the many rows of boats floating in their slips throughout the large marina. I planned to be the first up, because I had understood from Tyler that we might get going before we eat breakfast; that we might “grab something while we we’re on our way”. I wanted to be careful regarding my diet due to diabetes, so I knew I had to get a good breakfast in me before we set sail. I didn’t want to unbalance my blood sugar.

Since Tyler declared, “The first up makes the coffee”, every morning I boiled water the on the tiny gimbaled stove, which reminded me of the efficient little portable stove Uta and I used for

camping. Lighting it was a bit of a learning curve. One had to push the knob in, turn it counterclockwise while pushing in a red button. A sparking sound ensued for a few seconds until the flames appeared. The timing of the release of the knob was important because if you released too soon the flame would go out. The knobs were arranged in such a way that one had to guess which one went to which of the two eyes or to the oven. My first guess lit the oven. But I got the hang of it after several morning brews.

Captain March was a confident, experienced and knowledgeable sailor. At the helm, he decided without hesitation who would perform what duty as we eased out of the slip onto the narrow fairway. We could easily be blown by the wind into boats on the other side.

“Rick, use the bow line with a waterman’s turn around the forward piling.”

“Saul, you release the stern line as we move away.”

“Carlos, watch the piling and push the boat away if we get near it.”

He put the motor in gear and slowly eased us out into the fairway. Rick performed a perfect turn. Saul threw the stern line onto the deck and I prevented us from bumping the piling. We were perfectly centered in the middle of the fairway. Tyler increased the speed and we motored our way through the winding course out into the expanding blue-green waters.

With furling rigs for both the jib and mainsail, hoisting was easy.

“Carlos unfurl the main.”

“Rick keep the sheet tight at the other end.”

As the main unfurled slowly, Serenity heeled slightly. We performed the same for the jib. Tyler cut the motor and with twelve knot winds we were doing seven knots toward the southwest, heeling a forty degree angle.

Tyler's muscled torso covered a six-foot frame. Dark grey eyes flashed rapidly as he barked orders, which were interspersed with "thank you" and "good job". He handed off the helm to Saul, then phased into a whirlwind of activity, moving around the boat with ease, adjusting the jib, moving the traveler three inches to the right and tightening the outhaul. He looked down the boom noting the curve of the foot of the mainsail, then readjusted the outhaul. With these adjustments, the boat quickened and heeled even more.

"That's should do it." He had a satisfied smile. "Yah Hooo!", he yelled above the noise of the wind whizzing past our ears.

I watched the docks slowly fade into the distance. The sun was now full above the marina. Winhoven was trailing us. Freandease had embarked ahead of us very early and was nowhere in sight. Allora was just a spec behind Windhoven. There were a couple of other sailboats to our portside and a small square image could be seen far to the South.

Tyler explained. "It's a cargo ship. We have to watch it. It seems to be slow but it's moving faster than you think. It'll stay in the channel. We have to let its captain know what we'll do. So as we get closer we have to decide. Go in front of it or drop off and go below the stern. Technically we have right of way because sailboats have right of way over motorboats, but these big ships are the boss in these waters."

Saul was still at the helm. He was a large man of about forty-five. He had bushy black hair and beard, dark eyes and a small scar underneath his right eye. When he talked, his steady gaze dominated, but his voice was soft with a British accent.

“What’s our course, Captain?” he yelled to Tyler who was looking at a navigational chart of the Bay.

“One hundred thirty degrees southwest. We’ll tack for about four miles, then come about and head for St. Mary’s.”

But we never made it to St. Mary’s.

The cargo ship grew into a large bulk as we got closer. Saul decided we should cross ahead of the ship’s bow. The wind was strong and steady at about fifteen knots so it was a reasonable call. As we moved swiftly eastward and as our beam was exactly perpendicular to it, the big ship morphed into a broad wall with a white cap on its top. I was sitting high on the port railing. Rick was at the starboard wheel and Tyler was adjusting the outhaul.

Suddenly, I felt a dull thud and saw the helm jerked so hard Saul couldn’t control it. “Oh shit!” he yelled as he tried to pull himself up from the deck. The entire boat was jolted so hard I was tossed backward over port side.

“Man over board!” Tyler yelled as he fell to the cockpit deck. I was swiftly pulled underneath the boat, even with my self-inflating lifejacket. I emerged at the stern and saw Serenity moving away from me. Three figures were scrambling around in the cockpit, apparently trying to adjust the sails. The ship blew its horn as if someone might do something about the man and the large tree trunk floating beside him. I grabbed onto the tree trunk and held tight as the ship sucked us against its towering port hull. Wood and I bounced against the behemoth, pushed away, then

sucked in again. It felt like this repeated a hundred times. I was grateful for the stubs where branches had broken off the trunk. I could hold tight. Also, that I had remembered to put on my sailing gloves. Finally my salvaging friend, the tree trunk, and I were swept into the wake behind the ship. As we floated past the stern, I looked high up and saw sailors looking down at us. Exhausted, I straddled the log and positioned myself flat on my stomach.

I don't know how long I drifted. I must have fallen asleep, woken by something brushing against my shoulder. It was the branches of small bushes hanging from a bank. I had drifted into a shoal with bushes and trees surrounding me. I figured it must be Tangier Island on the eastern side of the Bay. I was able to stand in the clear shallow water. Fish nibbled at my toes. I pulled myself up the muddy bank between the leafy branches and onto solid ground. I sat, then lay flat on my back from exhaustion. The earth moved back and forth like the waves of the sea. I sobbed and laughed and sobbed and laughed for a long time.

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I finally stood and looked out over the fields of scrub brush toward a forest of evergreen trees aflame with the sun setting behind it. A chill crept around my bare arms and legs. Wearing only shorts, a t-shirt, and my deck shoes, I knew I had to find some shelter for the night. The sandy soil was still warm as I trudged through it toward the forest, closer now.

Something dark moved through the bushes ahead of me. It seemed to be trying to elude my vision. Maybe my imagination but taking no chances, I edged slowly around a large shrub with brilliant red berries. As I crept around, my nose and the nose of a large black animal which I

could not identify, met, creating terror, possibly in both of us. His fierce face flared sharp yellowish teeth and he emitted a loud strange wail. Keeping my wits, I eased back around the berry bush out of the monster's sight, then ran as fast as I could, falling once in the porous sand hitting my head on a rock. Blood trickled into my right eye and down my face as I scrambled again upright. I was gratefully surprised at the beast's lack of interest in me. I continued on into the dark forest, tall trees hovering above me like warning sentinels.

A dim light appeared ahead. With my last bit of strength, I approached a small cottage. Smoke curled upward from the tiny chimney. Rough-hewn timbers aged to a rustic grey-brown supported a dark roof covered with needles fallen for many years from an enormous tree which had grown close to the house and protruded around a back corner. I hauled my cold weary legs up the sunken wooden stairs onto the little porch which at one point had been covered with red paint but was now faded to strips of dull red and brown. I knocked weakly on the weathered wooden door noting the carvings of strange-looking birds flying above the tiny windows across the top of the door. I thought I heard a voice - "Come in" - but I wasn't sure. I knocked again. Harder this time. The voice was louder, "Come in!". I had to turn the large brass doorknob very hard to get the door open.

I wasn't sure if my dreamlike state was caused by my low blood sugar or the atmosphere of the small living room, a welcome sight which smelled of mold, smoke and strong spices. A weathered man with a white beard, looking ancient, sat beside an arched fireplace made of river stones. A painting of familiar mountain terrain with a high waterfall hung over the active fire. Blue and orange flames danced atop small round logs held in an iron grate with protruding rods and two small birds of the same variety as carved on the front door, mounted atop. A small brass statue of the same was the only objet d'art on the mantel made of a half-log. The old man smiled

an enigmatic smile then gestured for me to sit on a large brown wingback chair, twin to his, across from him. The fireplace between us emitted an orange glow, covering me in warmth. I sat, exhausted, grateful. He smiled with knowing, dark eyes.

"I've been expecting you. Well, not you, but someone like you," he said with a gravelly voice. "I'm glad you're here. I suppose you're hungry."

"Yes. Yes, I'm very hungry and I know my blood sugar is near it lowest glyceic state. I'll pass out soon if I don't stabilize. You see I'm diabetic."

The ole man rang a brass bell etched with the enigmatic bird, which was sitting on the little wooden table at his side. A tall thin woman with long, grey hair, dressed in a dark red velvet dress came through a door behind the old man.

"What is it dear? I heard the bell." She stared at me as she spoke.

"This poor man has a blood sugar problem and he is very hungry. Would you please find something to help him stabilize his glucose?"

"Of course, dear. I know just the remedy for unstable glucose." She continued to stare at me, into me, through me. Her grey eyes were too big for her small, thin wrinkled face. She turned swiftly and seemed to float back through the door from which she had come. Before I could comprehend what was happening she returned with a tray carrying a steaming bowl of white soup and course dark bread. She also carried some long pants and a white cable knit sweater, the kind Irish fishermen wear to ward of the cold seas. She placed the clothes on the arm of my chair and set the tray on my lap. Her grey eyes now met mine. They were kind, warm and nourishing, directing me to eat the offering.



"Thank you. You're very kind," I murmured a weak appreciation. She smiled and floated back through the door behind the old man. He continued his equanimity, glancing into the fire, then back to meet my eyes. Back and forth slowly.

The soup tasted like a combination of fish and milk plus a completely new taste I did not know. There were bits of a crunchy substance. It was very pleasing and I immediately began to regain strength. The bread was chewy and delicious. I stopped his glances with, "How can I ever repay your kindness?"

He looked directly into my eyes, penetrating into my very being, "You already have."

"How could I have done that? I've just met you."

"You are not who you think you are my son." He had a wise sparkle.

"Please explain. I don't understand."

"It's impossible for me to explain completely, but I will try." His voice became clear now. "You are descended from people who rescued my people long ago. Your historians called your civilization Atlantis. At one time we had evolved into a thriving planet just like the people of Atlantis. Everyone owned a machine which moved through the air at lightening speed. We could travel anywhere on this planet in just a few minutes. We had advanced agriculture with huge agrafarms and enhanced growth of domesticated animals which allowed everyone not only freedom from hunger but also foods and medicine which promoted longevity. We built large structures which reached enormous heights.

But, all this was our undoing. We were being extinguished by our own waste. The machines we built emitted carbon dioxide. The factories which made the products for the buildings emitted

other carbons into our air, and nuclear waste, which we buried in large quantities around the planet, leached throughout our soil. The nuclear waste and nitrogen used to enhance the agri-farms spoiled our waterways and wetlands. The air we breathed and the soil we cultivated became our poison. The water we drank caused huge boils like smallpox. The plants and animals we used for food dwindled to micro-farms. The wild animals disappeared. We were dying a dystopian nightmare.

Then, thousands of years ago a large airship came from space. It was your people who emerged from those ships of Grace. A few at first, then more and more of you came. You brought with you an awareness of how everything is connected. You taught us important lessons such as the one from the man you called Lorenz - that butterflies who flap their tiny wings are a part of a system which maintains balance and cohesion. You also brought new technologies. The use of magnetic fields and gravity waves, natural processes which maintained harmony with the universe gradually helped us to restore our dying planet."

The old man slowly stood and went over to a book case which covered the wall across from the fireplace. He picked up a black box. He carefully placed it on the table beside me.

"This is the Grace that allowed us to continue our evolution. This small box provides enough energy to support three million people. These boxes are distributed throughout our planet. It was your people who brought it to us."

"But where am I." I asked in complete innocence. "Am I not on the island of Tangiers?"

"Oh, no my son you are on Europa, Jupiter's smallest moon."

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"Carlos. Carlos. Wake up Carlos." Saul's deep voice penetrated my sleep. His large strong hands were shaking me. I could barely see in the dim light of dusk, but so relieved to see him, I threw my arms around him and hugged him. He pulled me to standing. I was shaking with cold, wearing only my shorts, a t-shirt and my deck shoes. I was also shaking from a collapse of energy.

"We've been looking all over for you."

"Thank God you found me! Are Tyler and Rick OK. Did Serenity manage to weather the blow from the tree?"

"They're fine. They're scouring for you along the island's edge. Worried sick about you, but fine. The log smashed a large hole on our starboard side, but it's high so she can still sail. Takes on water but we have a bailing system that seems to work. She's anchored just south of here in another cove. Lucky for you where you drifted, into this little cove here."

I felt very dizzy.

"I know I'm very lucky, but Saul I'm so weak from my low blood sugar I feel like I'll pass out any minute."

"Let's get you to the boat. There's plenty of food and water there." He put a large strong arm underneath mine, allowing me the support I needed. We hobbled through the scrub brush along the edge of the island for what seemed like an eternity, finally reaching the cove where, in the dark, I saw Serenity's white hull bobbing in the black water. The dinghy was tied to a small

stump at the shore. White ripples reflecting the moonlight bounced it gently. Saul let me down on the ground, then pulled the dinghy close to the bank and I was able to roll into it. He stepped into the back and rowed us to Serenity.

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I was eating a bowl of canned peaches, when I heard. "Hey over there can y'all see us. Is Carlos there?"

"Yeah. He's here. He's struggling with his endocrine system, but I think he'll be fine." Saul had gone up on deck.

I joined him and yelled, "I think I'll live". "Y'all OK?"

"We're fine. Just need a dinghy."

"Sure. I'll be right over. Don't go anywhere."

"Oh really. We thought we'd go out to dinner," was Rick's sardonic reply. It broke the tension. We all laughed heartily, finally relaxed, relieved and I was warm now, in my favorite sweater and my most comfortable jeans.

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A week later the sailing club held a reunion of those members who had been on the Chesapeake cruise. All four of the Serenity crew attended and sat around a small table on the deck overlooking Lake Norman.

"We just couldn't leave and not look for you Carlos. Rick was especially adamant that we search the island perchance you had drifted there," Tyler drew large gulp from his IPA.

"I don't know how I will ever repay you guys. I probably wouldn't be here now if it weren't for you. I would have starved to death on Algiers Island.

"You could leave us money in your will," Rick teased.

"Or you could give us money now." Tyler held out his hand, grinning and gesturing as if expecting me to give him money.

"Oh, I know. You could be our slave the rest of your life, Carlos," Saul ribbed.

"Believe me guys. I'd give all of that if I could." I said with a serious tone. All three became a blur through flooded eyes.

After a long pause:

"My appreciation for you guys reminds me of a dream I've been haunted by since that experience, a dream I had while lying on that island, just before you found me, Saul. It was a prophetic dream about how civilizations, worlds even, destroy themselves with their own waste. It was a dream about mankind's self-destructive behavior in the name of progress. And it was a dream about Grace. About how some people are rescued by the Grace of others. I was saved by the Grace of a large log. You guys rescued me via your own goodness and Grace. In the dream I

was rescued by the Grace of an old man and an old woman who were grateful for the Grace of being rescued by the people of Atlantis.

And, there's another part of the dream which keeps recurring. It's the image of a strange looking bird which appeared everywhere around the little cottage where the old man and woman lived. The images were carved on the front door and two of them were on the fire grate. Another was on the mantel and tiny ones were etched into a little bell the old man rang. It was like no bird I've ever seen. It had very large wings, too big for its small body. Its eyes bulged and its mouth was open wide, like it wanted food or something to grow its tiny body. Every time I imagine this image now I feel compelled to give, to give something to someone, or to something. So, yeah, I want to give you all I can. And I want to give all I can to our world which is headed toward destruction.

"Oh, come on, Carlos. Don't be so moribund," Tyler chided. I don't believe all the crap about global warming and our inevitable destruction.

"Well, it might be true but I have hope we will be able to reverse it," Rick said.

"I've read it's too late. Maybe the earth will survive but not us humans, unless we receive some kind of Grace," Saul smiled at me with a warm understanding.

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As I drove home in the darkness a brownish yellow bird flew down and sat on the front of my car, like a figurehead on a ship. It was the bird I had seen in my dream. It had large wings, too

big for its tiny body, bulging eyes and its mouth was wide. It looked back at me as if trying to make contact, then flew into a Hemlock tree beside the road. It landed on a branch extending over an old woman sitting on a bench. She was tall, very thin with large grey eyes, long grey hair and she wore a dark red velvet dress. I came to an abrupt halt, got out of the car and went over to the old woman. She looked at me with those big eyes - determined, gentle.

"Your president must learn about Grace. I'm here to teach him. I have this for him." The old woman presented a small black box.





