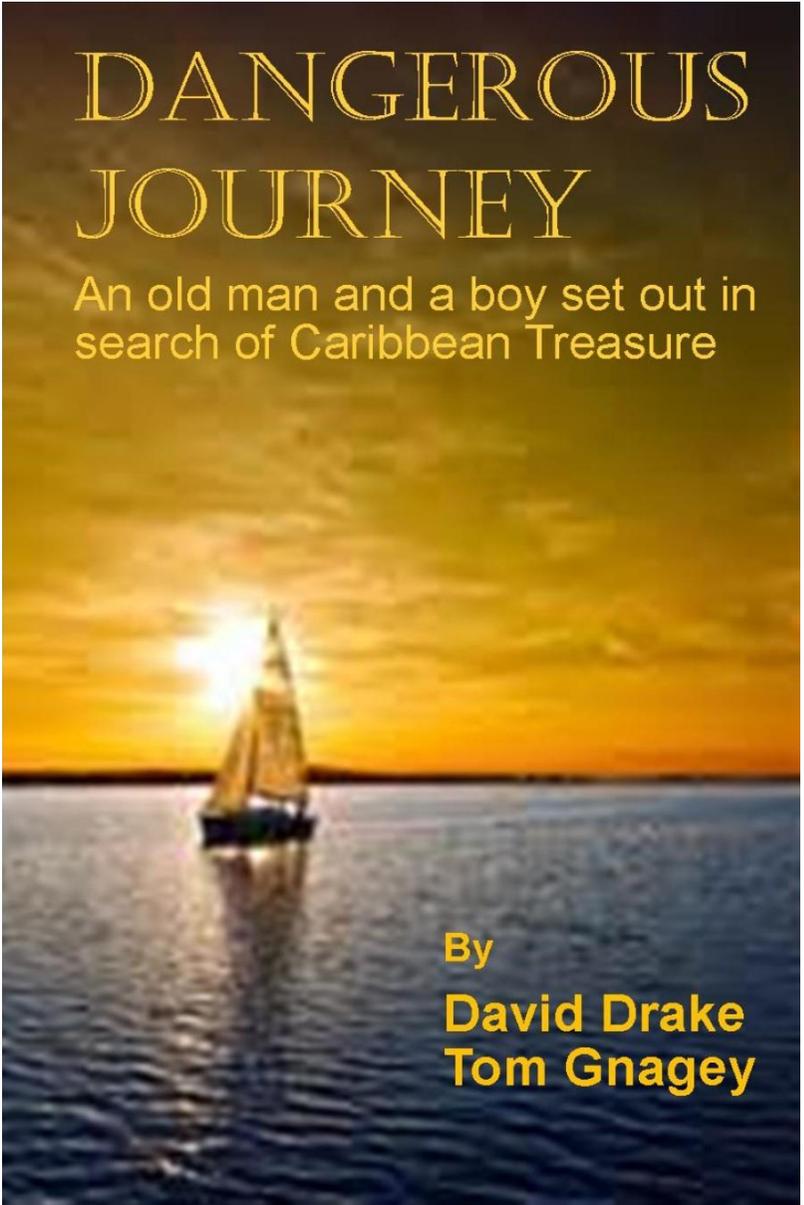


DANGEROUS JOURNEY

An old man and a boy set out in
search of Caribbean Treasure



By
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Dangerous Journey

**An adventure story for nine to fifteen year olds
(and adults who are still kids at heart.)**

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[To the reader. There may be a few words in this story
that you have not yet learned,
so the author put a list with their definitions
at the end for your quick reference.]

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CHAPTER ONE

By any measure it was a strange looking sailboat. The *Glada Tider* was a reflection of its builder in every respect. It had taken the old gentleman a full year to design and build with his own hands. The vessel was made for comfort, stability and dependability, not resale value, speed or looks. It was designed for ease of handling regardless of the condition of the sea below or the weather above. Twenty seven feet four inches from stem to stern (an unconventional length), it boasted two, triangular sails – a large main sail and a smaller head sail. There was a low power inboard motor for docking and emergencies, a small weather-secure cabin up front below deck, and it was wider by nearly a third than most boats of that sort.

The *Glada Tider* was the old man's home and had been since he retreated from the well-monied life six years earlier. Once a month he stopped for a few days at *Ramrod Key*, one of the smaller Florida Keys near the southernmost end of the famously expensive Highway Number One that connected the islands so tourists could visit and leave behind a substantial portion of their yearly earnings. It was there he received his mail, put in supplies, and trod solid land just long enough to reassure him it was still there. He also used it as a refuge as needed during the Fall storm season in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, the seas to the south of the United States, on which he joyfully spent the majority of his days.

Jonas – Jonas Horn – had become a hermit. He was not an antisocial or unpleasant type, just a happy-to-be-alone-at-last, sort of hermit. He always smiled and waved and had a word or two of pleasant, if meaningless, conversation when he passed close to other crafts. He always sailed alone. Well, usually, but that gets ahead of the story.

It was the first day of December. Hurricane season was over so he felt safe again venturing a good distance away from port.

"South sounds good," he announced out loud, as he stood on the dock, hands on his hips while he looked the sky around 360 degrees.

Jonas often talked to himself. He was of the opinion that the most meaningful conversations of his life were those he had held with himself.

"For some time I've wanted to return to the outer Bahamas

Islands. I've heard there are magnificent Christmas Eve services at the two churches on Aklins Island. Let's start in that direction, at least. The course will be East South East."

He had turned as if speaking to his boat.

It had not really been a spur of the moment decision. He had been mulling it over for several days. In fact, he had been spurred on by a conversation he'd had with a waiter several nights before. The young man had emigrated to the Keys from Aklins Island.

"Those two churches been goin' at each other for decades," he said. "Each one tries ta out do the other – Anglican vs Catholic you know. Probably sinful if ya take time ta think it through – it bein' about Christmas and all – but mostly its just really funny – hilarious how serious they get about it."

That morning, Jonas had been up with the sun, which was his custom. He checked the rigging and the water, propane, and gasoline tanks. Satisfied, he hauled in the ropes that had bound him to the dock for the past several days. He had purchased new rain gear and several canvas tarps for the trip since his course held the likelihood of assorted, short, intense rain showers. He had finally replaced the long broken, hand operated, bilge pump that he used to help rid the craft of the excess water during storms.

Ship shape, as they say," he said at last with a deliberate nod, looking things over one final time. Jonas was both cautious and carefree if that could be so, and since he was, it certainly could be so.

He raised the sails into the gentle but steady westerly breeze, adjusted them to his liking, and was soon safely free of the dock and other boats. There were times when he enjoyed just drifting with the craft wherever the seas or winds would take him, but other times, when there was more purpose to his adventure, he enjoyed using his well practiced skills and cunning to fight the currents or trick the winds to move the *Tider* toward the ends he sought. It was one of those latter times.

Strong, warm, currents flowed north along the eastern coast of the United States. He had to cross those as he headed southeast. Gradually, the currents would shift and come at him from the east and southeast. The breeze was with him that morning making the chore less of a challenge. He wasn't sure he liked that. After all, sailing without a challenge was, well, just sailing.

"Wind versus the sea," he said, the spirit of the contest

clearly invigorating him.

Actually, of course, it was the *Glada Tider* and the old man against both forces of nature. It was the stuff from which his happy times were made. He set the boat on course and locked the large, mahogany, wheel in place with a looped length of rope. Jonas enjoyed looking out across the water into forever, as he characterized it. It provided an uncommon opportunity to contemplate the fascinating mysteries of the universe.

The morning wore on. Eventually, the sun climbed to a point directly overhead. That signaled time for the mid-day meal.

“A spam sandwich and milk.”

He disappeared down into the cabin.

It was a single room and generally square – the width of the somewhat abruptly pointed bow (front) and ten feet front to rear. Five steps down from the main deck allowed entry into the partially sunken area. Although the height had not been designed for a basketball player, the old man's six foot frame fit with an inch or so to spare. Fold-up bunks clung to the outer walls on each side just inside the entry. The kitchen and bathroom fixtures were in the point up front and pretended no privacy. The room boasted a sizable propane powered refrigerator/freezer and a two burner hot plate – gas. The large, rectangular, drinking water tank hung from the ceiling over one bunk. The custom made, oversized propane tank occupied a similar position over the other one. In the center was a desk, of sorts, which functioned as a table, kitchen counter, and writing surface. To the head of the bunk on the left side was a small recliner. Opposite it on the other outer wall was the radio center – ship-to-shore, Sirius, GPS, CD/DVD player, and a 20 inch flat screen. Electricity was provided by a bank of batteries below deck, which were kept charged by a generator powered by a tube-style windmill atop the mast or, in the absence of sufficient wind, a back-up, gasoline motor. The gas tank was at the rear of the boat beneath deck where there was also additional storage space.

He had soon prepared the sandwich and poured the milk. He returned to the deck and seated himself in one of the two comfortably designed, well-padded, swivel chairs close to the rear. His doctor had cautioned him against eating canned meat – the over the top salt content – but fortunately, there was no doctor on board to hassle him. He convinced himself that the goodness of the skim milk balanced it out in some magical manner. Jonas lived his life the way

he wanted to, and assumed his style met the reasonable requirements of the valid and useful laws of the universe.

He closed his eyes for a moment to drink in the warmth of the sun and appreciate the perfectly orchestrated counterbalance of the cool breeze. His reverie was interrupted. There was an odd, out of place, noise behind him on the deck. Not even the stray rat that sometimes boarded when the boat was docked, *sneezed*. What was up? The disturbance had come from beneath the pile of tarps in disarray at the rear of the deck. Something within the pile moved.

“If that's a rat I might just as well surrender,” he said out loud. “It would have to be the biggest rat I've ever encountered.”

He turned his body in the chair so he could contemplate the event head on. He was curious and amused – his typical reactions to things that tended to scare the begeebers out of most folks. He had his suspicion

“Hey, rat, or whatever, there under the canvas. I have food if you're hungry.”

He waited. One corner of the canvas raised. The vicious varmint showed itself – well at least the ten or eleven year old head of the handsome young varmint showed its self. It smiled, spoke and waved in a tentative, single, pass.

“Hi?”

It had definitely been sheepishly offered as a question.

“Hi, yourself, son. I am interested in hearing more.”

“More?”

Again, a question.

The boy moved the canvas back and just sat there eying Jonas, perhaps fearfully – certainly not comfortably.

“Were you hatched under that canvas or is there some other explanation for how you have come to be there?”

The lad smiled faintly and snorted a single chuckle. Still, he remained silent and made no move to stand.

Jonas offered half his sandwich in the lad's direction. The boy reached for it with some caution. There was no hesitation about eating it. Several bites into the process he looked up and nodded.

“Gracias – er . . . thanks.”

The 'what' had become clear – a Latino boy, too long away from food, running from or to something. The 'why' and the 'how' it had come about were not so clear. Jonas was patient. Jonas was always patient.

“I have another chair there,” he said pointing. “You might find it more comfortable.”

The boy's brow furrowed. It had apparently not been the response he was expecting.

“I'm Jonas. I suppose you figured out this is my boat.”

The boy nodded. He got to his feet and took a seat well forward in the chair. The sandwich was gone.

“Milk?”

Jonas offered the glass.

“I haven't touched it, yet. It's skim, but I promise it came from a cow.”

The boy reached out and took it, chugging it in one continuous operation. He handed the glass back and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Carlos,” he said settling back a bit and looking around.

“I'm Jonas *Horn*.”

“I'm just Carlos. Never saw a boat like this before.”

“That's probably because I built it. It's a one of a kind. Made to suit my needs and nobody else's.”

“A clunker, I'd say.”

“A clunker?”

“Yeah. Too wide, snub nosed. Never win a race.”

“I never intend to race. I'm more the slow and steady type.”

Carlos nodded that back and forth nod indicating he heard the words but hadn't yet passed judgment on their meaning.

“Running *to* or running *from*?” Jonas asked working on his part of the sandwich.

It earned a direct, in the eyes, response.

“Both.”

It was the first time Jonas got a good look at the lad's face. Well tanned, presumably by mother nature, black, unkempt, wavy hair, dark eyes, sunken cheeks. He may have had a bath as a baby but not recently.

“So, you going to tell me your story?” Jonas asked.

“Story?”

Again a question. There seemed to be a pattern of rolling things back on his inquisitor. Not a newly acquired trait, Jonas assumed. It was most likely one that offered some sort of survival value.

“Where you from? Parents? How you have come to be

here?" Jonas answered.

"You talk high class. You go to high school?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact I did. In what grade are you?"

"High class talk puts words in the wrong place. You shoulda said, 'What grade are you in.'"

"Okay, then. What grade are you in, Carlos?"

"Ain't been in school in a while."

"A while?"

Jonas thought he'd try the boy's strategy.

Carlos understood and smiled – the first all out, pretty white teeth showing, smile of the relationship.

"Your boat's gotta dumb name. Seen it painted on the side. *Glada Tiden*? What crazy name is that. Ain't English. Ain't Spanish. Ain't any language I ever heard of."

"It is Swedish. It means Happy Times."

"Why Swedish?"

"My grandparents came from Sweden. My names – *Jonas and Horn* – are both Swedish, like yours, *Carlos Somebody*, is Spanish or Portuguese, perhaps."

Carlos nodded as if to say, considering the explanation, he'd allow the boat name and stop putting it down. He sat back further in the chair relaxing just a bit.

Jonas spoke.

"I've answered *your* questions. How about you answering *mine*?"

"Don't got no mom or dad – just abuelito – Gramps. Don't got no last name. Don't trust you enough to say why I'm here, but thanks, by the way – the food and bein' nice to me."

"You're welcome. I always try to be nice to people."

"Everything about you is extraño – weird – you know? This weird shaped boat, your high class English, feedin' strangers, bein' nice to people. Really weird!"

"Sorry your life has led you to expect different."

"Not sure what that means if it's important."

"Probably not, at this point. I do have a decision to make, you know."

"To toss me overboard?"

He tensed and gripped the arms of the chair suggesting it had not been meant as humorous.

"No. I'd never do that. I invested a sandwich and milk in

you. At least I need to get that back in work first, don't you think?"

Carlos nodded, all quite seriously. His glance flitted about the deck.

"I can fold the canvas back like it should be. I worked on boats before. I can lay the ropes in coils. I can scrub the deck."

"Those canvases never were folded properly. Just bought them and sort of tossed them in from the dock. Let's fold them together, okay?"

"Okay?"

His response reeked of mistrust.

Jonas set the glass on the deck and stood. He pulled back his chair to make room for the activity. Carlos followed suit with his. It was clear the lad knew what he was doing. In no time all three tarps were neatly folded and laid against the back rail.

"Got bungie straps?" Carlos asked. "They need to be tied down or they'll soon be lost overboard."

Jonas pointed to a compartment door in the floor and Carlos soon had things taken care of.

"So, how much is that?" he asked.

"How much what?" the old man asked in return.

"How much – a sandwich? Half a sandwich? How much?"

Jonas smiled. "I'll call it even, how's that?"

"Dadivoso! That's like very generous of you. You speak Spanish, by the way?"

"Muy mal (very badly), I'm afraid."

Carlos shrugged. He could see his work was cut out for him.

"Can you tell me about your Gramps?"

Jonas reset his chair and sat down. Carlos did the same, moving his a bit closer than it had been before.

"He's old and sick and very – de maniático."

Carlos held up his hands as if asking for help with the English.

"Cranky?"

"Si. Cranky."

It had clearly been a test, one Jonas had not seen coming. He wondered if he had passed or failed. Passed, he supposed if knowing Spanish was a good thing. Failed, if having feigned minimal knowledge of the language was what counted.

"Since we're gonna be together a while I can help you with your Spanish and you can teach me some more Swinkish."

“That's Swedish.”

Carlos nodded, clearly not bothered by the correction.

“You travel light,” Jonas noted.

“What do you mean?”

“Just shorts. No shirt. No shoes. Just shorts.”

“It's what I have.”

“And probably all you need out here, right?”

“Right.”

Carlos looked Jonas over.

“I've been thinking about your pale skin. You should put on a shirt and get a big straw hat or you'll soon be burned to a crisp.”

“Thanks for the reminder. I usually do both of those things at noon. I guess something came up that distracted me from my usual routine.”

They exchanged a grin. Jonas stood and moved toward the cabin. Carlos remained in his chair. The old man reappeared shortly more properly attired. Carlos nodded his approval.

“Long sleeves would probably be better,” the boy added.

“Probably. I don't have a shirt your size but you're welcome to what I have if you want one.”

“With this beautiful bronze skin, I don't need nothin'. Mother nature already fixed me up.”

Jonas nodded as he returned to his chair.

“More about your Gramps.”

“I've always lived with him. It's only one room behind his shop, but it's always worked good for us. He makes belts.”

He stood up and pointed to the one cinched tightly around his waist. Jonas had thought it odd for the boy to be wearing a belt with an elastic waist band in his shorts. He suddenly understood. Carlos moved closer to show it off. He was clearly proud of it.

“He does good work, no?”

Jonas gave it more than a cursory examination.

“Yes, he certainly does. Very nice.”

“I help him some. He is teaching me.”

“You and he live on Ramrod Key?”

Jonas intended that to be a set up. Ramrod was a retirement center which sported relatively expensive homes.

“Not ready to say where I live.”

It had been a better response than an outright lie.

“How about why you showed up under my tarps, then?”

“Nope.”

“You in some kind of trouble?”

“Hard to say.”

Jonas laughed.

Carlos frowned.

“What?”

“You intrigue me, lad.”

“Intrigue?”

“You fascinate me, interest me, you have quickly become someone about whom I want to know more.”

Carlos rolled his eyes – it was in response to that 'high class' English, again.

“I guess you could say that you fascinate me, too, then,” Carlos said. “Does that make us even?”

Again, Jonas chuckled.

“I suppose it does except I will be happy to answer *any* of *your* questions.”

Carlos squirmed. The exchange hadn't turned out the way the boy had intended – and the boy was clearly used to making things go his way.

///

CHAPTER TWO

“Back to that big decision, I mentioned,” Jonas said.

“The one *not* to throw me overboard?”

“Yes. That one. Unless you can give me good reason not to, I will need to turn around and take you back to Ramrod.”

“That's probably not a good idea – for neither of us, old man.”

“Perhaps you can begin by explaining that.”

Carlos stood and walked to the rail at the back of the boat. He leaned on it and looked back across the water toward the mainland.

“I could just lie to you, ya know.”

“Yes, I understand that. Are you going to lie to me?”

“Haven't decided for sure, yet.”

Jonas stood and walked to the wheel. Unstrapping it he gave it a major whirl to the left. The boat began changing course in a rather dramatic fashion. The sails floundered on their way to finding a new position.

“What ya doin'?”

“You know what I'm doing.”

“Okay. I'll lay things out for you.”

“Honestly?”

“Pretty much, honestly, I'd say.”

Jonas smiled thinking that had perhaps been one of the most honest things he had ever heard. He reset the original course.

“Can you steer a rig like this,” he asked the boy.”

“Never been given the chance, but I've watched a lot. Bet I can. I'm generally quite smart and confident about my abilities.”

Jonas raised his eyebrows thinking that may well have been the understatement of the afternoon.

Carlos moved to a place beside Jonas.

“See the compass, how it's pointing here?”

“Yeah.”

“Keep the needle right where it is. Won't really need much steering.”

Jonas stepped aside and Carlos stepped in, flashing a broad smile up over his shoulder at the old man. The wheel was situated amid-deck just behind and to the right of the entrance to the cabin. The roof of the cabin rose some four feet above the deck. The boy

could just see over the top. It wouldn't have worked for tricky navigation, but in the open sea would cause no problems.

Jonas returned to his chair.

“So, your story?” he asked.

“You think I should try and talk while I'm sailing this boat?”

It had been a feeble attempt at procrastination and both knew it.

“I have full confidence in your ability to do both at once.”

Carlos paused for a moment as if to find just the right starting point.

“My Gramps really ain't my Gramps. I was left at his front door when I was a baby with a note pinned to my diaper that just said, 'Carlos'. He and Grandma took me in and raised me – she died when I was four. He got real sick a couple of months ago. He figured he was about to die so he told me the family secret.”

Carlos looked back over his shoulder to see if he could catch some indication of how well the story was going over up to that point. The old man seemed to be paying attention and twirled his hand in the air indicating he should go on. The boy turned back forward and continued.

“Gramps was born in the Bahamas – lived on Aklins Island as a boy, a little town called Snug Corner. I never been there. His father was really old when he was born and had been some kind of pirate or something – he and his gang robbed small cruise ships, at least that's the story I got. He had a hideout in a cave where he kept his loot. Gramps figures it is mostly jewelry and cash from the rich people on those cruise ships. He was wounded on his last raid. He made it home but died a few days later. Before he died he gave Gramps a large key that had a metal disk attached to it by a wire. The disk is – was – etched with some marks. He figured it was a map, but his dad never explained. His dying words were, “The key to good exercise is never do it right. Live low. Die high.” Gramps figured those words was somehow important and made me memorize them.

“Anyway, last week he died and I set out to find the treasure – it was clearly what he wanted me to do.”

“That's quite a story.”

“It's the truth. That's what you wanted, right?”

“That's what I wanted.”

“You believe me?”

“You say it's the truth so I believe you.”

“Anybody ever tell you that you're – pánfilo, I don't know the English.”

“And I don't know the Spanish but I imagine you're trying for gullible.”

“Yes, that's it, gullible, easily fooled. Nice job!”

“I suppose I'd rather be a bit gullible than fully untrusting.”

“Really? You are a very strange person, old man, Jonas. I never knowed nobody like you before.”

“Do I make you uncomfortable?”

“Some, I guess.”

“I will always tell you the truth, I promise. Perhaps that will help.”

“Like I said, I never knowed nobody like you before.”

“Tell me,” Jonas said, “why did you choose my boat?”

“I heard you talkin' with a waiter at the cafe a couple of nights ago when I was collectin' table scraps for my supper. I heard you talkin' about Crooked Island and Long Cay and Aklins Island. Gramps talked about all a them. They like surround a lagoon he called the Bight – green water and white sand beaches. They're close to where I need to go. I figured you looked harmless enough so I decided to give you a try. I followed you back to the dock when you left.”

“So you pick your friends on the basis of how harmless they look?”

“Pretty much. Yes. Gramps always said that most men with white beards were trustworthy. I'm strong and smart for my age, but I can't count on that given' me a edge with grownups. I guess I'm more comfortable with old people havin' been around them all my life.”

“That makes sense. Your grandparents must have been fine people.”

“The best. Grandma used to kiss me on my forehead every night before I went to sleep. I still pretend she's doin' it sometimes.”

“I can understand that. I used to do the same thing with my son.”

“You got a son?”

“Had a son. He died in a war.”

“Sorry. It's hard when people die on you. You must a had a wife then?”

“I did, for almost forty years. She also passed away.”

“Sorry again. You live in one of the big houses on Ramrod?”

“No. Just dock there and get my mail there. I lived in New York State.”

“Cold and snow up there, I hear.”

“Very cold and lots of snow in the winters.”

“I wouldn't like that. Hate shoes and long pants.”

Several minutes passed in silence. Carlos couldn't resist moving the wheel a little bit one way and then the other perhaps verifying that the compass did indeed point the way, perhaps just to feel the power of the wheel in his hands. Jonas smiled. How could a little zig zag in the course possible hurt?

Carlos had questions.

“So, why you down here in Florida? Why you on a boat? Why you sailin' to the islands?”

“I needed a change after my wife died. I had been a very busy person most of my adult life never taking enough time to really enjoy it. I sold everything. Spent a year building the *Glada Tider*, and here I am.”

“And here *we* are,” Carlos said with a sigh.

The old man nodded. The boy had just brought an uneasy focus to the new situation. Jonas had planned his life specifically so it required a minimum of responsibility – few possessions, no work needing to be done, no relationships to clutter up his life. A fully unexpected rush of discomforting anxiety radiated from his stomach as he stared at the back of the bronze ragamuffin guiding his boat.

“You indicated that returning to Ramrod might not be such a good idea. Can you elaborate on that – tell me more about that?”

“You won't like it.”

“Maybe you should let me decide about that.”

“Okay, but I'm tellin' you, ya won't like it.”

“Try me.”

“My friend Juan told me he heard that Fidel – the baddest man in my neighborhood – overheard when Gramps told me the secret. He said Fidel told his friends that they had to get the key and disc from me at any cost. Juan said that probably meant even if they had to kill me. Juan is fifteen and knows about that stuff better than I do. That's when I left out of there. I made sure I was seen walking the railroad tracks going north to throw Fidel off my track. Then when night time came, I caught a ride in a produce truck heading

south. Just hopped from truck to truck until I got to Ramrod. Ate oranges and grapefruit, mostly. I figured they gave me both food and drink.”

As the boy had indicated, he was both smart and clever.

“And you started from . . .?”

“South Miami.”

“That's where you always lived?”

“Si. Yes.”

“I don't suppose you have a birth certificate or any sort of legal identification – no passport or such.”

“Sorry. I figure people should be able to know I'm me just by lookin' at me. I've hear about papers and green cards but ever understood about them.”

“It looks like it is just you and me for a while, at least, then,” Jonas said.

Carlos gave another backward glance nodding short, repeated, nods of his head.

“I'll take good care of you, old man. I took good care of Gramps for years. I got experience with old men.”

So it was set. Carlos was the caregiver and Jonas was along for the ride.

Jonas smiled. He was amused.

Carlos smiled. He was serious.

“Tell me more about the Fidel character.”

“Rumor has it he killed his first man before he turned sixteen. He's getting' on in age now, maybe thirty, I'd say. He has a really sweet boat. Runs guns south and drugs north. He beats on his girlfriend, I know that – seem him doin' it once with my own eyes. He's a bad man.”

“Sounds like it. He ever give you or your grandfather trouble before?”

“No. Doubt if he knowed I was alive, before.”

“What kind of boat does he have?”

“Big speed boat. Must seat over a dozen. Very fast. Black. That's cause he does his smuggling at night – or so I'm told. I figure it must have hidden compartments built into it. He's never been caught with stuff on him.”

“I assume you believe you got away from him without him knowing where you were going.”

“I hope so. With Fidel, you can't be sure. He has eyes and

ears everywhere – that's what Gramps told me. My friend said so, too. Anybody know where you're headed, Jonas?"

"I didn't tell anyone in so many words. That waiter might have gotten an impression from the conversation we had. I didn't tell him my name or the name of my boat. It was the first time I'd ever seen him. We're probably safe on that count."

"What did you have to eat at the restaurant?"

It seemed like an odd question, but Jonas went along.

"Steak."

"How much did it cost?"

"A little over twenty dollars."

"Tip?"

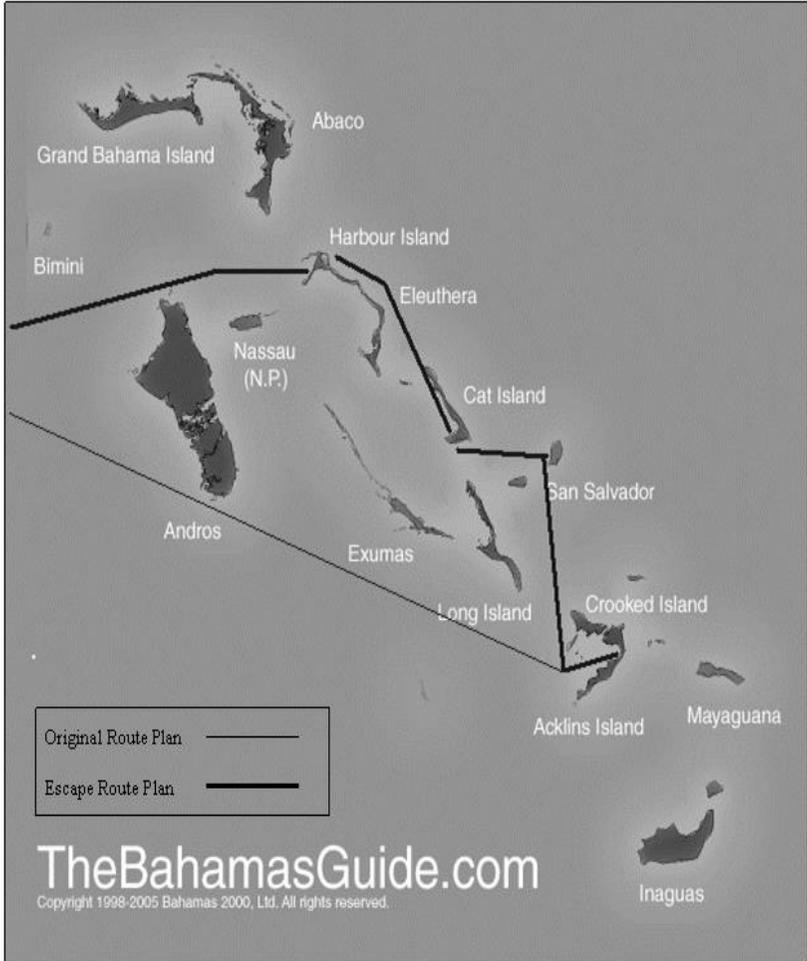
"Yes. Five added to the credit card."

"Twenty five percent tip. He'll remember you alright. I gotta teach you about things like that, old man."

Jonas was impressed with his quick computation and privately amused at his analysis of the situation. He did, however, understand the truth the boy spoke. He couldn't take him back – he had nobody to go back to if his story were to be believed. The problems surrounding the child's long term disposition notwithstanding, it might be nice to have a companion for a change. It would allow time to get to know him and conjure up some possibilities.

In the mean time, Jonas had to wonder about their safety. The straight shot course he had in mind was roughly five hundred miles long – Ramrod to Acklins Island. It would touch the south end of Andros Island and pass just south of both Exumas and Long Islands. He had planned to make those stops for supplies if needed. Acklins was some hundred and fifty miles South East of Long Island. He had studied the charts with care, Jonas being a cautious man about things such as safety and always interested in the geography of the Caribbean.

He mulled over the idea of heading northeast, which would take them just north of Andros instead. They could stop at Harbour Island, then sail south to Cat Island and east to San Salvador before heading due south to Acklins Island. It would increase the length of the trip by a third, but might be safer if indeed there were bad guys after Carlos. The beauty would be unsurpassed – all those white sand beaches and the dolphins on the move through the azure water. He stood and made his way to the wheel.



"Tell you what, Carlos, I've decided to change course here. Turn us to an East North East direction. You know how to read the compass?"

Carlos pointed to the ENE spot on the device.

"Here?" he asked.

"Very good. Yes."

Carlos made the change under the watchful eye of the old man. After a few minutes the boy had an observation.

"Seems like we're moving faster, now, Jonas."

"We probably are. Catching a bit of a current from the South. Before we were cutting across it – fighting it. Now we're going more or less with its natural flow. Not entirely, but more than we were."

"How you know all that stuff?"

"There are charts of the currents. I have lots of them in a big book in the cabin. I'll show them to you later."

Carlos nodded as he concentrated on maintaining the new direction. Eventually he spoke again.

"We doin' this to outsmart Fidel, ain't we."

"Yes, that's what we're doing. You are wise beyond your years, young man."

"A priest said that same thing to me last year. I kept askin' him questions about religious stuff. I got the idea he didn't like most of them much – at least he didn't have any good answers – so I stopped dropping in on him."

"So, you're a church goer?"

"Not really. Went with Gramma when I was little. Gramps said religion was for women and kids so I stopped after she died."

"I have to ask this. You will understand why."

"What?" Carlos asked.

He drummed his fingers nervously along the outside of the wheel.

"That key and disc. I assume you brought it with you."

"I did. I hid *it* before I hid *me*."

"You answered my question. I won't pester you about where it is. Just needed to know the clues would be available when we needed them later on."

"We?"

"Well, I just assumed we were a team and that we're having this treasure hunting adventure together."

Carlos remained silent for quite a while.

"What percent?" he asked at last.

"I don't understand the question, Carlos."

"What percent of the treasure you gonna take if we team up?"

"I have no interest in any percent of the treasure. Whatever we find is all yours."

More silence.

"You just get wierder and wierder, old man."

"I suppose I've been called worse. I never wanted to be just like everybody else. In my mind I'm just going to define 'wierd' as 'eccentric'."

"Don't know, eccentric."

"Means playfully oddball, crackpot, screwball, nut, one of a kind, does his own thing."

"Ah. Excéntrico."

"That sounds about right. Can you live with that?"

"Excentrico. Si. Jonas es excentrico. Maybe someday I can be excentrico, too."

"Perhaps."

"You know, old man, if I'm gonna steer this ship of ours, we're gonna have to find me a box or somethin' to stand on. I figure I need to be up at least another foot to really be able to see things out front over the cabin the way I'll need to."

"I think I have a wooden crate in the hold that should work fine. Let me take the wheel and you can look for it. Tie the wheel in place and I'll get you started."

Jonas watched as Carlos slipped the loop of rope over one of the brass spikes that decorated the circumference of the wheel. He walked to the rear of the deck and pointed to a ring laying flat against the floor.

"Pull up the door. The crate should be down there. It will say Bilge Pump on it in large green letters."

Jonas returned to the wheel making sure the wind and the current were allowing the boat to maintain its proper course. They were.

"Old man Jonas!" Carlos called, fear overtaking his voice.

Jonas looked around. Carlos was pointing into the sun back to the west.

"A boat, old man. No sails. Looks black. Do you think it's Fidel?"

Jonas removed the binoculars from the peg on the back of the cabin and moved to the rear of the boat. He got the distant craft in focus and handed the glasses to the boy.

"See what you think, son."

Carlos studied the image.

"Too far away. Really can't tell. The sun back there makes it hard to see."

He handed the binoculars back to Jonas who took his turn studying the horizon for some time.

"You're right it's not a sail boat. Can't hear the motor yet can you?"

"Nope, not yet."

"Can't really tell the color either – like you say the sun is confusing things. As a precaution, we need to lower the sails to make less of a silhouette against the sky."

"So our boat will be harder to see, right? Pretty sneaky."

During the next several minutes Jonas went about the process of hauling in the sails and tying them in place along the boom. Carlos watched and helped as he could. Jonas was confident the next time the lad would be able to do it by himself.

They turned their attention back to the craft coming up behind them. By then it appeared larger and Jonas could see that, in fact, it was a super speed boat of some kind. He handed the glasses to Carlos.

"What do you think, now?"

"It's closing fast, that's what I mainly think. I really can't tell. If I could only make out the color. What will we do if it is Fidel?"

Carlos sidestepped closer to Jonas.

"I have no idea. Hide you in the hold for one thing, I suppose. I'm not experienced at this kind of cops and robbers stuff. I'll cover the opening with the tarps and try to talk them on their way. If they know the ships name I suppose we will be in real trouble. If he is as bad as you say, you will probably need to hand over the key to him. Not even a treasure is worth dying for, you agree?"

"I guess. Shall I hide now?"

"The boat is still quite a few minutes away. We have some time. It appears to me that it may actually be following our old heading, ESE. It seems to be crossing our path instead of closing on us. You look and see what your young eyes tell you."

Carlos took the binoculars and spent some time making his

observation.

"I think my young eyes see just what your old eyes saw. They're heading away from us at an angle – south of us. I can see that it is a black boat for sure, though. No doubt about that."

"Are there many black boats like that around?"

"Not where I'm from. His was specially painted just for him. Can't speak about boats in the Keys, you know. Lots of rich guys down there so I s'pose there could be others."

"I think we will be well to believe it is Fidel," Jonas said. "Once it's out of sight we'll hoist the sails again and skedaddle."

"Skedaddle?"

"Get the heck out of here!"

"I'm with you on the skedaddle, then. Darse prisa! Darse Prisa! That's a rough translation, I suppose."

They were able to share a smile. It had been an eventful first day of their unplanned adventure together. It appeared the stage was set for a dangerous voyage. The time had come to get very serious about making more specific plans.

CHAPTER THREE

“What time is it?” Carlos asked. “Puttin' them sails back up has a way of makin' a boy hungry.”

“It's a little after three. Rope off the wheel and we'll duck into the cabin and see what we can rustle up.”

“Shouldn't one of us stay on deck to keep a look out just in case Fidel changed his mind and comes this way?”

“Do as I say. I'll show you why we'll be fine.”

With more than a little reluctance Carlos slipped the loop over the top spike on the wheel. He turned and gave a lingering look behind them. Jonas opened the door and motioned Carlos down the steps ahead of him.

“Hey! Pretty nice down here, old man. Them beds folded up there on the walls?”

“Yes.”

Carlos went from item to item touching each and giving it more than a cursory once over.

“Look here,” Jonas said pointing to the flat screen.

He flipped a switch on the control panel. A picture appeared.

“That's a picture of what's behind us,” Carlos said, clearly puzzled and perhaps some amazed. “How'd you do that?”

“There are several cameras on the boat – front, back, left side, right side, up into the sky and even one underwater up front to help us navigate the shallows.”

“Wow! You did all this?”

“Yes, with some guidance from a pretty good tech guy.”

“Can I try it?”

“Sure. These are the six switches. Each one is labeled.”

Carlos flipped the one labeled forward. The screen split in two, the rear view on one side and the front on the other. It was worth another, “Wow!”

One by one he flipped the remaining switches. All six could be displayed, albeit small pictures – three across and two up and down. The boy shut all of them down except for the rear view.

“You got guns?”

“No guns.”

Carlos nodded and continued looking around the cabin.

“What are you hungry for?”

“More of that meat sandwich would be great. Never had it

before. Really liked it. Never had bread at home – everything on tortillas. I like bread. What kind is it?”

“Whole wheat. I have several kinds – rye, oat, pumpernickel.”

Carlos smiled and chuckled.

“Pumpernickel? Are you kidding me? There's a bread called *pumpernickel*?”

“Sure is. Want to try it?”

“Okay. Pumpernickel!”

He chuckled and shook his head in disbelief. He tried the recliner, adjusting it and rocking in it. He sat at the desk and swiveled in the chair.

“See you got a lap top. Never got to use one, myself. Bet I could learn, though.”

“I'm sure you could. I'll show you about it later.”

The sandwich was soon made and served up on a piece of paper towel.

“Black bread. That's sort of odd, isn't it? Is it clean?”

“Oh, yes. I'd never serve you anything that wasn't clean.”

The comment drew a long, steady, glance up into the old man's face.

“Milk or pop?”

“Got orange?”

“Orange milk?”

“No, silly. Orange pop.”

Jonas smiled.

“I do. Orange, it will be.”

While Carlos munched on the sandwich, he swiveled in the chair so he could keep an eye on the screen. Jonas moved to the recliner.

“Ain't you havin' one, too?”

“No. I stick to just three meals a day, otherwise I'd get so fat I'd capsize the boat.”

Jonas delivered it with a smile indicating, he thought, that it had been an attempt at humor.

“That really wouldn't be possible, you know.”

The response indicated to Jonas that humor had not played much of a role in the boy's life. Still, he was eager to hear the lad's reasoning.

“And how's that?”

“Well, you'd be eatin' the food that's already on the boat, so whether it's in you makin' you fat or in the cupboards, it's all the same weight. If it ain't capsizin' the boat now, it ain't gonna capsize the boat once it's inside you.”

“You are a very astute young man, Carlos. I applaud your reasoning.”

“Astute? Like Astuto?”

“Yes, I suppose. It means cunning, clever, wily, crafty, smart, perspicacious, shrewd, discerning.”

“Ah! More like perspicaz I guess.”

“No idea. Sorry.”

“Don't know lots a them other words you said either, but I think I got your drift. You need to start teachin' me new words. I like to learn new stuff.”

“Seems to me I have already begun to teach you new words and new stuff.”

“Oh! Yeah. I guess you have. Thanks, I suppose.”

“You are welcome, I suppose.”

That time the boy caught the humor and responded with a big smile.

“The meat's really salty, ain't it. Used up my orange on just one half of it.”

“You know where the drinks are. Help yourself, anytime. I only ask that you finish whatever you take. Sailors can't afford to be wasteful. There is only so much food and drink on board.”

Carlos nodded and went to the refrigerator.

“I gottcha. We never wasted food at home neither. Sometimes there wasn't none to waste. Hungry ain't a good thing. Gramps would say to just hitch up my belt and drink more water. It helped some. You ever been hungry, old man?”

“Not really hungry, I suppose. Sometimes I say I am, but not like what you mean by it, I'm sure.”

Carlos returned to the swivel chair at the desk. It was becoming his place.

“You must be awful rich, old man – this boat and all this hi-tech equipment.”

“I made a lot of money earlier in my life. I suppose you could say I am sort of rich.”

“I want to be rich. When I – we – find that treasure I'm gonna be really rich and I'm gonna buy a house with a upstairs, and a

car, and a boat, and video games, and CDs, and all that kind of stuff.”

“I guess I can understand that desire,” Jonas said.

He cleared his throat and continued.

“I don't often give advice unless somebody has specifically asked me for it, Carlos, but I'm going to make an exception, now.”

Carlos turned in his seat so he could look directly into Jonas's face. He even put down his sandwich signaling that he figured whatever the old man had to say was going to be important. It was more of an attentive response than Jonas had expected. How could his advice have become so important to the boy in such a short time?

“Money and treasure will not make you happy, son. First, you have to learn how to be happy within yourself. You have to learn to like yourself and respect yourself and trust yourself and entertain yourself. Then, money can be enjoyable, but never skip that first step or you will be miserable all your life.”

“By first step you mean the inside happy thing?”

“That's right.”

Carlos turned back toward the screen and remained silent while he finished his sandwich and drink. Eventually, he had some questions.

“You got a car?”

“No.”

“You got a house?”

“No.”

“You got jewelry?”

“Not much – my wedding band and this watch.”

“You're happy inside though, I can tell.”

“Yes, I am. I love my life and I try to keep it very simple and uncomplicated.”

“Did money complicate your life before?”

“It did indeed – money and all the things I had bought with it.”

“We may be different in that way. Not sayin' we are, just sayin' we may be. That okay with you?”

“If you mean will I stop being your friend if we are different in that way, no, I don't let things like that get in the way of friendship.”

“We friends?”

There was genuine surprise in the boy's voice.

“I can't speak for you but during these past few hours I've come to think of you as my friend.”

“Gramps always said that friendship is a big-ticket item. He said you need to put a lot of thought into it before you buy it. He said it don't come with no guarantee and sometimes it just ends up heapin' a load of hurt on you.”

“I understand that and I will never try to hurry you where our relationship is concerned. Take things at your own pace. We come from different sorts of backgrounds. Mine showed me that friendship could come easily – that most folks in my world were trustworthy and enjoyable. Yours showed you that you need to be cautious before you commit to it because many folks are not trustworthy and maybe take advantage of you. That's okay. I understand. A man responds to life by what he has already learned about it.”

“Gramps said that to me sometimes. He used different words, but I think that's what he meant. He was a pretty wise man, too.”

That last word put an interesting spin on how the boy had already come to think about Jonas. The old man hoped he would never disappoint him.

“We should probably get back up on deck. The cameras don't always tell the whole story,” Jonas said.

“What do I do with the pop can. Toss it overboard?”

“No. We will crush it flat and put in the recycling container, there. Then, when we make land we will find a proper way of disposing of it. I don't want to be cluttering up these beautiful oceans with garbage.”

“I like that. Okay. How? Just stand on it and crush it?”

“That's how I do it – end to end.”

Carlos crushed the can and deposited in the container. They returned to the deck.

“Check the compass and make sure we're still on course,” Jonas said.

Carlos seemed pleased to have been asked – trusted – to do that and make that determination.

“On course ENE, captain.”

He flashed a grin toward the old man who returned it.

They moved to the rear of the deck and again searched the horizon with the binoculars. It appeared they were still in the clear. The sun was moving lower in the sky, which made the task more

difficult. On the other hand, it helped keep them camouflaged against the darkening sky to the east. That situation would be reversed come sun-up of course. Their silhouette would stand out starkly against the bright morning sky.

“What happens at night? Cameras can't see in the dark.”

“You might be surprised. Ever hear of night vision cameras?”

“Night vision goggles, like the soldiers use in video games. I've heard of them.”

“The cameras work in the same way. I'll show you when nightfall hits us.”

“I better get that crate, okay?”

“Good idea. Do you need some help with that door? It's pretty heavy.”

“Let me try first. I'm a pretty independent sort of guy.”

That was hardly a news flash for Jonas, but he waited through the young man's struggle. Very soon he had it open. Carlos flashed a smile – not particularly at Jonas. It was more just an indication of how pleased he was with himself and *that* pleased Jonas, as well.

The boy was a picture of opposites. He was clearly very intelligent, but fully uneducated and yet the struggles his life had inflicted on him had forced him to develop a kind of street smarts – he knew what it took to survive. He trusted himself, but not many others. He wanted to learn new things but had never had the necessary opportunities so that could happen for him. He needed to be protected and feel safe, but he had been forced to spend his life being the caretaker and protector, instead. He was a kid, but necessarily thought of himself as an adult. He was handsome, but didn't seem to realize it. He looked to be surprisingly strong and healthy although his impoverished upbringing suggested he should be scrawny and sickly. He was a puzzle, an enigma.

He located the box, hefted it up onto the deck, and climbed out. He pushed it toward the wheel and, after adjusting its position several times proclaimed it to be, “perfecto!”

No translation was needed.

Jonas closed the hatch door and approached him at the wheel.

“What's your position on taking baths?”

Carlos grinned.

“Hate 'em, but I suppose you already got that idea. Wouldn't want to waste the precious water we got on the boat, ya know.”

“How about this? We tie a rope around your waste. You spend some time in the water to loosen up the dirt. Then, back on board, you give yourself a sponge bath with soap, a washrag, and a basin full of water.”

“I’ll just get dirty again. Can’t see no reason for it.”

“For all I know you’re as lily white underneath all that crud as I am.”

“I can guarantee I ain’t, but since it seems important to you I’ll do it.”

A half hour later the deed had been accomplished. Jonas handed him a comb and showed him where the mirror was hung on the inside of a cupboard door. He soon looked ready for a party.

“See. I’m not lily white. Don’t even have no tan lines. Just my *hermosa piel bronceada* – that means beautiful bronze skin.

“It is both more beautiful and more bronzey now that it’s clean.”

“I guess I do feel better. That how you take a bath?”

“Pretty much.”

Jonas pointed up toward the eastern sky.

“Dark clouds gathering. Looks like we’re in for a squall pretty soon. They often come up about sunset.”

“Squall?”

“A short-lived storm – lots of rain and wind while it lasts.”

“We be safe on the boat?”

“Oh, yes. I built in some very special safety features. In case you hadn’t noticed, I’m no daredevil. I plan ahead for my wellbeing.”

“Is that different from being yellow – chicken?”

“I guess I will let you decide that for yourself as time goes by.”

Jonas surveyed the sky again.

“It actually looks like it is developing fast. Let’s make the boat ready in case it heads our way.”

“I’m up for that. What do we do?”

Jonas went to the center of the right side of the deck.

“See the piece of iron with the big slot in the end.”

“Yeah.”

“We will fit one end of this long two by four into it.”

“That beam that’s sittin’ there in those metal holders?”

“Yes, that one. You pick up the front end and I’ll get the rear.

Once it is removed from its resting place we will slip your end into that slotted iron sleeve. It will slip in about two feet.”

They worked together until that had been accomplished.

“See how that makes a long lever sticking out from just below the right railing. I will now pull that long lever back toward the rear. You look over that side and see what happens.”

Carlos did as he had been told.

“Looks like that side of the boat is falling apart. That okay?”

“Just keep watching.”

“It's like a thick, long, log shaped thing being pushed out into the water by two metal arms. I've seen pictures of canoes with those on each side. I think they are called outriggers.”

“Very good. That is exactly what it is. It will extend out ten feet and the log will float there in the water. It will lend stability to the boat essentially making the boat ten feet wider on both sides. It is like we are thirty-five feet wide instead of just twelve feet wide – the width of the deck. I've never seen a storm that could come close to causing the old *Glada Tider* any harm. We will hardly even notice the storm – well, if the waves swell high enough it may feel a bit like a roller coaster.”

“That sound like fun.”

The right-side outrigger was soon in place, gliding along the surface of the water.

“Can I do the other on – the one on the left?” Carlos asked.

“Sure. Give it a try. The further out toward the end of a lever you get to push, the easier it will be.”

“Is that like science or somethin'?”

“It is. The science of physics or more specifically one of the simple machines – the lever. I have a book about all that if you want to learn more.”

Carlos struggled a bit swinging one end of the iron sleeve out away from the railing, inserting the long wooden lever, and then pushing the far end the length of the deck. Jonas watched from the railing to make sure the outrigger was deploying properly.

“Great job, my boy. Great job! Come take a look at what your efforts just did.”

Carlos joined Jonas at the railing. Jonas put his hand on the boy's shoulder as they looked and talked about the success. Carlos noticeably snuggled a bit into the old man's side. For Jonas, it had been a natural move left over from when his son had been that age.

For Carlos, it was clearly a new experience – being touched gently in friendship. Jonas had to wonder if Gramps may not have been the saint the boy had made him out to be.

“I can already tell they are making the ride smoother,” Carlos said looking up at the man. “Why don't you use them all the time?”

“They slow us down quite a bit. See how they cut through the water making a wave on each side. That uses more power.”

“Not sure I get that?”

“Think of it this way. If you held your middle finger down in a pan of water and moved it front and back it would be fairly easy to do, right?”

Carlos configured his fingers and nodded.

“Now, unfold one finger on each side of that middle finger. What happens then?”

“I get it. It's like the more surface you have to move through the water the harder it is – the more force it takes.”

“Exactly.”

“You're a good teacher.”

“I'll take that as a compliment. And, you, by the way, are an excellent student.”

“I had a teacher tell me that once, back in second grade. Ain't been to school since then. Gramps needed me to help in the shop – cleanin' up, runnin' errands, makin' deliveries, and stuff like that. Gramps always wanted to know exactly where I was. He cared a lot about me.”

“I'm sure he did.”

The old man's response was met with a strange, almost sad, look from the lad. Jonas couldn't decide exactly what it meant, but let it pass.

The wind picked up and the waves swelled. The *Tider* held to a steady course.

“We better strike the sails. Remember how I did that before?”

“I guess we'll see, won't we?”

It had been a lighthearted comment and Jonas appreciated it.

“You work on the Jib.”

Jonas pointed to the smaller sail to the front of the mast.

“I'll take care of the Mainsail.”

The sails were soon down and tied in bundles for safe keeping. The boom was locked in place so it wouldn't sway back

and forth in the wind.

“Now we drop the center board down into the water as far as it will go. That adds lots of stability.”

“What's a center board?”

“On this boat, it is a board about two feet wide and five feet long. It swings down into the water from underneath the boat. In calm seas and winds, it is pulled up so only the two foot side shows. At times like this the rear end is dropped. The hinge keeps the front strongly attached to the boat.”

“That another of your inventions?”

“Only partly. Most small sail boats have a center board of some kind. I designed mine a bit differently so it would meet my needs better.”

“Your bein' a yellow chicken needs, you mean.”

Jonas chuckled.

“Something like that.”

The wind picked up to a fairly strong gale. The waves rose and the rain started coming down in sheets.

“Into the cabin,” Jonas directed. “We can dry off and ride out the weather in comfort in there.”

“I'm for that.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Jonas was seated at the desk and Carlos watched over his shoulder.

“Let me show you how to plot a sailing course on this map.”

Jonas placed a map of the Bahamas beneath a clear plastic cover piece.

“I can draw on it with this pen and make changes if I want to without ruining the map.”

“Cool!”

“We started here in the Keys and right now we are here,” he said drawing a line from point to point.

“How do you know we are there?”

“Go over to the control panel and find the GPS switch. Flip it.”

Carlos followed those instructions. A map came up on the screen similar to the one Jonas was using. An orange dot appeared.

“See the dot. That's where we are. It's right about where I pointed on this map, right?”

“Right.”

“Now look east to that first big island that runs like a shoestring to the south and east. That's Harbour Island. It's where we are heading. It will be our first stop.

“So, now on this map I need to make a line running due west from that island so it intersects this line that shows our present course. That is the spot where we need to turn in an easterly direction.”

“Looks to be straight east to me,” Carlos said.

“That's exactly right. The spot where the lines cross is still about a hundred miles away.”

“How long will that take?”

“About ten hours or so. The *Tider* averages about ten knots – that's a little over eleven miles an hour.”

Carlos estimated a distance with his fingers on the map.

“And then, what, about another hundred to Harbour Island?”

“You have a good eye. I'd say that's right on.”

“That makes it about a 20 hour trip so that must be about 200 miles.”

“Right again. I have to wonder if you dropped of school so

early, how you have been able to learn so many things.”

“Gramps had some books.”

It was offered as the complete answer to Jonas's question. He didn't press the issue.

“At Harbour Island we can pick up some more clothes for you and add water to the tank. I always keep that full. Sailors have to have water.”

“Where we goin' after that?”

“I think I'd like to sail down the east side of Harbour Island. It will keep us hidden from the sight of anyone sailing the usual channel on the west.”

“Smart.”

Jonas continued drawing lines.

“We'll sail SSE past Eleuthera Island then turn almost due south – slightly east – to the south end of Cat Island. There are places there we can stay overnight, eat a good restaurant meal, shower and such.”

“Never stayed in a hotel before.”

Jonas completed the chart showing them sailing east from Cat Island to San Salvador and then south to the Bight of Acklins, which formed a lagoon between Crooked Island and Acklins Island.

“So, how far is it to where we're going?”

“Well, let's see, originally, when I had charted a straight course from Ramrod it was 500 miles. Let's count up the miles here on the chart. Use this special ruler. Every mark represents fifty miles.”

Carlos placed the ruler along the lines Jonas had drawn, moving it down the course.

“Looks like we still have about 550 miles to go – maybe a little more. This route is lots longer, but lots safer too, right?”

“That is certainly the plan – to make it safer.”

“Do you sleep at night?”

“I sleep in three or four hour stretches checking up on deck in between – making sure everything is going along smoothly. Sometimes, when in shallow enough water I will put down the anchor and stay in one place for the night. My usual plan, though, is to make land by night time so I'm not out at sea. That's a better way, I think.”

“Which bunk is mine?”

“I sleep in the one over there, to the left of the door. That

would make the other one yours.”

“Sort of crowded with both of them down, I guess. You have company very often?”

“Almost never.”

“Not even ladies?”

“Not even ladies.”

“You like ladies?”

“Yes, I like ladies very much.”

“That's good, I guess. Not much into them yet myself. The time will probably come. I seen it happening all around me back home. A guy turns fourteen and whammo! All he can seem to think about is ladies, well, girls.”

“That is certainly the way things happen.”

“So, how long you think the squall will last?”

Jonas assumed that by 'squall' he was referring to the storm and not to his impending interest in 'ladies'.

“No telling. We just have to wait it out.”

“What can a guy do down here for fun?”

“I have several encyclopedias on DVDs if you want to look things up. I have lots of books on discs, too, but they probably aren't things you'd be interested in.”

“Got paper. I'm a great artist. I love to draw. I'm good with colored pencils and chalk.”

“I have lots of paper. Can probably even scrounge up a few colored pencils – red, blue, green, maybe one or two more. They'll be in the top desk drawer, here.”

Jonas rose and Carlos began going through the drawers. That wasn't what Jonas thought he had suggested, but it didn't really matter.

“Stormy weather always makes me hungry for popcorn. You like popcorn?”

“I love it. I know how to make it. You got a pot with a lid?”

“Under the sink.”

Before long the cabin was filled with the wonderful aroma of freshly popped corn. It called for pop, also, of course.

“Thought you only ate three meals a day, old man.”

“You can't call this a meal, now can you?”

“I was just joking with you. Gramps didn't joke so I'm probably not very good at it like you are.”

“Practice makes perfect, they say. I hope you will keep

trying. And, by the way, I knew it was a joke.”

“It garnered a quick smile and nod.”

“Great popcorn, by the way,” Jonas said.

He was seated in his recliner.

“Thanks. My own recipe.”

Jonas had no idea what a popcorn recipe might be, but he accepted the boy's statement.

Carlos went to the control panel and flipped through the cameras.

“Gettin' dark out. Is it time for the night vision thing yet?”

“Has to be completely dark. Those gadgets magnify light a thousand times so even a little light results in a white spike on the screen. A full moon can even cause problems. Can you see anything?”

“Darker behind than in front. What does that mean?”

“That the rain is clearing out up front and moving on back behind us, to the west. It should soon be over.”

“What time will we change course to due East?”

“About two in the morning. We will be sailing through clear weather by then.”

For the next several hours Jonas read and Carlos drew.

“Time to hoist the sales again, young man. You up to helping?”

“Of course, I am. What about the outriggers?”

“Depends on how the seas look. Smooth we'll take them in. Rough we'll leave them out.”

“How much do they slow us down?”

“That also depends on the sea. In calm waters, maybe one knot an hour. In rougher seas, up to two or three knots.”

“I hope we find smooth waters, then. I want to put as much ocean between us and the Keys as possible.”

“I understand.”

Jonas checked the GPS as Carlos watched.

“Looks like we're right where we're supposed to be, doesn't it?” the boy asked.

“Right on. Let's head up on deck. Flip that wall switch beside the door.”

“What does it do?”

“You'll see.”

The deck was well lit when they arrived.

“Oh, lights for up here. I hadn't thought about that.”

The deck was wet, of course, even though the rain had stopped and the wind had settled into a comfortably steady northern breeze.

“Be careful. Deck's slippery.”

They raised the sails and Jonas adjusted them so the boat would move east even though the wind was from the north.

“Let's pull in the outriggers. I'll bet you can figure out how to do that.”

“Just backwards from puttin' em out, I figure.”

“You figure right.”

Jonas helped in order to speed up the process. Although he didn't say it out loud, he wanted to get the lights off as soon as possible just in case the bad guys were in the vicinity. They couldn't very well remain hidden on a lighted boat in the middle of a black sea.

“Okay, seaman. That pretty well takes care of things up here for now,” Jonas said at last. Time to hit the hay.”

“Aye, aye – ain't that what sailors say?”

“It is. You'll be an old tar before the week's out.”

“Old tar?”

“An experienced seaman, usually referring to an older sailor who has spent many years at sea.”

“Old tar. I like that.”

Jonas pulled the door closed behind them. Carlos went to his bunk and attempted to figure out how it folded down. Very shortly he had it down and locked in place.

“Sheets and a blanket, I see. Never slept between sheets before. Know about it just never done it.”

“Sleep on top of the blanket if you'd be more comfortable that way. I often do. Probably will tonight. I'll sleep in my clothes since I'll need to get up in a few hours to change course.”

“You wake me to go along. I want to be sure you do it right?”

Carlos had intended it to be a joke so he waited for a reaction. Jonas smiled and chuckled. The boy seemed pleased.

At two a.m., they checked the GPS together.

“Looks like we're right where you said we'd be,” Carlos said flashing a grin and look up at Jonas. It indicated some degree of admiration.”

Five minutes later they were back in the cabin. The course had been changed and the deck and sails had been checked. They were soon back asleep.

Jonas heard Carlos hit the floor at six o'clock. He watched the boy, but didn't speak or move. Carlos smoothed out the blanket on his bunk and raised it back out of the way against the wall. He filled the coffee pot with water, added the coffee, and put it on a low flame on the hot plate. He had most certainly done that before. He searched through the cabinets removing various ingredients. Clearly trying to be quiet, he proceeded to mix up something.

A few minutes later he beat on a pan with a spoon.

"Time for chow you old tar."

Jonas 'woke up' and stretched. He left his bunk, made it up, and moved it back into its day time position against the wall.

"What's this?" he said sounding surprised.

"Breakfast. I hope you like cornmeal hot cakes. I roll 'em up and eat 'em. You can put sugar or syrup on 'em if you want to. Gramps used to put strawberry jelly on his. Got coffee brewing. Didn't know if you liked it weak or strong so I made it medium. I can adjust it next time. Do you want orange juice? I'm gonna have half a grapefruit. I love grapefruit."

"Why don't I take the other half, then. You are quite the chef young man. I didn't expect to wake up to such a feast."

Carlos grinned.

"I did a lot of thinking last night," he said.

"Oh."

"I'm going to trust you. You seem to trust me. Can't figure why, but you seem to."

Jonas explained – the short explanation.

"I trust people until they show me they aren't trustworthy."

"That's probably good in your world. Not a good idea in mine. But now that we are both here in yours, I'm gonna give it a try."

"I'm pleased you feel you can do that."

"I also decided that we can be friends. I never made a friend so fast so I have no idea how this is gonna work out over the long haul – you get what I'm sayin'?"

"I believe I do. You seem to have gotten a lot of thinking done last night. You get any sleep at all?"

"Some. Enough. I never needed much. Me and Gramps was

the same that way. Gramma could sleep all morning, but I suppose that was because she was sick. I didn't know that back then. I think it would a been better if they'd a told me she was gonna die. I could a prepared myself for her goin' away, you know? It almost killed me the morning I couldn't wake her up. They shouldn't a kept it a secret from me.”

“I'm sure they were just trying to shield you from worry and fear.”

“Probably. I figured that. Still . . .”

Jonas had taken a seat at the desk with his breakfast. Carlos kept his coffee filled. He had hitched himself up onto the counter beside the sink where he sat swinging his legs crossed at his ankles.

“Speakin' about secrets, Jonas, I've decided you can know where the key is.”

Jonas said nothing, but just kept eating. Carlos slid down from his perch on the counter and began removing his belt. He turned it front to back and showed the inside of it to Jonas.

“See. Here. There is a secret pocket. Made to hide money but the key and disc just fit.”

He opened the pocket and shook it. The key and disc fell onto the desk. Jonas put down his fork and watched as Carlos picked them up. He handed them to the old man.

“Take a look. I suppose the key is to a lock someplace – maybe a treasure chest I suppose. It's big and old fashioned looking. The disc has things on both sides. On this side it looks like the outline of a baseball bat with really rough edges. See the 'X' right there close to the middle.”

“Yes, I do. What's on the other side?”

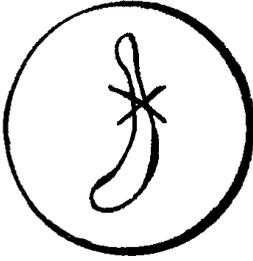
Carlos turned the disc over.

“That's got some strange marks on it. Like a pyramid – a upside down 'V'. In front of it are three strange shaped figures. Can't make any sense out of that side. Doubt if there are any pyramids on Aklins Island, are there?”

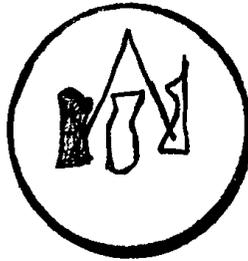
“I sincerely doubt it. I do have an idea about that bat, as you called it, though.”

“Really? What?”

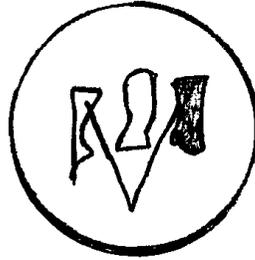
“Bring that atlas over here – the one with the red spine.”



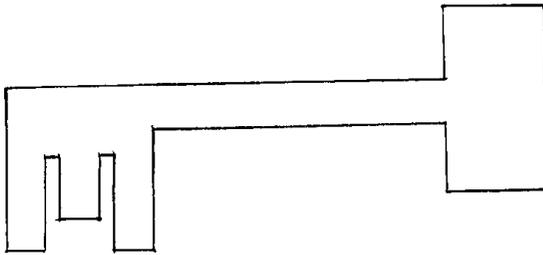
DISC SIDE ONE



SIDE TWO FLIPPED



SIDE TWO 'V' DOWN



IRON KEY

Jonas made room on the desk for the large book.

“Find the section on the Bahama Islands.”

With some difficulty, Carlos eventually opened it to that part.

“Now find the map of Crooked Island.”

“Okay. Here it is.”

“See a bat on that map?” Jonas asked.

“I do. Down here. Like it's hangin' off the bottom. It's not a bat it's a island – a long, narrow, sort of curved, island. It's labeled, 'Long Cay'. What does that mean?”

“A 'cay' is a small, low, island. There is also a *Long Island* in the Bahamas so it's important to keep them separate in your mind. We will pass east of Long Island on the final leg of our journey when we sail south from San Salvador.”

“So, what you're thinkin' is that this Long Cay place – the bat – is where we need to go?”

It was phrased like a question.

“At this point that's my best guess, and it really is a guess – an educated guess, I suppose.”

“What's an educated guess?”

“When you can't really be certain of something, but everything you know up to that point suggests that it is true. That's different from just pulling an answer out of the blue, so to speak.”

“I gottcha. This is great, you know?”

“This?”

“You teachin' me all this stuff and me makin' you breakfast and the two of us just hangin' out like this.”

“I agree. It is great!”

“What ya thinkin' about the other side – the pyramid and the three squiggly things?”

“I haven't a clue. Well, I do have an idea, I suppose. The side with Long Cay and the “X” on it could be the general area we need to be searching and the other side gives us some specific landmarks to look for.”

“But you said there wasn't no pyramids down there.”

“It may not be a pyramid. We may even be looking at it upside down. Turn it around and that pyramid becomes a 'V' with those three squiggly forms up at the top.”

“I see what you mean. How does that help us, then?”

“I don't know for sure, but my educated guess is that it does.”

Carlos grinned.

“If I were you, I'd put it back in your belt. That is an excellent hiding place. There probably isn't much more we can do until we get down there and begin exploring the Cay. We can start by sailing around it and looking for things that resemble the forms on the disc. If that doesn't help, then we may need to just begin walking the island from end to end to see what we can find.”

“How long a walk?”

“About ten miles I think – maybe less.”

“Any towns on the island?”

“Albert Town is on the map, but it has been abandoned for a long time. A few folks may still be there. I'm not sure. It's at the south end.”

“Mountains?”

“No. It's basically flat with a few rises here and there. We'll have to find a map of the terrain to make certain.”

“I'm ready to get there. Can't we crank this thing into high gear.”

“We are in high gear, son. Count on another 70 hours at

least.”

“That's what, about three days.”

“Given good winds and gentle seas, that's right on.”

“Gonna be the longest 70 hours of my life, I can tell you that.”

“I'll bet we can find some interesting things to do and make a *happy time* of it.”

“Make some *Glada Tider* of it, you mean.”

They had a good laugh.

CHAPTER FIVE

At noon they began looking for Harbour Island. At 12:15 Carlos made the sighting. He was sitting up front on the roof of the cabin, dangling his feet over the front, the point of the boat between his legs. He was scanning the horizon with the binoculars.

“I think I see it. I'm pretty sure I see it. Do you think I'm seeing it?”

He crawled back and handed the glasses to Jonas who was handling the wheel.

“I'm sure you see it. We are coming in just a bit north of Russel Island. That's a small island that is virtually attached to the main island on the northwest.”

Carlos had turned to look at Jonas. He looked beyond him toward the western horizon.

“Oh, oh. Better look behind us.”

Jonas tied off the wheel and turned around. He saw what Carlos had seen. He put the binoculars on it.

“It's a speed boat for sure. It's black for sure. The sun is still a bit in their eyes so they may not have spotted us yet. We'll make for the channel between the two islands and see if we can hide among the other boats that will be docked there.”

Jonas altered the positions of the sails just a bit.

“This angle should give us a little more speed. We are entering the Trade Wind belt. They come from the east and one leg turns south along the back of Harbour Island. Once we get back there we should be able to make thirteen knots, more if the north running currents are running deep at this time of year. Not sure about that. You take the binoculars and keep a watch on that craft behind us.”

They were soon just north of the inlet to the channel. Jonas turned the wheel hard right, locked it in place and readjusted the sails again. They headed south. There were lots of small sailboats docked on both sides of the channel. Jonas sailed in about half way before striking the sails and edging into a vacant slip under the power of the motor. Together they tied up to the dock.

“I got a idea,” Carlos said.

“I'm open for any and all ideas, son. Lay it on me.”

“The boat's name is on the rear end. If they know the name and come in looking they'll see it and find us. Let me paint a new

name on a little piece of canvas and then you can hold me over the back and I can attach it over the name.”

“Excellent idea. You get the paint and a brush from under the sink in the cabin. I'll cut a section of canvas. We can tack it in place. Hurry. If they are following us they'll be here in no time.”

Jonas cut a section of canvas that he felt should just cover the name. He laid it out flat on the deck so Carlos could work on it. While the boy worked, Jonas extended one out rigger.”

“If they know the boat they won't be looking for a catamaran.”

“Catamaran.”

“A boat with outriggers.”

“Good thinking. I'm almost finished.”

Jonas went to look not having thought to discuss the new name with the boy. He had to chuckle.

'BILGE PUMP'

“Probably the first ship ever carrying that name, boy.”

Jonas got the hammer and tacks. He also brought masking tape.

“You can tape it place, first. That will free your hands while you tack it.”

“Good thinking. You're gonna have to hold on to me by my legs so I can swing down there.”

“Let's get at it then.”

Carlos bent over the railing, sign between his teeth, supplies in hand and hammer slipped under his belt. Jonas grabbed his legs and lowered him into position. Several minutes later the job was finished.

“I think it looks good,” Carlos said. “Straight and everything.”

“Okay. Let's get down into the cabin,” Jonas said.

“How will we know if Fidel comes by if we're down there?”

“The camera looking toward the back, remember?”

“Oh. Yeah. Good thinking.”

“We'll have to depend on you to ID the boat.”

“I'm ready.”

They entered the cabin. Jonas turned the lock and put a two by four across the door. There were metal brackets on each side into which it slipped. It was designed to keep the door closed in high winds, but it would double well as an extra security measure.

“Nobody'll get through that, Jonas.”

“That's the idea. You know this is the first time I've ever used that bar.”

“Huh! Guess you've lived a pretty easy life, then.”

“I guess I have. Now, get that camera image up on the screen.”

Carlos flipped the switch and scooted the desk chair over in front of it so he could keep watch. Jonas watched from his recliner. Several boats passed by. They were mostly other sail boats moving at a snail's pace. A half hour passed.

“I guess we outsmarted him, you think?” the boy asked.

“Hard to say. We need to keep watching.”

Another half hour passed. Still no Fidel.

Carlos turned toward Jonas to say something. Jonas saw it first.

“Look at the screen, Carlos. Is that Fidel?”

A black speed boat came into view. It was moving very slowly. There were three men visible on board. They were scanning the docked ships with great care.

“That's it. That's Fidel – the tall skinny one with the beard. What are we gonna do?”

“We're going to sit tight and see what happens.”

The boat slowed and gave them a long look, then passed on without incident. The way they smiled and pointed suggested to Jonas that they were merely amused by the name.

“So, what did we just learn, Carlos?”

“That we are pretty lucky dudes.”

“Well, yes, I suppose that. But what else?”

Carlos thought for a moment.

“I guess we learned that he really is after us.”

“Right. After us, and that he thinks he knows in general where we may be. From now on we need to be very cagy sailors, my friend. We'll wait until dark and then leave the same we came in – back to the north. Then we will sail around to the east side of Harbour Island and head south, fairly far out to sea. Can't chance Fidel waiting in hiding for us along the shore. Almost all traffic sails down the west channel between Harbour and Nassau. I imagine that's where he will think we will go, also. Being on the other side of the island and far out to sea looks like our safest bet.”

“Sounds good to me. Think he'll give up and just leave?”

“You're the one who knows him. What do you think?”

“Fidel's not the kind to give up. So, now what?”

“I think we have the advantage in this cat and mouse game,”

Jonas said.

“How's that?”

“He doesn't know that we know he's after us. He'll stay out in the open, having no reason to hide. We'll keep an eye out for him.”

“Four eyes, actually!”

They traded smiles.

“Now, I suggest we take turns getting some shut eye,” Jonas said. “We have a long night ahead of us.”

“Take turns?” Carlos asked needing a further explanation.

“One of us needs to keep an eye on the camera at all times.”

“Gotcha. I can't sleep. I'll take the first stay awake thing. How long?”

“Let's do two hour shifts. If you find yourself getting sleepy, you wake me up immediately. We can't chance not having eyes on that screen at all times. Let's fix something to eat first. I imagine you're starved.”

“I could eat. What we got?”

“I was thinking pork and beans with a side of French fries and an apple.”

“That really sounds pretty good. You can make French fries?”

“I cheat. I have the frozen variety that we just zap in the microwave. Not the best, but actually not too bad either. Dip them in catchup or honey and they're actually quite passable.”

“I'll get the drinks. What you want?”

“Diet cola, if you please, little sir.”

Carlos grinned.

“Coming right up, big sir.”

They kept close watch on the screen as they prepared the food.

“I love beans,” Carlos said. “Prefer re-fried, but these are okay. Sweet like dessert.”

“I wasn't expecting a guest with Latino taste buds. When we get to a place where we can safely set foot on land we will lay in some food more to your liking.”

“That's okay. I can eat Anglo. Most of it's passable and

some of it's even pretty good. This stuff is good.”

They finished eating mostly in silence while they watched the screen together.

“When it gets dark we'll switch to night vision, right?” Carlos asked.

It had been another of the boys' statement/questions that Jonas was coming to expect.

“Right.”

Jonas washed the plates and pulled down his bunk.

“You wake me if anything looks suspicious or if you have any question about anything going on out there. You understand? Anything!”

“Yes. You'll be the first to know. I may need another pop to stay awake.”

“You know where they are. Just don't let your eyes leave that screen.”

Truth be known, Jonas didn't actually get much sleep. Carlos shook his shoulder at five o'clock.

“Two hours. Time to switch places.”

“Okay. Everything go okay, I assume?”

“Lots of boats, but no more Fidel. Lots of them have old ladies on them. You should like that.”

“Perhaps.”

Jonas slipped over the side of his bunk and onto the floor.

“Okay, young man. Get some sleep.”

“What if I can't?”

“Then lay there with your eyes closed and rest. Just resting will help all by itself.”

The boy was sound asleep in less than five minutes. Jonas put on a pot of coffee and settled into his recliner. He had always loved the aroma of brewing coffee. He remembered the first time he tried it, wondering how something that smelled so good could taste so awful. Eventually he acquired a taste for it and came to look forward to its special flavor.

Boat after boat passed. None was Fidel. None was even black. He hadn't really thought about it before but almost every sail boat he had ever seen was white. He wondered how that preference had evolved down through the years. Perhaps it was the easiest color to see on a body of water. Blue and green would probably get lost in the colors of the water and the sky. Red or orange might

blend into the sunrise or sunset along the horizon. He wondered why he wondered about such things and chuckled at himself.

Jonas calculated that dusk would be the best time to slip out of the channel. The last of the day sailors would be bringing their boats into port so they would not look as suspicious as if they were the only one on the move late at night. Although the docks would be well lit, once out in open sea to the north they would be able to blend into the darkening sky. He wanted to set his course south before it became completely black out there. Night at sea with no moon was the absolutely darkest place on the face of the earth. He would clear the island by ten or fifteen miles to the west before turning south. He would turn off the running lights so they couldn't be seen.

It would be light before they had to modify their course a bit to the west so they could make land on the south west corner of Cat Island. There were stores there where they could restock and find some clothes for Carlos. He wished the motor was more powerful. The one he had was just for use in docking and emergencies and couldn't really get them much above one knot in speed. That was almost like standing still.

His two hours passed quickly. He thought about letting Carlos sleep longer, but figured the boy would be upset if he weren't asked to take his rightful turn.

"Anything?" Carlos said, stretching himself back awake and jumping to the floor.

"Nada!"

Carlos smiled at the old man's choice of a Spanish term.

"I'm good," Carlos said. "Your turn in the sack."

"The dock lights will stay on all night so we won't need the night vision camera as long as we stay here," Jonas said. "I hadn't thought about that until a few minutes ago."

"Okay. See you in two. That'll be nine, right?"

"Right. That's when we'll head this rig out of here."

"I'll stay up and help do that."

"Yes. We'll need all eyes to maneuver us back up the channel. We'll probably be one of a very few heading north against all the traffic coming in south to dock for the night."

"Use the motor for that, I suppose?"

"That's right. Need to be very careful. Can't risk a sudden gust moving us into the oncoming armada."

"Armada?"

“Group of ships.”

Carlos nodded, another good word added to his English vocabulary but he had to ask:

“Armada sounds like it could be a Spanish word, you know.”

“You have a good ear for languages. It is Spanish. The English language just adopted it.”

“Can it just do that?”

“Just do what?”

“Steal a Spanish word like that.”

Jonas smiled.

“Lots of words are shared by several languages.”

“So Spanish isn't just Spanish, and English just isn't English.”

“That's a good way to look at it.”

“When I was a little kid I used to mix up the two languages when I talked. Part of it would be in one language and part in the other. Gramma used to say I spoke 'Mezclar'. It means like 'scrambled'.”

“Estoy muy tired,” Jonas said trying to make a joke.

“Very funny. You said 'I am very' in Spanish and 'tired' in English. Get to bed, then.”

Jonas climbed into his bunk. Carlos broke out another pop and sat in front of the screen.

Jonas made a mental note that they would need to lay in a much larger pop supply than the *Glada Tider* usually carried. Pop, spam, tortillas, re-fried beans . . .

He was soon asleep.

He was soon awakened.

“Jonas, you need to see this.”

Carlos was tugging on his arm. They went to the screen.

“Fidel has been past here three times in the past half hour. This time he stopped right out there headed south – heading toward our right.”

“Anybody left the boat?”

“Not on this side that I could see.”

“I don't see any of the men.”

“The guy who was steering walked to the back of the boat and it's not in the picture.”

“Has Fidel been visible on the three passes about which you speak?”

Carlos looked into his face and smiled.

“ 'About which you speak' sounds *so* funny. It really cracks me up, but, no. I haven't seen him. It must mean he isn't on the boat tonight. Like his guys are out doing the looking for him. He's probably in a hotel sleeping.”

“How long have they been stopped there?”

“I don't know. Maybe five minutes. You need to think about getting a gun.”

“There will be no guns on this ship. We'll just sit tight. You are sure that's Fidel's boat, right?”

“Yup. See that thin red line that runs along the top around the side. That's Fidel's okay.”

The man who had walked to the rear came back into view and returned to the steering wheel, which was right in the middle of the picture on the screen.

“That's Mario, or Marcus, or Munchkin, or something like that. I seen him around. Not one of the baddest of the bunch the way I hear it. I still wouldn't want to meet up with him.”

Presently there were three men gathered together near the wheel. One was on his cell phone. From the way he flailed his other arm around he was either excited or upset. Another one carried a line, coiled up in this right hand. The rear of a second motorized boat backed into the scene and stopped a few yards ahead of the speed boat. The rope was thrown to it.

“I believe that provides an answer for us, Carlos.”

“What?”

“Fidel's boat is dead in the water – has engine trouble. They've been waiting for a tow. What are the chances it would die right there by us?”

“That wasn't really a question, right?”

“No. It was an expression of amazement. Out of the dozens and dozens of boats in slips here, the chance of its engine dying right there behind the boat for which they are looking is unbelievable.”

“I guess our disguise is working pretty good, huh?”

“It seems like it. They do have other things on their mind, though, so I imagine they really aren't paying attention to their mission at the moment.”

“And that mission is to find me and get the key and disk, right?”

“That's what I meant.”

“I bet that guy on the phone is talking to Fidel.”

“It would probably be a very good bet. I think we just gained an advantage.”

“The boat being down, you mean.”

“Right. Once they get towed out of here going south through the channel, we will get under way to the north. Every mile we can put on while that boat is inoperable will be to our advantage.”

“Inoperable means not able to work, right?”

“That's right. Make ready to retract the outrigger.”

“Retract means bring in?”

“It does. Once they leave we can be on our way in five minutes.”

“I'm ready. I may need your help retracting, just to speed it up,” Carlos said with a grin.

“A good plan.”

A few minutes later the rope between Fidel's boat and the tug grew taut and it slowly moved away. The men on it seemed very unhappy. Jonas could only imagine how unhappy the Fidel character must be.

A few minutes later they were bringing in the outrigger and soon had it secured into its place in the side of the boat. Jonas flipped the switch beside the wheel and the motor started. He pushed a button and the boat began slowly backing up, the water was set to churning behind them by the propeller. Before long they reversed the motor and were heading north.

Once clear of the entrance to the channel Jonas spoke.

“Think you can turn off the motor?”

“Flip this switch back down?”

“That will do it. Now, let's get those sails up so they can catch this breeze. It seems strong and steady tonight.”

“Strong and steady is good, right?”

“Very good. We'll soon be topping twelve knots.”

“That's like 14 or 15 miles an hour.”

“Very good.”

Fifteen minutes later the sails were up and billowed full-out.

“Set us on a northeasterly course, Carlos. That will clear us around the northern edge of Harbour Island. Then we'll sail due east for about an hour before veering south.”

“Due means . . . “

“Directly or exactly when referring to directions.”

“Gotcha. Ya know, Jonas, if we had black sails on this rig it would be lots harder to spot us at night.”

“You're right, but I've never seen black sails.”

“We could paint them.”

“Paint would make them stiff. They'd probably catch the wind okay but the paint would tend to crack when they were taken in and folded up.”

Carlos nodded that he understood. He continued to think.

“How about dye instead of paint. Shirts are like dyed and they don't crack.”

“Interesting idea. Black would be very easy to see during the day, however. White tends to blend in better with the water and the sky.”

More thought. Carlos tied off the wheel and walked to the rear of the boat where Jonas had taken a seat.

“How about two sets of sails? One white for day and one black for night.”

“I must say I had not thought about that. It could work. My plan has been to mostly sail at night, but we'd make much better time on a twenty-four-hour schedule. You have quite a head on your shoulders, young man.”

“My principal at school used to call me his *survivor*. I think he sort of meant the same thing.”

“I think he probably did. Here is a question for that survivor head of yours. How would we go about dying them? They are way too big to fit into any pot I know about.”

“I bet we could apply it with brushes or rollers like you do paint. It would just be like painting, but with dye.”

“A good solution. One problem remains, however.”

“What's that?”

“It would take a tremendous amount of black dye. I have no idea where we could find enough.”

“We'll have to think on that.”

Carlos thought. Jonas watched. He had a few ideas of his own but it seemed to have become the boy's project so he wouldn't interfere with the creative genius at work. The boy soon began thinking out loud.

“I remember once in second grade we was painting in art class and I mixed all the pretty colors together to see if I could make a even prettier color and you know what I got?”

“Tell me.”

“I got black. I mixed red, yellow and blue – my three favorite colors – and all I got was black.”

“And where is this leading?” Jonas asked, figuring he knew.

“If we can't find enough black dye, maybe we can get enough if we buy up all those other colors and mix them together.”

“Very good. I'd say it's worth a try. We won't be making port again until we get to Cat Island. There are stores there, but I don't know just what kind. Maybe you can find something about them on the computer. I have a CD all about the Bahama ports of call and what's available in each of them.”

“That's probably a DVD. Lot's of you old people make that mistake. I'll look later. I like it up here tonight. Not too chilly. No rain. Just a slip of a moon.”

“It is all of those things. We still need to be alert for bad guys, though. We can't know if the problem with Fidel's boat was small or large. Maybe he'll rent a boat to use – that would be present problems for us.”

“You mean because we'd have no idea what it would look like.”

“That's what I mean.”

“Sounds like our life just got more complicated.”

“Explain.”

“Since we can't know if he'll be in his own boat or in a rented boat we have to be suspicious of all speed boats, now.”

“That's how I see it,” Jonas said agreeing.

“I think our dangerous voyage just turned into a dangerouser voyage. There such a word as dangerouser?”

“There is now.”

They exchanged grins and began scanning the horizon in all directions.

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CHAPTER SIX

By midnight they had turned southeast and were skirting Harbour Island some ten miles off shore to its east. They were still about 100 miles from the northern tip of Cat Island. They were both up on deck. The wheel was tied off and Jonas was relaxing in one of the chairs toward the rear. Carlos moved from place to place the guardian of the binoculars.

“So, tell me about this Cat Island we're going to.”

“It's a long narrow island. Highest point is no more than 200 feet above sea level. Much of it is no more than two or three miles wide – a little wider at the north end and quite a bit wider at the south. There is a single road that runs the length. It has several dozen tiny settlements – most have less than a hundred people in them.”

“Why's it called Cat Island?”

“Some say it is shaped like a sitting cat. Some say it was named after the pirate Arthur Catt and some say there once was a huge population of wild cats living there.”

Carlos nodded, satisfied. He kept searching into the night with the binoculars.

“We gonna make port there?”

“If all goes well we will. The largest town is Orange Creek on the northwest corner of the island. We can get whatever supplies we need there. I'm told there is a nice, though tiny, port at Moss Town near the southern end. I thought we might tie up there for a while and rent a room so we can shower and get a home cooked meal. There are some hills just to the south and east if we want to take a hike and get the cricks out of our legs.”

“Cricks?”

“One of those terms that is very vague – you know vague?”

“Not definite?”

“Right. Anyway it just refers to needing to stretch and move around a bit to get the muscles in ones legs back to functioning normally.”

“I knew a kid once from Arkansas and he called creeks, cricks.”

“I've heard that myself.”

“You could make a joke out of that.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. The old man crossing the desert didn't want the crick in his leg to get better because he needed the water.”

Jonas laughed full out.

“That is a very funny joke. You're telling me you just made that up?”

“Yeah. Sometimes my brain just throws things like that at me. Don't know why. I may get to be eccentric like you after all.”

“Or perhaps, you already are.”

It brought a big grin to the boy's face.

They lapsed into silence for a period of time. Then Carlos spoke with some excitement in his tone.

“Better look at this, Jonas. I see a light out there between us and the island.”

Jonas got up and went to stand beside Carlos. Carlos reached the glasses up to him. He studied the area where Carlos had been looking.

“Should we strike the sails,” he asked, already on his way toward the mast.

“Not a bad idea, considering everything. I imagine it's harmless. Probably the running light on another friendly boat or ship. Let me see if I can get a feel for the direction it's going.”

He studied the light for some time.

“So, what do you think?” Carlos asked.

“It doesn't appear to be moving. That could mean one of three things. Can you figure that out?”

Carlos furrowed his forehead and began thinking out loud.

“Well, it could be that it really isn't moving. I suppose that's the best possibility. I guess if it was coming right at us the light would look like it was staying in the same place. If it gets bigger I guess that could be the case. Can't come up with the third.”

“What if it's a light on the rear of the boat?”

“Oh! Gottcha! It could be going directly away from us. I guess it would get smaller, in that case.”

“Very good. Regardless, it is a long ways a way. Let's keep track of it a while before we mess with the sails.”

Ten minutes passed. Jonas had been watching.

“Well, it seems to me that the light is getting bigger.”

“That ain't good news, right?”

“Of the three possibilities, it's probably not the best. To be on the safe side let's lower the sails.”

Before long the two sails lay draped over the boom at the bottom of the mast. The *Glada Tider* slowed and soon sat motionless in the water. Jonas got back to the binoculars.

“So what's up?” Carlos asked.

“Still getting bigger. Now it looks like it is actually the two running lights on each side of the bow. Being able to separate them like that means it can't be too far away.”

“Is it going to hit us?”

“Can't tell. Chances of two ships colliding in this big ocean are pretty slim, however. The problem is if they spot us and come to investigate.”

“Or a bigger problem is if it's Fidel who's coming to investigate,” Carlos added.

“I'll grant you that. Now that it's closer we should be able to get a better idea of its course.”

“I can see the two lights now, too, with my bare eyes,” Carlos said.

They watched in silence for some time.

“What if it is, Fidel?” Carlos asked. “We really haven't come up with a plan for that, you know.”

“I know, but I have been thinking about it. You are a good swimmer – I could see that when you were washing up in the ocean earlier.”

“I'm a *really* good swimmer. Spent time at the beach every day of my life back in Miami.”

“So, here's plan 'A'. If the ship gets really close, you get into the water and keep to the opposite side of the boat.”

“Like hiding, you mean.”

“Right.”

“What's plan 'B'?”

“That won't be ready until tomorrow so we'll hope 'A' is good enough for tonight.”

The other boat was definitely coming almost directly at them. Jonas considered starting the motor and moving off to the south of them, but he was afraid the noise would call attention to them. He waited.

“I think it's over the side time, young man. There's a life jacket there by the door. It will help keep you afloat without needing to expend much energy. Get into it and go!”

Carlos was quickly into the bright orange life jacket. He

would wait to buckle it until after he was safely in the water – time suddenly becoming short. Jonas released the rear anchor, thinking that would seem more realistic if they were spotted. He sat, but changed the position of the chair so he could keep an eye on the oncoming craft.

It got very close. That was not a good thing. Worse than that, it lit a spotlight and played it against the G T.

“Ahoy,” came a man's voice from the other vessel as it slowed in the water.

It was not a speed boat; it was a motor-powered yacht of considerable size. Jonas stood up and waved.

“You okay over there?” came the man's voice a second time.

“Doing fine. Just taking a little cat nap. Sorry the running lights were off. Trying to save the battery, you know.”

“Okay, then. Have a safe journey.”

“Thanks. Same to you.”

The voice bore a Spanish accent although Jonas had not been able to see the man's face since the spotlight had been on him. A Spanish accent in those waters was probably more common than an Anglo accent. Still, his heart was racing as the big boat pulled away and crossed behind them continuing on its way east.

Its course made no sense to Jonas. There were no more islands to the east – only the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean. Perhaps it was just seeking some solitude – alone time. Perhaps it was soon going to turn south and meet up with San Salvador or Mayaguana still further south. He would keep an eye on it for a time to make sure it didn't circle back.

Jonas unrolled the rope ladder over the side toward the spot where Carlos should be. He lit the area beside the boat with his flashlight beam. There was no Carlos to be seen. Jonas panicked.

“Carlos!” he called in something greater than his usual gentle voice. “Carlos!”

“Over here, on the other side, up front.”

Not wanting to waste time asking why, Jonas said:

“I have the ladder down on the back side. Swim around there and come up.”

Carlos was soon back on board, shivering in the night air.

“Inside,” Jonas said, opening the door to the cabin. “Let's get you dried off.”

Carlos was soon warmed up with a towel in place around his

middle.

“So, I guess you want to know why I wasn't behind the boat.”

“That question did come to mind.”

“I thought maybe I could see who was on the other boat so we'd know if it was part of Fidel's gang.”

“And was it?”

“Don't think so. He stood in the shadows. Didn't see anybody else. Maybe they were sleeping in the cabin. That man's accent was Jamaican. Fidel's guys are all born and bred in south Florida. A big difference.”

“A big, good, difference, I'd say.”

“I'm hungry. A midnight swim will do that to a guy.”

“Go. Graze. Find what you want. I'm going to go raise the sails and get us moving south again. We need to take advantage of this strong northeasterly breeze as long as it lasts.”

“I can wait til we get the sails up. I'll help.”

They soon had the anchor raised and the sails back in place.

“I can feel us moving,” Carlos said. “Usually I don't.”

“Just went from nothing to a whopping speedy twelve knots in 200 seconds or less.”

There were smiles, but they were lost in the darkness. They both went down to the cabin. Carlos fixed a ham and cheese sandwich.

“So, what's this plan 'B' you talked about for tomorrow?”

“We were lucky on two counts tonight. First it wasn't Fidel. But second it happened at night and the darkness was our friend. In the daylight, putting you down in the water like that would have been pretty risky.”

“So, plan 'B' involves turning off the sun?”

Those smiles they could see.

“I have scuba gear in the hold.”

“I seen it when I got out the crate.”

“I have it so if I need to make an underwater repair or just go sightseeing beneath the water I can do that. But, I figure we can use it for you to wear if another dangerous situation should come up during the day. You can submerge and rope yourself to the centerboard on the bottom of the boat. The tank will have enough air for an hour for a guy your size. I just doubt if anybody would think of searching down there for you.”

“Why we just hiding me?”

"I'm only a suspect if I'm associated with you. If you are not here, I should come off clean as a whistle. Fidel can't anymore than just *suspect* you are with me. He can't have any direct information about it, can he?"

"Well . . ."

"I usually like, 'well', but somehow I don't like *that* 'well'. Give. What's up?"

"I might have told a guy I met what I had planned after I overheard you talkin' in the restaurant."

"Might have?"

"He was a bum and he was going through the dumpster behind the building and I had just scored a whole sack full of scraps so I shared some of it with him. We got to talkin' and one thing led to another and he asked me where I lived and I said on your boat with you. I didn't want him to think I was a homeless kid and call the cops."

"How old a bum?"

"Bums are pretty hard to fix a age on. I'd say not as old as you, but still pretty old."

"You think he'd have told somebody?"

"Bums talk among themselves, you know, and if the word got around and got to Fidel and he figured I was the kid the bum was talkin' about then . . . well, you get the picture."

"I've been wondering about how my boat became Fidel's target."

Carlos shrugged.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to put you in danger. Well, I really didn't even think about it. You was just a guy with a boat and I needed a way to the Bahamas. I didn't know you was a good guy and stuff or I might have done something else."

"Something else? Really?"

Carlos grinned.

"Probably not. I didn't have no other options, you see."

"I understand and I appreciate your honesty."

"Grammar used to say, 'Better late than never'. You say that, too?"

"In this case I think I'll go with, 'Better safe than sorry.'"

Carlos frowned, clearly thinking about what Jonas had just said.

"Does that mean you care about what happens to me?"

“No. That means the first chance I get I'm going to toss you into Fidel's boat. Of course, I care about what happens to you. Where's your head been all these hours we've been together?”

“I figured as much, but I find that grownups are often hard to read.”

He thought some more.

“I guess I care about what happens to you, too. Sorry I got you into this mess.”

“It seems to me that we just need to redefine 'mess' as 'adventure'. That will change it from being a problem into a, well, into an adventure. You okay with that?”

“I'm fine with that. Now if we could just convince my shaking legs and my queasy stomach of it, I'd be in pretty good shape.”

Carlos finished his snack and crawled into his bunk. Jonas went back up on deck and kept an uneasy vigil hoping the boy really knew the difference between Jamaican and South Miami accents.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

With the breaking of dawn, Jonas went down and woke up Carlos. The boat was on a SSE course. The breeze was at their back and the waters calm. They were making between 12 and 14 knots which was like the pace of a cheetah for the GT. They had cereal and juice and Jonas explained what Carlos would be expected to do while he was in command of the boat up on deck. Carlos went topside and Jonas got some much-needed shut eye.

The first rays of sun felt good across the boy's chest as he stood at the wheel. He understood that the boat would do just fine with the wheel tied off but he liked feeling in command of the craft. He kept a regular watch on the horizon all around him. He could see the high points of Eleuthera Island which hung off the south end of Harbour Island and turned in an arc back toward the west. The sun highlighted the high points and glistened off the exposed limestone slopes.

Carlos was content to let Jonas sleep but he missed him – an odd feeling since he had trained himself over the years never to miss anyone, just in case they left him the way his mother had. He was eager to learn about using the air tank and trying the plan out under water. If it had been for any other reason than to use it in case of a life and death emergency, he thought he could really enjoy the activity.

A seagull landed on the roof of the cabin in front of him. It strutted back and forth as if inspecting the place. Apparently, the place didn't meet his standards because it soon flew off toward land. Sometimes Carlos had dreams about being able to fly. They made him feel powerful and safe – a lot like Jonas made him feel he thought. He had never met anybody like Jonas before. His Gramps and Gramma had been the best thing that ever happened to him – just taking him in like they did when they had no reason to – but they were more like gruff, unhappy, old caretakers. They fed him and made him mind and required him to help out. It had been like a family and he appreciated that, but he never really felt like they wanted him. It was hard to put into words and just sat in his gut as a constant ache. Not even tightening his belt could make it go away completely.

Jonas, on the other hand, was different. He had no reason to take care of him either but he seemed to enjoy having him around.

He was a good teacher and in his gently, soft spoken, way helped Carlos learn new things. He never put him down for what he didn't know or the mistakes he made. It was like mistakes were okay to him. That was a totally new concept for the boy. Carlos figured once the mission was over they would part company. He was worried about what he'd do and where he'd go but what he had learned up to that point in his life told him the two of them would definitely have to go their separate ways.

That seemed fair, to the boy. After all, the old man had his own life to live and seemed to enjoy living it alone. There was the second bunk, however, and Carlos figured deep down inside Jonas just might really want company – why else would he have built a cabin with a second bed in it? As soon as that thought entered his head he tried to put it out of his mind. He knew better than to wish for things he could never have.

If Carlos would have had to describe Jonas in one phrase it would have been 'gently caring' or maybe 'smart and happy' or maybe 'decent and trustworthy'. Perhaps it was good that he hadn't been required to come up with just one phrase. He wondered how Jonas would have described him. Probably 'helpless and obnoxious' (it was a word a teacher had once used to describe his overly demanding behaviors). He'd rather that Jonas thought of him as 'helpful and a good companion'. He had no way of really knowing, although the old guy hadn't thrown him overboard back when he'd had the chance. That had to say something good about what was going on. He figured Jonas was the kind of guy who would even take care of a helpless and obnoxious kid – at least for a while. Like he kept thinking to himself, he had never known a person like Jonas before so it was hard to know what to expect.

He wondered if Jonas had ever stolen anything. Carlos had stolen lots of things – money, food, presents for his Gramma. It hadn't ever bothered him before. He only took things from people who seemed to have way more than they needed. They'd hardly miss the stuff so it seemed fair in a way – they had too much and he and his grandparents had too little. He was just evening things out. But since meeting Jonas he had to wonder about it. What if he had stolen something from Jonas? He was a good guy and Carlos had no reason to hurt him. He figured it was a lot easier stealing from people you didn't know than from people you did know. One thing he knew for sure, he would never steal from Jonas.

He trusted Jonas and apparently, Jonas trusted him – he was asleep down in the cabin and had left him in charge up on deck. His Gramps had only really trusted him as long he was watching him. This thing with Jonas was different. It probably couldn't even be called trust if somebody thought they had to keep an eye on you. He was at the same time very happy and very sad – happy about how things were at that minute in his life, even with Fidel after him; sad because he was sure it would all have to come to an end someday soon.

Time passed in a hurry when he was thinking about such important things.

“Hey, I see you haven't sunk us yet,” Jonas joked as he came up on deck.

It was nearly noon. He had slept well for a long stretch and felt refreshed.

“Came close a few times when the sea monsters came after us but I beat them off with the outrigger timber.”

“Those sea monsters can be pesky critters, can't they.”

He ruffled the boy's hair and smiled down at him. Carlos usually pulled away from being touched. It was different with Jonas. He allowed it. In fact, he sort of liked it. Gentle touching was new to him.

“We're right on course. See. SSE. For a while we seemed to be getting closer to Eleuthera but now we're getting farther away.”

“You mean that big island is floating away from us?”

“No. I figured it out. Before it was curving out toward us but now we're down to where it curves away from us. Must mean we aren't too far from Cat Island, huh?”

“In fact, that may be it off to the southeast.”

Carlos tied off the wheel and took the binoculars from the hook on the back of the cabin. He was soon nodding.

“It's land, alright and the only land on the map is Cat Island. Did we make good time?”

“We sure did. Excellent, in fact. You must have been scooting us along at better than 14 knots.”

“Fast for us. Slow for a car. Huh?”

“Right.”

“I'm starved, you know,” Carlos said. “Cheerios only last a guy so long.”

“Looks like we have a half hour or so before we really need

to begin steering this thing into Cat, so let's get some lunch.”

“McDonald's or Burger King?”

“McHorn's floating kitchen.”

It was worth another chuckle. There were being lots and lots of reasons to chuckle. Carlos liked that.

They went down to the cabin and were soon enjoying bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwiches and potato chips – the kind out of the round boxes. They stored easier and survived in one piece better than those in bags. Carlos changed from orange to lemon-lime. Jonas stuck with diet cola.

“Why you even bring anything but that diet stuff if you never drink the good stuff,” Carlos asked.

“Sea monsters and gulls prefer the fruity drinks.”

Carlos did a double take.

“You were joking, right?”

“I was. They really like diet cola, too.”

Carlos grinned.

“I like it when you make jokes. It gives me like a free feeling inside. Can't explain it more than that.”

“Free as in unguarded and at ease?”

“Yeah. Like that. It's a good feeling.”

“Yes. It is a very good feeling,” Jonas agreed.

With lunch finished they went topside.

Jonas took the binoculars and scanned a 360-degree circle around the horizon.

“All's clear, but I guess you already knew that.”

“I been lookin' regularly. Not a single boat has came in sight since sun up.”

“That's the good thing about sailing way out east here,” Jonas pointed out. “If we were in the main channel to the west of the big islands we'd be in among many dozens of boats.”

“And one of them just might be Fidel.”

“That's a possibility. It's why I opted to go this way.”

“Opted is like chose, right?”

“Right.”

“Like you opted to keep me on the ship that first day.”

“Yes, and I must say it has turned out to be a very good decision.”

Carlos grinned again. He agreed but didn't think it was his place to say so. He did think he should say something, however.

“You know I'm sorry I got you into this.”

“Into this adventure, you mean? Into this us getting to know each other, you mean? Into this having somebody along who appreciates my dumb jokes, you mean?”

Carlos understood. He also understood that no response was required.

Carlos steered the boat according to the old man's directions and they moved close along the west side of the northern edge of the big Cat.

“First docks will be at Bain Town – over there near the head of that cove.”

Jonas pointed.

“We're heading for Orange Creek, the docks a mile or so south. It's a much larger town with stores. Probably lots of tourists. I believe that should be helpful if we're trying to stay out of sight – like hiding within a crowd.”

“We need to change the name of the boat again, I think,” Carlos said.

“That is actually a very good idea. I wouldn't have thought to do it.”

“You're just not used to living the cat and mouse game like I am.”

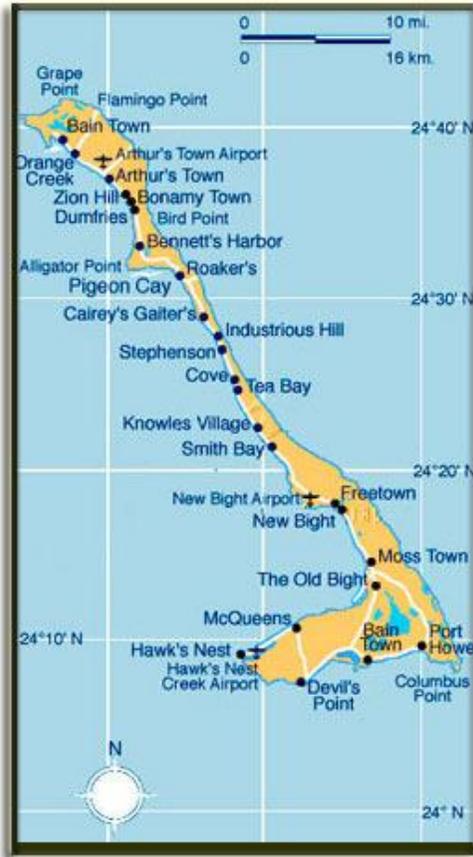
The comment saddened Jonas but he didn't say anything.

“I'll cut a new piece of canvas. Then we'll trade spots and you can paint the name.”

“What name shall we use this time?”

“You did such a good job picking one last time, I'll just leave that up to you.”

Within fifteen minutes the GT, alias the Bilge Pump, became 'Good Feelings'. Jonas gave his nod of approval. The canvas was tacked in place right over the first one. They lowered the sails and Jonas instructed Carlos in docking the boat under the power of the motor. Jonas was continually amazed at how quickly the boy picked up on new skills such as those. Carlos was continually amazed at how patient the old man was.



MAP OF CAT ISLAND

They were soon tied up and out on the wood plank dock. The owner of the dock approached them. It would cost them five dollars an hour or twenty dollars for the rest of the day and night. Jonas handed over five with the understanding that if they ran over he'd make it right. The payment was accepted with the promise to keep a careful watch on the boat for them. Even so, Jonas had locked the cabin.

The man pointed them in the direction of a store that had boy's clothing and before long Carlos was the proud owner of two new shirts, a new pair of denim cut offs, and a pair of shoes. When asked what size shoes he wore the boy looked blank and said, "I guess the size that fits my feet."

Although he had been serious, the store keeper and Jonas shared a chuckle. Come to find out they were the first shoes the boy had ever owned. Outside, Carlos had a question – well, two.

“Why do I need shoes and can I please take them off now?”

Jonas agreed to to the take off and explained.

“I figure when we get down to exploring Long Cay we may be hiking over some really rocky surfaces. Just figured shoes would help to keep your feet from getting cut.”

“My feet are pretty darn tough. But, we’ll see. I hate the way they feel – the shoes, not my feet. I mean I really hate the way they feel.”

The shoes were soon back into the sack with the shirts and shorts.

“Can I wear one of the shirts?”

“Sure. Pick one.”

Jonas held the sack open.

“I like the green one.”

“Green it will be then.”

“Green goes okay with my tan shorts, right?”

“Very well, actually.”

“Ain’t had a shirt for a while. Feels good – soft.”

They headed for the grocery store where they loaded up with things Jonas knew Carlos would like. The boy's eyes grew to the size of saucers when he he saw a hundred-dollar bill come out of his old friend's wallet. He knew they existed but had never seen one. Jonas asked for a cardboard carton instead of a sack since the load was fairly heavy with milk, juice, canned food and pop – lots and lots of pop.

Carlos spotted a rug maker sitting in front of her shop, weaving. He had an idea.

“She might have dye or know where we could get some,” he said.

They made their way to her through the crowd of tourists. She spoke tourist English but was more comfortable with Spanish. Carlos handled the conversation. She sold them what dye she could spare and told them about her cousin down in Moss Town who also made rugs. She would have more dye and even had a large dying vat. Maybe they wouldn't need to paint it on the sails after all.

“I have the need for a banana split,” Jonas said.

“A what?”

“Haven't you ever had a banana split?”

“I don't think so.”

Jonas pointed to a shop just down the street.

“See the sign in the window.”

“Sodas, malts, splits.”

A few minutes later they were sitting at a small, round, glass-topped, table on chairs with metal filigree backs. The ceiling fan overhead did little other than to force the hot air down upon them but Carlos thought it was the lap of luxury.

“Two banana splits, please,” Jonas said to the waitress.

Carlos had never imagined that anything could be so delicious. He oohed and aahed and licked his fingers. He rolled his eyes back into his head. He shook his legs up and down. He didn't even seem to mind the 'brain freeze' he got after trying too large a portion. Jonas loved splits but he really enjoyed watching the young man even more.

“Better get to it, Jonas. It'll melt away before you finish.”

Jonas got to it!

Carlos licked his glass bowl clean.

Jonas didn't.

They made it back to the boat with just seconds to spare on that first five dollars. They backed out of the slip and moved a few docks south to where they could top off the water, gasoline, and propane tanks. By 1:30 they were headed south toward Moss Town.

“You're handling the wheel like a seasoned veteran,” Carlos.

The boy grinned. It was not his usual happy grin. It was the grin of an imp!

“That would be like a well salted old soldier? Salt, seasoning. Old soldier, veteran. Get it?”

“I do indeed. That is what is called a groaner – and actually a very good groaner at that.”

“Why a groaner.”

“Because to be good it has to be so bad that people who hear it, groan instead of laugh.”

“Gottcha. Has to be bad to be good.”

He shook his head but was clearly pleased that he had been able to come up with a joke all by himself.

“When I gonna get in the water to practice with that air tank?”

“I thought we'd do that after we leave Moss Town.”

“I really gotta take a shower down there? I hate showers, did I tell you that?”

“If you didn't I guess I just assumed as much.”

Jonas smiled.

“So we ain't gonna stay in a hotel overnight, then?”

“I'd rather keep after it. I'm thinking we may have eluded Fidel and I don't want to give him a chance to catch up.”

“Eluded? Like kept away from or avoided?”

“Exactly.”

Jonas became suddenly serious.

“He may know we are headed for the Bight of Acklins, depending on what information the waiter may have shared.”

“What's a Bight – like a bite out of an apple?”

“This Bight is spelled b-i-g-h-t not b-i-t-e. It means cove or bay or inlet, or lagoon.”

Carlos nodded. That's where the Long Cay is, right?”

“Yes.”

“What towns are there?”

“On Crooked Island I only know of one – Colonel Hill and on Acklins, Spring Point. I'm sure there are others.”

“Long Cay is just off Crooked Island, right.”

Jonas nodded.

“So, Colonel Hill is closer?”

“Sort of. Spring Point is just across the Bight as I recall. We'll need to look at the map when we get closer. Right now our concern is getting to Moss Town.”

“How far is that?”

“The island is about 50 miles long so I'd say probably another 30 or 35 from where we are right now.”

“Looks like lots of little towns along the bank.”

“The settlements are almost all on this side of the Island, and like I said earlier, they are all tiny with only a few dozen people in most of them.”

“Do you think we are safer here close to the land or out at sea away from the islands?”

“I don't know how to answer you. We're closer to help here but we may be easier to find. Out on the sea we will be harder to find but we'll be on our own. If we need help there won't be any.”

“I guess it doesn't really matter anyway.”

“Why's that?”

“We have to get to that Cay and there ain't no way a getting there except across stretches of open sea.”

“You have a good grasp of the situation. Still want to go on with the search?”

“Sure do. So far, this is the best adventure a kid has ever been on.”

They sailed on in virtual silence for a long time, each one buried in his own thoughts.

* * *

Later that afternoon Jonas brought up the adventure topic again.

“Earlier you were saying you are liking this adventure. I have a book down in the cabin you will probably enjoy reading sometime. It is about a wonderful adventure.”

“What's it called?”

“Treasure Island.”

“Good name. What's it about?”

“A boy about your age who gets mixed up with pirates back in the old days.”

“That does sound fun. Never read a book all the way through, though. Don't know if I could stick with it.”

“Guess there's only one way to find out.”

“You're sneaky, old man.”

“Me? Sneaky. I don't see how.”

“I can't see if I can stick with it to the end if I don't start it, so I can't use the excuse not to start it that I was building up to.”

“My. That is sneaky. Did I really do that?”

“I like you, Jonas.”

“And I like you, Carlos. Now, turn that wheel hard left or we'll sail right past the little dock at Moss Town.”

Carlos gave the big wheel a rapid spin. The boat tipped a bit to the right side as it cornered quite severely, making the two of them struggle to keep their footing.

“Now that's what I call a hard left, young man.”

It was worth some good out loud laughter from both of them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Well, I only see two large houses and what, a dozen smaller ones,” Carlos said surveying the little community as he stepped off the boat onto the dock. “About as far from South Miami as you can get, I’d say.”

“I imagine that’s right. That big house has a sign over the door. I can’t see it from here, can you?”

“It says Inn. That’s like a hotel.”

Jonas smiled to himself suddenly finding himself on the receiving end of an education.

“Let’s see what they have to offer.”

The dock seemed to be free. They had secured the *Glada Tider* fore and aft alongside the aging wooden structure. There were rubber tires tied in place so the boats didn’t rub directly against the planking. It made for a basically safe arrangement but often turned the side of the boat black.

The front door of the Inn was standing open.

“Air conditioning, I assume,” Jonas said pointing to the open door and smiling.

Carlos smiled back and nodded. He pointed up to the second floor where a real, if old, old air conditioner hung out a window. A woman in her late forties came to greet them as they entered the front hall.

“I’m Maria. Want a room? I have a room. A hundred bucks a night. Fresh sheets. Share a bathroom with the rest of us.”

“You got a shower?” Carlos asked.

“No shower. Water is too precious here.”

The boy’s face lit up. He was ready to stay the week.

Jonas took over the conversation.

“Two questions, really. We did want a place to clean up, but we are also looking for Gina, the cousin of the rug maker up at Orange Creek.”

“Three houses that way.”

“Thank you. I think we will go see her first. Then we will come back and talk about a room.”

“I will save it for you,” she said as they turned to leave.

“Save it from who?” Carlos asked Jonas as they walked south along a path. “Not another boat or tourist to be seen as far as I can

tell.”

“I believe it is that very small house right there.”

Carlos approached it. It's door was also open.

“Anybody home?” he called.

A pretty young lady in her mid-thirties appeared.

“Can I help you?”

“Your cousin from up in Orange Creek – the rug maker – told us you might be able to help us with some dye we need.”

“I have dye. What you need?”

Carlos took over.

“See that boat docked out there. We need enough dye to color both of its sails.”

“What color?”

“Black. We can mix colors to make black if you don't have enough.”

“Probably eight, maybe ten square yards. I have enough. You want me to do the dying for you. I can do the dying.”

“Let's talk price,” Carlos said.

His approach tickled Jonas who just stood back and watched – learned, actually.

When all was said and done the boy got the dye down to \$22.35 and the dying done for free.

Jonas was impressed.

“I don't suppose there is a shop that sells sails that size around here is there?”

“No but I got you something even better.”

“Oh? Better? I don't understand.”

“My Uncle, Marky, makes sails. He give you good deal if I say so.”

“You are most kind. Where can we find Marky?”

“At the big house, there.”

She pointed to the Inn.

“At the inn?”

“Yes. In back. He and my Aunt own it. He works out of a shack in back.”

Jonas and Carlos had the same thought but neither said it out loud.

‘Is everybody on that island related?’

“Let me talk with Marky. If he can make me sails then perhaps you can dye those for me so we won't need to take the ones

off the boat.”

“He makes very good sails. Top notch canvas. Strong thread. A-1 grommets.”

It sounded like she knew the sail business as well as the dye business.

They walked back to the inn and went around to the rear. They found a man who looked to be the right age.

“Would you be Marky?” Jonas asked.

“Maybe.”

There was an undisguised degree of hesitation in his voice.

“Gina sent us. We wanted to talk about some sails for the boat moored out at the dock.”

“Saw it come in. I'm Marky. I'm the best sail maker on the Island. Everybody says so. Learned from my father who learned from his father.

“How long will it take – main sail and jib? They are a bit oversized for the size of the boat. You'll need to take a close up look, I imagine.”

“Looks like eight to ten yards. I can have them done this time tomorrow.”

He made Jonas an offer. Jonas looked at Carlos who stood behind the man. Carlos shook his head. Jonas made a counter offer. It went on for several minutes. A price was eventually agreed upon. Marky was happy. Jonas was happy. Carlos thought he could have cut a few more bucks off the price but wouldn't really complain.

“One more thing. Gina is going to dye them black for us so we need to allow drying time, I guess.”

“Same time. I'll cut them both. She can dye the big one while I make the little one. By then the canvas for the big one will be dry and I can work on it while she dyes the little one.”

Jonas was surprised that Marty hadn't asked why they wanted black sails. From listening to him rattle off the process he'd use, one might have guessed he and Gina did that sort of thing every day.

“I guess we'll need a room for the night, then.”

“Maria takes care of the rooms. Ask for 201. It's got AC. Costs five bucks to use it but it's worth it.”

Carlos wondered to himself if they charged to use the bathroom, too.

Soon the arrangements were made. Jonas had a question for Maria.

“Is there a good restaurant close by?”

“Down at Old Bight. A couple of miles along the road south. Vince's Pizzeria. They have very good food and wine and beautiful waitresses.”

She winked at Carlos. He may have blushed. It was hard to tell, since Carlos sported that beautiful bronze skin he was so proud of.

“I assume the boat will be safe from vandals, overnight?”

“We got no crime here on Cat. Just nice people.”

“That's good to know.”

The two of them were soon stepping out toward Old Bight. Jonas had visions of a huge steak with baked potato and sour cream. Carlos saw a meat lover's pizza sitting in front of him. Would you believe, that's exactly how it worked out?

They took their time on the return trip and walked the shoreline instead of sticking to the road. The pure white sand was as beautiful close up as it had been from out on the boat.

“Would you look at that,” Carlos said pointing off shore some 50 yards.

A large group of Dolphins were swimming by – up and out of the water and then they'd do it all over again.

“They look like waves up above the water,” Carlos said with a degree of awe and excitement in his voice. “And it's like they know we're watching and they're showing off. I never seen so many at one time. You?”

“A few times. The area to the west and north of here is just loaded with Dolphins. We missed most of them by taking the easterly route.”

“Glad I got to see these. I'd love to be able to swim with them. That would be awesome, don't you think?”

“It would indeed.”

The sun was setting when they walked into the yard in front of the Inn. It was surrounded by trees that formed a woods of sorts behind it and ran up the low hill to the east. There had been lots of trees along the road. They grew right up to the sand line on the beaches.

As much as Jonas had been looking forward to a shower, he settled for the washrag and basin of water. He convinced Carlos to do the same. The boy thought it was a good trade off from a shower so didn't launch much of a protest.

The five dollar-a-day air conditioner produced about six cents worth of cool and \$4.94 worth of noise, but the beds were good and close to it. They were both tired so it really didn't matter. They had a good night's sleep.

Carlos was up first and went right for the front window to make sure the *Glada Tider* was still safe and sound at the dock. It was but that may not have counted for anything. Tied up on the opposite side of the dock was . . .

“Jonas! Jonas! Get up. You gotta see this!”

Jonas roused a bit more quickly than usual due to the urgency in the boy's voice. He joined him at the window.

“I see. Fidel's speedboat. Probably not good. It is possible that he is just checking all the docks and doesn't really know the boat is ours.”

“If he knows the boat's name and he starts nosing around the rear end he'll find the two layers of canvas. Don't look good to me,” Carlos said clearly distressed.

“This is going to be our plan. You scoot out the back door and head through the woods and up onto the hill behind the house. Keep watch on the boats. If Fidel leaves and if you see me get onto the boat by myself, then it will be safe for you to return. Otherwise, I will try to meet up with you at the Pizza place down in Old Bight at noon – or whenever I can. Here, take this money. Now go!”

With no more than a reluctant glance up into the old man's face Carlos turned and was on his way. Jonas returned his attention out the window. Fidel and Marky appeared in the front yard from around the side of the house. They were talking; Marky was doing most of it. He pointed north back up the island and nodded several times. Fidel handed him something – money, Jonas assumed – and then returned to his boat. Two others joined him, following from the side of the house. They had not been visible from the window. They scanned the *Tider* one final time, backed out, and moved north at slow speed searching the shore with apparent interest and care.

Jonas dressed and went downstairs stepping out the front door and stretching as if he were just there to begin his day. Marky approached him.

“Bad dudes askin' about you.”

He pointed after them.

“Bad dudes?”

“Sure seemed like that to me. South Florida accent. They

was askin' about you two.”

“Oh! I wonder why?”

Marky realized they had begun a game of words and seemed to enjoy it.

“Said you had something that belonged to him and he intended to get it back.”

“And . . .”

“And, he seemed real fuzzy on the details.”

“Like?”

“Like he was mostly sure about the kid – not so much about you.”

“And you told them what?”

“First, I told them your boat belonged to four beautiful young Jamaican women who were here to hike the island north to Pigeon Cay. I'm going to sail it north in two days and meet them up there. I told him they are on Christmas break from college and that the boat belonged to one of their rich fathers.”

“You spin a good yarn. Why are you protecting us?”

“You still owe me for the sails. If they slit your throat I'll never get paid.”

His smile suggested a mixture of truth and jest. His open palm suggested he was open to taking a tip for the services he had already rendered. Jonas forked over a hundred-dollar bill.

“Thank you. If I may make a suggestion?”

“Certainly. Please!”

“You and the boy leave in the boat for the day. Sail south around the toe of the island and tie up on the other side just opposite Old Bight. You'll know the spot by the collapsed wooden fishing hut with the remains of a corrugated metal roof and the pier posts of a old dock out front. Hike back over the ridge late afternoon and I'll help you get the sails to your boat.”

“You are being unbelievably helpful. Thank you.”

“I like you from the start. I fear the man in the beard from the start. Here on Cat we take care of good people and run off the bad element. No crime here and lots of joy because of it. Where's the boy?”

He looked all around as if concerned.

“I sent him into the hills when I spotted the black speed boat.”

“That's good. You knew he was after you, then.”

“Unfortunately, yes. The less you know the better. We *are* the good guys in all of it, however.”

“I don't doubt it. I wish you safety.”

“Thanks. I need to get to the boat. That's the signal the boy is waiting for to tell him all is well.”

Marky nodded.

“I need to get back to work so I'll have you the finest set of sails ever made.”

Jonas moved directly to the *Tider* and stood on deck being as conspicuous as possible. Fifteen minutes later Carlos appeared on the run from behind the house.

When he reached the dock he bent over, hands on his knees, puffing for some time. He tried to speak through the heavy breathing.

“I seen Fidel leave ... but I waited for the signal ... like you said. ... Did I do good?”

“Very good. Now, here's the next part of our plan.”

He related the suggestion from Marky and in another five minutes they were on their way south west past the town of McQueen. They circled south and then west at the the point just off Hawks Nest. They sailed due west past Devil's Point, Bain Town and turned back north at Columbus Point and hugged the shore to make sure they wouldn't miss the landmark Marky had described. It had been better than a forty-mile trip.

“There! See!” Carlos said pointing east toward the beach. The old shack and the pier poles standing waist deep in the water.”

Jonas was amused at the 'waist deep' characterization but kept it to himself.

“Look the area over good,” Jonas said. “We don't want any surprises when we make land later.”

“Surprises? Later?”

“Surprises like Fidel peering down at us from somewhere up on that wooded hillside. Later, because I think we will be better off taking the *Tider* back out to sea and out of sight until late afternoon.”

“Gotcha. A good plan. Pretty good thinking for a old guy.”

He immediately looked up into the 'old guy's' face.

“That was a joke, you know – the old guy thing.”

“I understood that. One of those things that can be both a joke and the truth at the same time.”

Carlos responded with a shrug and continued scanning the

area through the binoculars.

“Looks all clear to me. Want to look?”

“I’ll take your word for it. You have proved what a good set of peepers you have.”

“Peepers?”

“What we called eyes, when I was your age – like slang.”

“Hard to think of you my age. But I guess you had to be, once, didn't you?”

“That's how it usually goes, I'm told.”

Carlos delivered a quick smile in response but didn't look at the old man.

“You have a mom and dad when you was a kid?”

“Yes. I was fortunate that way.”

“They was good to you, I bet.”

“They were very good to me.”

“That's good. I'm happy for you.”

He sounded like the old man reassuring the kid. What he hadn't voiced was his clear message that the adults in his life had not been all that good to him, but he realized that what he had was better than nothing at all so he held onto that. He wasn't one to dwell on such things and moved on.

“So, what we gonna do out at sea for the rest of the afternoon?”

“Eat lunch seems to be the first order of business, wouldn't you say?”

“You ever fry that Spam? I think it would be pretty good fried with scrambled eggs and toast.”

“I have, and it is. Set us a course due west, tie off that wheel, and let's go below and find that skillet.”

CHAPTER NINE

After lunch Jonas showed Carlos some of the tricks of sailing almost directly into the wind. It had to do with positioning the sails at exactly the correct angles and running a slight zig-zag path across the water – tacking, it was called. They sailed northwest for an hour or so and the boy got lots of practice. Again, Jonas was amazed at how quickly he picked up the skills. They struck the sails at 2:30 and Carlos became familiar with the air tank and eventually mastered the move in which he hid under the boat lashing himself to the center board. Jonas accompanied him with scuba gear on the first dive showing him how to arrange the rope and hang motionless from the board. He then made a half dozen practice dives until he reported he was comfortable and confident with the move. He probably became comfortable and confident after just two or three dives, but it was a lot of fun!

They recharged the air tank from the compressor in the hold and situated it for easy access on a moment's notice. His best time from working the wheel to donning the tank and entering the water was 58 seconds. Jonas couldn't envision any circumstance in which he would need to do it any faster. Carlos seemed pleased with himself and had clearly enjoyed the underwater activities.

Jonas introduced Carlos to his encyclopedias on discs and the boy spent several hours in the cabin learning about the Bahamas and the surrounding waters. He was, of course, most interested in the islands surrounding Bight of Acklins and was disappointed in the paucity of information available about Long Cay, the extension to the south of Crooked Island that Jonas thought was represented on the disc Carlos carried.

At 4:00 Jonas entered the cabin from where he had been keeping watch up top.

“Time to head back to Cat. Think you can turn this baby around and get us there?”

“All by myself?”

“That's what I had in mind, after all, isn't that why I'm paying you the big bucks?”

Carlos offered his wonderful, full out, grin.

“Aye, aye, captain. And just when is it I get those big bucks?”

Jonas ruffled his hair.

“I guess we better get the sails up then,” Carlos said.

“We? What's this *we* stuff?”

Carlos nodded indicating he understood his skills were about to be put to the test – sails up, boat turned around, sail the boat back east across the northerly winds, and find the old shack on the beach again, all without any assistance from the old man. He felt up to the challenge and was pleased Jonas was giving him the chance.

All aspects of the ride went well. At a few minutes after six he pointed a few degrees off to the south.

“There's the shack and the pier poles. I really did it! I got us back.”

“You did an excellent job, seaman. Excellent.”

Jonas picked up the binoculars and scanned up and down the coast line. Not a single boat in sight and the beach was deserted as far as he could see in both directions.

“How do I know if the water's deep enough so I don't drag bottom on the way in?”

“An important question. My guess is that if there had been a pier here at one time that won't be a problem, but just in case we'll use my knotted rope and weight.”

“I guess I missed that chapter in my education,” Carlos said.

Jonas removed the rope he had spoken about from a small compartment in the floor and explained.

“I lower the weight over the side with the rope and keep track of the number of knots that go below the surface. Each knot represents three feet. We need five feet clearance from the bottom – could do with less but I don't want to get surprised by a single, sharp, rock sticking up down there. If I feel the weight settle onto the bottom I know how many feet of water we have. As we get in closer it should become shallower. We'll take the final thirty yards under motor power.”

At forty yards, they began to strike the sails. The boat drifted on toward shore several more yards. Carlos started the motor. Jonas dropped the weight over the side. At thirty yards, they had more than fifteen feet – that was all the line he used. At twenty yards the weight was still not in contact with the bottom. At ten yards, he felt it begin to drag so he lifted it just until it was free. Apparently, there was a sharp drop off right at the water's edge because they coasted right up to the beach with no problem. Instead of heading in bow

first, Jonas positioned the boat parallel with the shore in case they might need to make a hasty get-away.

Carlos killed the motor and jumped off the boat. Jonas tossed him a mooring line and he tied it around a handy tree. They were docked.

Jonas figured it was going to be at least an hour's hike up the hill and back down to the Inn. He was pleasantly surprised when, half way up the hill they saw Marky making his way down the slope toward them, the sails were folded and riding on a makeshift sled of sorts, which he pulled behind him. Within the hour, they had them aboard and said their good-byes to their new friend.

It would be an 8 to 10-hour sail to San Salvador, their next port. They got underway at a little after seven sailing a mostly eastern course. The black sails were in place and even in the dusky sky they could barely be seen.

“It was a stroke of genius – the black sail thing, Carlos.”

Carlos grinned and tied off the wheel.

“I think this genius is hungry again. How about mac and cheese and some fruit?”

“Sounds good to me. I'd like to stay up here and keep a look out for a few more hours. How about you fixing the food this time, and we can eat up here?”

“This time? I thought I'd been fixin' the food every time.”

“I guess you have at that, and a fine chef you are.”

“I was mostly the cook for Gramps after Gramma got sick. I'm better with Mexican but I can get by with Anglo.”

“Tomorrow you can hit me with Mexican, okay?”

“Okay. I know just what I'll fix.”

They sat in the chairs up on deck and ate. Before too long it became pitch dark. That slip of a moon that had been floating up above them during the previous nights had disappeared.

“We standin' watch up here or down at the screen tonight?” Carlos asked.

“I think down in the cabin will be okay. There's nothing going on up here. I'm quite certain we have no silhouette showing against the sky. We'll keep the running lights off even though that isn't strictly legal. Under the circumstances, I think we're allowed.”

“Is that like, all rules are meant to be broken?”

“It's more like sometimes you have to weigh the result of following the rule with following your good, common sense.”

The response satisfied Carlos.

“We'll need the night vision cameras for sure tonight, don't you think, Jonas?”

“Definitely. Let's go get them on-line and make sure they are working.”

“Green – dirty green.”

It was how Carlos characterized the color of the night vision pictures on the screen.

“That's just how they look in the movies. Pretty cool, huh?”

It required the first, “Yes, pretty cool,” Jonas had ever stated in his entire life.

The night continued without incident. They did two hour shifts. Jonas actually got some sleep. He supposed that meant he finally believed he could fully trust the boy to carry out his responsibilities unsupervised. It provided him with a feeling of security he hadn't realized he had been missing.

* * *

“Thar she blows, Jonas,” Carlos said stirring the old man out of a sound sleep. “San Salvador Island.”

“Let's head up top and see for ourselves.”

Carlos had found the island on the screen from the camera up top the mast. They were soon on deck. Carlos used the binoculars although it loomed large even without them.

“We gonna stop?”

“I think we'll pass this one up. We have supplies. It's a straight shot south to Crooked Island – a little over 100 miles. If we keep at it we can be there before sundown.”

“Good. I'm getting eager to get there, get the treasure, and get out safely.”

“You make it sound so simple. The way I see it, our toughest times are still ahead.”

“I suppose. But at least once we get to Long Cay we can actually begin doing something.”

“I understand. I suppose I'm eager, also. Let's turn south and tie off the wheel. We need to begin studying whatever we can find about Long Cay.”

“Not much. I've already looked.”

“There will surely be information available on the island – tourist information.”

“I hope so. I did find something called a topographic map. It

looks like it shows the hills and valleys and stuff.”

“Won't be high hills. Mostly level the way I understand it. Very low at the point of the mark on your disc, I believe.”

“I guess we'll just have to make our own map, then.”

“We can do that. A fine idea. Let's take a look anyway”

What they found was pretty much what Jonas had said. Most of the hills were on the wider south end of the island. There did appear to be two low hills right at about the spot where the X was on the disc. It would be there they would begin their search.

Carlos pulled up the map he had found. He cropped it and enlarged it so it mostly just showed how the Cay hung to the south off the northwest part of Crooked Island. It was shaped something like a softball bat, fat at the bottom – south. It was less than ten miles long and about a mile wide at its widest point. There were five small islands off the southeast end. Carlos had only found names for two of them. The northern was called North Cay and the next one south, Fish Cay. Fish was the largest. They were essentially flat, only a few feet above sea level. Carlos took out the disc and key and they compared the drawing to the map. The X seemed to be right between the two small hills on the north end of the of Long Cay.

“You think that's really the place?” Carlos asked.

“I'd be the *Glada Tider* on it.”

“That means you have no doubt at all, doesn't it.”

“Indeed, it does.”

Jonas was privately concerned that the last leg of the trip – the one they were on – was going to be the most likely spot for Fidel to find them. It wasn't among the heaviest boat traffic areas within the Bahamas but it had its share of both trade ships that made deliveries of essential items and pleasure craft like the *Tider*. His concern stemmed from the fact it was the last place Fidel really had to look. It represented the southern end of the Bahamas. He felt certain Fidel wouldn't give up without first exploring that area. He kept his concern to himself.

“There should be lots more dolphins in these waters,” Jonas said. “I understand they stick to middle of the channel, which is less used by boats.”

“Dolphins are good but treasure is better. Fourteen knots and don't spare the horses!”

“In this gentle breeze, we'll be lucky to make eight knots. Maybe you can lasso some dolphins and have them pull us. Some

species can swim at speeds greater than thirty miles an hour.”

“Twenty-five knots would be awesome, you know.”

“Probably shake the planks right off the deck,” Jonas joked.

They enjoyed the leisurely pace for some time. There were dolphins and lots of large white birds. They replaced the black sails with the original white ones, not wanting to have to explain or to become known as the ship with black sails.

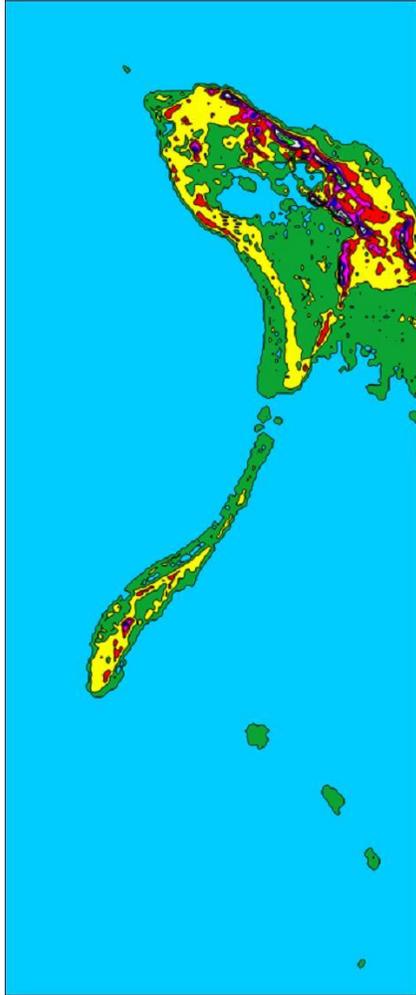
No sooner had they stowed the new sails and hoisted the old ones than Carlos spotted a black speed boat behind them. It was also moving slowly.

“Maybe Fidel, back there, Jonas. You look.”

As Jonas focused the binoculars, Carlos opened the hatch, which contained the diving gear. He stood by for instructions.

“We have some time. He's hardly gaining on us. Probably hasn't seen us yet or he's interested in some of the other boats back there. Let's launch the outriggers first to change our look. Then, if he moves in on us you can take a dip.”

It took no longer than five minutes to extend the outriggers. The boat that could have been Fidel's began to catch up. Carlos was into his equipment and over the side. Jonas lowered the center board so he would have a good-sized area to which to lash himself. The old man looked at his watch to calculate when the hours' worth of air in the tank would be used up. He took a seat and began to stare



into a book, looking very much like a tourist, he hoped. He heard the boat before he turned to look at it. The good news would have been that it was filled with bikini clad coeds on holiday break. The bad news would have been a skinny black haired man with a long, scraggly, beard.

It wasn't the good news! Jonas remained seated as the boat slowed and pulled alongside.

“Vamos a subir!”

Jonas stood and walked to the rail nearest the boat.

“No habla Espanol.”

He shrugged as if demonstrating ignorance.

“We are coming on board,” one of the men said, translating into English.

“May I ask why?”

There was no response. Two of the men climbed over the railing. They had hand guns in holsters. The one who had been doing the talking continued.

“You have a kid with you?”

“A kid. I often have my grandson with me but not on this trip. Wish I did. I always enjoy having him along.”

The second man went below into the cabin. He searched in there for a considerable amount of time. Eventually he was back carrying one of the shirts recently purchased for Carlos. He held it up.

“Que es esto?”

Although Jonas knew he had said, 'What is this?', he again pleaded ignorance of Spanish. The first man translated and more.

“What is this? Looks like a boy's shirt to me. Where's the kid?”

“Like I said, I often bring my grandson along so I just keep clothes for him here.”

The man spoke back and forth across to Fidel who stood hands on hips waiting. Jonas caught a few words – nino, nieto, ningun nino aqui. Things were being reported about no boy and some reference to his grandson. Fidel revved the engine and moved his craft in a small circle around the *Tider* apparently searching for a child hanging off the side or treading water on the far side. He returned to his starting point.

“Ver su licencia de conducir.”

“Let me see your ID, driver's license . . .”

“It's in the cabin in the chest on the left, top drawer inside my wallet.”

He instructed the other man to go into the cabin and find the old man's ID.

“Armario, cajón superior. Licencia de conducir.”

He soon returned with just the license. He handed it to the spokesman who held it up and glanced back and forth between it and Jonas. He turned to Fidel.

“Se dice que es Jonas Horn. Ramrod Key.”

Fidel answered.

“Buscar en las bodegas.”

He passed the request on to his helper. The hold was searched. It entailed opening a total of six doors in the deck floor. Time was running out for the air supply in the tank.

“No hay nadie allí .”

That, Jonas understood – ‘there is nobody down there.’

Fidel had heard and he spoke.

“Dale al hombre nuestras disculpas y volver.”

“Senor Fidel says to give you our apologies and we will leave you alone.”

Five minutes later the boat was nearly out of sight headed back north at a high rate of speed. Jonas figured that probably made continuing on south somewhat safe.

They had pre-arranged an all safe signal for Carlos. Jonas took out the knotted rope and lowered the weight over the side so Carlos could see it. Shortly the boy surfaced, eager for all the details. Once he was safely back on deck, Jonas filled him in and handed him a towel. After the tank was refilled with air from the compressor, they stowed the gear back in its compartment. Carlos kept a vigil off the back with the binoculars for another half hour just to make sure the encounter was really over.

He found his shirt and asked about it. Jonas related the 'grandson' story.

“Pretty sharp for a old man,” Carlos said, only partly joking.

“I have to admit that I had already rehearsed that in case we would ever be searched. I knew it would be hard to explain away your clothes.”

Carlos nodded, clearly impressed. He spoke.

“Well, I for one peed my pants while I was under water. You

still seem to be dry. Good for you.”

“I guess I wouldn't have believed it, before.”

“Wouldn't have believed what,” Carlos asked.

“That I would ever be in a situation where I'd actually be too scared to pee my pants.”

It was worth the exchange of some belly jiggling, full out, laughter.

They remained up on deck regularly scanning the horizon – 360 degrees – with the binoculars.

“Fidel looks the part, I'd say,” Jonas said at one point.

“Looks the part of a vicious, scary, terrifying, low life, human being – that part, you mean?”

“Yes, I suppose that fairly well defines what I meant.”

Carlos managed a faint smile. Jonas had a further comment.

“Two bad scars on his face.”

“Knife fights when he was a kid, I'm told. He wears them with pride. Has whip marks all over his back from where his dad lashed him for misbehaving as a boy. When I have a boy I'll never do that, I'm telling you right now.”

“I have no doubt about that.”

“I'm not so sure I was really raised with love – was reading about that in one of the books down in the cabin – but I sure wasn't raised with hate or meanness. Fidel had to be raised in a terrible way for him to turn out like he did, don't you think?”

“That would certainly be my belief, Carlos.”

“Things was never great for me, you know, but it was sure a billion times better than what he must a had to go through.”

“A wise take on life,” Jonas said.

He walked to where the boy was standing with the binoculars at the rear railing and put his arm around his shoulders. They just stood silently for a long time. Jonas was coming to understand what a remarkable young man he had on board. He could show understanding and compassion for a the man who in all likelihood would kill him if caught.

The sun passed over head and slipped down the western sky. With the coming of mid-afternoon, the breeze picking up and the *Tider* broke a wake at last. Crooked Island appeared dead ahead. It raised higher above the horizon than either of them had expected.

“Set a course that will take us along the west edge. We'll sail south along that side and then take a ride around Long Cay before

we find a place to settle in for the night – providing the light holds.”

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CHAPTER TEN

“Sunset about 5:30 again, right?” Carlos said proposing one of his statement/question combos.”

“Right.”

Jonas had learned that all conversation ceased until he responded to those.

“What town is that at the point out there?”

“Pitts Town, I imagine. A few miles south of it on this side of the island will be Landrail Point.”

“Is that a lighthouse?”

“It is. I believe it is called Bird Rock Lighthouse. It's actually on a tiny island just off the coast of Pitts Town.”

“Wow! I didn't know there really were lighthouses anymore.”

“Well, now you know.”

“From here it looks like a white candle sitting on a huge blue tablecloth.”

“It does,” Jonas said nodding and enjoying the boy's imaginative take on the scene.

They moved in close and took time to give the old structure a good looking over. It was tall and narrow, and over a hundred feet high. It sat on a wide, stone base which was set back from a low, white, cliff toward the middle of the little island.

They then sailed south past Landrail Point. An hour later Jonas made an announcement of sorts.

“There she is – Long Cay.”

“It's long alright. Can't even see the other end of it from here. Can we move in closer to get a better look?”

“Sure. My charts show a coral reef running pretty much its entire length on this side. It's about a quarter of a mile out from the beach. I suggest we don't try go in any closer than that during this first look.”

“You were right. The hills aren't very high. Look like ant hills from out here,” Carlos said not really to Jonas.

“I think the two hills we can see from here are the ones just north and south of where the X is on your disc.”

“Hard to believe we're really here.”

“Let's just go on south and then come back up the east side.”

Carlos nodded and straightened out the boat, keeping it the

required distance from shore as they sailed south.

“That a town over there?”

“Probably what's left of Albert Town. Used to be alive and well but if I understand correctly only a few folks may live there anymore.”

“Can you take the wheel, Jonas. I'd like to use the binoculars and see what there is to see.”

The trade was made. It became a descriptive monologue.

“What's left of the town is up on top of a low white cliff like the one with the lighthouse on it back there – limestone I imagine. I was reading that all these islands are limestone and that limestone usually has lots of caves in it where water has washed out the soft stone.

“It looks like some small white animals – goats maybe. Never seen one but seen pictures. Lots of birds everywhere. There is lots of green spots – grass and trees. Look different from what we seen on Cat Island. I see flowers I think – lots a colors. And look at those pure white beaches. Wow! The green water and white beaches and cliffs and the blue sky behind it. I imagine it is beautiful if a guy was into knowing about beautiful. I see a dock or a pier and a few small boats. There's a road that looks like it may run the length of the island like the one on Cat only this one is just dirt.

“Look there, Jonas. More dolphins. Lots and lots of dolphins. Looks like some rocks floating around in the water. That can't be. Rocks don't float.”

“I believe there are lots of large turtles that live along that coast,” Jonas said.

“Could be them. Makes more sense than rocks, I guess. Why they here you suppose?”

“I read they like to eat conch – it's a real meaty sea snail with a large shell. People like to eat them, also. This area is known for the best in the World.”

“Lucky turtles, then, I'd say.”

Jonas smiled at the boy's take on that. He could have just as easily said, 'Poor conchs'!

The boy was clearly spellbound by what he was seeing. Jonas was clearly spell bound by watching the boy.

“I think I see a few people moving around. How many you say live at Albert Town.”

“I believe I read only about two dozen. Seems to get smaller every year.”

“Will we go there when we dock and start exploring?”

“Maybe. Have to see how things go, I guess.”

They had soon sailed past the town and came to the southern end of the cay. Jonas maneuvered the boat around the end and started back up the east coast. They were inside the Bight of Acklins, which was a sheltered lagoon. The water was smooth and the breeze had calmed some. They moved north at a much slower pace than before.

“More hills down here at the south end,” Carlos said still examining every detail of the landscape through the binoculars.

He turned and looked across the Bight, east toward Acklins Island. It was some thirty miles away but he could make it out with its higher hills still visible against the darkening sky.

“I suppose Snug Corner where Gramps was born is over there somewhere, huh?”

“Yes. Actually you are probably looking at it. It is due east of Albert Town.”

“That's really something, you know?”

“I'm not sure I understand.”

“That right over there is where Gramps was born and that I'm right over here lookin' at it. Never thought I'd be this close. I think Gramps would a liked to a come back here. He didn't get to.”

“I'll bet he would have been very pleased to know you were going to get to see his home town, don't you?”

There. Finally. Jonas had got to head one of the boy's statement/questions right back at him! He smiled. Carlos missed the humor but nodded, all quite seriously, agreeing with what had been said.

Half an hour later, as dusk over took the area, Jonas pointed toward the cay.

“See the two low hills. Looks like a natural dock there between them. Let's see if we can find a way to tie up the *Tider* there for the night.”

“Sounds good. Shall I get the knotted rope and weight?”

“Yes. Definitely. I don't recall reading that there are any reefs over here but better safe than sorry.”

“I think that's like your theme song, Jonas.”

“What?”

“Better safe than sorry. You've said it a couple time.”

Jonas chuckled.

“You're probably right. I am a safety-first sort.”

There was no dock but there was a small natural, cove about fifteen yards wide and twenty-yards front to back. They hauled in the sails while still some distance out. Jonas handled the knotted, depth, rope and Carlos the wheel and motor. The water in the cove was ten to fifteen feet deep so posed no problem for the *Tider*. Jonas pointed to a spot between two substantial looking trees and Carlos brought them in close.

“Done like a pro, Carlos. Great work. Let's get lines around those tree trunks.”

As Carlos jumped from the deck onto the land he scared up a small flock of white birds. Jonas tossed him the lines and lowered the anchor to the bottom to keep the boat stable for the night. They were secure. Jonas hoped they were safe from Fidel, as well. He had one precaution to voice before they thought about eating.

“If we should have to leave in a hurry tonight, remember it will be the black sails that we will hoist.”

“Gottcha. This won't be an easy place to get out of if he locates us. Did you think about that?”

“No, actually, I didn't, but I feel confident he wasn't on our tail out there today. We have the dark of the moon in our favor and from a hundred yards out no one will even be able to see the inlet to this place. We should be just fine here.”

“So, in the morning we go looking for the treasure?”

“First thing. Need a good night's sleep to get ready.”

“You sound like a parent.”

“I suppose I do.”

They looked into each other's faces, and held it for a long moment.

“Who's cooking tonight?” Jonas asked.

“I think it's Mexican Pizza night. I'll to the honors.”

“We don't have an oven.”

“That's the great thing about tortillas,” Carlos said smiling. “Can make a pizza without baking. Give me twenty minutes and you'll finally know what delicious really is – *delicioso!*”

“Sounds great!”

“If you want coffee you'll have to make it. This will need my full attention.”

“I'm a diet coke man with pizza.”

Carlos went down into the cabin and began his work.

While Carlos cooked – and sang – Jonas adjusted the cameras, repositioning the one high on the mast to focus on the narrow entrance to the cove. It was a moonless night but the stars glistened through a cloudless sky and twinkled across the darkness of the mirror-like surface of the calm water in the cove. He was ready to find that treasure and skedaddle. How had Carlos translated that? *Darse prisa!*

The Mexican Pizza turned out to be two pizzas, each the size of a twelve inch, flat, tortilla. Each was actually built on three tortillas with layers of melted cheeses between them. On top were the usual pizza ingredients, tomato sauce, ham, pepperoni, sausage and refried beans – yes, refried beans, somebody's favorite!

“I can honestly say this is the most delicious Mexican Pizza I have ever tasted,” Jonas said, smiling.

“Not saying much since it's the only one you've ever tasted.”

“You got me. Actually, it really is delicioso. I will vote for a repeat very soon.”

Carlos smiled and guzzled a long drink of pop.

“I thought it might be too salty for an old guy but it just ain't MP without salt.”

“Certainly more than my doctor would like but I love it.”

Another nod and smile.

“Do I also detect sugar?”

“Yeah. That's not Mexican. That's Carlos. I think it adds a nice touch. Like my signature, you could say.”

Jonas nodded and continued to munch. Then he spoke.

“Can you draw out the etching that's on the back of the disc – the one with the V?”

“Sure.”

He took out paper and pencil and it was done in a matter of minutes – complete with the proud young artist's signature..

“And can you also write out what your Gramps had you memorize?”

“Okay. We gonna like study up and figure things out, now, right?”

“I think it's time for that, don't you?”

“The pyramid could represent a mountain or hill when it's pointing up,” Jonas began. “Many maps use that method.”

“I seen that on some a the maps in the atlas. When it's put like a V, though, it might mean a valley, do you think?”

“I hadn't thought of that, but it might,” Jonas said. “Hmmm! So, when we go looking tomorrow we need to keep an eye out for both valleys and hills. There won't be many of either, there in the narrow neck of the Cay. Probably our best bet it to be on the lookout for those strangely shaped objects – the three of them. I wonder why that one shapped like a mitten is filled in? The others are just outlines.”

“Don't know. Hadn't thought about it. You got a idea. I guess you don't or you wouldn't a asked, would you?”

Carlos turned the paper around so Jonas could see the drawings of the disc and the words he had been required to memorize.

The key to good exercise is never do it right. Live low. Die high.

“So, what do think it means?” Carlos asked.

“One word sure stands out.”

“Key, you mean?”

“Right. I think this has to do more with using the key once we find where it fits than it does finding that place. We may not understand the meaning until we are at the place – the chest or the door or the padlock or whatever the key fits.”

“A awful big key for a padlock – its six inches long,” Carlos pointed out.

“It would have to be a big one, alright.”

“So that's it. We can't figure anything out ‘til we find where the key goes?”

Carlos sounded disappointed.

“Well, we can consider several things. The words 'live' and 'die' seem to be important don't you think?”

“Rather live than die if I got the choice. So maybe it's tellin' us to stay low if we want to live not get too high or we'll die?”

“That could be it. Certainly, seems to be saying low or a lower something-or-other is safer than high or a higher something-or-other.”

“Maybe two treasure chests and I'm supposed to open the lower one – like one may be stacked on top of the other.”

“Another possibility, for sure.”

“What you suppose happens if we do high instead of low.

Blows up or something?”

“I doubt that. The explosive would be close to one hundred years old. I don't think it maintains its integrity that long.”

“Integrity?”

“Chemicals that are combined have to remain in the right proportion to each other and must not have gone bad, so to speak, over time. All those things have to be the way they were originally intended to be in order to maintain its integrity – its form or purpose or ability to do what it's supposed to do.”

“Gottcha. Integrity means it hangs together so it works, is what you're trying to say, I think.”

“I think you're correct.”

“If not a big boom-boom than what could it be?”

“I have no idea. Like I said. We need to eyeball the setting. Then, I'm hoping, it will all fall into place.”

Carlos nodded.

“Here is one idea that just flashed across my brain,” Jonas said. “Pretend you have a key in your hand and demonstrate how you would turn it to open a lock.”

Carlos did as he'd been asked.

“Which way did you turn it?”

He repeated the process to help him answer.

“To the right. I turned the top of the key to the right.”

“That's how keys generally work. Think about the words now.”

“Oh. Right you die. Maybe it means instead of turning it the way most keys have to be turned, this one has to be turned to the left – left you live. You still have your brilliant moments, old man.”

“It's only a hunch. We will add it our list of other hunches and hope that helps when the times comes.”

“The time to open up the treasure, you mean.”

“Yes, that time. You have to understand, Carlos, that somebody may have already run across it and taken it. It's been hidden for so long.”

“I've thought about that but I'm going to think it hasn't and if I find out I'm wrong I'll handle it then.”

“Alright. Just wanted to make sure you understood that.”

“I find that I understand a lot of stuff that I don't let myself think about.”

It didn't call for a response. Jonas was glad of that because

he really didn't have one.

“So, we gonna take turns watchin' for Fidel tonight?” Carlos asked as he cleaned up after the meal.

“Yes. The night vision cameras will probably actually be better than our eyes would be up on the deck.”

“I figured that. I'll take first watch. Not really tired. Too excited. We may be gazillionaires by this time tomorrow.”

“That's *you* may be. Remember? *I'm* not a part of the treasure – just a part of the adventure.”

Carlos grew quiet but eventually had a question.

“You think being rich will make me turn rotten?”

It was not what Jonas was expecting and he snorted a short chuckle.

“What?”

“I guess I just wasn't ready for your question. I can't imagine you ever being rotten. Let's just say it will present you with lots of challenges.”

“How to spend it, you mean?”

“I'd say how to *use* it.”

“Spend? Use? There's a difference?”

“You can think about that, I suppose. I think using is a broader term including things like charity and so on. Spending usually means buying stuff you want.”

“Okay. I'll think on it. I do want to buy some stuff, you understand.”

“And I'm not saying that's a bad thing. Just trying to expand your thinking about how money can be used.”

“You do charities?”

“Yes.”

“Like what, if it ain't too personal.”

“I suppose it isn't. I set up a scholarship fund in the names of my wife and son to help kids go to college when they couldn't afford to go otherwise.”

“That was nice. Sort of what I'd expect from you, I guess. Those kids are probably really special to you, huh?”

“Actually, I choose not to know them. I have a person who takes care of all that.”

“They know who you are – the one who gives them the money?”

“No, they don't.”

“I don't get it.”

“My father had a philosophy about charity. He said it couldn't be true charity if you profited from it in any way. Being recognized and thanked is like profiting from it I think. I'm not doing it so people will think good things about me. I'm doing it to help worthy young people.”

“I never run across that philosophy before. I'll have to think on it some. I sort of like to get credit for the good stuff I do. I like it when you tell me I did something good or that I'm a fast learner. You think that's bad?”

“No, of course not. It is just human nature to like to be appreciated. It's like I said to you a few days ago, though. Like yourself first. Don't depend on what other people say to you or about you for that. I've known people who loved themselves even when others said awful things about them. During my life, I was criticized for some of the things I did but I didn't ever let that define me to myself. I never liked or disliked myself because of what others had to say.”

“That's a lot to take in. Like I said, I'll have to think on it a long time.”

“That is exactly how I think it should be – you think about things and make the decisions you believe are best or right, rather than just accepting what anybody else tells you.”

“Now I know for sure I won't be able to sleep. Two hour shifts again?”

“That works for me. You?”

“I see what you just done?”

“What was that?”

“You gave me your opinion but then asked me to make up my own mind about it – agree or disagree about the two hours. I'm sort of seeing how it works. So, would you like to turn in now or later?”

It was the boy's attempt to do the same thing back at Jonas. They smiled. Jonas got in bed. Carlos moved the chair in front of the screen and got on with his thinking.

///

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Jonas let Carlos sleep in a bit later the next morning. He fixed bacon and eggs with juice thinking that would be a proper breakfast for a couple of explorers. When it was ready he roused the boy. Carlos stretched himself awake.

“Smells great, Jonas. It's really my favorite breakfast. Eggs was hard to come by back home and bacon was way too expensive.”

He jumped down to the floor, straightened his blanket and clicked the bunk back against the wall for the day.

“I'm gonna miss that bunk after all this is over. A real mattress is a pretty good thing. I'm going to buy me one with some of the money I get.”

They sat and ate, Jonas in the recliner and Carlos at the table.

“I realized something very important last night while I as thinking,” Carlos offered.

“Oh?”

Jonas said it like a question in case Carlos wanted to say more. He did.

“Me and Gramps was really poor. I didn't have nothin', really. No bike, no skateboard or surf board, no phone or watch, none a that kind of stuff but you know what?”

“What?”

“I've always been a pretty happy guy. I always liked myself pretty good. And I was that way even though I didn't have lots of stuff – not even food sometimes. I think I've always sort of been like you said a guy needs to be – needs to be before he gets rich.”

It had not been the entire message Jonas had been trying to convey to the boy, but it was an interesting take on it and quite honestly, it was a very good beginning.

“I am so glad to hear those things. A happy guy who likes himself is ninety percent of the battle, I think.”

“Battle?”

“Perhaps a poor choice of word – I was referring to living a good and content life.”

They finished breakfast and did up the dishes – there were five: the skillet, two plates, and two glasses. It was a simple life Jonas had made for himself, but even so it was far above what Carlos had lived with his entire life. There with Jonas he had regular meals, a mattress, sheets, a blanket, real plates and glasses, shirts, shoes and

more than just one pair of shorts. It gave Jonas something he would have to think about – he had down-sized in a big way to live that life style but the very same things represented a huge up-sizing for Carlos. It made the old man very thankful for what life had given him.

Jonas was ready to get on with the adventure of the day. There was just one more task needed to be completed first.

“I’ve been thinking. Fidel must not know the name of our boat – *Glada Tider* – or he wouldn’t have boarded us yesterday since it bears a different name. I think it’s time to remove the two aliases you have tacked on the rear.”

“Good thinking. Are we going to set out the outriggers while we’re gone – to disguise it more?”

“I considered that but decided if we run into trouble and have to skedaddle out of here that would only slow our get away.”

“Two good thinkings in one morning!”

They shared another smile. It seemed they were doing that a lot.

With a good deal of giggling from both of them, Jonas managed to hold Carlos over the back of the boat by his ankles while he removed the two canvas sheets, which held the two fake names. They stored them below deck in case they might be needed again.

That done, Jonas spoke.

“So, let’s go ashore and see what we can find.”

“Shoes or no shoes?” Carlos asked.

“Tie them to your back pack if you want to. Then if you need them you’ll have them. They don’t really weigh very much.”

Carlos got that impish look on his face but before he could speak Jonas spoke.

“I know. Three good thinkings from me in one morning is unbelievable.”

“You read my mind.”

“I read your impish face, is what I did.”

“An imp is like a little trouble maker, right?”

“That’s a good way to think of it. Technically I believe it is a smiling little devil. I think of it as a good-natured lad named Carlos.”

Another exchange of smiles.

They were soon on the narrow sandy beach heading inland. The terrain was relatively flat, just the way it appeared to be on the

map. They could see both hills. The longer one was to the north – their right – and the smaller one to the south.

“Right or left?” Jonas asked.

“Let's look at the little one first. I have a idea it's the wrong one so it'll be good to get it out of the way first.”

They turned left and immediately noticed it appeared like a worn hump of white rock no more than twenty feet high and not quite as long as a football field. There were a few trees on it and grass and bushes here and there.

“A cave right on this end,” Carlos pointed out. “Can we take a look?”

Jonas suddenly wondered when the boy had begun asking permission of him. The relationship seemed to be changing. Originally the boy had promised to take care of Jonas. He smiled at that memory and answered.

“I think that's why we're here. Remember to keep an eye out for the three figures on the disk.”

“Been thinkin' about them. Over all the years since Gramps' dad made them etchings, those figures as you call them might have changed. Like if they was limestone the rain or the sea could have washed parts of them away and they may not look the same way anymore.”

“An excellent observation. I must say I hadn't thought that out, myself. But, we don't know what they are – could even be buildings or walls I suppose.”

Carlos nodded peeking inside the cave opening and lighting it with his flashlight.

“Not very deep – maybe fifteen feet. Good shelter in a storm I suppose but not much of a hiding place for treasure.”

“Let's go ahead and examine the walls and the floor for cracks or possible openings.”

They spent no more than ten minutes convincing themselves of the truth of the boy's first impression. They moved around to the west side of the hill and walked south. They came upon several more small caves some only a few feet high but none held any promise as a treasure cave. The same was true as they moved around the southern end and back up the east side. It seemed Carlos had been right in his feeling about the small hill.

They walked north along the center of the island toward the larger hill. It was more irregularly shaped and the cave openings

were higher up on the hillsides. Carlos was the first to point them out.

“I'm bettin' on one of them up high. More secret, harder to reach, protected from big waves during hurricanes and storms.”

“All good ideas,” Jonas said. “I guess we just start at one end and work our way around.”

“I can climb up and take the first look. If I see something useful you can come up, too. It'll save wear and tear on your old body.”

“I'm all for saving wear and tear. Good plan.”

As it turned out none of those dozen or so caves showed any promise, either. There was one that seemed to have a breeze coming out of it. Carlos found a crevasse – a crack – in the rear that was several inches wide and about three feet tall. Air rushed out of it. He reported what he found to Jonas.

“It probably runs clear through to the other side,” Jonas said. “For some reason the air flows out in this direction. Probably no real help. Lots of crevasses and fissures in limestone.”

Carlos jumped down onto the beach very disappointed.

“So, now what?” he asked.

“Well, the X on the disk was really between the two hills. Let's walk back south and take careful note of that whole area – hill to hill and coast to coast.”

They searched the area systematically for a long time walking back and forth between the coasts and paying attention to every irregularity in the terrain. Flat, however, seemed to be just that – flat.

“Hey! Look here,” Carlos said at last.

He was calling from inside a small group of trees, their trunks and roots overgrown with low shrubs and tall grass.

“What?” Jonas said, hurrying to join him.

“Don't know for sure but there's something in here – like another cave or steps going down into the earth maybe.”

Jonas joined him. The shrubs and thick growth of grass made it hard to see what was there.

“We need a machete,” Carlos said.

“That would help for sure. Be careful now. Where do you think the steps start?”

“Right here in front of me. See what happens when I take a step forward. I drop down some. And then another and I drop down

even more.”

“Let's stop and think this through,” Jonas said. “There could be all sorts of critters down there, rats, snakes, who knows what.”

“I know one thing. The grass stops down about four feet from the surface. I can kick it back with my foot. It is steps and they only go down about ten more feet. It's dark down there. Come and look.”

Jonas proceeded cautiously. He removed his fishing knife from his belt and cut away some of the thick grass smaller shrubs. He saw what Carlos saw. He took out his flashlight and lit the bottom of the pit.

“Hey. A tunnel heading due north – to the right – like it's leading back under the larger hill,” Carlos reported.

Jonas saw it, too. He searched the ceiling of the low tunnel to make sure it appeared to be sturdy and safe. The passageway leveled off and became a steady four to five feet high and two to three feet wide. Jonas had to remain severely bent over. It was relatively dry for being carved out of limestone that sat right at sea level. Once into the tunnel, they detected a breeze flowing over and around them. It was coming from back where they had entered.

“I'll bet that breeze leaves this place up at that last cave I found,” Carlos said.

“I wouldn't doubt that at all. Move forward, I suppose. If it branches off, we'll have to reconsider what we are doing so we don't get lost down here.”

“Do you think this was man made or just a natural tunnel?” Carlos asked.

“Probably some of both. Maybe a small natural tunnel that somebody made a bit bigger to accommodate passage for people.”

“For pirate kind of people, I hope,” Carlos said enthusiastically.

The passage began to rise a bit, eventually three feet or so from the low spot back in the pit where they started. Then it leveled off and widened a bit for the final ten feet.

“You see what I see?” Carlos said running the beam of his flashlight across the closed end of the tunnel just ahead.

“I do. A door.”

Carlos described it out loud.

“Looks like it was built out of big old railroad ties – black and stinking.”

“Creosote.” Jonas explained. “A byproduct of tar. Used to preserve wood – keeps it from rotting when it gets wet or when it comes in contact with soil. Has been known to keep wood safe and sound for centuries. That is quite a door. Whoever built it didn't want anybody to be able to break it down.”

“Couldn't somebody just burn it down?” Carlos asked.

“Probably not enough oxygen in here to support a fire for long, even with the air flow you discovered.”

Carlos let that pass because his flashlight beam had discovered a lock – a key hole, really, in a large, metal plate. The hole looked to be a good fit for his key. He reached to remove his belt.

“Not yet, son. We need to be very careful and think this through before we take any further steps. Remember the 'die' thing in that passage you learned?”

“Okay. Yeah. And the high and low stuff.”

He moved the beam of light down the left side of the door.

“Bingo,” Jonas said. There is a second key hole.”

“Looks just like the one above it to me.”

“It does.”

Jonas moved his flashlight's beam all around. There was about a foot of stone between each side of the three foot wide door and the walls. Above the door and extending out into the tunnel some six feet above where the two of them were standing were more ties set close together as if making a ceiling or roof up there.

“Odd, don't you think?” he asked Carlos.

“Odd? Not sure what you mean.”

“Why a ceiling here and not anywhere else?”

“Ah! A good question. To keep the rocks up there from falling in, maybe.”

“Maybe.”

Carlos had a further idea/explanation.

“This last ten feet widens from the three feet it was before to like five or so here at the door. Maybe when they widened it they loosened the rocks up above so they had to like build a strong ceiling to keep the rocks from falling down and filling in the area.”

“An interesting possibility.”

“So, can I open it now?”

“I don't think so. I have a theory and to test it we need to get a few supplies from back at the boat. By the way, if you were to

choose, which lock would you try?"

Carlos thought out loud. "The saying goes, 'live low, die high,' so I guess I'd go for the lower one."

"And you'd turn the key which way?"

"Left, not right."

"Excellent. I believe it all may have something to do with that wooden ceiling. Let's get back to the boat. I think I know how to beat the odds when we finally go to open that door."

"I'm for that – beatin' the odds – that means gettin' the odds more in our favor, right?"

"Right."

They left the tunnel and squinted their eyes back into focus out in the sunlight. Jonas worked at straightening up. It was more of a task than he had anticipated. Old spines were clearly not intended to be twisted like pretzels.

It wasn't far to their boat. It wasn't far to big trouble. As they left the wooded area just twenty feet beyond the spot where the *Tider* was tied up they saw the last thing they ever wanted to see. There was the black speed boat and there was Fidel standing between them and their *Tider*. He was alone and there didn't appear to be anybody on either boat. His gun was holstered. He unsnapped the strap, making it ready to be drawn should he need to.

"Bienvenidos mis amigos. Te he seguido a los bosques y la figura que encontró el tesoro. ¿Vamos a volver y recuperarlo? Yo te seguiré ".

Carlos translated for Jonas.

"Welcome my friends. I followed you into the woods and figure you found the treasure. Shall we return and retrieve it? I will follow you."

Carlos had to wonder why Fidel was alone.

Jonas understood he was alone because he didn't want to share the treasure with his men. How he had tracked down the *Glada Tider* remained a mystery.

"How did you find us?" Jonas asked.

Carlos translated although he believed Fidel really understood.

"¿Cómo se enteró de nosotros?"

Fidel was quick to answer his question.

"Cuando nos embarcamos en el barco antes se colocó un GPS concebir a bordo. He sabido dónde estaba desde entonces. "

Again, Carlos translated.

“When we boarded your ship earlier we placed a GPS device on board. I've known where you were ever since.”

“How did you know it was the right boat? What made you sure?”

“¿Cómo sabes que era el barco? ¿Qué hizo usted seguro? ”

Fidel smiled clearly feeling superior about it all.

"Abajo en la cabaña, mi hombre encontró unas fotos del chico habían firmado, Carlos. Yo sabía que estaba después de un chico llamado Carlos. ¿Por qué le has mentado acerca de un nieto si el chico no era quien yo buscaba? Dudaba de que el nieto de una de Anglo sería nombrado Carlos.”

“Down in the cabin, my man found some pictures the boy had drawn and signed, Carlos. I knew I was after a boy named Carlos. Why would you have lied about a grandson if the boy was not who I was after? I doubted that an Anglo's grandson would be named Carlos.”

“Very clever, Fidel. Very clever. It is Fidel, isn't it. The gun running, dope smuggling, Fidel, from South Miami.”

"Muy inteligente, Fidel. Muy inteligente. Es Fidel, no lo es. El rodaje pistola, el contrabando de droga, Fidel, desde el sur de Miami. "

Fidel immediately became uneasy and looked over his shoulder, back out across the cove. He motioned them to turn around and lead him to their find.

"Ponerse en marcha. Date prisa ahora!"

He said, “Get going. Hurry now!”

The two turned. Jonas bent down and whispered something into the boy's ear.

“Deja de hablar! Camina!” came Fidel's command.

“Stop talking! Walk!” Carlos repeated in his own whisper.

Before long they had made their way through the tunnel and were soon crowded into the small, though wider and taller, area in front of the wooden door.

"Dame la llave!"

“Give me the key!”

Carlos looked up at Jonas. Jonas nodded. Carlos removed his belt and took out the key and disk.

"Dos cerraduras. ¿Cuál? "

“Two locks. Which one?”

Carlos shrugged his shoulders and looked at Jonas. Jonas shrugged his shoulder and spoke.

“Your guess is as good as ours. We thought probably both. We really don't know. There is nothing on the disc to tell us.”

Carlos translated.

"Su conjetura es tan buena como la nuestra. Pensamos que probablemente ambas cosas. Realmente no lo sé. No hay nada en el disco que nos diga ".

Carlos repeated his shrug and pointed to the disc. Fidel looked it over and studied the locks for some time. His concentration distracted him somewhat from his prisoners. Jonas and Carlos very slowly and quietly edged their way backward until they were just beyond the ceiling timbers.

Fidel inserted the key in the top hole and turned it – to the right.

The timbers opened up dropping hundreds of pounds of large, jagged, rocks into the open area in front of the door burying Fidel immediately. A tremendous amount of dust accompanied the collapse filling the air. Jonas and Carlos quickly made their way out the tunnel coughing and sneezing and spitting. They breathed hard for some time trying to clear their lungs.

“Whew! My boy. I've heard about close calls but that was the closest I ever want to experience. You okay?”

“I think so – fingers, toes, head. Yeah, I'm okay. You?”

“I also seem to have all my vital parts.”

“Now what?” Carlos asked.

“We wait for the breeze in there to clear out the air and then we go back in and look things over. I'm quite sure Fidel couldn't have survived. If the rocks and timbers didn't get him the dust filled air would have suffocated him. Wish I could feel sorry for him.”

“The world's better off without him,” Carlos said.

“I'm sure you're right but still I hate to see anybody come to such a gruesome end. Does he have relatives that should be notified?”

“Can't say. His girlfriend, but I'm thinking she'll be glad just to be able to get away from him. Like I said, he treated her pretty bad.”

They sat and rested while they waited for the air to clear.

“That was good thinking – the thing you whispered to me back at the boat,” Carlos said.

“Well, if Fidel had forced you to insert the key I just wanted to be sure you would have done it properly – lower key hole and turned to the left. There was no reason for us to risk our lives over what may only be a few trinkets. Fortunately for us, his greed urged him on to do it himself.”

“I’ll say, fortunate!”

“I still don’t get the clues on the disc,” Jonas.

“I’ve been thinking about that, also. Get the disc out and let’s see what we can figure.”

Carlos produced the disc.

“With the ‘V’ pointing down – which clearly indicated something underground like you suggested – that center figure could be the path the steps take down into the tunnel. They don’t descend in a really straight fashion. They are crooked like the figure.”

“Maybe. I suppose so,” Carlos said a bit skeptical of the suggestion.

Jonas took note but continued.

“The figure on the left could be a map showing the cove – that small indentation near the bottom. Think of the curving line along the right side as the coastline. It pretty well follows the outline of the shore that makes up the section just south of the cove. The straight line to the left could just be marking the outside of the map. I must admit I have no idea about the darkened figure to the right – the one I’ve said was shaped like a mitten.”

“Maybe it’s a decoy – like just put there to throw people off if the disc fell into the wrong hands,” Carlos said.

“Or, maybe it was something that had been there once, but no longer is there. It could be a tree stump I suppose. The darkened area could represent the bark maybe. A stump would have certainly rotted away by now.”

Carlos nodded.

“That could be, alright.”

“I suppose we’ll never know. But the good news is . . .”

“We really don’t even know if there is any good news yet, Jonas. We’ll have to get that door open. What were you going to do back at the boat before?”

“I was going to fasten the key to the end of a long pole – like from the fishing seine on the boat – so we could stand way back behind that strange ceiling when the key was inserted and turned.

Just a safety precaution.”

“It was a good idea – a great idea, really, considering what actually happened. You thought the roof was going to fall in all along?”

“I wondered about it. Actually, I figured there was a cave up there filled with sand and if the key was used wrong, the sand would be released engulfing the person trying to gain access.”

“You were close. How do you suppose they got all those rocks up on top of the ceiling?”

“Probably built most of the ceiling first, then stashed the rocks up there before closing the opening with the last couple of ties.”

“How did turning the key make it all collapse like that?”

“Probably something as simple as a wire from the lock mechanism to a slip pin. When the pin got pulled it released the timbers – the railroad ties.”

“You are a very clever man, Jonas. I would have never thought of that.”

“It may be a skill that comes during old age to us old guys who live by the 'better safe than sorry' motto.”

It was worth a good chuckle and another long, face to face moment.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Once rested and before re-entering the tunnel they returned to the boats. Jonas thought it was important to get the speed boat well away from the *Tider* in case Fidel's men came looking for him. They made several two-inch holes in its bottom. That done, Jonas started it and headed toward the opening in the cove. That set it on course to move out into the Bight beyond, where it would soon sink to the bottom to join the turtles and the conch.

It took them two days to clear the stones and timbers away from the door. Fidel had been pinned and completely covered on the floor against the west wall so they didn't have to deal with him. The key was still in the lock – the wrong, upper, lock. Carlos removed it to his pocket for safe keeping.

Finally, the big moment came. The door was free of debris. They were certain there was nothing else that could fall from above. Jonas was as sure as he could be that there was no other trap – at least on *their* side of the door. They would use caution. Jonas sprayed the ancient iron hinges with WD40 from the boat, something that cut through rust and lubricated such devices.

Carlos inserted the key in the lower lock telling himself, “turn to the left, turn to the left,” over and over again. They both knew there was still the possibility of some trap awaiting them once the key was turned.

‘Click. Click. Click.’

It turned a quarter of the way to the left. Nothing happened even though the boy ducked as if expecting the worst. Carlos held the key in that position while Jonas pulled on the large metal handle. The hinges squeaked. More dust and dirt fell from around the door. Slowly it began to swing toward them. Once free of the slot in the door frame, Carlos removed the key. He helped Jonas push the heavy door back against the wall of the tunnel. It opened into a small room perhaps six feet square. There were a half dozen wooden chests. Some were partially rotted away and their contents had spilled out onto the rock floor.

Carlos found that his growing level of astonishment made it difficult for him to breathe let alone speak. He did both, of course.

“Jewels – red, green, blue, and diamonds and gold chains and bars of gold and gold and silver vases and plates and silverware. I only imagined one chest, Jonas. But look. Six chests and a gazillion

pounds of jewels and gold and silver. Am I rich?"

"It sure looks to me like you are rich. It will take us at least one more full day to get it all carried to the *Tider*."

Snug Corner was a small community of about four hundred people located on Mason's Bay directly across the Bight of Acklins from the cave. It was located close to the ocean on the main north south road that ran the length of Acklins Island. There were several dozen houses – many with red and blue roofs – set among stands of dense woods. It was a village that pretty much took care of itself. There was one small general store that appeared to meet all their regular needs – food, hardware, cloth, even a kite and bike.

They rented a room in a large older house that had a satellite hookup for the internet. Jonas spent a good deal of time doing some research on line, while Carlos was given a personal tour of the community by Lucas, the young son of the owner of the house where they were staying. They found the remains of the house where Lucas thought his Gramps may have been born and lived the first few years of his life. The local stories about it included the pirate father who died there of wounds he had received on a raid, and the young boy leaving for the States aboard a freighter when he was only seven, matched up well with what Carlos knew. It was more of a special feeling being there than Carlos had anticipated. He ran his hand down the frame that still stood where the door had once been, and touched some huge rocks in the yard, which he felt certain his Gramps would have also touched back when.

Later the two boys went for a swim in a lake the locals called the Duck Pond. Lucas said boys had been swimming in there since the days of Columbus and even before. Carlos figured Gramps had done the same. It was a great time – a reunion of a kind even if Gramps couldn't be there with him.

When Carlos returned to their room late in the afternoon, he talked about his day nonstop. Eventually Jonas got to speak. He had some news of his own to tell.

"You've said you'd like to go to school, right?"

"Right. That's one of my seventeen goals for the next ten years."

Jonas did a double take. It was the first time he had heard of that list. It did not really surprise him, however. He let it go and continued.

“First, I have arranged to sell the treasure and have established a bank account for you. We'll talk about the details, later, but you are a very wealthy young man.

“I have also arranged for you to attend a boarding school here in the Bahamas. It's a great school and I have been talking with its Head Master on the phone since we've been here. He has an opening next semester – January – and really wants you to become a part of what he calls, 'their family'. I told him the decision would be up to you but that we would talk about it and sail up during the next week to take the tour and let the two of you look each other over.”

The smile that had originally over taken the boy's face at the mention of school faded and he sat back in his chair.

“This is the end of the line for us, then, I guess, huh? Me in school and you back on the *Tider* by yourself.”

“Well, only if you don't agree to the third thing I've been working on since we arrived here in Snug Corner.”

Carlos furrowed his brow and leaned a bit toward the front of his chair ready to listen. His puzzled expression did not change.

“I don't understand,” he said.

“Well, it is something else you will need to think about. Not something you will want to agree to without a lot of careful consideration.”

Carlos cocked his head, clearly puzzled.

Jonas motioned for the boy to come to him. Carlos stood and walked to where the old man was sitting. He reached out and took the boy's hands in his. Looking him directly in the eyes he laid it out for him.

“Two things, really. First, I plan to relocate my main port from the Ramrod Key to here in the Bahamas. And second, Carlos, I'm wondering if you think don't you've been without a last name for long enough – I mean a guy really needs a last name. And, I was wondering if you would do me the honor of taking my last name – becoming Carlos Horn.”

Carlos deepened his frown for just a moment.

“You askin' me like to marry you, Jonas?”

“Sort of, I suppose. I was hoping that you would let me adopt you.”

“Become your son?”

“That would be what would happen.”

“Well, if fifteen seconds is long enough to be considered a lot

of careful consideration I would really like to take you up on the adoption thing. Can I adopt you, too.”

“I think it really always works in both directions.”

They studied each other's faces for a long moment. It was less smiles and more serious.

Jonas drew Carlos into his arms and pulled him close.

“I love you, son.”

“I love you, too, father, dad, pop – I'll have to work on that, I guess.”

Who would have guessed that a Dangerous Voyage could have so many happy endings!

The End

Some Words You May Not Have Known Before

Bow = in this usage the front of a ship

Capsize = sink a boat

Conjure = make up in a magical way, think up, call forth – like witches call forth evil spirits

Disarray = messed up, messy, out of proper order

Disposition = in this case how something is going to be solved or taken care of in the long run

Emigrated = moved from (immigrated means moved to)

Engulf = cover, wrap up, enclose

Feign = pretend as when trying to make someone believe your lie

Garnered = brought up, created, caused to happen, received

Honed = sharpened

Ilk = kind, type, style

Inquisitor = person asking questions of somebody

Machete = a short, sharp, thick bladed, sword often used to cut one's way through underbrush.

Paucity = too little, not enough

Reek = stink, smell very bad

Reveled = had fun, delighted in

Reverie = daydream

Wake = the outflow of water behind a boat caused by its speed.