



**Another Book In The
Orvie Mystery Series**

**by
David Drake**

**The Mystery
of the Treasure on
Doubloon Island**

The Mystery of The Treasure on Doubloon Island

**Book Five in The Orvie Mysteries
Featuring The Boy Who Could See Into the Past**

**By
David Drake**

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Book 1: The Boy Who Could see into the Past
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Book 3: The Mystery of the Duke's Diamonds
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Book 6: The Mystery of Gallagher's Ghost

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BACKGROUND:

Orvie had been born soon after the conclusion of the Civil War in the United States – late 1800s. Due to an accident in a terrible electrical storm when Orvie was twelve years old two huge changes had taken place for him: He stopped growing older – forever to be a twelve-year-old, and he developed the ability to feel whether people were telling the truth about things in their past. He chose to use that skill to make life better for the good people he encountered. To conceal his agelessness, he had to move every year or so – in order to keep those around him from becoming suspicious. Wherever he went, he ran onto new mysteries that needed to be solved. These stories take place in the present. At the time this story takes place, he had finished seventh grade for the 112th time.

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CHAPTER ONE: New Friends (again)

After nearly a month on Windsor Island in Lake Michigan, Orvie traveled south. His intention was to work his way down as far as the Ozark Mountains and hang out there during the beautiful Fall season. Like many of his plans, that one got derailed and he found himself on a tug pushing barges down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. Once at the Gulf of Mexico he decided to complete the journey he'd had in the back of his mind for some time – winter on the east coast of southern Florida. He hopped from boat to boat and arrived just south of Miami in mid-September.

He walked the beaches for several days, sunning, swimming, and just being lazy – not something that came naturally to Orvie – being lazy. He had run out of money and although he needed very little, it was always comforting to know he had a few bucks in reserve. The last time he was in that area he had worked briefly for a boat tour company that was just struggling to get started. That had been twenty-five years before, but he decided to check it out – see if it had made it. He certainly could not contact the owners since they would recognize him as the ageless twelve-year-old they had known all those years earlier.

Jan and John Pleasure had been their names. They were newly married and had inherited a boat, a building and dock, and a small island from John's grandparents. They had developed a fledgling (young) business that ran a tour boat

between their dock and the Florida Keys off the southern tip of the state. It was a small boat, accommodating only ten tourists at a time for the day long outing. Orvie had worked for them keeping the boat spotless, cleaning the office, and other things appropriate for a boy his age. They were good people, struggling to keep ahead of the bills. He often worked just for meals and a place to sleep in an unfinished area in a low attic above their office. He had enjoyed his months with them.

So it was, that he broke camp on the beach, assembled his backpack, sleeping and shoulder bags and headed south. It was no more than a two-hour walk. Although still early morning the sand was warm and felt good between his toes.

By mid-morning he was sitting in the small park across the street from the business. He figured from there he would likely get a glimpse of his old friends coming and going. There was a new boat in the dock – far larger and more colorful. It was then he noticed the large sign atop the building. It had been there before, but an important change had been made on it. Where it had listed Jan and John Pleasure as the owners it now listed Carl and Chad Pleasure.

He did some mental calculations. It could be possible that in twenty-five years they had two sons who might be old enough to take over the business. It seemed unlikely that Jan and John would have retired, as energetic and devoted to the business as they had been. He sat and watched for another hour.

A boy about his age made several trips back and forth between the office and the boat. At one point a young man met him at the front door and handed him a box, which he delivered to the boat. Orvie decided to investigate at close range. He picked up his belongings and crossed the street. The boy was again exiting the building trying to balance two boxes, one on top of the other. He was clearly losing the struggle.

“Hey, let me give you a hand, there,” Orvie said, dropping his things beside the wood plank walkway that ran between the building and the dock.

“Thanks. My big brother sometimes over estimates both the strength and endurance of his younger sibling.”

Orvie liked the way the kid used words. He removed the top box. They stood there facing each other box to box.

“I’m Orvie, by the way, short for a name I never felt fit me comfortably.

“I’m Chad, short for nothing but Chad, and I guess I’ve never really contemplated my pleasure or aversion (dislike of) to it. By the way, I’m infamous (known in a less than good way) for using words generally considered beyond the reasonable vocabulary of kids my age. I’m always willing to translate into regular English – or Spanish if that’s your preference.

“Ich bevorzuge Deutsch,” Orvie said, kidding. (German for, ‘I prefer German’.)

“Ah. Ich spreche Deutsch, aber nicht so gut, but I’ll try.” (Ah! I speak German, but not so good.)

It had been reason for the first prolonged chuckle between them. Chad turned toward the boat and Orvie followed. They stowed the boxes at the rear and returned to the dock.

“The information I was given suggested that this tour service was owned by Jan and John Pleasure, but I see from the sign that doesn’t seem to be the case.”

“Those were my parents. Died in a boating accident six years ago. Since then it has just been my older brother Carl and me – he is twenty-three.”

“I’m sorry. Must have been a devastating loss.”

“Pretty bad for a while, but Carl has always been there for me. He’s my guardian until I turn eighteen or until the first time I can beat him arm wrestling.”

“An odd clause in a legal custody agreement,” Orvie said offering a smile.

“The arm wrestling thing is pretty much an unofficial personal thing between the two of us.”

“I would think on a mid-September morning you would be in school.”

“You would think that, I suppose, but clearly I’m not.”

“Playing hooky?”

“Nothing that dramatic. I’m enrolled in an advanced

placement program for kids who are thought to have super brains. Most of the work is done by way of computer. I meet twice a month with Dr. Madison, my Program Administrator and we review what I've been doing and plan out the next two weeks or 15 ½ days, whichever comes first."

Orvie liked his sense of humor and the ways he apparently had been able to accept both his living situation and his educational arrangement.

Chad mounted a mischievous grin and spoke trying to mimic Orvie's previous statement.

"I would think on a mid-September morning you would be in school."

Orvie smiled again and offered one of his several standard explanations.

"I won't try to mislead you; I'm on my own in the world, but sincerely hope that will go no further than the two of us. I need my freedom and do very well for myself. I would soon smother if I had parent types hovering over me."

"I remember very few things about my parents, but one thing dad said to me has always stuck: 'Trust people until they show you they can't be trusted.' I've found it be a very good piece of advice."

"I adhere to that, as well. We should get on just fine."

"So, why were you looking my parents?"

"I've worked some for tour companies and was told they might be in the market for some help – really, really, cheap help."

"Help always sounds good to me. Cheap only makes it better. Usually I'd just offer my hand and say welcome aboard, but we're going through a tough time, right now."

"Personally, or the business – if I may ask?"

"Business – personally everything is always great. I have the finest big brother that has ever walked the face of the Earth."

"I see. Saint Carl, did you say his name was?"

Chad smiled, shrugged his shoulders and nodded.

"I didn't mean to make light of your brother," Orvie added quickly. "Sometimes I see the possibility of a joke and I

just can't resist."

"Never hold back. Carl and I tend to spend our life swimming in a sea of humor."

"Room for one more in there – for just a short time?"

"I'm sure there is. Carl is concerned that since we opted for this individual study program for me that I'm too isolated from my peers. He'll be delighted that I have a new age appropriate associate."

"Does 'age appropriate associate' translate as friend?"

"It does – I figured that was obvious, and since you got it I suppose it was."

Let's get your stuff inside and I'll introduce you to St. Carl.

It was cause for one more smile.

"Carl this my new friend, Orvie – don't ask about the name or parents or any other worldly responsibilities."

Carl offered his hand and smile.

"Glad to meet you. If you've been with the here kid for five minutes and have survived his unique characteristics – preposterous vocabulary, runaway mouth, and inane sense of humor – you have passed the first test." [preposterous = ridiculous. Inane = silly]

"First test? There are more?"

"In the twelve years I've known the kid, I find there are new tests every day."

"I see. I've passed quite a few in the last 125 years so I imagine I'll be up to his."

"And exaggeration," Carl said. "I failed to include that as another of his unique characteristics. The two of you should get on fine. What you doing around here – or do I dare not ask that?"

Chad related what Orvie and revealed to him – parents, work, cheap and so on.

"I figure since Jasper ran away we can afford to take on an Orvie for a while," Chad said.

"And who's Jasper and why did he run away – two answers I think I need before I sign on," Orvie said offering it

as a joke.

“Jasper was our dog – a huge, shaggy, multi-breed mutt. Ate us out of house and home. Left out after a fancy lady poodle one day and we’ve never seen him since.”

“Let’s see – a fancy lady poodle or you two. I get the idea Jasper was one pretty smart canine.”

Carl turned to Chad.

“I think he’ll fit in well around here, you?”

“I agree. At least we can give him two weeks and if he isn’t house broken by then we’ll call animal control.”

“Where shall he bunk?” Carl asked.

“Hmm. Doubt if he’ll fit in Jasper’s house.”

“I’m happy to find a spot on the beach for my sleeping bag. It’s what I’m used to.”

“You know,” Carl said, “there is that space up in the attic where you played as a kid, Chad. We always thought it had been used as a bedroom by some very short elfin like creature way back in the old days, remember.”

“If you don’t mind crouching a bit that would be a place inside out of the weather. What do you say – beach good weather, attic lousy weather.”

“Actually, that sounds better than you might imagine.”

Orvie allowed a set of warm memories to visit him for a moment and recalled the comfortable time he’d spent up there years before.

The deal was struck. The gear was stowed upstairs. It appeared to be the same mattress on the floor and that would be fine.

Back downstairs Orvie had questions.

“So, I’m led to believe the business is experiencing a rough spot.”

“Not so much the business – we still have more people wanting to book our services than we can handle – but we’ve had a series of bad experiences,” Carl said.

“Bad experiences?”

“Tampering with the boat to delay departures. Rumors spread that call into question the quality of our service.

Vouchers handed out to our customers offering free tours with other tour lines.”

“Sounds like somebody would like to see you out of business.”

“That’s the gist of it. Been going on for nearly two months now,” Chad added.

“Any clues at all?”

“Not really,” Carl said.

“We’re baffled, and believe me I’m almost never baffled!” Chad said.

“Have you spoken with the authorities?”

“And told them what? That somebody doesn’t like us and we want the cops to find them and put them in jail?”

“I understand. Well, in the meantime, until we get all that figured out, how can I help around here. I clean things up very well. Been known to swab a few decks and wash widows.”

“I guess all of the above,” Carl said. “We can’t pay you much more than room and board. Mostly, just hang out with Chad so he doesn’t forget what social relationships are all about.”

“I see. You want me to date your little brother.”

It was worth a prolonged chuckle among the three of them.

“Actually, we have a tour that leaves at six in the morning,” Chad said. “It will be gone all day, not returning until midnight. I still have to make the boat ready – all those things you listed. We demand spotless service from ourselves. Like the name of our boat – The Pleasure Craft – implies, nothing but a great time with lots of fun-building wonderful memories.”

“Deck or windows?” Orvie asked.

“I really hate windows,” Chad said the hint of a whine in his voice.

“More than that, he’s really terrible at getting them streak-free-clean,” Carl added.

“And that,” Chad said nodding, confirming every aspect

of Carl's analysis.

"I will defy you to find a streak when I'm finished with them," Orvie said.

"I won't hold you that," Carl said. "I imagine anything will be an improvement."

"Not many things I don't excel at," Chad said, "but windows are my juggernaut (unsolvable problem)."

"Windows and using words like juggernaut," Orvie joked.

He and Carl exchanged a knowing glance.

The boys talked as they worked on the boat.

"Tell me about this craft?"

"Well, as you can see it floats."

"Doofus! Be serious."

"Sorry. Well, it's thirty-eight feet long, a propane-powered water cooled inboard motor that pushes it to fifteen knots when necessary, has twenty swivel seats – ten on each side – that turn from looking outward onto the ocean to inward to view the scene through the glass bottom strip that runs down the central six by 24 feet of the boat."

"It looks relatively new."

"Thanks. It's not, but we work hard to keep it looking that way. Five years old. We bought it with insurance money after we lost our parents."

"Tell me about your tour or tours as the case may be."

"Mostly just one, over and over again. From here we hug the coast south and visit several of the keys – the little islands that chain south from the tip of Florida. There are lots of fish species – many of them wildly colorful – and a wide variety of underwater vegetation. On the way back north, we pass over one of the few remaining live coral reefs. We pause there and Carl dives to play with the fish. The tourists love that – I'm told the ladies think he's a pretty sexy specimen in his swimming suit – I have no way of knowing that other than watching the expressions on the women's faces. If you know about that stuff, we need to have a talk sometime.

"Anyway, we dock at our private island at about six in the evening, throw a big feast with a huge bonfire, hold a sand

dollar hunting contest – we call it a treasure hunt – then return here.”

“Lots of things I’ll need more info on about that. Do you go along?”

“Oh, yes. I’m like the resident expert on fish and vegetation. When they have questions, I answer them. Never been stumped yet. They get a kick out of a kid who has all that information stored away in his head. I’ve been known to outshine marine biologists. Not bragging. I don’t do that. Just answering your question as honestly as I can.”

“And I understand that and appreciate it.”

“You seem to be interested in the problems we’re having. Should we be concerned about that?”

“I hope not. I’ve been known to help solve a few mysteries in my day and you certainly seem to have a mystery here.”

“And I haven’t even mentioned the really big mystery we have.”

“Oh, your mysteries come in really big and not so big sizes?”

“They do. The really big one has to do with my great, great, something, grandfather’s treasure map.”

“That gets my attention.”

“My great grandfather told my grandfather there was treasure buried on our island – Doubloon Island. It’s been in our family since the time of my great, great, something grandfather. Supposedly, a rogue (untrustworthy) sea captain who was transporting a shipload of gold coins and jewelry for a Spanish King, decided to keep them for himself and buried them on our island in the late 1700s. He later marooned his crew on another island so they couldn’t tell the secret, and they died. He was caught by Spanish authorities and hung. The secret died with him.”

“I thought you said there was a map.”

“It surfaced a few years after the captain’s death. His daughter found it among his possessions that she received from the prison where he was kept before the hanging. The original copy disintegrated a century ago, but a copy was

made and it was passed down from generation to generation. It's less a map, actually, than it is a code – a code that describes where the treasure was buried.”

“If we get to the point you and your brother can trust me, I'd sure like to take a crack at it. Codes are one of the skills I've developed over the past century or so.”

“You crack me up – century or so. You are definitely more fun than Jasper was, but how do you feel about Kibble (dog food) for lunch? We just happen to have several unused cases.”

“Well, I can make great biscuits from pine bark flour, so who knows what I might be able to do with dog Kibble? I know, that was an arful attempt at a joke.”

“But your skill at decoding was not a joke, right,” Chad said ignoring it, appearing far more serious than Orvie had seen him before. He got the idea that finding the treasure had become a big thing in the Pleasure brother's lives. He wondered why?

CHAPTER TWO: The Bag Guys Show Their Hand

Orvie felt very comfortable back in his cozy attic room. He figured it was the same single light bulb dangling there from the two-strand black wire that had lit his reading material more than two decades before. Jan and John's sons certainly showed the same loving nature their parents had. The models we have around us during those first few years of living really must set us up for life – one way or the other.

There was a small window across the attic on the east side, which allowed the first rays of morning sun to find Orvie's eyes. It was a few minutes before six. He stretched himself awake, dressed and made his way down the ladder into the storage room below. He was soon outside walking the beach. He had no idea when the others arrived or, in fact, where they made their home. There was no place for them to live on the boat. He'd wait and let them tell him when they were ready.

He was hungry but had not planned ahead very well. He would survive the growling stomach. He had many times before.

As he walked back toward the dock, Chad and Carl drove up in an open, red jeep. Chad waved him to them, holding up several white paper bags.

"Got breakfast. Always more than we can eat. From Barney's – a café just up the coast. We provide free tours for him to give away as promotions and he provides us with

breakfast every morning. Win/win as they say. What's your pleasure – or no, it's always our Pleasure, isn't it, he said pointing to the sign, which announced their business."

There was a small round table and three chairs just outside the front door on what passed for a porch – a six-foot-wide extension of the plank walk that led out to the dock. They placed the sacks on the table and the three of them took seats.

Chad had been right – it was certainly overkill on quantity. Orvie sampled widely – ham, egg, and cheese biscuits, pancakes, buttered toast, grits, sausage, bacon and ham.

"How do you two stay so slender?" Orvie joked.

"Stick around a few days and you'll see. It gets worked off in a hurry."

"I'm game."

"First, we eat, then we work it off," Carl said.

Chad announced the day's itinerary.

"This is a tour day. We usually do four a week. Wednesdays – and today is Wednesday if the vagabond among us doesn't keep track of time – is a short ten-hour tour. We sail the same route but don't stop at any of the Keys. The other three days we let them take in the sights down there."

"What shall I be doing while you two are handling the tour?"

"Oh, you're coming with us, right Carl?"

"Of course. Your job will be to charm the old ladies and keep the kids from falling into the ocean."

"I will do my best. I'm afraid I don't have anything but jeans and cutoffs."

"Never fear. I have brought a wardrobe for you – you being my size and all. In the back of the jeep. Tan shorts, a tan T-shirt with the company logo, tan socks and tan tennies. There will also be a tan hoodie for this evening on the island when it gets chilly."

"Socks?"

"Mandatory, I'm afraid," Chad said. "I've noticed you are a sockless creature."

“Or, Carl said looking at Chad as if to ignore Orvie’s very presence, “we could just paint his ankles tan. Save on laundry.”

“Okay, guys. I’m cool with socks – well, not really, I hate them, but I will bow to the management and succumb to the distress of the foot mittens for the greater good.”

“Oh. No! Don’t tell me you are a walking dictionary, too!” Carl said.

“I can be. Usually think better of it and stick to words most folks know.”

With breakfast over, Orvie changed into the company uniform. He hadn’t been told there was also a tan ball cap. That, he liked.

The tourists began to arrive at 7:45. Chad checked them in according to a list on the clipboard. By 8:00 all were on board having been personally welcomed by Carl – always with a handshake and often with a hug. Each was handed a name tag. They took seats. The motor began its low gently purr toward the rear and Carl – standing at the large, wooden steering wheel toward the front – began his monologue extoling the beauties of nature above and below the surface of the ocean. He was concise, clear, and witty. Orvie immediately became comfortable. He stationed himself at the rear and watched the proceedings with some interest.

When there was a question beyond Carl’s expertise, Chad stepped in and amazed the guests with the breadth and specificity of his knowledge. Orvie assumed he had been asked many of the questions dozens of times so had honed (sharpened) his responses. Orvie mostly kept quiet, watching and listening as he learned the ropes.

The guests were alternately directed to observe things out at sea and through the bottom of the boat. The swivel chairs earned their keep. The sides of the boat were open from the top of a clear, solid plastic railing that stood 30 inches tall to the roof supported by white poles every so often. The ceiling was painted pale blue the way porch ceilings of old had always been – to mimic the color of the sky. Chad strolled the deck jumping at every chance to be helpful. It was clear why Pleasance Tours had such a fine reputation and got high word

of mouth praise and recommendations.

Orvie saw a white speed boat approaching from the shore side, rear of the boat. It was moving at a tremendous rate of speed. As it drew even with their boat it swerved close and sprayed the tourists with its sizable wake, drenching everyone. Chad hitched his head and Orvie followed him to the cupboards across the rear of the boat. They broke out towels and soon had them distributed. The tourists were asked to keep them and hang them over the backs of their seats.

No further mention was made of the incident by either Carl or Chad. The monologue continued more or less uninterrupted. Orvie made a note of the registration numbers on the speed boat.

By noon they were maneuvering between and around the tiny islands that made up the Keys. Chad held forth on the historic events that had taken place there from battles to recent celebrity weddings. Orvie could have added a good deal of detail, but chose not to.

They pulled into a quiet lagoon – probably man made, but a quiet lagoon, nevertheless – and box lunches were handed out. Many of the tourists chose to stand and walk around the deck, stretching their legs. Most of them approached Orvie – with his long black hair, dark eyes, and wonderful grin he was immediately attractive wherever he went, just naturally receiving a good deal of attention.

That had been unexpected (some 113-year-old twelve-year-old boys are so dumb about such things!), but he soon had the encounters mastered and found he was even enjoying them. He was a master at turning conversation away from himself and toward other things, in that case the history of the area they were exploring.

Carl and Chad listened with interest. They would need to find a way to include him in the mix – or, perhaps, they just had. With boxes broken down and put in the recycling container, Carl started the craft and they headed back out to sea. Chad announced the rest of the itinerary.

“As we head north we will swing out to sea and maintain a course approximately one mile off shore. You will

find a significantly different array of fish and vegetation out there. The bottom will only occasionally be visible. We will stop above a shallow coral reef – one of the few still living reefs in this area. Water pollution and the continuing rise in the temperature of the water have gradually caused the vast majority of the reefs to become dormant. I promise you a real treat when we arrive. My brother – who has been variously described as handsome, sexy, and DELicious by former female-type guests – will dive into the reef and play chase and hide and seek with the fish that make it their home. He will point out certain features and I will describe them for you, taking questions as before.

Conversation turned to the view below the surface. It was very much the same conversation that occurred on every excursion – the brilliant colors of the fish and rock formations, the graceful ballet performed as the schools of fish moved as if to a choreographer's (dance instructor's) grand plan, the unique variety and sizes of plants, and the clarity of the water allowing them to see a good distance toward the bottom. The time always passed quickly on that leg of the trip.

Presently, Carl circled the reef and cut the motor. Chad lowered two anchors – one front and one aft – to hold the boat steady in the water. Carl stepped behind a curtain at the rear as Chad continued his commentary on the major features of the area below.

“The reef is hundreds of years old and extends nearly a hundred feet down to the ocean bottom. The part we are viewing has grown to within forty feet of the surface, a hazard for large ships. That's the reason for the bouncing buoys that mark each corner of the area. They include a triple warning system – just their presence so they can be seen, the light on top which provides a visual warning at dark and on overcast days, and a radio warning signal that is continually emitted – powered by the solar cells you see on the upper structure of each one.

By the time Chad had finished, Carl appeared, ready for the dive. He let himself down a ladder near the rear and was soon underwater. It was an impressive sight – a member of one species swimming among hundreds of members of

other species. The fish seemed more intrigued by him than frightened by him. When he remained still they would approach him and nibble at his nose and ears and swim through his long floating hair as if it were just another form of flimsy vegetation for them to investigate.

The dive usually lasted fifteen to twenty minutes – longer if Carl were lucky enough to come upon some uncommon fish or sea animal that would play with him.

Orvie again noticed the speed boat approaching, from the south that time. It was setting a far slower pace as it moved toward the area just out to sea from the boat. Orvie became concerned as well he should have.

As it slowed to a stop in the water just ten yards away, a man with a spear gun pointed it into the water and fired directly at Carl. The tourists were all turned inward watching Carl through the glass bottom and most of them were unaware of the other craft.

Then it happened. The spear hit Carl in the shoulder, also severing his air hose in the process. Orvie was immediately out of his shirt and shoes and over the side propelling himself on a direct line toward Carl, who, stunned, hurting, and bleeding was struggling to find his air supply.

Orvie reached him within seconds. He grabbed the floating end of the severed air tube and stuffed it into Carl's mouth. He breathed deeply for several seconds. Carl pointed to Orvie's mouth and nodded. Orvie transferred the hose into his own mouth and took, what by then was a much-needed breath. He secured his arm under Carl's arm and, alternating the use of the air, they slowly made their way back to the surface.

Up on top, the intruding boat had sped off to the north. The tourists, who at first assuming it was part of the show, soon realized it had been for real and began to panic. Chad did what he could to calm them, but realistically, there was very little he was able to do. He did get on the radio to the Coast Guard and reported the incident along with the number on the boat. He requested medical aid, having no idea how badly his brother had been hurt.

In the water, Orvie helped Carl to the boat and several

guests helped him up the ladder. One tourist was a nurse and she offered her assistance. Carl collapsed into one of the rear seats. The spear had been no more than a foot long and had no barb on the front. It had gone completely through the flesh and lodged in the muscle. Chad arrived with the sizable first aid kit. Orvie, who seemed to know more about the care of wounds than the nurse, first wet a gauze bandage with alcohol and used it to wipe down the front section of the spear – the part protruding through the skin to the front. Once disinfected the best he could, Orvie pulled it out from behind. Carl screamed in pain, but made no attempt to interfere, understanding it had to be done. The nurse prepared gauze pads to tape in place over the wounds – front and back. She dried his skin and applied more alcohol around the openings, then taped the pads in place. They fashioned a sling from material in the kit and pinned it behind his neck.

Orvie spoke to the guests.

“Well, as you can plainly see, we have encountered an unexpected problem. You will understand why we need to head directly back to shore. It would be best if you would return to your seats. We may be approached by another speeding craft. It should be a Coast Guard cutter so there is no need for alarm.”

Chad had already started the motor and had the craft speeding to the west toward the shore. He handled the boat like an old pro and kept to a steady course.

In the distance the flashing lights of the official looking boat came into view. Orvie focused the binoculars in that direction.

“Got a problem, folks. That is not the Coast Guard. It’s the rogue speed boat coming back. I advise you to remain seated and take hold of the sides of your seats.”

Orvie took the wheel and Chad got on the radio informing the authorities what was taking place. The boat continued to close on them. Chad continued to provide radio updates.

Suddenly, from the south another fast-moving boat came into view. Orvie’s first thought considered whether the bad guys were ganging up on them from both directions. It

soon became clear the newly arriving craft was, in fact, a Coast Guard Cutter. Orvie announced that to the guests. The first boat turned and headed back north. Chad slowed and stopped. The cutter pulled up alongside. Chad handled the back and forth conversation.

It was decided that Carl should be transferred, since there were medical staff on board. That was done. Chad modified his course and headed back to the home dock of The Pleasure Craft. They were still an hour away. Orvie began spinning tales of the days when the pirates menaced the area and described ships and men in great detail. That had been before his time, of course, but when he was a small child there were still old men around who had been a part of it and Orvie had listened well and had retold those stories many times.

As they pulled into dock, Orvie thanked them for their attention. They applauded. Chad offered to refund their fees, but to a person they refused, some saying they'd have paid extra if they'd have known how exciting it was going to be. Many wished Carl well.

Once they were gone, once the mandatory smiles could leave their tired cheeks, once the call was received saying Carl had been treated and was on his way home by boat, Orvie and Chad breathed a sigh of relief and sat down at the table on the porch.

Chad had given a full report to the authorities. The registration number on the speed boat proved to be fake. Orvie had saved the spear so they could track down the manufacturer and even, perhaps, the purchaser. Although Carl was weak from his ordeal he decided to stay there at the dock. Once seated at the table with the others he spoke directly to Orvie.

"I guess it goes without saying that you have my eternal thanks."

"And mine," Chad chimed in. "You were awesome!"

Orvie shrugged.

"We all do what we need to do."

"You risked your life, man," Chad said. "A forty-foot dive with no air supply! You'd have never made it back to the

surface alive without air.”

“But there was air and I did make it back, so hush your prattle.”

“Hush my what?”

“Something my mother used to say to me when I was running off at the mouth. No offense.”

“Besides saving my bacon, Orvie, the tourists loved you. We need to discuss some sort of permanent arrangement.”

“I have a hard and fast policy never to make permanent arrangements. I will stick around until we get these bad guys behind bars, however.”

“We?” Carl said/asked

“I should have mentioned,” Chad began, “Orvie here seems to have a way of solving mysteries and breaking codes – two skills it certainly seems like we could use just about now.”

“So, it does – mysteries and codes. Seems like those are the things our lives have been revolving around recently.”

“Never been able to resist either. I must admit it’s gotten me into a lot of really dangerous situations, but on the other hand, I have clearly always lived to tell about them.”

“It would seem like it,” Carl said.

He turned to Chad.

“Think we just might be able to trust him with great gramp’s secret?”

“Seems like we trusted him with your life. The code seems pretty insignificant all of a sudden.”

The adrenalin began to flow through Orvie’s veins – a mystery, a secret code and two new friends. What more could he possibly ask for?

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CHAPTER THREE: Setting the Agenda

Thursday was a day off from tours. Chad needed the time to begin healing and get back on his feet. The wound had done no permanent damage to the muscles in the shoulder. It had penetrated the flesh above his left scapula (shoulder bone) and skimmed along the bone, which had directed the spear shaft out the front of his shoulder.

Orvie had several things on his agenda for that day. He wanted to find out the origin of the spear. Apparently, the bad guys were amateurs because they had made no attempt to conceal the manufacturer's number on the shaft. That would take some computer work and he figured Chad's apparent knowledge about everything should be useful.

He also wanted to get a look at the code so he would have some general idea what they had to work with. And that led him to his third priority. If the code had to do with Doubloon Island, he needed to pay a visit and begin getting acquainted with it.

He laid his priorities out to the brothers as they arrived that morning. Chad's laptop was up to the challenge. The company name was Aqua Quick Shot and it was located just north in Miami. In addition to the company name, the spear had the letters, SSS-NB, stamped onto it as well as the number 12X.25. The company website pictured all the products and it was easy to find the item in question – the

non-barbed Slender Sur-Shot, with a shaft 12 inches long and a quarter of an inch thick. It was sharpened to a long narrow point and had three, metal fins at the rear to provide stability along its trajectory (flight path). When shot from the spear gun for which it was made, it was said to average a speed of 60 miles an hour over a distance of 60 feet. Perhaps the best find was that it was a special-order item. That should provide their best route to finding who ordered it.

“If we only had some idea of who owned that boat, it would make our search a whole lot easier,” Orvie said, downing his second egg, ham and cheese biscuit.

“Would a name like, Phantom, inc. help?” Chad asked.

“Maybe. From where, when?”

“From the rear end of the speed boat as it was taking off after shooting Carl.”

“Great! Any good idea how to find out what that means, Chad?”

“Well, I think we can narrow it down to Kendall, Florida, just inland from us out here on the coast.”

“How do you figure that?”

“Because under Phantom, Inc. it said, Kendall, Florida.”

“I suppose that just might tie the two together. Again, great going.”

“Since I doubt if my little brother thought to mention it, he has a photographic memory – if he sees it he remembers it,” Carl offered.

“It’s not photographic, it’s eidetic,” Chad said clearly disgusted with his brother’s imprecision.

“I just imagine that has some advantages,” Orvie said.

“I wouldn’t know, never having been without it.”

“Let’s see what you can find out about Phantom in Kendall?”

“Almost there, now. Phantom Tattooing, Phantom Comic Book Store, Phantom Acting Agency. That’s it – all I can find.”

“Okay, is there a way to find owners of boats by boat names?”

“Perhaps. Let me fiddle a bit.”

Chad fiddled with the laptop. Orvie fiddled his way through a sausage roll. ‘Calories, grease, and indigestion,’ he thought to himself.

“I got a list of entries in a speed boat regatta (parade of boats) from back in June of this year. You won’t believe this, but there are thirteen boats entered that have the word phantom in their name.”

“You tried, phantom inc, I assume.”

“Actually no. But, now I have. Bingo! Phantom, Inc, owned by a boat rental company – where else – in Kendall.”

“How about a website?”

“As we speak. Not much of one, really. Gives store hours and a picture of the owner, a blond beauty looks to be mid-thirties.”

“A guy you describe as a blond beauty?”

“It’s not a guy, if that talk Carl had with me when I was nine was anything like accurate.”

“Ah! A blond female-type beauty! Gotcha!”

Chad, being the young gentleman he was, turned the laptop so the others could see the picture.

“Her name – you really won’t believe this – is Paula Phantom.”

He looked further and dug up a few more facts.

“Looks like it mostly rents diving rigs. Lots of rich tourist-types show up down here to try their hands at treasure hunting – this area is lousy with sunken ships, none of which were known to be treasure carriers, but that doesn’t quell their initial enthusiasm. She also rents the diving equipment and such. Only week long rentals.”

“Not sure what that tells us other than that we have the owner of the boat. Certainly, no motivation to drown your guests or to use Carl as a pincushion. We need to find out who has rented that boat for the week.”

“Not at all sure how to do that,” Chad said.

Orvie directed his glance toward Carl.

“What if, the renter of the boat called Paula and

reported a malfunction and worked the conversation around to having her tell him what phone number or address they had on file for him?"

"Sounds like a plan to me," Chad said also turning his gaze at Carl.

"Why me?"

"Our voices, though recently lowered, are not yet dependable in that register and yours has been there for quite some time."

It had been Orvie and the case he made was difficult to dispute.

"Okay. Of course, I'll give it a try. Help me understand what I need to do."

Orvie and Chad helped Carl rehearse all the possibilities they could envision and at last believed he was ready.

As it turned out, Paula was out, but her bookkeeper was female and willing to be chatty. In the end it was the younger boys who learned a number of things about how to charm the ladies into spilling their beautiful guts to a man. He got the renter's phone number, and the address on the application.

"Good going lover boy," Chad said clearly impressed.

"Sorry I couldn't get the man's full name. She called me Frankie. I hope that helps."

"It's data," Orvie reminded them. "The more data the better our chance at solving this thing. I assume that address doesn't mean anything to either of you."

His implied question met blank faces.

"How about running a reverse check on that phone number?"

"Why? We have the address."

"We have one address. Who knows what the other number might reveal."

"You have done this detective stuff before, haven't you?"

Orvie shrugged and raised his eyebrows.

“It’s a cell phone. Never worry, though. We subscribe to a cell number service in case irregularities come up with reservations.”

A few minutes later they had another bingo.

“Franklin Benjamin.”

“Really. Franklin Benjamin as in the reverse of Ben Franklin?”

“Seems so.”

“Okay, Carl. You did so well with Paula’s assistant, how do you feel about trying the same routine with some secretary at the Spear Gun place in Kendall?”

“I’ll give it try.”

The results of that phone call were puzzling, although Orvie found them interesting. The spear, along with a dozen more, and the spear gun, had been purchased by Paula Phantom.

“I suppose it makes sense, in a way,” Orvie said. “A place that rents diving equipment owning spear guns and spears.”

“I suppose so,” Chad said.

“Okay. Let’s give that front a rest,” Orvie said. “On to the next point on our agenda for this morning – I need to be shown around your island.”

“Why don’t you take him out there in the runabout,” Carl said directing the suggestion to Chad. “I probably should stay relatively inactive like the doctor said.

“Sounds good. We can be out there by 9:30. If we stay two hours, we can be back by two, easy.”

“Be sure to take your cell phone and I know that’s a dumb thing to say since you were born talking on it, giving advice to the doctor who was delivering you, the way the story has been told.”

A nice, brotherly, smile passed between them. Orvie sometimes regretted that, despite all the wonderful things about his life, he would never get to know that special relationship between brothers. He had to settle for moments like that and feel good that the two of them understood.

“Remember, today’s your appointment at school at

3:30.”

“Me forget something?” Chad said.

“Only when it conveniently covers up something you’d rather be doing.”

Carl seemed to have his brother’s number.

The runabout, as it turned out, was a ten foot, outboard, wide and clumsy but appeared to be both seaworthy and quite stable in the water. Chad rescued two box lunches from the refrigerator on the tour boat before they left and Orvie added his back pack under the front seat.

“Motor’s oversized for the boat – not by design, but it’s what we have. I can make it fly.”

“I’d just as soon stay on the water.”

Smiles.

“So, about the code.”

“Got paper and pencil?”

“I always have paper and pencil.”

He opened a side pocket on his backpack.

“Okay, here it is. 1/100 + Ne + 2Ls beso.”

Orvie began thinking out loud.

“That’s it? Beso, of course, is Spanish for kiss. That may or may not be the intent of the four letters, however. The ‘so’ could mean south, the ‘e’ east. The ‘b’ could stand for one of nearly 5,000 commonly used English words that begin with that letter and a similar number of Spanish words. I’m thinking Spanish because they held such a prominent position in this area historically.”

“Carl and I have wondered about the Ne. If they were both capitals it could mean North East. The two sizes of the letter are confusing.”

Orvie had an idea.

“Keeping with the Spanish in which North East is typically spelled as one word – Noreste – we might be able to account for the two sizes. It may reflect some written language pattern no longer in use, even.”

“You have any thoughts about what seems to be the fraction 1/100 at the beginning?” Orvie asked.

“Nothing that makes any sense. One at one hundred, maybe. One something over one hundred other somethings. The lowest form of the fraction $10/1,000$ or $100/10,000$ – it soon becomes absurd.”

“What about the + signs?”

“Carl suggested they might mean ‘by’ instead of plus. I wondered if maybe they were crosses instead of plus signs.”

“Interesting, which leads me to throw in, ‘quadrants’ – four quadrants, top left and right and bottom left and right.”

“That actually makes some good sense. A map – for which this code is just a clandestine (hidden) substitute – would be set out in quadrants or could easily be divided up into four equal sections or quadrants.”

“Describe the form of the island to me.”

[The reader may want to begin drawing a map of the island and add to it as new information is provided.]

“That’s easy. It’s basically a circle – like a cookie with a small chunk bitten off the south side forming a lagoon or cove. Then there is a really small mini-island out at the outside edge of the water filled cove. It closes the middle third of the opening into the cove allowing ways to enter on both sides of it.”

“How big is the island?”

“Carl calculates the size of a rounded off city block – just the circular center part as wide as where it touches the four streets that encompass it. Better said, maybe, a circle with the diameter of a city block.”

“So, say a typical city block is about an eighth of a mile long. That would be how many feet – about 650?”

“Six hundred and sixty actually, but that was a very good, quick calculation.”

“Thank you, Dr. Pleasure.”

“Someday it will be, Dr. Pleasure; you can count on that.”

“I assume you’ve explored the island. Does that seem about right – like a block of four football fields?”

“Yes, I’d say very much like that.”

“Where do you dock?”

“In the cove. It’s the only reasonable place. There is a rock ridge that encircles the outside edge of the island all the way up to the cove. It varies from twenty to forty feet in width in from the outside.”

“How high?”

“See for yourself. There it is just ahead. I’ll take a spin around it before we dock so you can get an idea of what I’ve been trying to describe.”

“The rocky areas appear to only be, what, twenty to fifty feet high?”

“About that. Certainly, nowhere are they less than fifteen high. At sunset and sunrise, they cast really eerie shadows like long witch fingers moving across the island about to grab you. Carl tells a story about that while our guests are here.”

As eerie as THAT?” Orvie said pointing some fifty yards off shore to the east.

CHAPTER FOUR: Doubloon Island

“This can’t be good,” Chad said.

The white speed boat, which had been moving directly east, seemed to catch sight of them and turned in a tight circle and headed right for them.

“Shall we run, fight or surrender?” Chad asked more serious than not.

“Let me handle it. Slow down. Is there another island around here very close?”

“Yeah. San Carlos just to the south.”

The white boat slowed and pulled within twenty yards. The lone man in it called out.

“What you kids doin’ out here?”

“Looking for San Carlos Island. Trying to get our Navigation Merit Badge.”

“The man chuckled.”

“You missed it by five miles. Head due south and you’ll run right into it.”

“Thanks. I suppose we can count on you not to tell our scout master about this tiny, little, miscalculation, right?”

“No problem. Go!”

He remained where he was, clearly waiting for the boys to turn and leave. They did. Soon the white boat continued on its way.

“Slow down. We’ll let him get out of sight and then circle back.”

“That was awesome – I seem to be saying that about you regularly. How do you know how to do stuff like that?”

“When you’ve been practicing for a hundred years it just seems to happen automatically.”

“I really would like to know. It was a serious question.”

“When you’re on your own like I am, you learn many different kinds of survival skills. Talking your way out of unpleasant – no offense – situations is one of them. Not really a big deal.”

They soon turned around and headed for the cove on the opposite side of the island.

“Did you get a good look at the man?” Orvie asked, thinking Chad’s eidetic memory thing would come in handy later.

“Not only that, but for you less mentally gifted mortals, I also got his picture on my phone.”

“Very sneaky. I didn’t even see you take it.”

“Sleight of hand from my year as a budding magician when I was nine.”

They were soon tied up at the wide wooden dock in the cove. Orvie took time to just stand in one spot and look over the island. He saw the ring of low rock hills surrounding the rear two thirds of the circular island forming a backdrop to the flat central area covered in a mix of soil and sand. There were isolated palm trees and low bushes with tall grass along the cove/lagoon. When he turned around he saw the tiny mini-island, as Chad had referred to it. He estimated it to be 75 feet (25 yards) long from east to west and perhaps 40 to 50 feet (15 yards) wide, north to south. It rose out of the water two feet from a base similar in every way to the rock hills. It was also covered in dirt and sand with mixed vegetation scattered here and there. The distance from it to the shoreline of the cove was about the same as its length – perhaps as far as ninety feet (30 yards).

Orvie began walking onto the plain of the main island picking up sand and letting it drain away through his fingers.

“Any water source here?”

“No. The vegetation is sustained by the frequent rains.”

“Animals?”

“Just birds –gulls mostly. Occasionally a stray Snowy Egret or Frigate. I’ve seen vultures circling overhead, but since there are no animals here, nothing ever dies on the island, so they are always disappointed.”

Orvie thought to himself: ‘Hmm. A place where nothing ever dies. Sounds like a place tailor made for me.’ He offered himself a mental chuckle. (It can be done! Try it!)

“I assume you have searched the rocks for marks like the +; the plus or cross or quadrant sign.”

“Sure have. None that are obvious.”

“The Ne+ in the code. Suppose that + could have been intended to be a ‘t’?”

“Never thought of that. ‘Net’. Can’t see how it helps though.”

“Neither can I. Anything here resembling the 2 ‘L’s that seem to be mentioned in the code?”

“Not that we’ve been able to find.”

Orvie looked the hills over, one end to the other.

“I suppose if you stretched your thinking about it, the semi-circle made by the hills might be divided in half straight ahead at the middle of the rear of the island. Each side of the range could be construed as an ‘L’ – the one on the west being backward and the two of them touching right there in the center.”

“We’ve never considered that. ‘Beso’, it says; perhaps, like the two ‘L’ are kissing, meeting. Could that be where the treasure is buried?”

“I think it is one possibility. Let’s go take a look at that area.”

As they walked, Chad talked.

“Just using that much, though, leaves out all the rest of the clue. Does that seem reasonable?”

“Probably not, but let’s take a look anyway.”

They jogged to the spot where the two ‘Ls’ would meet

at the center of the extreme north end of the island. They each searched, neither one having any idea what they were looking for.

“It was buried 300 plus years ago,” Orvie said. “Any signs indicating disturbance to the area will be long gone. That makes the process very difficult. I suppose we’re looking for a large rock out of place – wrong coloration for the specific spot. The rock that makes up these hills varies from dark brown, through light brown and shades of tan.”

They went on searching for some time. Chad spoke.

“Any reason it has to be down at the bottom of the hill? Could it be up on the hillside?”

“I don’t know why not. Just looks pretty solid up there, but it’s certainly worth a look.”

They gradually worked their way up the hillside until they were at the top. Although less than forty feet high, it provided the best view into the distance they had.

“What do you think that is over to the east – way the heck out there – 150 yards or so?” Chad asked, pointing.

Orvie broke out a pair of binoculars and searched the area.

“Looks to be a ship – maybe two.”

He handed the glasses to Chad.

“Yeah. Two and maybe one of them is the white speed boat.”

“You think?”

Chad passed the glasses back. Orvie studied the area for some time.

“I think you’re right. A white boat against the light green of the ocean is hard to make out. At any rate, the main craft is significantly larger and darker in color highlighting the speed boat sitting to this side of it. They are both dead in the water.”

“If that’s only 150 yards away it’s within our territorial waters.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Back when the island was granted to my great, great whatever, the Spanish automatically assigned territorial rights

extending two hundred meters in all directions from an island or out to sea from a shore property. The reason I've heard was to prevent ships with cannons from getting close enough to be accurate with any bombardment."

"And would any ship who was about to bombard the property pay any attention to such limits?"

"Of course, not, but it gave some legal standing to the owner – like getting the ship for trespassing if nothing else. It probably kept enemy ships from getting close enough to spy on what was going on. They'd get too close and the folks on the island would have the right to blow them out of the water."

"Is that territorial limit still recognized?"

"I've heard of legal cases where it was, yes. Not sure how general that application is. Carl may know more – he handles the lawyer stuff. One case it read about was where some outsider was trying to salvage a sunken ship within the territorial waters of somebody else's island. The island one won in court."

Orvie nodded as if to say thanks for the information. It didn't seem in any way relevant to the current situation. He hung the binoculars around his neck and they made their way back down to the plain.

"How deep's the cove or lagoon or whatever?"

"A pretty even twenty-five feet out to the mini-island and then past it on out another twenty-yards. That rock ledge extends to some degree out into the ocean all the way around the main island – not so sure about the north side. Never spent much time in the water back there. In general, though, a large boat couldn't get close – large like a freighter or liner that rode more than twenty or so feet down into the water."

"I suppose I've seen enough to get my head around things out here. Before we leave the area, I'd like to walk the mini-island. You've done that I take it."

"Not in a long time. In recent years, I'm only really ever out here with the tours and we set up on the main island. The main function the little island serves is to protect the water in the lagoon from taking on the waves from the ocean. They break up on it and never disturb things in here."

Chad got them to the little island in the runabout and Orvie jumped up onto it. He walked the length and breadth, knelt down to examine the sandy surface, and was ready to leave.

“Five palm trees on it. Does that mean a deep soil base?”

“These trees don’t grow very tall, twenty feet tops. Palm trees typically have shallow root systems, often just a big ball of roots under the trunk. These probably only go down three or so feet. Have no idea how deep the soil base is either out here or on the main island.”

Orvie re-boarded the boat and they began the trip back to the home dock. He looked over the code again.

“Maybe it isn’t beso – the Spanish. Maybe it’s the two English words ‘be’ and ‘so’.”

“That make any kind of sense?” Chad asked.

“Not at the moment, but then none of it does.”

“I wonder if what we’ve been calling an ‘s’ that follows the ‘2 L’, could be a 5, instead?”

“We’ve compare its shape with the ‘s’ in ‘beso’ and on our copy, at least the two are nearly identical.”

They sailed on in silence for some time. It was Orvie who spoke first.

“We got company.”

“Where?”

“Way out to sea, probably 200 yards or more. I have trouble judging distances over water – no reference points.”

Chad took a look.

“I see it. You think it’s our white boat friend?”

“I have no idea, but it’s been shadowing us for at least a half hour.”

“Well, if it is, Whitie, we sure don’t want to give the impression we are connected to Pleasure Tours,” Chad said.

“Good thinking. What’s your suggestion?”

“That we sail past our dock and pull into the seaside ‘drive through’ at Barney’s. That’ll give us a chance to determine what he may be up to.”

“We didn’t eat you know,” Orvie said looking at the white boxes they had both forgotten about.

“That’s right. It may be the first time in history two twelve year olds missed a meal when it could have been avoided. Barney will be good for a burger and fries, Okay?”

“I would not protest the acquisition of that sort of nutritional sustenance.”

“And I would be remiss if I didn’t enlighten you by apprising you of the fact that that the quality of the mid-day fare will not equate with that of the early morning repasts he so graciously bestows upon us.”

“If Carl heard that exchange he’d toss us both overboard, my good doctor,” Orvie said grinning.

“He would, indeed, my learned professor.”

“I’ll keep my glasses on the boat while you tend to conning somebody out of lunch,” Orvie said.

Orvie watched the boat while Chad charmed the waitress. It worked out fine on both counts. The boat soon turned and angled off to the south west. The pretty waitress returned with burgers, fries, and shakes. It certainly wouldn’t win a good nutrition contest, but my how they did enjoy it.

* * *

“So, you two learn anything worthwhile, today,” Carl asked as he met them at the dock.

“I learned the lay of the land out there on Doubloon Island. Do you have anything like an official deed from either Florida or the United States?”

“We do. As legal as it gets. No problems there. Is that somehow important?”

“Don’t know. Just like to know where things stand. Does that apply to the extended two thousand yards around the perimeter as well?”

“It does. Ours, signed, sealed and delivered. By the way, Butch, we better get you to school.”

“Butch?”

“A loving nickname my big brother foisted (imposed) on

me back before I could defend myself.”

“Hard to believe there ever was such a time.”

Orvie and Carl traded raised eyebrows.

The brothers left, and Orvie busied himself cleaning up the tour boat. It would go out again the next day – Friday. It would be an eighteen-hour excursion with stops in the Keys and a bonfire, feast, and treasure hunt on Doubloon Island come dusk. It sounded like a good time, as well it should be for the \$200 ticket price he’d seen in a brochure.

He assumed the dive at the coral reef would have to be scratched due to Carl’s confrontation with a spear. He went through a list of topics he could talk about and stories he could relate if Carl had been serious about having him contribute in those ways.

He had once spent a good portion of a summer helping a salvage crew bring up things from a sunken, three-masted, Spanish galleon. There had been no treasure, but they located a half dozen cannons of various sizes, lots of cannon balls covered in debris on the bottom and beautifully carved ebony woodwork that had remained in extremely good shape even after fifty years under water. The find brought the salvage company a good deal of money and several of the pieces were still on display at the wonderful Museum of Science and History at Jacksonville in northern Florida.

Orvie always loved reviewing his best memories – and Orvie had lots and lots and lots of them!

Carl and Chad were gone until nearly five.

Chad was up and over the side of the jeep before Carl had brought it to a full stop.

“You will never believe what I got here. I mean never, never, never.”

“An ‘A+’ on a project few scholars in the world could have produced.”

“No, I get those all the time.”

“A ‘D-’ on a project virtually any fifth grader could have aced.”

“No. It doesn’t have to do with my school work. That’s always ‘A’ work regardless of the topic – not to brag; just to

state the facts like they are.”

“We’ve been there, I believe, and you have fully satisfied me as to the truth in the matter. Just tell me.”

“Look here.”

He produced his phone and a picture of a girl – a very pretty girl – a very pretty woman, actually.

“Hey, that’s Paula Phantom. You two go stalking her did you?”

“No. May be worse than that.”

“Give!”

“You’ll never guess where I got it.”

“Okay, I’ll never guess. Where?”

“On, Dr. Madison’s desk.”

“Am I to assume that Dr. Madison is your Educational Administrator?”

“You are, and Paula is his new girlfriend.”

“Since when?”

“Since four weeks ago, when I met with him.”

“Coincidence?”

“Carl and I have been talking about it on the way back here. We don’t think so. Like he did today, last time I was with him he spent a lot of time trying to be buddy, buddy with me. He asked a lot of personal questions about the tour business, our schedule, our routes – things like that. To me it all seemed legitimate as if he were trying to really get to know me so he could relate to me better. I may be absolutely brilliant, but I’m twelve and still find it easy for people to pull the wool over my eyes – trick me as it were. I think he set me up and I fell for it. My theory is he’s somehow in on things with Paula and that means her role may go a whole lot further than just renting a boat and equipment to the Franklin guy.”

“What is Dr. Madison’s academic field?” Orvie asked.

“Fields. Anthropology (study of cultures) and archeology (study of the things people left behind from olden times).”

Several fascinating new twists. Orvie had to admit – to himself, privately – Miss Phantom would certainly be one of

the most attractive adversaries (foes) he'd ever had to clap in irons.

CHAPTER FIVE: Playing With Hand Grenades

“I think it’s time we meet one Paula Phantom,” Orvie said. Her website said they stay open until eight. Can we make it there still today?”

“Sure. Will we need an excuse?” Chad asked.

“I’d like for us to buy one spear of the very same variety that Carl brought home as a prize yesterday.”

“Won’t she get suspicious?”

“I hope so. Nervous bad guys are more likely to slip up. I want to meet her and get a feeling about her.”

What he wanted, of course, was the opportunity to use his special skill and see what he could ascertain about her actual role in things.

As luck would have it, Paula met them as they entered the store. She clearly knew Chad and Carl though played ignorant.

“How may I help you gentlemen?”

Carl handled the conversation. He described exactly what they wanted.

“Those are special order items. I’m afraid we don’t stock them.”

Orvie heard: ‘Please don’t look on the south wall where we have them for sale.’

“Then I guess we’ll look around if that’s okay,” Carl

said. "We may order before we leave."

Orvie approached her.

"I understand you rent all sorts of boats."

"Several kinds, yes."

"I hear there is going to be what they're calling the 'White King and Queen Regatta', down at Key Largo. Only white boats allowed. Dad's four boats are black, green, yellow and red. My girlfriend really wants to go to it so he said if I could find a white one to rent he'll foot the bill. Looking for a killer, white, speed boat. Have anything like that?"

"No. We're not really into pleasure craft – more the industrial and salvage types of equipment."

Orvie heard a mixed message: They did specialize in the heavier boats, but also did a large business in pleasure rentals as well. She did have a white speed boat. His questions were making her very nervous.

Chad walked up carrying a spear of the type they had inquired about.

"This is what we were asking about. Perhaps, we didn't describe it appropriately."

"Oh, that, yes. We had a special order for that model some time ago. I always order a few extras to see if they'll sell. Sorry, I forgot about it."

That had been a lie from beginning to end. Orvie began wondering if she ever considered telling the whole truth.

Chad caught on to what was going on. He didn't understand what Orvie was really doing, but he figured he could help.

"You look so familiar. Haven't we met somewhere – maybe at the university? It seems like it was very recently."

"I'm sure we don't know each other. I have no connection with a university."

"My error I guess. Maybe a picture. You been in the paper for any reason?"

"No. No university and no newspaper photo."

She sounded more than a little upset with Chad and his

insistent approach.

It had provided Orvie with more important information. She did have some connection to a university – he couldn't tell what that was. She was mostly telling the truth about the newspaper picture – there had been one of her in her boat that really didn't show her face so shouldn't count.

Carl purchased the spear. Orvie had earlier explained to them that they needed a copy of the first one, but hadn't mentioned why. They left and were immediately headed back to their dock and office.

"Well?" Chad asked directing it at Orvie.

"She seems fully untrustworthy, don't you think. From things we know, many of her answers were either out and out lies or misrepresentations of the facts as we know them."

"So how does that help?" Carl asked.

"It's always good to have confirmation of what we think we know. She lied about her Dr. Madison connection at the university and her Franklin connection – whatever that really is. She wouldn't be lying unless she had something to hide, right?"

"Right," Chad agreed. "Something like trying to destroy our business!"

"And, kill your big brother, I might remind you," Carl said.

"So, what's with the second spear we just bought?"

"I figure we've let Paula know that she is a suspect. Suspects generally try to clean up their trails. The one piece of evidence we have on her is the spear that her guy left in Carl's shoulder. I'm thinking somebody will be back to retrieve it."

"So, you just moved things from already dangerous, to really, really, dangerous," Chad said putting his hands around his neck as if needing to demonstrate his feelings.

"I do believe you are finally getting a clear grasp of the situation."

"How do we proceed?" Carl asked.

"My best guess is they will move fast – tonight, probably, tomorrow at the latest. We need to make certain

they find what they're looking for."

"Give up the evidence?" Chad asked, clearly puzzled.

"Give up the substitute evidence. We need to mark the new spear in some way that will be obvious to us but not them. Then we take pictures of it so when they are caught with the spear we can prove they took it from us."

"Would a GPS sticker help?"

"I'm not familiar with what you're talking about."

Chad let Carl explain.

"We give each of our guests a name tag. On the back is a high-tech sticker that can be tracked, like the GPS in a cell phone. We use it in case any of our guests wander off or get lost at one of our stops."

"Sounds like science fiction," Orvie said.

"It was just a few years ago," Chad began. "I got in on a research project at the university that was developing the technology. I made a few good contributions and now have a lifetime supply available – more or less."

"A sticker, you say?"

"Yes. Like this."

Chad pulled out his wallet and opened it to the picture section.

"There."

Orvie looked.

"I see, but I wouldn't have thought twice about it unless we had this discussion. It's virtually clear and about the size of a stamp."

"They all transmit the same data – location – so we can't differentiate among the stickers, but a lost guest is lost guest so it really doesn't matter."

"So, if we attach a sticker to one of the fins on the spear, you can track it just like a lost guest."

"Right. Pretty neat, huh."

"I'd say so. We still need another mark in case the sticker is located and removed."

"This lad is so untrusting, have you noticed that, Big Brother?"

“I have, but I’m inclined to go along with it, aren’t you, Little Brother?”

“He seems to be proving himself trustworthy.”

They worked on the spear, affixing a sticker, and cutting three, shallow lines across the metal shaft near the point. They looked like they belonged, although few if any would even ever see them.

“Now to hide them both – the real one so it can’t be found and the fake so it can be found, but not easily. I have an idea about the original – slip it inside the mattress upstairs. You guys suggest a place for the other one.”

“Hmm. Well-hidden and yet not too well hidden,” Chad said walking around the office looking here and there. “We basically have four venues (places) to consider. Our mobile home, here, the tour boat or the runabout.”

“I vote for some place other than the tour boat so they can find it tomorrow while we are gone if they miss it tonight,” Orvie offered.

They settled on behind the books on the shelf behind the desk which sat behind the counter where they dealt with customers. It seemed to meet the requirements Orvie had established. (And the sentence set the all-time record for the number of ‘behinds’ in one sentence!)

“Morning comes really early on tour days, guys,” Carl said. About time for bed. Up at 4:30 for a six-a.m. launch.”

Chad filled in details.

“We’ll be here at 5:00 with breakfast. We eat. The caterer will arrive with the box lunches and the food for the island soon after that – 5:15 or so. Then, I – we, now – stow it in the gas-powered refrigerator on board. Carl replaces the propane tanks on the boat and makes sure the engine is running well. I make sure the seats are dry – they tend to accumulate dew overnight – and do the same with the windows on the boat bottom. The guests arrive at 5:45. Carl goes over the safety precautions with them and by 6:00 we’re on our way.”

“Sounds like a very efficient operation.”

“Of course. That’s the only way we Pleasure Brothers

know how to operate.”

“By the way, Orvie,” Carl said. “Are you up to doing the coral reef dive tomorrow? I assume you’ve done that sort of diving before.”

“Sure, and yes.”

They exchanged smiles. Carl handed him his underwater watch.

“Twenty minutes is plenty. You’ll have air enough for an hour. You saw what I did down there. Just adlib. Have fun. I’m sure the fishies will love you.”

“And the old ladies will, too, if how they carried on during the last tour is any indication,” Chad said, perhaps just a little jealousy showing in his tone.”

Orvie sensed that.

“Let’s make a game of it. I’ll try to find something down there I don’t think you’ll know about, so you’ll have nothing to say. If I do, you’ll owe me something stupendous.”

“Like?”

“Oh, I don’t know, do my homework for the next month.”

“You have homework?”

“I guess there is just one way to find out.”

“Me failing at this game, you mean. Not going to happen, Professor.”

Orvie shrugged.

“And if I win?” Chad said already feeling better.

“Isn’t it obvious? I’ll do your homework for a month.”

“Like you could do that – no offense.”

It ended in a draw.

That night, Orvie opted to stay on board the tour boat in his sleeping bag, just in case the bad guys tried to sabotage it. He figured they were getting desperate and hoped his obvious presence there – he’d position himself on the deck at the entrance – would dissuade (discourage) them. He certainly wasn’t looking for a fight.

* * *

Orvie was up at four, cleaned up in the office bathroom by 4:15 – he’d have to find out about a shower – and was

waiting on the porch when the others arrived. The schedule as it had been laid out the night before was followed with precision. Orvie was looking forward to an interesting day. It had been thirty years since he had visited the Keys and figured many things would have changed.

The first leg of the journey was mostly a repeat of the first tour. Then they made three half hour stops on each of three different islands in the Keys, and didn't lose a single tourist! How twenty people could buy that much pure junk in ninety minutes – and apparently love it – was beyond his comprehension. There were open baskets on shelves at the rear they used to hold their purchases.

From time to time, Chad would interrupt an explanation he was offering, to ask Orvie if he had anything to add. He always did. It became a redefined form of the game Orvie had suggested. Orvie understood what was going on and delighted in it as did the passengers who came to enjoy the good-natured give-and-take of the one-up-man-ship competition.

Orvie always had an appropriate story or comeback. It was soon to be his opportunity to turn the tables on his new friend.

As the boat slowed to a stop above the reef, Orvie slipped into the gear and was soon over the side. He played among the fish and went nose to nose with a fairly large starfish. The guests roared when the starfish seemed to reach out and touch Orvie's face and Orvie reached out and did he same to it.

Chad added to the fun by announcing: "Come back tomorrow folks for the first wedding of a human and six-pronged creature of the deep."

Orvie continued to point out features on and near the reef for Chad to describe. Chad went on about each as if it had all been rehearsed. Orvie then came upon something unusual. At first, he was baffled; perhaps a dark rock out of place up on the reef. It was the size of a very large potato. He picked it up and immediately understood that had been a really bad idea. It was a lever activated hand grenade. It had been resting on the reef with the lever underneath it. When

Orvie lifted it the grenade cocked and began its countdown to fire – eight to ten seconds he figured.

In one motion Orvie held it up so Chad could see what it was and then swam with it as fast as he could away from the ship. As he swam he counted to himself: one ... two ... three ... four ... five ... six. At that point he was still only twenty-five feet away from the boat. He dropped the grenade and swam back toward the boat. At the count of eight there was an explosion. It initiated a powerful concussion wave through the water and sent Orvie spinning head over heels. Onboard, the guests panicked – not understanding what Orvie had been about down below. The boat rocked from the force of the explosion, but was not damaged. Had it still been on top of the grenade, the glass bottom would have been destroyed and it and the passengers would have been gurgling their way toward the bottom of the ocean. Carl tended to the passengers, offering words to help them regain a sense of calm. Chad was at the railing near the ladder searching the water for Orvie. The explosion had kicked up dirt and debris making the water murky. Because of Orvie's quick thinking and action, neither the boat nor the reef had been destroyed.

But, where was Orvie?

It took some time for the water to clear. Chad prepared to dive into the water with no real plan in mind. He heard a familiar voice from across the deck behind him.

“Hey, doc. Were you able to describe that chunk of iron to the guests or do I win?”

Chad turned and ran across the deck offering Orvie a hand up. Two of the male tourists assisted them. Somewhat humorously, Orvie began going through a check list of his body parts.

“Toes, check. Legs, check. Hands, check. Arms, check. Head – Oh, no! I can't see me my head. A little help here folks.”

His antics sent a much-needed chuckle through the group.

“You, doofus – as somebody I know calls people who have just executed some fully inane (stupid) act – you could have been killed. What were you thinking?”

Carl answered.

“He was thinking about the twenty-two lives just forty feet above him. Thanks, son. That was amazing.”

Orvie never knew how to accept compliments or words of appreciation. He usually went for the joke, but instead he went for a seat. He was suddenly dizzy.

“Sitting down is probably a good idea on several fronts,” Chad said concerned, but also clearly amused.

“Several?” Orvie asked confused through the cobwebs that seemed to have suddenly been spun across his mind.

“One, so you don’t faint dead away and fall harming yourself or a passenger. Two, because the explosion appears to have blown away the entire seat of your pants.

Orvie, muddled as his head was, still had a comeback.

“You’re not just making me the butt of a joke now are you?”

“He is not,” Carl said supplying a towel. “Under the circumstances, the company will stand the cost of a replacement.”

Once Orvie was appropriately attired, Carl poled the tourists.

“We have the option of retuning directly back to port with a refund or, we can move on to our next planned stop at Doubloon Island for an evening of good food, fellowship and a treasure hunt.”

“And,” Orvie added, “the winner of the treasure hunt not only gets one free cruise with us, but should a grenade be found on the reef during that tour, he or she will be allowed to dive and remove it.”

There were laughs all around and everybody opted to continue – if Orvie didn’t need immediate medical attention.

“I believe what I need more than medical assistance right now is a good tailor, folks.”

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CHAPTER SIX: A Night Alone on Doubloon Island

Orvie was surprised to see a large pile of small logs waiting on the island when the boat arrived. They were arranged in the fire pit some twenty yards from the lagoon, all ready to make one heck of a blazing bonfire. He asked Chad about it.

“We have a log guy. Four times a week he drops them off and sets them up for us. Then all we need to do is light a match to them when the time comes.”

The passengers stepped from the boat to the dock and from the dock onto the sandy beach. They had been forewarned to pack a jacket for the evening and they had, although the air was still warm. The ocean water remained a constant 84 degrees’ day and night that time of year and tended to keep the air warm even after the sun went down. Still, with the ocean breezes that happened along in the early evening an extra wrap was often appreciated.

They played a silly game, the winner of which had the privilege of lighting the fire. Chad and Orvie brought ten blankets from the boat and spread them out on the sand around the fire for the tourists to sit on.

“Anybody have a good ghost story about sunken ships or pirates or beheaded queens?” Carl asked.

Nobody offered so Orvie raised his hand.

Carl nodded and he stood at a spot from which he

could be seen by everybody.

“The Captain of the Western Breeze, a majestic, three-masted clipper ship, had been a cruel captain. He was quick to order floggings and known to put his crew on starvation diets for weeks at a time for insubordination (disobedience). He once hung a man for sneezing during religious services.

One dark, rainy night, his crew crept up through the shadows from below deck, approached the Captain’s quarters and set upon him. They dragged him up on deck and set him off the ship in a small row boat without water or food. As the ship pulled away, the crew heard him shouting that upon his death he would return and haunt them. ‘I shall snatch your souls.’

“For the rest of that journey – north across the Caribbean to the area later known as southern Florida – nights became uneasy times for the crew there on that ship. Men swore they would see the tiny row boat following them and they heard the wail of a ghostly voice repeating over and over again, ‘I have come for your souls, I have come for your souls.’

“One by one the crew members began disappearing. They would be there at night, but gone by morning. The water kegs were found empty and the food stores laden with salt so it was all inedible.

“Eventually the entire crew had vanished, and the eerie ghostly figure of the Captain climbed aboard from the rowboat and took the wheel. He set course for his secret island, where he invited passersby to join him in a feast around a bonfire. One by one he would snatch their souls. Legend has it that the ghostly form of that man still walks his private island at dusk, appearing as dancing shadows, as he lures in guests with his huge fire and promise of a fabulous feast. To this day, for those who listen closely, they can hear his voice riding the wailing wind – ‘I have come for your s o u l s. I have come for your s o u l s.’

“The pirate’s name was Carl Pleasure and the island was called Doubloon.”

Orvie paused and looked about. He had delivered the story in a quiet, subdued, voice, but suddenly let out a blood

curdling laugh. Every guest jumped and searched out into the darkness with fear on his face – if only for a moment before they broke into applause.

The boys brought the food and passed it from blanket to blanket: Individual green salads with strawberries, two sliced whole hams, bowls of potato salad, slaw, and baked, brown-sugar beans. There were uncut loaves of hard crust bread to pull apart, with jugs of honey and plates of butter. There were grape and apple juice served in large, decorative, tankards (mugs) and peach cobbler for desert. It was all served up on old fashioned, pewter (a soft metal) plates, with large utensils – spoons, three pronged forks, and razor sharp knives.

Everyone seemed to have a great time. Chad brought bongos, a guitar and two ukuleles for those in the group to use and encouraged everyone to sing along. All the usual tunes were rendered: 'Tell Me Why,' 'Oh! Susannah', 'Down by the Old Mill Stream' and others – old-folk's music.

Once the tummies were full, the dishes collected, voices happily worn hoarse, the instruments collected, and darkness had overtaken the world, each guest was furnished with a lantern in the old-fashioned style. They were shown a sample sand dollar (flattened sea urchin shell between two and four inches in diameter) and informed there were dozens like it to be found within just yards of the fire. One, however, was painted red on the bottom. Whoever found that one would win a crisp, new, one-hundred-dollar bill. The guests pursued the treasure hunt as if their lives depended on it.

It produced a great deal of laughter and good natured pushing and shoving.

Just as a retired teacher called out that she had found it and raised it high above her head, a sizable explosion rocked the area. It had come from the fire. Burning and hot glowing pieces of wood shot across the area and high into the air. The jackets and sweaters saved more than a few from receiving serious burns to the arms and shoulders. In fact, several did receive minor burns. Chad was immediately on the scene with the first aid kits and the members of the group freely helped each other tend to the injuries.

Carl apologized, of course, and the group was directed back onto the boat. Chad, for the third time in as many days, used the mobile phone and reported an incident to the authorities.

“I’d like to remain out here over night,” Orvie told Carl. “We need to see if there is any evidence of what caused the explosion left in the fire pit. It’s still way too hot to sift through. I’ll be fine.”

With great reluctance Chad broke out two blankets, a canteen of water, and a goodie bag of leftovers from the feast. He announced he’d be back in the runabout by eight the next morning. Orvie requested the air tanks and diving gear remain with him on the island – “Just in case a very friendly, very lonely, mermaid happens along,” he gave as his humorous reason. The other two didn’t question him (about staying, not about the mermaid). He wished he had his back pack, but he didn’t. He kept a pewter plate, a set of utensils, two lanterns and a length of rope.

The boat pulled away and Orvie was left alone.

He sat watching what was left of the fire – the low flames turning to red hot embers and eventually to faint flickering, widely separated, glowing red spots. It would remain too hot to investigate until morning. Mainly, he didn’t want somebody else messing with the site of the explosion. While the embers flickered themselves to sleep, Orvie walked the beach collecting drift wood. When he had accumulated enough to keep a small fire going throughout the night, he stabbed a small still glowing stick from the bonfire and used it to ignite the new fire – much smaller and twenty feet to the rear of the fire pit.

He figured the appearance of a small contained fire on the island should give the illusion of campers and discourage anyone from landing and taking or ruining any evidence of what had caused the explosion. He suspected a stick of dynamite buried just beneath the sand in the fire pit, the idea being that when the heat became intense enough the dynamite would explode.

He arranged the blankets and went to sleep, awakening every so often to add wood to the fire.

At first light, he had already folded the blankets and sampled the leftovers from the night before. Barney had spoiled him, but he struggled through a hot ham sandwich and cobbler.

By the time those things were taken care of, he was ready to search the remains of the bonfire. It had burned virtually every twig. Clearly the wood had been dry and well arranged. He removed his shoes and socks – the mandatory tan socks – and moved into the pit. Using a fairly large stick he moved the fully cooled ashes around hoping to find something incriminating.

Back in the late 1890s Orvie had worked a summer in the gold and silver fields of Utah and Nevada so he had some familiarity with dynamite – relatively new at the time. He assumed it would still be similar – eight inch sticks an inch and a quarter in diameter wrapped in heavy paper or cardboard. It could be detonated in several ways, but he figured only one seemed appropriate to the current situation – a fuse fitted well into the nitroglycerin inside the tube. The nitro was the explosive and it was often applied wet to sawdust to keep it from exploding prematurely. The treated sawdust was packed into the cardboard tube with a fuse or blasting cap extending from one end.

He was hoping that in the case of their blast, some of that tube covering had been blown down into the sand and might be preserved. The sand at the bottom of the pit most likely drew and saved some moisture from below. A wet outer tube just might provide the luck Orvie needed.

He poked around for some time. There was a red something at the bottom of the pit – a leaf or a scrap of paper, perhaps. He got down on his hands and knees and began to carefully separate it from the sand and ash. Not only was it part of a dynamite tube, but it appeared to have legible printing on it. He wrapped it carefully in plastic wrap from the food. He would see if Chad could work any computer magic on it.

He let his fire burn out, its usefulness being over. His feet and ankles were dark gray from his time in the ashes. He headed toward the lagoon for a quick wash up carrying the

blankets and such to the spot beside the dock where he had left the air tanks.

He sat on the dock and dangled his legs in the water. He knew, of course, that ash and water didn't easily mix, but there would be tan sox to cover the dark ankles. A boat approached from shore, moving relatively slowly. He stood thinking it was way too early for Chad to arrive. That may have been because it wasn't Chad; it was the white speed boat. Where does one hide on a tiny island where there is no place to hide?

He stowed the blankets and other things under the dock and pulled the tall shore grass over them.

It seemed to be time for a game of hide and seek, unless it should turn into a game of cat and mouse with Orvie as the mouse. That could turn out badly. He had the idea Frank would not make a very compassionate cat.

He quickly checked the gauges on the air tanks – forty minutes left in the one he had used at the reef and a full hour in the other. He slipped them both into place on the shoulder harness, arranged the tube to the mask from the one showing a forty-minute supply, and let himself down into the water. He would stay on the surface until he could determine what the boat operator's intention seemed to be.

The boat first circled the island then slowed and entered the lagoon from the east, stopping and tying up at the dock. Orvie moved around to the west side of the mini-island. From there he could keep an eye on whoever it was and be prepared to submerge the second anything indicated that was the most prudent (sensible) course of action.

It was the same man he and Chad encountered during the 'merit badge caper' – he assumed it was Frank. 'Frank' finished securing the boat to a post and climbed up onto the dock. He looked around as if hoping he were alone. Apparently satisfied that was the case, he walked directly to the fire circle and poked around in the ashes. He worked at it for some time.

The delay gave Orvie an idea – or more precisely the time to execute an idea. He submerged and made his way to the rear end of the boat. It had an inboard engine. The

propeller protruded from a drive shaft at the rear a few inches below the bottom of the boat, just under its natural water line. Each of the three blades was only six inches long and about that wide at the ends. Orvie removed the tank he wasn't using and repeatedly bashed at the blades, eventually bending two of them significantly. Before he had completed what he really wanted to accomplish he heard footsteps back on the dock heading for the boat. He submerged. There was not time to head across the lagoon to hide behind the mini-island so he moved to the opposite side of the dock and pulled himself down a significant number of feet under water.

Air escaped from his breathing piece every time he exhaled and it bubbled up to the surface. He stuck close to the end of the dock thinking once Frank started the motor his bubbles would appear to be part of the churning caused by the boat's propeller.

The motor started and the boat backed up out into the open lagoon. At that point Orvie headed back under and toward the front of the dock. As the boat stopped in the water shifting into a forward gear it paused for a significant amount of time. Orvie couldn't see what was taking place. He hoped he hadn't been spotted. He reduced his breathing rate to minimize the bubbles. Eventually the boat moved out.

Orvie was relieved that he hadn't damaged the propeller to the point it wouldn't work at all. He was quite sure, however, that its speed and power would be greatly diminished (reduced). Once he determined the sound of the motor was growing faint he surfaced, cautiously. It was no longer in the lagoon. With his head out of the water, he could hear it heading south west – the very direction from which Chad would soon be coming.

Orvie swam back to the west side of the mini-island to a spot where he could see what was going on. The speed boat was moving away, but at a much-reduced speed and seemed to be moving a bit erratically in the water. Orvie smiled.

It was still an hour and a half before Chad was due. Orvie figured he could swim around the island a couple of times in ninety minutes. He'd settle for once. He began swimming east out of the lagoon and would make the circle to

the east, then north, then west and finally back south to the lagoon.

The base of the island was solid rock – irregular with crevices and projections, but rock heading pretty much straight down for as far as he cared to dive – only twenty feet that morning. It was bad enough that he was disregarding the first rule of scuba diving – never swim alone.

He tired and surfaced to rest when he arrived at the spot he figured was half way around. He looked up to survey the island from the rear. The hill was highest there so he was sure he was correct. The back of that hill was solid rock and contained two fissures (cracks) that began at the same point about half way up and then gradually spread apart until they were fifteen or so feet apart by the time they dipped below the surface.

For some reason, it intrigued him. He readjusted his mask, turned on the air and dived along the west fissure. Five feet below the waterline chunks of the rock between the two fissures had fallen away. At ten feet, so much had fallen away the hole spread from one to the other, a distance of at least twelve feet. He wished he had a light. Still, he moved inside just a couple of yards. The light from the early morning sun helped light the area, if only faintly. He moved in still a bit further.

It was a cave. He had just come from an adventure involving underwater caves and had learned some important things about navigating them safely. In the one he had explored, there was an air space above the surface of the water. He swam toward the top. It immediately became darker. His head hit something. He felt his way to its outer edge. It was a wooden structure. It was a large wooden structure that was floating on the surface. He positioned himself higher in the water so his head broke the surface.

In the darkness, he only knew two things. First, there was a large floating wooden structure near the top of the cave and second, it shouldn't have been there.

A moment later there was a third unexplainable thing: below him was a light moving in his direction. Another diver, most likely. Not what he needed! He was sure it couldn't be

Chad or Carl. That meant whoever it was had no legal right to be there and guys with no legal right to be places were usually the bad guys.

He swam as far back toward the front of the cave as he could – some distance, actually. He hugged the wall and hoped he would just blend in and stay out of sight. Unless the beam of light moved across him he figured he'd remain unnoticed. After all, he was sure they had no reason to suspect anybody else would be there . . . right?

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CHAPTER SEVEN: A Discovery Inside the Cave

When the swimmer reached the surface, he appeared to climb up onto the floating structure. Lights came on and lit the area above. The structure cast a long shadow that kept Orvie in the darkness and, he hoped, out of sight.

He could see that the top of structure – he began thinking of it as a deck or raft – was only twelve inches above the water's surface. He strained to get a look at what was on top – a box, perhaps a room, 10 feet by 10 feet square. The swimmer opened a door, which faced in Orvie's direction. Although the man's body blocked most of the view it was lit inside and he could see shelves with some sort of items sitting on them. He certainly wanted to get a better peek inside.

He looked at the watch that Carl had loaned him and saw that a good deal of time had slipped by. Chad was due at the island at any time. He figured that while the swimmer was occupied up top it would be an ideal time for him to slip deep into the water and make his way back outside. He flipped himself over in the water and headed down. The opening was well lit from the outside and easily located.

As he moved to leave the cave he passed through a shadow. He looked up toward the surface. The bottom of a small boat looked back at him.

'Probably not a good thing,' he thought to himself.' It could have been the one that brought the swimmer. He could

have come alone or somebody could have brought him and still be in the boat.

He was ten feet below it at that point. He moved another ten lower and, staying close to the rock underpinning of the island, he swam east. After he had put thirty feet between him and the boat, he saw and heard its propeller begin to churn. He stood up straight in the water and maintained his gaze at the bottom of the craft. Once directly above him, its motor stopped and it sat still in the water. It appeared that not only had he been seen, but he was being followed. His air supply was nearly gone. He couldn't outswim a boat. He needed a very good idea, and he needed it very soon!

The next thing that occurred was at the same time frightening and hilarious. Something at the side of the boat broke the surface. Orvie hoped it was not another grenade – an anchor, perhaps. He made some tentative motions to move to his left. His heart pumped rapidly and he was sucking air from the tank at a far faster than usual rate. He was sure his bubbles were more than a little obvious up on the surface.

The object that had entered the water from above had not fallen any further into the water; it remained at the surface. He checked it out more closely. It was a face – not the face that belonged to Frank or Paula or the Monster from the Black Lagoon – it was the face that belonged to Chad. His automatic response was to laugh – a response that came close to drowning him.

He moved high in the water. By the time his head penetrated the surface Chad's face was gone. He was sitting upright in the runabout.

"What's with the game of hide-and-seeK this morning?" Chad asked.

"What's with arriving three minutes early?" Orvie said kidding.

He handed up the tanks and fins and lifted himself up and over the side.

"How'd you find me?"

"I found your stuff – hidden it seemed – and noticed the

air tanks were gone. That suggested you were underwater somewhere. You had expressed an interest in the back side of the island, ergo (therefore) I circled back here, spotted your bubbles and the rest you were a part of.”

“Just glad they were my bubbles and not somebody else’s.”

“Who else’s would they have been?”

“Let me start from the beginning. Clever, by the way, the face thing so I’d know who was up here. Anyway, I had some time to kill after Frank left.”

“Frank was here?”

“Yes, just before the anonymous swimming bad guy almost trapped me in the underwater cave.”

“Swimming bad guy? Underwater cave? You have a bunch of things to explain.”

“Not really explain. More like elucidate, explicate, illuminate, describe.”

“You made your point. I get it. Tell the story – give.”

As Orvie related the things that had taken place since sunrise, Chad took the boat around the island, into the lagoon and pulled to a stop at the dock. They loaded Orvie’s gear and supplies and were soon on their way back to the office.

“Did you see any other boats in the area when you turned onto the east side of the island earlier while you were looking for me?”

“None,” Chad said. You’re wondering how the cave diver guy got there. I’m thinking an underwater ski – a SeaBob maybe. It’s probably parked down there somewhere. They can propel a swimmer underwater at a good distance in a short amount of time – some reach in excess of ten miles an hour. Ten grand apiece. They have rechargeable batteries that last about an hour – take all day to recharge them. Probably a ‘mother ship’ somewhere further out that we both missed.”

“Makes sense. Could he have come all the way from shore using such a contraption?”

“Sure. Hadn’t considered that. At top speed, it could come and go several times in one hour.”

“That only complicates things, then,” Orvie said. “It and the swimmer could have come from almost anywhere.”

“I could show you how your last statement is seriously flawed – from almost anywhere – but I imagine there are more important things to discuss.”

Back at the office, Chad took it upon himself to fill in Carl about Orvie’s recent adventures. That accomplished, Chad scanned the red scrap from the dynamite blast into his computer. He managed to clear up the printing to the point most of it could be read. He figured it was a partial identification number of some kind: 10-1-12. Orvie new differently.

“Dynamite has a suggested shelf life of only one year so each stick has to be marked with the date of manufacture.”

“If that’s it’s date, it’s old.”

“It is. The older it gets the more unstable it gets. Never loses its power, just his stability. Really old sticks have been known to explode from the vibrations caused by a passing train.”

“What does that tell us?” Chad asked.

“Could be several things. That the user preferred not to go into a legitimate outlet and buy it – not wanting to be traced, perhaps – so he bought from a less than dependable source. Or, that the user is uninformed about the dangers of aging dynamite – another indicator of an amateur, I suppose.”

“There are five letters that run off the torn edge of the paper – P A C I F.

“Could be Pacific something – the name of a company I suppose,” Orvie suggested.

“Let me look,” Chad said clicking on Google. “Dynamite manufacturers, USA.”

“Lookie here. PACIFIC EXPLOSIVES, Inc. Located in Davie, Florida, not far north and a bit inland from here.”

“Knowing that doesn’t really help, I suppose,” Orvie said.

“Unless, the accountant for Phantom, Inc. would call them asking why there was a delay in their last order,” Carl said.

“Good call, old man,” Chad said. “You can work that to see if Paula has ever ordered from them.”

“You think she would be so dumb as to do that if she planned to use it to kill off two dozen people?” Carl said, having second thoughts.

“Won’t know ‘til we get the data, I guess,” Orvie said. “I’m thinking whoever it is, is still just trying to scare you out of business or, by way of rumor, ruin your reputation. Although, a grenade and a stick of TNT certainly look like things might be escalating (increasing). It also could be she bought the dynamite for another legitimate purpose years ago and just decided it use for malevolent purposes.”

“Malevolent – wicked – love the word,” Chad said.

Carl made the call and managed to find out several things. Paula had ordered once, but it had been several years before. As Orvie had suspected, that could account for the age of the product. Although it probably was unimportant, Orvie wondered why she would have ordered dynamite in the first place.

“For whatever reason,” Orvie began, “Frank’s presence on the island this morning suggests that somebody wanted to make sure there was no trace of the dynamite left out there. Why would that be?”

“Maybe somebody used the wrong product by mistake and that wasn’t determined until after it had been buried in the fire pit,” Chad offered.

“Or, just learned about the possibility of remnants actually being left over after a blast,” Carl added. “I sure didn’t know that. I’d have thought every part of a stick of dynamite would be blown to smithereens.”

“What do you know about your ‘log guy’, as Chad referred to him?” Orvie asked.

“He and his son have been doing our logs ever since Chad and I took over six years ago. If you’re asking if we have any reason to think he’d be in on this, it’s a definite ‘no’.”

Chad indicated his agreement with a series of emphatic nods.

“The same for his son, I suppose,” Orvie said, really

continuing the question.

“We really don’t know him very well, I guess,” Chad said.

“But still, no reason to suspect him, right?” Carl said looking directly at his brother.

Chad shrugged and shook his head.

“As I see it there are two things we can be pretty sure of,” Orvie said. ‘First, we have a treasure to find, and second, we need to figure out what’s going on in that cave on the north side of Doubloon Island.”

“And third,” Chad added all quite seriously, “keep from letting somebody do us in – grenades, TNT, spears!”

“And that!” Orvie agreed, then continued.

“Somebody has gone to a great deal of work remodeling that cave to receive and maybe store some sort of objects. My first guess is that it has something to do with the meeting of the white speed boat and the other, larger boat we saw off in the distance the first-time Chad took me to the island. There’s nothing in my head beyond that. Well, one thing: I’m sure the problems you have been experiencing are connected to what’s going on in that cave. Somebody clearly wants your regular trips to the island stopped. The best way to do that is to destroy your business.”

“First thing that comes to mind for me is drug smugglers,” Chad said.

“Could be although from what I hear they employ professionals to do their dirty work and all along these guys have appeared to be just the opposite,” Orvie said.

“I’ve been thinking it had to be one of our competitors,” Carl said. “The tour business is known to be exceedingly competitive and when done right can be very lucrative (profitable).”

“At first, I figured somebody was after the treasure,” Chad offered.

“All those are legitimate possibilities,” Orvie said.

“Where do we go from here?” Chad asked looking for some direction.

They both turned to Orvie.

“When are the next tours?”

“Saturday and Sunday are long tours,” Chad said. “Back to back like that makes for very short nights. There won’t be much time to work on things over the weekend.”

“Then I suggest we get back out to the Island and explore that cave today. We will need some underwater light sources and a camera that we can carry with us through the water. Chad, you need to invent a warning system that will be able to communicate between your runabout just outside the cave and me, inside the cave.”

“Got that covered.”

“That was quick.”

“You need to get used to that if you’re going to be around Butch. He often seems to know answers to questions before I even ask them.”

“So?” Orvie asked wanting to hear the solution.

“I noticed fissures on the rock hills above the cave opening.”

“Right. They run deep into the side of the hill and form the outside edges of the cave opening below the water.”

“Assuming the fissures are open all the way into the cave above the water line, we slide a wire deep into the crack. It will have a tiny transmitter on the end. We dangle the other end of that wire down the outside rock wall to the boat. You will carry a water proof receiver. When danger approaches, the person in the boat will tell you what’s up so you can take appropriate evasive steps if necessary.”

“Sounds like a fine plan. But, what’s the chance of gathering all that equipment within the next ten minutes?”

“It’s excellent. In fact, consider it done. Used it all before, back in the days I spied on Carl when he had girls over to the house.”

“Educational?” Orvie asked with a grin.

“Not really. Lots of talking and popcorn and soda. Really quite boring. I’d end up falling asleep.”

“And that was the signal for the real date to get underway,” Carl said spreading his own smile.

“You knew?”

“You were brilliant, but face it you were seven – not real sophisticated about the workings of the mind of a romantically inclined big brother.”

The equipment was gathered and stowed in the boat. The lights were left over from their earlier attempt to offer a nighttime excursion to the coral reef. It had been successful with the spot lights and several that offered a variety of colored beams, but it meant even more sleepless nights and they couldn't keep it up. It was still a good plan and with additional staff someday it would happen again.

After further discussion, it was determined that a three-man operation would be best – Chad and Orvie diving and Carl in the boat. While Chad and Orvie assembled the transmission devices and made sure the receiver worked, Carl put together a lunch. They would eat on the way out to the island. They would also work on the code.

Orvie's main question – one he kept to himself – was, to exactly what ends the bad guys would be willing to go in order to shut down Pleasure Tours. They had to know that nothing they had done up to that point was making any impact on the young owners. If the bad guys had a lick of sense, they would see they had to step up their game. What were the remaining options? Destroy their property. Make more direct attempts to harm Chad and Carl – beatings, maiming (severe harm), death? He hoped he'd find some clue in that little room on the platform inside the cave. That, of course, put Orvie in those very same kinds of dangers.

CHAPTER EIGHT: The Cave, The Doctor, and Dilated Eyes

As they sped toward the island with Carl playing captain, they ate and discussed the code. Orvie took the lead.

“Have you ever calculated the size of the island?”

“In what form would you like the answer – Square feet, yards, diameter?”

“Whatever you got.”

“I got it all. $\frac{1}{8}$ th of a mile in diameter or about 660 feet. That’s 342,000 square feet or 38,000 square yards.”

“So, if the $\frac{1}{100}$ is a fraction of that it would equal about 3,400 square feet, right?”

“Right.”

“That’s close to, what, a square, 60 feet on all sides.”

“Right. Or 80 feet by forty feet.”

“Do any of those sizes or shapes bring any structure to mind – any distinct part of the island?”

The brothers looked at each other and they shook their heads.”

“The lagoon is considerably larger than that, I’d say,” Orvie said.”

“Yes. Nearly three times as large – a rough calculation. It never occurred to me to figure that before. I can give you an estimate of the cubic feet of water that’s in it if you want.”

“Probably not necessary.”

“You’re thinking that’s a fraction and not like ‘one out of a hundred’.”

“I’m willing to consider anything. That, one out of a hundred, idea take you anywhere?”

“No. Well, maybe. Like one rock out of a hundred – of course there are thousands of rocks on the island. One hill peak out of a hundred, but there are no more than a dozen actual high points. I once thought it might have something to do with 100 paces – treasure maps always are about so many paces from the palm tree – but you have to have a starting point for 100 paces to mean anything. And that doesn’t even consider the 1. I guess that gets us nowhere.”

“Okay, then, what about the Ne?” Orvie said, moving on. “On a map, and that’s essentially what the code is, like we’ve said, Ne would naturally mean north east. Anything spectacular or unusual on that northeastern section of the island?”

“The cave you found is at the far end of the northern part of the north-east section – as much north as east, I guess. It’s where the highest hills are. I take it you didn’t notice any caves along that stretch before you got to the one we’re interested in.”

“That’s right. Some interesting formations, but nothing useful to us, I’m afraid.”

“How about the 2Ls?” Orvie said moving on. “Longitude and Latitude? Two Lips – if you’re thinking about the beso at the end.”

“An interesting tie-in but where does it go?” Chad asked.

“Against another set of lips, I’m told!”

“I’ll bet you have lots of first-hand experience and don’t need to be told,” Chad said repeatedly raising his eyebrows in Orvie’s direction.

“Focus,” Orvie said evading the comment and implied topic.

“Just saw something,” Chad said. “Ne plus two L’s would make the word ‘Nell’ or ‘Nells’ if you actually used the ‘S’ as a letter.”

“It would. That mean anything to either of you?”

“Not unless somebody is kissing Nell,” Carl said stretching the point.

“What else could the ‘L’ be?” Orvie asked. “It’s an upper-case letter so maybe the shape is important.”

“Angle, maybe,” Chad said.

“Very interesting. Let’s keep that one in mind. Two angles. Hmm.”

“We’re missing something very basic. I’m thinking it is the meaning of the 1/100 since that was provided first – like a stage-setter or a starting point.”

“I guess we’ll need to put that on the back burner for now,” Carl said. “Here we are. Nobody in sight.”

As one, Orvie and Chad looked north across the ocean to see if there were boats sitting out there. There weren’t.

“The past minute has emphasized something pretty important to me,” Orvie said. “We are working on two different mysteries – the location of the treasure and finding out what the bad guys are up to. We need to keep that in mind.”

The others nodded.

“First things first, I guess,” Carl said. “The treasure’s never tried to kill us. I just imagine it will be content to wait.”

Orvie and Chad wiggled into the air tanks and masks and slipped on their fins. Carl took them in close to the fissure on the north-east side of the rock hill. Chad picked up the transmitter – actually a transceiver in that it both transmitted and received. It was slender – no more than a half inch wide – having been made for secret surveillance by private detectives and such. With the wire attached he slipped it into the crack as far as he could – that turned out to be the length of his arm.

Chad commented.

“If the crack goes all the way through the rock it will transmit to us. If it doesn’t go all the way through we got nothing. Can’t be counted on to transmit through any sizable mass of solid rock.”

Carl clipped the mike to his shirt pocket and inserted the earplug into his

. . . well, into his ear!

They tested a transmission. Orvie, who was wearing the receiver, heard it loud and clear.

“How will I know if the transmission is working?” Carl asked.

“If you don’t hear from me in say five minutes, assume it’s a bust.”

He turned to Chad.

“If we get visitors while we’re in there I suggest we dive deep and stick to the north wall about five yards from the entrance. That’s where I stayed and the lights they have arranged up above don’t penetrate there.”

Chad nodded.

The boys were over the side and underwater. They each carried one spot light in their hands and an unlit flood light tied to their belts for use as needed up above. Orvie wished they had the excellent LED lights he’d used back on Windsor Island, but they’d make the best use of what they had. Orvie also carried his usual knife and rope clipped to his belt. Chad had the camera. They were well prepared for everything but trouble.

A few minutes later they surfaced at the top of the cave with their elbows holding them onto the deck. A few seconds later they were standing on top of it. Orvie put in a call to Carl.

“We have arrived up on the deck.”

“Reading you loud and clear. Be careful in there.”

To know it as working was more of a relief than either boy had realized it would be. Orvie hoped the door wasn’t locked. He hadn’t paid attention to that when the swimmer was opening it earlier. Good fortune was to be theirs; there was no lock. The door opened out toward them, hinged on the left. They lit the inside and entered. There were three-foot wide shelves on the back side they were facing and on both the right and left walls. That left four or five feet in between.

“Get that camera going! We want to get in and out in a hurry.”

“You know what this stuff is?”

“Oh, yes. It’s parts that have been salvaged from a

sunken ship and I'm thinking it's only about 1,500 feet north of the island."

"Where we saw the boats. Within our territorial rights, then," Chad said. "That's why they don't want us to find out. Whatever they find really belongs to us. You think it's really worth anything."

"Definitely. I'll fill you in later. Down here. A wooden box filled with dishes and mugs – looks to be silver. Worth a huge amount as very rare antiques."

He held up several pieces so Chad could get good close-ups of both the fronts and backs. There were markings that should offer a great deal of information about the time period, the national origin of the ship, and perhaps the passengers.

With that done, Orvie went from piece to piece up on the shelves, making sure Chad got pictures of certain ones. There were lanterns, candle holders, a small cupboard door with metal filigree window coverings and brass knob and hinges. The list went on. There were even a few good-sized cannon balls – something he had to deal with just a few weeks before in Lake Michigan and would be happy to forget about.

"Why here?" Chad asked. "I don't get it. Why not just keep them on their boat?"

"Can't answer that, but you raise an interesting question. It also tells us somebody knew about this cave ahead of time. That could have come as the result of a search for just such a spot on several of the little islands along here or from knowledge one of the players has had for some time – a local I'm thinking. Do we know where Paula and Frank come from?"

"No. But we will soon after I get back to my computer."

They spent about twenty minutes inventorying the items with Chad's camera. There were nearly a hundred items with lots of shelf room left. Clearly the salvage crew was nowhere near done. It had taken longer than Orvie wanted, but it took what it took.

They left the room and closed the door. Orvie gave Carl an update. In turn, he said all was still clear down there.

They prepared to return, positioning their masks and breathing tubes.

“What’s that?” Chad said pointing to something causing a reflection from a crack in the wide plank wooden floor.

They knelt down for a closer look.

“A gold chain . . . with a heavy cross. Somebody lost their neckwear,” Orvie said. “Another pretty dumb move – diving with an expensive piece of jewelry hung around your neck from a chain.”

He picked it up and stuffed it into the pocket of his cut offs. They were immediately into the water and diving at full speed toward the opening. It seemed to have been a very successful mission. They suddenly understood what the bad guys were really after and why they wanted to keep the Pleasure Tours from stopping at the island. They had a lot of information to search through and apparently not much time available during the next few days.

It was 2:00 as they found themselves leaving Doubloon Island in their wake. They would be home and unloaded by 3:00. That still gave them lots of time to work on things.

“Can we get in to see Dr. Madison still this afternoon,” Orvie asked.

“I imagine. He seems to be very interested in me all of a sudden. What excuse shall we use?”

“You were showing me around the campus and wanted me to meet the good doctor.”

Chad placed a call and arranged a meeting at 3:30. Carl drove them.

“Dr. Madison, this is my new friend I told you about on the phone. He prefers to be called Orvie.”

“Dr. Madison extended his hand for a shake.

“Orvie – I would guess a shortened form of Orville.”

“And you would guess correctly. I understand you have to put up with this little twerp twice a month. May I offer you my condolences?”

“He’s a fine young man. I enjoy our time together. Someday, when they invent some super new test of mental ability, we may even get to know his IQ.”

Orvie began his subtle interrogation.

"I understand your areas are anthropology and archeology – two fields that have always intrigued me."

"Me too, thus the degrees, I suppose."

He offered a quick smile and the boys returned it.

"My interests mostly lie in the Civil War Era and the Pirate Era before that," Orvie said setting the stage for his real questions.

"I'm more interested in the ancient times – Old Rome and Greece," Dr. Madison said.

Orvie heard: it was a lie.

"I'm sorry, I was hoping to chat about Blackbeard, Calico Jack, Captain Kidd and such."

"Afraid I'll have to disappoint you. Even archeologists are very specialized these days. Don't know enough about such things to be of much help."

Orvie heard: it was a lie. The man's mind had even spun a list of a half dozen other pirates that Orvie knew had worked the Atlantic Ocean just off the Florida coast.

"I once saw a sixteen-pound cannon ball in a museum. I was amazed that something that heavy wouldn't be much larger. But, like you said, I'm talking to the wrong guy about such things."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, but it's just not my area of expertise."

Orvie heard: lie and anxiety.

"I understand. The world is becoming super specialized. I heard of a doctor who only removed warts from noses."

"Actually, I've heard of that," Chad said, "a nasal verruca vulgaris ectomist."

"See! There you go!" the doctor said patting Chad on the head as if he were his trained seal.

"Well, thanks for your time," Orvie said, offering his hand that time. "Interesting meeting you. We'll let you get back to meddling with old gladiators and such."

Out in the hall Orvie spoke, looking directly at Chad.

“A nasal verruca vulgaris ectomist? Really?”

“I was feeling left out of the conversation so thought I’d make a contribution.”

“Is there really such a medical specialty?”

“Of course, not. I just wanted to support you in case he questioned it. Nasal refers to nose. Verruca Vulgaris is the scientific name for wart. Ectomist means the person who does the medical cutting out of something: Nasal verruca vulgaris ectomist.”

“You’re something else.”

“Been told that many times. So, what was your impression?”

“For one thing, my questions really rattled him. During our first shake his palm was dry and cool. By our last one it was hot and sopping wet. Not only do I doubt his lack of interest in pirate-day things – his eyes dilated when I mentioned it, suggesting it was most certainly his interest – but he also had numerous books on the shelf right behind his desk on the topic of nautical artifacts from the mid-1600s to mid-1700s. And what kind of books would you keep handy like that?”

“Books you used frequently. You are really good!”

“More than that, while he spoke of Greek and Roman things his eyes constricted (got smaller) suggesting either or both a lack of interest or out and out lies. He had the same reaction when I asked about the weight of the cannon ball. He was just itching to prove to me how much he knew about such things, but couldn’t. I thought his pupils were going to disappear completely.”

“Like black holes?” Chad said smiling.

“Very clever.”

“Remind me never to look you in the face when I’m bragging on myself,” Chad said, grinning.”

“You mean like the time you told me about diving head first off the highest hill at Doubloon Island?”

“Yes, that would be a very good example – I prefer to think of it as an exercise in self-initiated ego-boosting rather than lying.”

Orvie decided to play with him and looked him face into face.

“Then there was the time I led the cops to the house where Bonnie and Clyde were hiding out.”

“A fib, right? But your eyes dilated instead of contracting – what’s the deal.”

Orvie smiled to himself. It had been true so why would they contract?

“A bit of stage trickery I learned from Harry Houdini.”

“You learned it well then, because there was no contracting with that one, either.”

Orvie knew he had to stop doing things like that, but it had become one of the great pleasures in his life. Someday he’d get up the courage to use it with a girl when he asked her if she liked him. He was still twelve and unwilling to risk the blow to his self-esteem that would follow if she said yes, but he could tell she was lying.

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CHAPTER NINE: Putting Miles on the Jeep

On the ride back to the office, Chad cranked up his laptop and began searching for where Paula and Frank – Franklin Benjamin – had been born and raised. As it turned out, both had lived their entire lives within a hundred miles of Miami.

He addressed Carl.

“Wasn’t that friend of Dad’s who came by a few months back named Benjamin?”

“Yeah. David Benjamin. Boyhood chums. I heard Dad speak about him often when I was younger. That is something we probably failed to mention to you, Orvie. He stopped by the office not long ago and after sharing memories for a while asked if we would be interested in selling our business to him.”

“We said, no, of course,” Chad added immediately.

“Did he make an actual monetary offer?”

“No. When we said no, he said to think about it and he’d stop by later with an offer.”

“But he hasn’t been back?” Orvie asked.

“Nope!” Chad said. “I think he got the message when I told him not in a gazillion years for a gazillion dollars.”

“I would think that sort of a subtle hint just might get through to somebody.”

That conversation reminded Orvie of something he had

intended to verify earlier.

“Were the tours your Mom and Dad ran similar to the ones you run?”

He thought he remembered, but wanted to make sure.

“No,” Carl said. “They did one and two hour excursions that mostly hugged the coast line.”

“So, they never took tourists out to Doubloon Island.”

“That’s right. We used it more for our own private recreational spot. We’d go spend whole days there together. They were great times. Butch doesn’t remember much about them. I’m sorry about that.”

“Has it been widely known that you own the island?”

“I’m not sure how to answer that. We’ve never made a secret of it. There is that small plaque on the dock out there stating our ownership and asking folks who drop by on their own to respect the property and clean up after themselves. Most do.”

“Yeah. Nothing related to ownership ever really comes up except with our guests, now,” Chad added.

They arrived back at the office.

“Has anybody checked to see if the spear is still behind the books in the bookcase,” Orvie asked as they entered the office.

“I guess not,” Carl said. “You’ve kept us too busy with other things.”

It was worth smiles all around.

Chad, not one to wait for either invitations or requests, went right to the bookcase.”

“Want to guess?”

“Gone?” Orvie said.

“Disappeared, departed, vanished, left, absent, skedaddled – gone.”

“Not there, would have been sufficient,” Carl said getting serious. “We always lock the office when we’re out.”

Orvie went to the front door and examined the lock from the outside.

“It’s been opened with picks,” he announced. “All

scratched up. Another obviously amateur undertaking.”

“Let me check the mattress up in the attic,” Orvie said.

With Chad at his heels they climbed the ladder. It was still in place. They returned downstairs.

“How long will that sticker let us track it?”

“Six months – maybe longer. The problem is we need to be within 300 yards of it to get a reading.”

“I guess we only have one place to look – Paula’s business,” Carl said.

“I also have her home address – a house several miles from her store,” Chad said.

“I suppose there may also be Madison’s office and or home,” Orvie said.

“And Frank. I can get an address in two minutes,” Chad said turning back to his laptop.

“You guys will never believe this.”

“That he and Paula live together, you mean?” Orvie said.

“Let me rephrase that. I’ll bet you guys will easily guess where he lives – right off.”

“That jeep have another ride in it this evening,” Orvie asked.

“Of course,” Carl said. “Bring the address of their house.”

They were immediately underway – making sure the office door was locked.

“Are we thinking dad’s friend and Frank are related?” Chad asked.

“It’s only a possibility,” Orvie said.

“But it’s looking like a pretty good one, huh?” Chad said, stating what the others were thinking.

They nodded.

“I have a question,” Orvie said. “If you have a sticker in your wallet, why are we not picking it up?”

“Mine is several years old. I just keep it there for expository (example) reasons.”

They were soon driving a street just south of the

address that Chad had found for her house. It was within easy distance of the signal from the sticker. Nothing.

“What gives?” Chad asked.

“Let’s circle the block that her house sets on,” Orvie suggested. “She, at least, should still be at her store so won’t see us. Doubt if Frank would know the jeep if he’s there.”

Even when they drove past the front of the house – no more than 100 feet away – they received no signal.

“Back to her store, I suppose,” Carl asked more than said.

“I guess so,” Orvie said.

They fared no better there – front, back sides.

“Frustrating,” Carl said.

“How about on the speed boat?” Chad suggested.

“Good idea, but we have no idea where it’s docked,” Orvie said pointing out what he figured was the obvious.

“Do not give up, Grasshopper. Doctor Smart Guy is on the case.”

Chad spent a few minutes on his computer.

“Let’s try slips 22 through 27 at Maggie’s Docking Service. Phantom, Inc. has them permanently leased, according to Paula’s website.”

“I know the place – almost next to Barney’s,” Carl said.

“Let’s go,” Chad said.

“It’s like a progressive hunt at a party,” Carl said.

“Not really,” Chad said. “In a progressive hunt, each spot gives a clue to the next spot and so on. In this case, we find ourselves having to supply the clues as nothing more than best judgment hunches.”

“I stand corrected for the billionth time, little brother.”

“Just saying!”

“And we appreciate your efforts to clarify things and offer more precise commentaries.”

That had also come from Carl.

They were soon at Maggie’s, walking the docks. There were two long wide wooden structures stretching a half block out into the ocean, with a dozen berths on each side. The

twenties were on the one to the south. They found the slips. They found the white speed boat. They found no signal.

Again, disappointed they returned to the Jeep.

“I’m going to suggest a stop at Barney’s for dinner – such as it will be from Barney’s,” Carl said.

The others were ready. They did the roadside drive up that time, and talked while they downed the # 7, which turned out to be very good Reuben sandwiches with chips, baked beans and slaw – and the mandatory spear of pickle and hot mustard.

“What about the necklace?” Chad asked.

Orvie pulled it out of his pocket and held it out for the others to see – the first time they had really taken time to examine it. It was a heavy cross an inch across and one and half long. The chain was more manly than feminine – large, elongated, links. Nothing delicate about it. Even so, the chain had broken, the obvious reason for it coming off and being left behind in the cave.

Chad took it and examined it close up.

“You two would miss a Patton Tank if it were three feet from flattening you. Look at it again.”

Carl took it.

“Yes. I see. On the central post, it has the word PAULA coming down from the top and across the arm it has FRANK. They share the ‘A’. I suppose that leaves very little to the imagination. Frank had most likely been making deliveries to the room in the cave.”

“It just came to me why they are probably using that particular spot,” Orvie said. “I’ve ‘read’ that wood that has spent a good deal of time under water needs to dry out slowly so it won’t crack and is always initially stored in high humidity areas. That cave and that room certainly combine to qualify as a high humidity area. It has the other advantage of being close enough to the dive sight that the wood won’t have a chance to dry out before reaching the storage room.”

“Excellent! You must read a lot,” Chad said some sort of suspicion in his voice.

“I try to read at least one book a week; that times fifty-

two weeks a year time 124 years and it does amount to a lot of books.”

“Nearly sixty-five hundred,” Chad said.

Carl shook his head and smiled. He enjoyed Orvie’s offbeat sense of humor and the degree to which he exaggerated to get a laugh. (Yeah. Sure!)

On the ride back to the office, Orvie summarized what they thought they knew about what they had come to call Mystery # One.

“Paula and Frank are primary players. Paula is clearly just using Dr. Madison since she and Frank are a couple. Paula furnished the speed boat, the explosives, and the spear. Frank is probably doing the actual dirty work – firing the spear, splashing the tour boat, and planting the grenade and dynamite. There may well be another player, however, since we have not located the spear with any of the main suspects.

“Tell me more about David Benjamin, your Dad’s friend.”

“I remember him coming around some when I was really young. They’d talk about the girls they had chased as teens and about hiking and swimming and even about diving off the highest hill out on the island. He and Dad seemed to drift apart, I guess, after that. I doubt if he ever came by after Chad was born.”

“I have no recollection of his face and I would if I had seen it,” Chad said.

“What does Dave do for a living?”

“I have no idea,” Carl said.

Chad got busy on the laptop.

“Would you believe three David Benjamins in the immediate area? A dermatologist, a teacher, and, get this, guys, the owner of a salvage company. Let me get to his website. There he is, picture and all. That’s our Dave. Let’s see what services he offers. He buys junk, he does undersea salvage on a contract bases for others, and has just started what the site calls The Scavenger Hunt – a day long trip in shallow water where the clients can snorkel-dive into areas littered with castoffs of one kind and another and see if they

can discover something wonderful. It boasts that some clients have found diamond rings and other things of value.”

The information prompted a number of thoughts for Orvie.

“That connects him with our interests in several possible ways – the salvage of what we are assuming is a sunken ship going on north of the island and perhaps wanting to either take over Pleasure Tours as his own or kill it if he can’t, in order to get rid of competition when he expands his own enterprise.”

“So, it could be that he is Mr. Big in all this and Paula and Frank are just players – like assistants or co-conspirators,” Chad said. “Maybe Frank is a relative – son or nephew.”

“That’s the way I’m leaning. Do we have time to drive by his home and place of business?”

“No, but we will. It’s going to be a very short sleep night. We have a tour at six a.m.” Carl said.

“They are at the same address – home address and business,” Chad said.

It was south ten miles and right on the beach.

As they got close the red light on the GPS device Chad had been petting as if to convince it to come to life, did just that. It began producing a slow, but steady blink. The closer they got, the faster the blink. It was a narrow, one-way lane so Carl had no alternative but to drive right up to the front of the building. At that place the GPS light shone constantly.

As Carl began maneuvering the jeep to turn around, Dave came out the front door and approached them carrying what looked to be an axe – a very heavy, long handled, very sharp, axe.

Carl chose the friendly route rather than either the turn tail and run or the put up your dukes and fight way out.

“Hey, David. Haven’t heard back from you with the offer. Wondered if you were still interested in our little enterprise.”

Orvie and Chad thought his approach had been a stroke of genius.

“Didn’t really think you were interested so I didn’t follow through.”

“May not be. May be. Need to see a figure, you know.”

“I’ll have one for you Monday. That soon enough?”

“That’ll be fine. Some weapon you have there.”

“An axe from a sunken ship I salvaged some time ago. That would open a skull in a hurry, wouldn’t it?”

“I’d say so. Well, ‘til Monday, then. Have a good weekend.”

Carl completed the turn and took them slowly back out the lane.

“You were awesome, big brother. How did you come by all that so fast?”

“I’m thinking part of Orvie must have rubbed off on me.”

“I’ll say,” Chad said.

“What? You don’t think your older sibling has that kind of stuff in him?”

“Oh, I didn’t mean it that way. Really, I didn’t. You are regularly the most awesome big brother any little brother ever had.”

“And don’t forget it!” Carl said delivering the comment with a determined nod before breaking into his wonderful smile and reaching over and ruffling Chad’s hair.

Chad turned around to Orvie who always rode in the back.

“Just to let you know, Carl’s the only person on the planet I let do that to my hair.”

Orvie put his hands out in front of himself, palms out as if to say back off. I get the message. He wondered to himself why he’d ever want to rummage around in another guy’s hair in the first place.

They dropped Orvie off at the office. By then he had his own key. Again, he decided to sleep on board the tour boat. He retrieved his gear from the attic and soon had his sleeping bag unrolled just to the front of the steering wheel. The moon was in and out behind clouds and spread an interesting array of shadows across the water that from time to

time climbed up and over the boat. Some might call it eerie!

Orvie prided himself in having a cast iron stomach. He could eat anything and never get heart burn, but there was something about the hot mustard in that Reuben that was doing a dance in his gut while wearing spurs. He took a long swig of water from his canteen, removed his shoes, and slipped into his bag.

He was immediately asleep. He was immediately awake with a pain in his stomach. That may have been fortunate. Somebody was coming onboard. He lay quietly to see what was happening. He could tell very little other than that it was the figure of a person (lots of help there, Orvie!). Whoever it was went directly to the hatch in the deck back by the cupboards in the rear. He lifted open the door. The engine and propane system lay just beneath. The person carried a bag or sack – Orvie couldn't see clearly in the darkness caused by the cloud covering the moon at that moment.

He figured he needed to make some move before damage was done. He stood and began his version of a Sioux Indian war dance that he had once seen in an old west show. It was loud and it was active and it got louder and more active as he slowly twirled and high stepped his way toward the intruder, all as if that person had not been seen.

It caused the person to run from the boat leaving his bag of tricks behind. Orvie gave him a few moments to clear the area and then turned on the dock lights hoping to dissuade whoever it was from returning. He returned to the boat and knelt down to examine the tools – two adjustable wrenches, a pruning shears – probably for cutting the gas line – a small narrow toothed saw and a hammer and a lighter.

Clearly, the plan had been for the boat to have gone up in flames from a propane accident. Things had just gotten way out of hand. Orvie never let himself become angry, but at that moment he certainly had a good case of the upsets. He did have to chuckle, thinking back to his wicked war dance. He rated it a 5 out of 10 for authenticity (realism), but gave it a 10 in terms of gusto (energy and enthusiasm).

There would be very little sleep that night, so he figured he might as well just re-enjoy that tasty Reuben for as long as

it was determined to hang around down there.

CHAPTER TEN: A Shot out of the Past

A boat approached out of the darkness from the south and pulled to a halt alongside Orvie.

“Ahoy, Pleasure Craft. This is the Coast Guard.”

Orvie stood and moved toward the outer railing. The beam from a spotlight found him.

“Yes, sir. How may I help?”

“We received a report of an extended blood curdling series of noises coming from the boat – almost human the way it was described.”

Orvie chuckled. Somebody nearby had apparently not appreciated his little dance.

“That was just an overenthusiastic twelve-year-old scaring off a bad guy.”

“You confuse me. May we come aboard?”

“Yes. In fact, I think that’s a very good idea.”

Two Coast Guardsmen stepped on board at the ladder opening.

“This your boat?” the spokesman asked.

“No, sir. I work for the brothers who own it, Carl and Chad Pleasure. We’ve been having some – I suppose vandalism would best describe it – so I decided to stay onboard tonight and try to catch the bad guys.”

“Perhaps not the best idea you’ve ever had, son.”

“Perhaps, as you say, but I chased him away and have the tool bag and tools here that he left behind. I imagine they’re laden with prints, but since I can tell you who it is, that might save you the time of going through a finger print data base. There are four bad guys actually. I can give you all the information. Carl and Chad can verify it. There’s plenty of proof to back it up. I assume you will need to call them.”

The men took the information and called Carl, who soon arrived with his ever-present young sidekick. They verified the information. Orvie got the spear from the mattress and turned it over to them, requesting a receipt, which was obtained without question. Chad photographed the transfer for further verification.

The talkative Guardsman turned to his partner.

“This kid sounds a lot like the kid my uncle Jim told us about that solved a case on an island up in Lake Michigan a few weeks back.”

“You wouldn’t be speaking of Commander Jim Benton, would you?”

“I would. So, you are that kid, then. You do get around. Good to meet you. My uncle has nothing but respect for you.”

“Seems to be a small world, as has been said a billion times before,” Orvie said avoiding the need to respond to the respect thing.

The Guardsman offered his hand for a shake. Carl and Chad stood dumbfounded and speechless – and Chad hadn’t been speechless since, well, Chad had never been speechless. It’s said he even talked through the anesthetic while he was having his appendix removed when he was eight.

“You folks let us clean this thing up,” the Guardsman said. “There is also booty from a salvaged vessel in your territorial waters, is that also what we are to understand?”

“Yes, sir. I will meet you at the island any time and show you how to locate it. Well, tomorrow we have a tour and the same on Sunday so how about no sooner than Monday?”

“We’ll be in contact. I assume you have a phone.”

Orvie pointed to Carl who provided several ways in which he could be contacted.

The Coast Guardsmen re-boarded their ship. Orvie waved them on their way and called after them.

“Be sure to remember me to your uncle Jim. Ask him to tell you about the Lexus with the frying pan.”

He turned back to Carl and Chad who were standing behind him.

“We’re eager to hear any stories you’re willing to relate, boy whose mystery solving skills seem to be known far and wide,” Chad said.

“It’s too late tonight. We should get some sleep if we’re going to be bright eyed and bushy tailed for the tourists, tomorrow.”

“In the morning, then, over Barney.”

“It’s a deal.”

“We have a cot we can put up in the office,” Carl said. “I think we’ll just stay here. It’s already past midnight.”

“Chad, you can use my attic if you want to. I’m already set up on the boat.”

The arrangements had been made and three restless young men did their best to quiet their minds and get some shuteye.

* * *

“Wake up. It’s almost six. Carl’s got breakfast.”

Those were Chad’s words that coaxed Orvie back into the real world the next morning. It had been an interesting dream that had been interrupted: something about Native Americans plastering mustard all over a very expensive car.

“So, give! What’s up with you and Coast Guard Commanders and expensive cars and frying pans, and sleuthing all over the world?”

“Now, that’s how rumors get stated,” Orvie said wagging his index finger into the face of his new friend. “All in due time. First we eat.”

As they ate Orvie gave the brief versions of his latest

adventures in Lake Michigan, North Dakota, Northern Minnesota, and Central Indiana. They seemed satisfied – and impressed, even though Orvie always played down his own roles in such things.

“I guess it’s full steam ahead on Mystery # 2, now, right guys,” he said, licking the jelly off his fingers – buttermilk biscuits and jelly had been added as an extra treat that morning.

“First, let’s give twenty new tourists the time of their lives,” Carl said, pointing to his watch.

Orvie moved to remove the one he had loaned him several days before.

“If you’re up to working the reef a few more times I’d appreciate it,” Carl said. “By next week I should be back to my old form.”

“Not a problem. By the way, don’t you ever get any girls our age on these tours? I hate to waste my stuff on old ladies.”

Chad just had to respond:

“No, you don’t. Admit it. You love the way they make over you.”

It had been Chad and had been offered with a grin.

“Of course, I do. I’m not lucky enough to have somebody close to share my life with so I take whatever I can get.”

“That’s so sad,” Chad said frowning.

“I didn’t intend it that way. I have a wonderful life. I just get my affection from multiple sources in tiny doses rather than from one main source in constant and reliable doses. I am not a person to be pitied. I like my life. I need you to believe that.”

They both nodded. They really wanted to believe it.

They were soon into their uniforms again – including socks regardless of Orvie’s heroics the night before. They were soon ready to greet the new passengers and sail off into another great time.

It appeared the danger was gone and they all breathed easier fully anticipating nothing but a fun-filled day.

And, that's what it was. As was Sunday that followed.

Monday morning early, they set to work on Mystery #2 over breakfast.

"One thing we haven't really tried to reconfigure are the plus signs," Orvie said. "I have the feeling they represent something else, something other than the addition implied by plus. I've wondered if they were two angles, touching. That came basically from something you said, Chad, about the L's also being angles. I like the idea of quadrants – dividing an area into four relatively equal segments. Assuming that is what they mean, there remains the problem of there being two of them."

Chad's face lit up.

"What if the first sign means to divide some area into quadrants, like you are thinking, and then re-divide the Northeast quadrant into four more sections – like a quadrant within one portion of a quadrant?"

"Very good, pal. And that brings up another possibility. What two geometric figures are found in the quadrant mark – the + sign?"

"Two right angles – the Ls."

"Could be, couldn't it."

"So, where does the kissing come in?" Carl asked.

"Spoil sport!" Orvie kidded. "We were doing so well until you butted in."

"Beso, kiss?" Orvie said. "Think of some other meanings for kiss."

"Osculation," Chad said and was immediately met with two blank faces.

"The scientific term for kissing is osculation."

"So, the treasure will be buried under some old lovelorn guy sitting there reading a dictionary?" Carl said/asked/joked.

"Guess I took that one a bit too far. Sorry. It just came to me and I do tend to just spout out whatever comes to me."

"Not a problem," Orvie said. "Back to other alternate meanings of kiss."

"Peck, smack, brush, buss, lightly touch . . ."

Those had also come from Chad as he tried to make up for his osculation (Well, the reader understands.).

“Brush could also mean like short growing woody plants,” Orvie offered. “I think that’s way too farfetched, however.”

“Peck is a measurement of dry quantity – two gallons or a quarter of a bushel,” Chad added.

“What do two sets of lips do when they kiss?” Orvie asked.

“They mostly slobber all over each other the way I see it, Chad said.”

“Not what I had in mind – and by the way, slobbering is strictly for amateurs. I was going for ‘meet’. What gets formed when two angles or Ls meet?”

“A square?”

“In one configuration, yes or in another a plus or a quadrant symbol.”

“So, let’s see here,” Carl said needing to sort it out before it all got away from him. “If we divide some area into four sections – quadrants –and then divide the northeast quadrant of that area into another quadrant – four more smaller sections – and we are directed to look for where two angles meet, it seems to me that we have been directed to the spot where the two lines of the smaller quadrant cross each other.”

“Which is smack dab in the dead center of that north-east quadrant,” Chad said.”

“It certainly seems like a plausible (likely) solution to me,” Orvie said. “How about you guys?”

They nodded.

“It still leaves us with that pesky one over one hundred at the beginning,” Chad said.

“Something just came to me, unrelated to what we’ve been talking about and may not be important at all, but what language have we been assuming this code is in?” Orvie asked.

“English, of course, with that one Spanish word thrown in,” Carl said.

“But, what if it is all written in Spanish? It would all be exactly the same, wouldn’t it?”

“I guess it would,” Chad said. “Pluses, numbers, letters, all the same in both languages. You got anywhere to go with that?”

“Only vaguely. It was granted to your great, great, somebody or other from a Spanish nobleman, correct?”

“That’s the story we’ve been told,” Carl said. “I see, so it makes sense the code might be in Spanish, also.”

“I can’t see how it changes a thing,” Chad said. “An angle’s an angle. A plus or quadrant is a plus or quadrant. A kiss is a kiss – or so I’ve been led to believe.”

“I know. All that’s right. But does a Spanish influence add anything? I have no idea what I’m looking for.”

“Well, it looks to me as though we have a starting place, even without having tacked down the 1/100,” Carl said. “Let’s make tracks for Doubloon. Gather what equipment you think we’ll need. I’ll go back and get a days’ worth of food from Barney.”

By seven they were on their way, the runabout loaded with picks, shovels, hammers, chisels, rope, cameras, kindling for a fire, food and canteens filled with water and fruit juice. Orvie added a full diving tank and equipment in case the Coast Guard showed up. They drug a twelve-foot wooden ladder along behind in case they might have to climb up onto something or down into something.

They were unloaded by seven thirty and mounded their gear up in the center of the island.

“First, let’s mark this place off into quadrants by shuffling through the sand with our feet to make one north/south line down the middle of the island and one east west line,” Chad said.

“A good way to begin,” Orvie agreed.

Chad calculated the appropriate starting places.

It took ten minutes to complete.

“Okay, now we do the same inside the north east quadrant.”

Again, it had been Chad.

That took less than five minutes.

“That could be it,” Chad said pointing to the place the lines met.

“Let’s get at it then,” Carl said.

He made the first thrust with a pick. They soon found it was an irregular combination of sand, soil and assorted sizes of rocks. They traded off between pick and shovels. Digging was not easy. Early on, Orvie suggested they pile what they were digging out some distance away in case the hole needed to be significantly widened.

“After an hour, they stopped to rest. The hole was six feet square and six feet deep. About right to hold two coffins, Orvie thought, but didn’t mention it. Like his friends, he hoped the dangers were all behind them. They slipped the ladder into the hole for easier exiting and entering.

At ten feet they hit a huge slab of solid rock and it looked like the end of the road at that spot at least.

“Let’s widen our hole by digging in around the bottom if we can,” Orvie suggested. “Maybe the rock is not naturally occurring, but was placed down here intentionally to hide and protect something.”

“If that’s the case it will take a crane to remove it,” Carl said.

They kept digging according to Orvie’s suggestion. The rock continued in all directions. At one point the north wall of the hole collapsed unable to hold together up above without the support of its base.

“Well, so much for plan ‘B’,” Orvie said.

“I thought that was plan ‘A’,” Chad said.

“I thought it was plan ‘X’,” Carl joked.

Their smiles soon turned to startled looks and those quickly to concern.

There was what sounded like a shot fired from the top of the hill just to the west of them. The sand kicked up beside Carl. They looked up just in time to see a huge puff of smoke dissipating (scattering) in the still air. A figure was standing there with a large gun – most likely an old-fashioned rifle or shotgun – held high above his head. He was oddly dressed

looking very much like a fifteenth century soldier – a metal chest plate, a pointed metal helmet, colorful puffy knee pants, and high, oversized black boots.

“Like something out of a Spanish history book,” Orvie said.

“A soldier of the conquistadors, to be more accurate and specific,” Chad said.

The man shouted down at them:

“Tiene lo que es en forma legítima el mío.”

As if to make sure he had been understood he repeated it more slowly and distinctly.

“Tiene lo que es en forma legítima el mío.”

Orvie understood in general what had been said, but turned to Chad who had the precise translation on the tip of his tongue. ‘You have what is rightfully mine.’

Orvie reached for his binoculars. The man sported a closely cropped full beard that came to a point below his chin. As he continued to stand there, he put down the gun, and removed his helmet and chest armor. He wore a skirt of mail (small metal links), high boots and metal gloves, which he also soon removed. Within minutes it had all been removed revealing the wet suit he wore underneath. He turned and dove off the hilltop into the ocean beyond, leaving his outfit behind on the rocks.

The three of them hurried across the sand and began the climb up the side of the relatively low hill. It was not difficult. When they arrived at the site, Chad began pointing to and naming the parts of the uniform as Orvie unsuccessfully searched the ocean with his binoculars for some sign of the man.

“The helmet was called a morion – heavy steel with a crest running from forehead back and down to the neck in the rear. The arm and leg protectors were called greaves. The skirt went by several names, falda or pollara. The chest armor, the breastplate, was called peto among other things. The pants, pantalones or bambachos. I’m pretty sure this rifle is an arquebuse. I’ll need to verify that because as I recall an arquebuse was actually Portuguese.”

“The larger questions are why was he up here, why did he shoot at us, why did he leave his armor behind and what does he want?” Orvie said.

“Nothing good, I’m quite sure of that!” Chad said.

“It would seem another bad guy just entered our lives,” Carl said.

“He probably could have killed one of us if he’d wanted to,” Orvie said.

“Maybe next time he will want to,” Chad said.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: The Spanish Invasion

They gathered the various parts of the uniform and took them down to the boat for safe keeping.

“Heavy,” Carl said.

“Weighed about 60 pounds altogether, but the way it was made in several sections the weight was distributed so it didn’t tire the soldier as fast the older configurations had,” Chad explained.

The others nodded.

“Now we need to fill that hole so nobody stumbles onto it in the dark and hurts themselves,” Carl said.

“I vote we eat first,” Chad said.

The others agreed.

Carl removed the cooler from the boat and they moved into the narrow band of shade that remained close to the hills on the east side of the island. They lingered over barbecued ribs and all the trimmings for nearly half an hour. Chad was clearly keeping a nervous eye out for the return of the Spanish dude.

When they had finished Orvie returned the cooler to the boat. He found an envelope taped to the rear seat. He took it on the run to where the others had moved back to begin filling the hole.

“You got mail,” he said trying to be humorous.

He handed it to Carl who opened it. The others gathered in close.

The words were written in fancy script. The message was written in Spanish. Chad translated.

“The island you believe was legally transferred to you from my ancestor was not his to give. It belonged to his brother in whose bloodline I follow. I therefor claim the island as mine and request you leave immediately and never return.
- Estevao de Cordoba.”

“So, Fancy Pants is dramatically acting out his supposed claim on Doubloon Island,” Orvie said. “I suggest you get this information to your attorney immediately so he can check it out, if it can be checked out – which I just imagine cannot be done at this point. The best you may be able to do is get a cease and desist (stop all contact) order from a judge against the man. Maybe more, since he took a shot at you.”

Chad had a thought.

“The name signed to the note is Estevan de Cordoba. Francisco de Cordoba was the name of famous Spanish explorer of the new world who spent time in the Southern Florida area. I suppose we could find a Cordoba family tree and see if it leads to Estevan. One other thing I did notice. The man spoke with a Castilian (from Spain) accent, not a Mexican or Caribbean accent.”

“Do you know the name of the original donor?”

Somewhat humorously, the other two looked at Chad at the same moment.

“Juan Carlos de Leon. 1698.”

“Not sure where any of this leads us,” Carl said.

“I want to know where he went when he dove into the ocean?” Chad wondered out loud still looking around.

“He’s either an excellent distance swimmer or he had somebody waiting,” Orvie said. “He spent a pretty penny on the getup he was wearing – I’d estimate in the many thousands of dollars. And then just left them behind.”

“Could that have been his attempt to validate his authority or credentials or some such thing?” Chad asked.

“Could be, I suppose,” Orvie said. “I’m thinking serious

delusions of grandeur (a mental illness in which one believes he is far more important than he really is).

“One thing’s for sure – legal claim or not, the man seems intent on fighting us for the island,” Carl said bringing them back to the reality of their situation.

“Let’s see if we can find the slug that ended up in the sand beside Carl,” Orvie suggested.

It didn’t take long.

“A ball, not a slug,” Chad said. “Another point for authenticity. As I recall this gun could also shoot a small collection of tiny balls all at once – a scatter load – but we wouldn’t have been able to locate them.”

“This seems all quite well planned,” Orvie said.

He turned to Chad with a question.

“How accurate is a weapon of that vintage (age)?”

“Could fire about a hundred yards – the length of a football field. Only really accurate up to between fifty and seventy-five. Fired various sizes of balls - 0.5 to 0.8 in (13 to 20 mm). The gun barrels built up lots of ash from the explosion of the powder. During lengthy battles soldiers had to use smaller and smaller balls as time went on so they could fit through the opening down the dirty barrel. If they didn’t, the gun might explode in their face. The most accuracy was obtained when the barrel was clean and it was using the largest ball the barrel would handle. The ball we found was about medium to small in size. Maybe all he could find in modern times.”

“He was shooting with a clean barrel from a bit less than 300 feet or that outside range of 100 yards. He came fairly close.”

“It may have been more an accident than good aim. The ball really couldn’t be accurately controlled that far unless it was propelled by a very large amount of powder, and too much powder and *kablooy* – the gun blows up. If he knew the gun, he’d know there was less than one chance in a hundred he’d hit his target all those things considered.”

“There’s that one in a hundred thing again,” Carl pointed out.

“No connection, I’m thinking,” Orvie said.

He handed the ball to Carl for safe-keeping.

They went to work on filling the hole. It took longer than they had expected.

By the time the sun was straight up over head they were patting the mound of sand with the backs of their shovels as if to insist that it all fit back into the hole from which it came.

The Coast Guard cutter nosed into the lagoon and the boys ran to meet it. During the next hour Orvie took three of their divers into the cave and up to the drying room. One of them set to inventorying and photographing what was there and the others put the items inside water proof sacks and removed them to the cutter, by then behind the island. It was evidence that would be returned to the Pleasure brothers after the legal proceedings were finished.

Orvie left the Guardsmen to complete their job on their own, and returned to Carl and Chad who had been watching what they could see from the top of the hill. Orvie had not shared the encounter with the Spaniard with the Guardsmen. He thought that should be a group decision.

Once out of his diving gear, he sat on the far front end of the dock to rest. The others made their way to him south across the central plain. He was facing the mini-island that stood guard against the ocean waves. It came to him in a flash. He turned to his friends who had just joined him there.

“What very general concept did we say the 1/100 would represent?”

“The starting point since it came first in the code?”

It had been more a question than an answer from Chad.

“Right. A starting point or a first point. What’s the first point when approaching the island?”

“Ah! The breaker island – the mini-island,” Carl said.

“And what proportion of the main island did we determine the mini was?”

“I don’t believe we stated it as a proportion,” Chad began, “just 3,400 square feet compared with 340,000 square feet for the big island. Figuring that proportion, of course, it

would be 1/100.”

(Sometimes the others just had to let Chad’s chatter run its course!)

“Shall we do the quadrant within a quadrant thing out there?” Carl asked.

“I believe that’s the most promising alternative we’ve had so far,” Orvie said.

They loaded the equipment into the runabout and traveled the twenty-five yards across the Lagoon. Orvie tossed the anchor up onto the bank to secure the boat and pulled himself up onto it. Chad followed immediately. Carl got the gear up into their hands before joining them.

They followed the same general plan as before – setting in the two main lines of the main quadrant first and then the smaller quadrant within the north-eastern portion of the main one.

“Well, there it is again,” Chad said, “two angles kissing. Let’s hope this one pans out.”

They began to use the pick and to dig with the shovels. It was somewhat easier than it had been on the main island with virtually no stones and they were soon down two feet in a six-foot square hole. In a half-hour, they were down four feet. At that point, they ran into what appeared to be a repeat of the problem on the main island. The pick hit a piece of solid rock. Carl moved the pick from place to place but everywhere he came to the same conclusion – “Solid rock down there, guys.”

“Let’s at least clear it of sand and dirt before we throw in the towel,” Orvie urged.

They continued. It proved to be a different sort of rock – the type not immediately obvious. What was obvious was that it had had boundaries – four sides – and could be seen to be four feet wide in the north to south dimension and five in the east west dimension. Clearly it had been chiseled into that perfect size.

Excitement rose within each of them, but no one was willing to express it. Orvie got down on his hands and knees and began pushing the remaining sand off to the sides. He discovered two very large iron rings, each six inches in

diameter, made from $\frac{3}{4}$ inch metal and each attached to an iron rod coming up right through the stone. The rings were hinged and Orvie pried them away from centuries of rust so they stood straight up.

The others saw what he had found.

“Our problem will be to lift it,” Chad said. “A piece of stone that size will weigh hundreds of pounds.”

“Notice the location of the rings relative to the center of the stone,”

Orvie pointed out. “They are way off center to the west side. I’m guess it is made to swivel in some way. That means that at most we’ll only have to lift half its weight.”

“It will be considerably less than that actually,” Chad said. “If it is a true swivel, as one side comes up the other will go down. The weight of that down moving rock will tend to counterbalance the effort needed to pull the other side up.”

Orvie began to remove the sand from around the area just outside the perimeter of the stone.

“Got something here, guys,” he said.

He removed more sand revealing an iron rod some two inches thick that overlapped the stone on the outside by eight inches. It was set into a groove that had been chiseled out of the surrounding rock. The same arrangement was found at the other end. The rods were inserted into the centers of the smaller sides of suddenly appeared to be a lid or door.

“Let’s give it a pull and see what happens,” Orvie said. “It’s the only way to figure out what we need to do – what other equipment we may need to find and bring out here.”

“There isn’t room for all of us to stand down there,” Carl said. “Do we need to dig the walls back further?”

“Maybe, but first just let me give it a tug and see if I can prove Chad’s theory correct. I’m nearly as strong as a seventh grader, you know.”

It received chuckles from the others. He bent down, bending his knees prepared for some really heavy lifting. He was ready for the tug of his life so he was amazed when that side of the stone lifted with very little effort. It swung open on – swiveled on – the iron rods which worked like hinges. He

soon had it standing straight up – half upright and half down in the hole.

“Lights,” he said. “Need lights down here.”

Carl went out to the boat and was soon back with three flashlights. He handed one into the hole to Orvie while he and Chad did their best to direct beams down into whatever lay beneath the stone cover.

“A box down here,” Orvie announced. “Nearly as big around as the opening. Still covered in tar after all these years – moisture proofing I assume. Whether it’s still moisture proof remains to be seen. The tar has dried out. It sits in a hole that appears to be bricked up all around with close fitting flat stones. The area is maybe eight feet square. The box is, like I said, nearly four by five feet – probably six inches less than that in both dimensions. I can’t tell how tall it stands yet. I need to get down there on the bottom – the floor.”

He turned around backward and let his legs dangle behind him down into to the hole. His feet met the box below him. He straightened up and then crouched searching the area with his light.

“Sure seems secure – structurally sound I guess I really mean. Looks like the floor was laid in large flat stones each several feet square. Somebody who really knew what he was doing went to a great deal of trouble, I can tell you that. Let me let myself down onto the floor.”

Several moments passed as the other two watched him carefully drop himself even further into the hole. They continued to light the area as best they could.

“Made it, but I suppose you saw that. I can tell the box has a top, three inches thick. On the east edge, there are like ears on each side. I mean a three inch by four-inch beam extends out nearly a foot. It’s part of the lid. May mean the whole box is made of wood. My first take is that we will have to push up on those from below in order to open the top. Before that, though, I’ll need to cut through the layers of tar just below the lip to separate it from the lower part of the box. This will take a while. Then I’ll need one or both of you down here to help lift it up. It’s been stuck here for centuries.”

“How tall is the box?” Chad asked.

“A good five feet. Standing on the floor beside it, I can barely see over the top of it.”

Orvie worked on for some time. At last he had completed the cut all the way around.

“Okay. Get yourselves down here. It will be a tight fit, but I guess we’re all friends here. I figure Chad and I will lift on one side and, Carl, you on the other side. I’m counting on those muscles of yours to be worth something more than just anatomical parts for the females on the tours to gawk at.”

It took some doing, but they had soon arranged themselves in positions where they could put good leverage under each handle.

A shadow crossed the box. It had been caused by something up above. As one, they looked up. Standing there, legs spread slightly apart, was the man with the full beard in the wet suit. He had upgraded himself from the ancient Spanish weapon to a very modern looking AK47.

"Gracias por hacer todo el trabajo por mí. Si usted es el tipo de orar, tienes sesenta segundos para lograr que se haga".

Chad translated:

“Thank you for doing all the work for me. If you’re the praying kind, you got sixty seconds to get them said.”

CHAPTER TWELVE: Rescue, Sudden Wealth and Good Deeds

As quickly as he had appeared he disappeared – well not really. They saw someone’s arm reach around the man’s throat while a second person forced he gun up and removed the it from his hand.

“You guys, okay down there?” came a familiar voice – the Coast Guardsman who had been in charge from the first encounter between him and Orvie the night before on the tour boat.

“Yes, sir,” all three said in unison.

Then Orvie added: “Didn’t know you guys charged to the rescue on land as well as sea. Thanks.”

“Can you tell us what’s going on here?”

Orvie motioned for Carl to lift him up on top of the box so he could more or less face the Guardsman.

“Short version: This guy appears to be Spanish and is claiming this island as own through his blood line back several centuries. He fired his arquebuse at us a little before noon from up on top of the north-western hills. He was dressed in the 15th century Spanish uniform of the conquistadors’ soldiers – armor, helmet and all – we have it stowed in the runabout out there. Just now he approached us and threatened to kill us.”

“We heard that. It’s what alerted us to the fact somebody was in serious trouble down there. We were just

coming back to inform you we have removed all the artifacts (relics) from the drying room as you called it. I guess things worked out fortuitously (by chance with a good outcome) for you guys.”

“I would say fortuitously would be the exact word to use in describing our dire situation, juxtaposed (occupying the same place) with your arrival,” Chad said.

“May we help you out from down there?”

“No, sir. We still have a little work to complete, but thanks. I assume you will handle our Spaniard?”

“We will. Can get your statement later. You know where our station is?”

“Sure do,” Chad said. “Thanks again.”

Once the Guardsmen left, Carl spoke directly to Orvie.

“This kind of thing happens to you regularly, I assume.”

“Fairly regularly, yes, I’d have to say that’s correct. I guess I may sort of go looking for trouble.”

“Well, I must say, we’re happy you came looking for our trouble.”

Orvie shrugged and smiled.

Chad’s head was on a completely different path.

“Let’s get this box open. It better be more than the skeleton of Captain So and So after everything I’ve been through.”

Carl and Orvie noticed the ‘I’ve’ rather than the ‘we’ve’, but chose to ignore it.

“I’m with Chad,” Orvie said. “Let’s get back to it.”

Orvie slipped back down to the floor of the stone vault.

Carl nodded and crouched just a bit so he could place his shoulder beneath the extended section of the beam. The boys, also, made ready, situated to push up with their hands against the underside of the beam on their side of the box.

“On three,” Chad said. “One, two, three.”

The top of the container gave no more than a quarter of an inch. They stopped to rest.

“A little break and then we’ll try again,” Orvie said.

A minute later they once more pushed with all their

might.

Another quarter of an inch.

“I’d say we’re making good progress,” Orvie said.

Chad rolled his eyes at Carl.

They repeated that same exercise four more times before it slipped up and swung open on a set of hinges that had been ingeniously fashioned to work from the inside where they had the best chance of not rusting away.

They picked up their flashlights and looked inside.

“Oh, my, gosh!” Chad said. “Gold coins by the ton and gold jewelry set with diamonds and emeralds. Look, there’s even a crown and a tiara and dozens and dozens of gold bracelets of every size and shape.”

“I’m amazed at how dry it has remained inside,” Orvie said. “Some ancestor of you guys really knew his stuff, I’d say.”

“Thank you Great, great, great somebody ancestor or other,” Chad said. “I will look that up so we will know exactly who he was.”

“So, what do you want to do with it?” Orvie asked.

“Where to keep it, you mean?” Carl said. “I guess for all the times we’ve talked about finding it and what we’d do with the money, we’ve never once thought about that.”

“If I may make a suggestion, call your attorney and have him arrange for some company like Brinks to work out the details of transportation and the destination to which it should go for safe keeping. There looks to be at least seventy-five cubic feet of – well, of treasure. I guess it needs to be called what it is – The Treasure on Doubloon Island.”

“I don’t know about you guys, but I’m famished,” Chad said. “All this watching Orvie do all the work has really worked up my appetite.”

The laugh lasted longer than seemed necessary – it had been prolonged by the release of the anxiety from the days of tension and uncertainty that had led up to that moment.

* * *

Paula, Frank and Dave Benjamin were found guilty of

numerous charges and would be making license plates in the state prison for some time. (When you see a Florida plate on a car, think of them!) Frank turned out to be Dave's son. Dr. Madison got off with a slap on the wrist, but lost his university appointment. Even smart guys like he, sometimes do really dumb things in the name of a promised romantic relationship. Girls! Spanish guy was convicted of one count of attempted murder and three counts of intent to commit murder, but was found to be mentally ill and spent a number of years recovering in a fine hospital (paid for by Carl and Chad).

The artifacts from the sunken ship were worth great gobs of money. Since it was resting in relatively shallow water, Carl and Chad decided to leave the rest right there on the ship and designed an outing on the Pleasure Craft – complete with underwater TV and spot lights – just so folks could see it and hear about its history (Chad found out the who, what, when, where and why of its long and illustrious career on the high seas.).

The regular trip to the island was expanded to include a look at the stone safe on mini-island, which came to be called Breaker Island – clearly a more distinguished name.

The treasure would keep the brothers' families well taken care of financially for generations to come. They, however, wouldn't think of not continuing to conduct tours for their clients four days a week.

They used a sizable portion of their new wealth to fund a counseling and foster care program for children who had lost their parents – something they had been planning for a long time. As a part of it there was a provision for a college or trade school education for those who wanted to pursue career training beyond high school.

Chad met a girl and finally came to understand a great deal more about the *beso* and eventually fashioned himself a Class 'A' *osculizer* (is that a word?). Carl would soon find the love of his life and become engaged. At fourteen, Chad entered the university and studied – well, the reader knows Chad. He studied everything!

Jasper and his Lady Poodle returned with four of the strangest looking pups you can possibly imagine.

Orvie stayed around several more weeks until Carl had fully recovered, then he got itchy feet (sockless feet!) and set off back north in search of a new mystery and interesting new friends.

[When he finds them, rest assured, there will be another story.]

The End