

TEMPEST ON BOARD

THE SUGARCANE

Mike Connole

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my family and friends for their
encouragement and inspiration

Chapter I

The deck of the forty-six foot sloop was damp, a typical tropical rain shower having rinsed everything down just before dawn. At 6:30 A.M., the sun was illuminating Fort Charlotte, which guarded the entrance to English Harbour in Antigua. Early June in the Caribbean is the beginning of the “little period of the big rains” (as opposed to the “big period of the little rains”).

As usual, Mitch was the first one on deck, checking the moorings before heading back into the spacious cabin to start the coffee. The aroma of locally-brewed Caribbean beans served as a wake-up call to the other five on board.

“Honey, what’s for breakfast this morning?” called out Mitch to his French wife, Anne Sophie. She had vaguely felt him leave their forward cabin on the starboard side, but had nodded back off.

“Keep it down out there,” came the voice of Hal from the aft cabin. “This is vacation! Can’t a body get some sleep?”

From the forward port cabin, John replied, “Everybody up. It’s almost seven in the morning, and we’ve got a long day if we’re going to make the Saintes by nightfall.”

The three men met on deck, silently admiring the puffy white clouds as they gradually crossed the pale blue sky from east to west.

“Another beautiful morning,” observed Mitch. “Let’s just hope the weatherman is wrong about that tropical depression, and that it will head up north before making it to the Lesser Antilles.”

“Listen, you two,” admonished Hal. “We’ve been sailing together since we were ten years old, and a little squally weather isn’t going to scare us off. Remember that chubasco off

MIKE CONNOLE

Point Loma when we were in high school? We made it back with only a ripped mainsail and my dad's Victory sailboat without a scratch."

"I'm not worried about us," added John. "It's the women that worry me. I only wish that they could get along like the three of us do, but there always seems to be something wrong. I don't know what's going on with Tammy and Laura, but dinner at Admiral's Inn last night was rather uncomfortable, to say the least. And Anne Sophie kind of stays off by herself. I was hoping that this three week cruise in close quarters might bring the three of them closer together, but so far it seems the opposite is taking place."

"Whatever you're doing up there, get down here if you want your bacon and eggs warm," commanded the voice of Laura.

"And another day begins," muttered John under his breath.

In the galley, things seemed okay, the three women pitching in to get breakfast on the table. The tension of the night before had dissipated. The three men gave each other a look of relief.

"How long will we be sailing today, mon amour?" questioned Anne Sophie. "I hope the sea will be more tranquil than when we sailed down from Nevis and St. Kitts."

Mitch, eager to dispel any fear, replied, "We'll have a few hours of open sea until we reach the north coast of Basse Terre, in Guadeloupe. There, we should be protected by the mountains. The ocean will probably be very calm there, and we might even have to use the motor for a few hours before spotting the lighthouse at Vieux Fort. From there, we should be able to see the Saintes, and tonight we'll be mooring in what is considered to be the second or third most beautiful bay in the world, after Rio de Janeiro, and maybe after Hong Kong."

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“And it’s French!” exclaimed Anne Sophie. “Surely we’ll find some good restaurants, and, at last, eat decently, after a week of English cuisine,” she added somewhat pedantically. The other two women stiffened almost imperceptibly, but their attitude was not lost on the three men.

After a hearty, truly American breakfast, everyone went about the preparations for a day at sea, battening down anything that might be sent flying across the cabin if the seas roughened, or the heel increased abruptly, due to a sudden squall. They would probably only snack at noon, as the women didn’t like being thrown about in the cabin while trying to prepare lunch.

It was about nine, and they were just about ready to set sail. The women volunteered to go to the Custom’s Office with their six passports and the registration papers of the rented sloop, *Tempête*, to notify the local authorities of their departure.

Although Antigua achieved full independence from Great Britain in 1981, the British influence was obvious everywhere, even to driving on the left-hand side of the road. The Customs’ official, very black, had a spotless white uniform and a friendly attitude. He thanked the women in his British accent tainted by the tropics, and wished them a pleasant trip to their next island, after having collected the \$60 customs’ fee.

English Harbour had been an excellent haven for a three-day breather, before heading back to sea. The harbor was founded in 1725, but had been used as a hurricane shelter as far back as 1671, and served as Admiral Horatio Nelson’s base in 1784 to launch his attacks on neighboring islands. This little island, very poor and arid at first view, has been devastated several times over the years by severe earthquakes and also hurricanes – Hurricane Marilyn as recently as 1996, and Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

MIKE CONNOLE

The Customs and Immigration formalities took about 45 minutes. During this time, the men were charging the batteries with the big diesel motor, and readying the sails.

“Is Tammy all right, Hal?” asked Mitch. “Sorry for asking, but I can’t help my medical training. She seems pale and anxious.” He didn’t add that he noticed her checking her watch much too often for someone on vacation, and that she took many pills throughout the day. However discreet she tried to be, as a doctor he noticed these things

“Yeah, she’s fine. Just a little uptight and tired. I don’t think she really enjoys sailing all that much,” Hal explained unconvincingly.

Chapter II

The three guys were so much at ease in each other's company. They'd done everything together since grade school and Boy Scouts. They all attended middle school and high school together in an exclusive La Jolla school. John had been Student Body President in his senior year, while Mitch was Year Book Editor. Hal was first-string quarterback during his junior and senior years. All three maintained a 3.5 plus grade point average, but Mitch was clearly the intellectual of the trio. He read more, was interested in philosophy, and in observing man and nature. John was the organizer, a born leader, and was destined to become a lawyer, as had his father and his grandfather before him.

Hal was going to San Diego State University on a football scholarship, and was unsure beyond the four years at State what he would do with his life. The only certainty seemed his marrying Tammy, his girlfriend since their sophomore year. He was tall – 6foot 2 with broad shoulders and an easy stride. Blond with blue eyes, his good looks and baby face often drew stares. Of the three, he was the most fashion-conscious, but still favored the casual Southern California surfer garb. But he and Tammy melded together so well, why bother shopping around, as had done Mitch and John throughout high school. The three teenagers confided everything to one another, from their first innocent kisses to heavier French kissing and petting, and what it would be like to go “all the way”. They did all their boyhood exploring together – looking at their first Playboy magazine, smoking their first cigarette, and comparing the size of their early-puberty hard-ons.

Mitch appeared the most mature of the three. Just under 6 feet with a firm body, he had jet-black hair and hazel eyes. His

MIKE CONNOLE

ever-present five o'clock shadow gave him a swarthy look, but his ready smile and sparkling eyes assuaged this impression, and he was easily likable.

John had roughly the same build as Mitch, but with a little more baby fat. His two friends often teased him about this, but he couldn't resist sweets. His dark brown hair and light blue eyes, almost transparent, always caused second looks. He was the planner of their weekends and vacations together, but never imposed his ideas.

All were from upper middle class to upper class families, but none seemed spoiled by the outward signs of wealth. They all lived in the same La Jolla neighborhood, just north of Bird Rock, with ocean-front yards and fantastic views of the waves. All were practically raised in the water - sailing, swimming, surfing and diving from an early age. When the waves were up, or a good north swell materialized, they'd grab their boards and paddle out for a few hours after school. Sometimes, on weekends, they'd take Hal's dad's Victory sloop from Shelter Island Yacht Club, and sail it around to Mission Bay, spending the night on board before returning home Sunday night, relaxed and tanned.

Growing up in Southern California in the 1960's inside a silk cocoon did take its toll in social consciousness. Once in a while, lying on the beach with Hal and John, Mitch would bring up some current events problem. They were all shaken by the assassinations of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, and postulated on the reasons for these insane acts. The Civil Rights Bill of 1964 sparked little interest. The only blacks they ever saw were their maids and the trash collectors who passed once a week. There were no blacks in their school, no black neighbors, and no black surfers. Only in sporting events was there an occasional contact with black players.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Vietnam, however, was a recurrent topic of conversation. Young Americans were being killed every day in Southeast Asia, and the draft had been instated. As all three were approaching their eighteenth birthdays, there was some concern. Back and forth, they argued the Domino Theory, U.S. financial interests in Southeast Asia, the economic boon of a war, and the just-dawning anti-war movements. Should they blindly support their government's policies, or rise up against their conservative don't-rock-the-boat Establishment parental influence.

They rarely discussed religion. All three believed, or at least hoped, that there was a God out there somewhere, maintaining a certain order in the Universe. Mitch was a C and E person, going to mass with his parents on Christmas and Easter. It was not unpleasant, but he didn't see the necessity of making it a weekly affair. All three had a deep sense of what was morally right or wrong, and their basic code of living included respecting and being honest with others, but also with themselves.

John's dad had a successful law practice in La Jolla, and was an associate of his own father, who was now semi-retired but came in daily, more or less to avoid boredom. John's mother was involved in several charitable organizations and bridge clubs, and was rarely home.

Doctor Christiansen, Hal's dad, was a clinical pathologist, and a full professor at the U.C.S.D. Medical School. When he wasn't teaching at the medical school, he was travelling to various medical conferences around the world. He published often, and had become a worldwide reference in clinical pathology. His wife was an avid tennis player, but always managed to be free to accompany her husband in his travels.

Mitch's parents were the only ones often at home. Hal and John appreciated the homey atmosphere at the Donaldson home, and spent a lot of their free time there. Mitch's dad didn't

MIKE CONNOLE

actually work, but drove to his stockbroker's for an hour or so every morning and late afternoon. Both of his parents came from old New England money, and the stock market was their distraction. They both loved flowers, and spent several hours daily pruning the tropical flowers and six or seven varieties of orchids. When the Dendrobiums weren't flowering, they were likely to have some Phalaenopsis, Oncidium or Cattleyas in bloom. The always-blooming Vandas assured year-round color in the side yard. Beyond the swimming pool, in the back yard, were the citrus fruit trees, always generous with their yields in the mild Southern California climate. Mitch had one little sister, six years old, who was forever in love with Hal or John, depending on the week.

Chapter III

As a graduation present, their parents sent Hal, Mitch and John to Europe. Of course, each had already been to the old continent several times, but this would be their first foreign experience without chaperones. They had purchased in advance a VW van equipped for camping. The boys were to pick it up in London, and then cruise around Europe for a few months. Their first view of England was from the air, and they were stricken by the so very green rolling hills and countryside. They noticed things they hadn't really paid attention to before, when their parents were by their sides, tending to everything. The England from their History and Geography class was one of the Industrial Revolution, and the grimy, sooty England from the Dickens' novels of their English classes. The bucolic scenery below them was anything but industrialized.

The British accent was difficult to cope with, and they found themselves asking the various airport officials to please repeat what they were saying. After a long (and very expensive) taxi ride into the city – driving on the wrong side of the road – they arrived at the dealership and found everything in order.

The van had a miniature kitchen and a big bed in the back – tight, but possible for two of them, with the third one sleeping on the padded bench behind the little table. Fortunately, they were young and would make do. They were travelling lightly, so there wasn't much to stow.

The first week was full of English and Scottish scenery, and lots of laughing and joking with the narrow roads and left-side driving. They found the food greasy, and barely digestible – greasy fish and chips wrapped in old newspapers, or tasteless, overcooked roast beef, but they decided to make the most of this trip, and not compare everything to “back home”.

MIKE CONNOLE

Ferrying over to Calais, they immediately encountered another type of language problem. Mitch's two years of French was just too basic, but he did catch a word now and then. It seemed that the French authorities were chauvinistic, and expected all foreigners to speak and understand their language. The baguettes, red wine and berets were not at all caricatural, and were visible everywhere. In Paris, they found a cheap hotel in the Quartier Latin, with a hot, running shower – down the hall, of course! They got a kick out of the hot and cold water urinal in their room, which they also used to wash their feet. An Australian in the room next door later explained what a bidet was. The weather was gorgeous, and they discovered Paris on foot. Driving the van around this bustling metropolis just proved too stressful, and they were freer to move about without their wheels. After a tour of the magnificent Gothic cathedral with its flying buttresses [Notre Dame], they leisurely strolled along the quays of the Seine, past the Louvre, reserved for the next day, to the Place Concorde with its obelisk – a gift to the French people from Egypt. From there, they passed in front of the U.S. Embassy, then the Elysee Palace (home of the French President), and up the world-famous Champs Elysee, with its chic boutiques. The boulevard ends with the Arc de Triomphe. Of course, their goal was the Eiffel tower, clearly visible from almost anywhere in Paris, and only a short distance from Trocadero, which afforded a splendid view of the fountains, the Seine, the Eiffel Tower, the Champs de Mars, and the Hotel Invalide in the background (under the gilded dome reposes the remains of Napoleon). They courageously attacked the Eiffel Tower by the steps for the first two levels. A brief elevator ride took them to the top, and they weren't disappointed with the view. The next day was more cultural, and devoted entirely to the Louvre and its fantastic collection of artists, sculptors and works of many and varied civilizations.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Leaving Paris, they headed south to Biarritz to try some French surfing. What a disappointment! Three days of camping in the beach parking lot, and the waves never came. They crossed the nearby border into Spain, and took the coastal route from San Sebastian to Bilbao. Still no waves, and they headed inland to Madrid. Although there were museums and churches everywhere, they knew they couldn't take them all in at once, but did agree to visit the Prado in Madrid, and Picasso's home/museum in Barcelona.

Hal and John had each taken two years of Spanish in high school, and did manage to communicate when necessary. They were agreeably surprised by the prices in Spain, including meals and gas. They did have a generous budget from their concerned parents, but decided not to squander money unnecessarily. In France, filling up the van was very expensive. Someone explained to them that over 80% of the cost was government taxes [gas being roughly four times more expensive than in the States]. They wondered how the French people could tolerate such high prices, and welcomed the cheaper Spanish gas. It seemed that everywhere they went, there were other English-speaking teenagers, all discovering these numerous, vastly different countries within such a small area.

The weather was holding up wonderfully – lots of sunshine and light breezes across the south of France, from Perpignan, through Marseilles, Cassis, Nice, to Monaco. The beaches all along the Cote d'Azur were small and crowded, and the people actually sunbathed stretched out on rocks – no sand to be seen! Hal, John and Mitch were surprised when the doorman at the Monte Carlo Casino requested that they put on ties if they wished to enter. Of course, for a small fee, there were rental ties. Compared to Las Vegas (naturally, they did compare some things), it seemed like a mausoleum inside, practically no noise,

MIKE CONNOLE

expressionless gamblers, making it impossible to tell who was winning and who was losing.

The van was running great after over 4,000 kms. They crossed into Italy at Ventimiglia. This was definitely the country of the car horn and good brakes, if one expected to survive. They were to meet some friends from San Diego in Sicily in just five days, so headed directly to Rome. All three had to agree that Vatican City, the Sistine Chapel with its magnificent Michelangelo ceilings, and St. Peter's Basilica, was the most impressive sight they had seen on this trip. The huge plaza in front of the basilica, the Pieta, the tombs of all the popes, and the fantastic view after climbing 520 steps to the top of the cupola – they were definitely impressed. An eerie walk through the catacombs with candles to light their way ended their stay in Rome. From there, they motored down to the tip of the Italian boot, and took a car ferry across to Messina in Sicily. They were rewarded with a splendid view of incandescent lava flowing down the side of Mount Etna as they drove toward Catania that evening.

Unfortunately, they were two days late, their friends having already headed back to the States. They drove on to Palermo, and left the van at the VW agency, as had been previously decided before leaving San Diego. They were glad to be back on foot for a few days of sight-seeing in this pleasant Sicilian seaport. They all found Sicily a bit like Southern California – blue, sunny skies, and palm trees swaying in the warm breeze.

After two months on their own, they were greeted by their parents at L.A. International Airport. They had matured in that short period of time, had fended for themselves, absorbed some European culture, and were now ready to tackle college.

Chapter IV

With Mitch at the helm, Hal and John cast off, and they slowly motored out of English Harbour, and continued their voyage to the south. The heading was roughly 190 degrees, which they would try to maintain, thus bringing them close to the northwest coast of the Basse Terre part of Guadeloupe. Guadeloupe is composed of two large islands – Grande Terre to the northeast (flatter, with white-sand beaches), and Basse Terre, which is mountainous with black, lava beaches. The island's volcano is active, and the last eruption of the Souffriere was in 1976. The two islands are separated by a salt-water river, and are connected by two bridges.

Once out in open water, Mitch cut back the motor.

“Let's do it, guys,” said Mitch, heading the boat into the wind. Hal and John hoisted the mainsail, then the jib. Mitch fell off and the sails filled immediately. He took the heading of 190 degrees, and they trimmed the sails.

“Who's ready for a good cold beer?” asked Hal, once everything was under control, and they were gliding along smoothly at about six knots. They had discovered Carib beer in St. Kitts, a light, mild beer, and the three men appreciated their first gulp. The only sound was the fluttering of the sails and the small waves slapping against the hull.

Laura broke the silence. “What about that depression they mentioned. What if it hits us between here and Guadeloupe?”

“Don't worry, Laura, reassured John. “It's too early in the year. Hurricane season starts officially on June 1, but most hit in August and September. There is a tropical depression off to the east, but that only means disorganized winds and lots of rain.

MIKE CONNOLE

We can handle that if we have to.” The three women looked at each other, anything but reassured.

Monserrat was off the starboard stern. The visibility was exceptional, and the smoke from the Souffriere Hills volcano formed a huge, billowing mushroom cloud above the peak. The eruption had begun in July, 1996, had capriciously calmed down only to re-erupt after a brief dormant period. Most of the eleven thousand inhabitants had fled, two-thirds of the island covered with soot and lava. There was a fair-sized American population, many there at the medical school, founded some twenty years earlier by some wealthy Americans, whose pre-med children hadn’t been among the chosen few for the med schools back in the States. There was also a huge state-of-the-art recording studio, frequently used by such big names as Steevie Wonder and Paul McCartney.

A large school of dolphin showed up and toyed with them for a good thirty minutes – a good distraction, and the three women actually seemed to relax a bit.

Guadeloupe was in view when the first warning came. First a few dark clouds and wind gusts, then from the east a squall line, and gusts over forty knots. Hal was now at the helm. “Let’s not take any chances,” he cautioned. “Why don’t we haul down the mainsail, and navigate with the jib and motor. If it gets too bad, we’ll take in the jib and ride it out into the wind.” John and Mitch scurried off to execute the plan, and with the first wind-driven raindrops stinging their faces, the women decided to go below decks.

It got bad fast – gusts over fifty knots – rain, lightening and thunder. The waves tripled, then quadrupled in size, crashing over the deck. Mitch yelled down to the women to verify that all the hatches were closed, thus keeping out both the sea and rain water.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

With the gusts roaring in their ears, the now-drenched men couldn't hear one another, but didn't need to speak. From their looks, they were worried, but had been through so much together already, that this was just another episode of their sharing, be it the good or the bad. They knew that when this one blew over, they would once again feel their special bond reinforced even more. They knew that there was something so very special between the three of them, and they also knew that their wives sensed this and were jealous, not of the physical closeness, but more of the spiritual communion their husbands had enjoyed for over forty years.

When Hal tired at the helm, John took over. It was tricky keeping the bow into the wind to the east, and at the same time not gaining too much headway, as the west coast of Guadeloupe was only a few nautical miles to the east, and they didn't want to get in among the shoals and rocky cliffs. Of course, this was practically a white-out, with visibility at less than thirty feet. Fortunately, there was a GPS on board, and via the satellite, they knew that the coast was approximately three nautical miles to the east. They seemed to be keeping the same distance from the coast and drifting slightly to the south. It was incredible, the amount of rain that kept sweeping over them.

Imperceptibly, the three experienced sailors felt a slackening, ever so slight, and gave each other the thumbs-up sign. Sure enough, within another thirty minutes, they could see areas of blue sky, and suddenly the massive mountain range of Guadeloupe was staring back at them, with luscious green vegetation, and two or three villages in sight. The rain suddenly stopped, the faucet closed, so typical of the tropical weather. After a few hours at sea, the smell of earth, wet vegetation, and even smoke, were powerful. In just a few short hours, their olfactory senses had acclimated solely to the briny smell of the ocean.

MIKE CONNOLE

“Hey, down there,” yelled Mitch. “Are you still alive? You can come out now.” When there was no visible movement from below, Hal opened the hatch. Still no movement. He hurried below – no sign of life in the main cabin. He found Laura on the bed in their cabin, awake, but obviously very unhappy. She refused to speak to him, and he went back on deck.

“I don’t know what happened down there with the women, but they’re closed up in their cabins and aren’t talking. I think I prefer another couple of hours of bad weather out here than the storm I fear we may soon experience down there,” quipped Hal, tired after battling the elements, and disappointed once again by the women’s attitude. Maybe the girls were right – after all, they hadn’t been friends for over forty years, and had been more or less thrown together by their husbands, who, even after college and fifteen years of professional careers, still got together at least once a week. What did a pushy, ambitious lawyer (Laura), a transplanted French housewife, and a glamorous real estate agent (Tammy), have in common? With the exception of being married to Athos, Portos and Aramis, nothing at all.

John suggested, “Let’s have another beer to celebrate our feat out there. After all, this is our first tropical depression together. Soon we’ll be in a quiet little port, well-protected, and we’ll relax. In the meantime, down the hatch, and pass me some Pringles, Hal.”

Fortunately, the women had stocked the outside ice chest with munchies and lots of Carib beer.

“After a few beers, maybe someone can go untangle the mess down below.” Hal and Mitch both stared at John, the arbitrator, who quickly got the gist of their looks.

“I read you loud and clear, but let me get up my courage first.”

They observed that the wind had lightened, the ocean much calmer already, and decided to hoist the sails and parallel the

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

coast while watching out for the lighthouse at Vieux Fort. From there, the Saintes were a mere six miles to the south. Unfortunately, they had already drifted too far south to stop off for some snorkelling at Pigeon Island, just off the coast of Bouillante. It was a marine reserve, made famous by Jacques Cousteau in his film “The Silent World”.

They had projected stopping off for a late lunch and seeing some of the magnificent tropical fish, lobster and coral formations. But after the bad weather and stirred-up seas, the visibility was undoubtedly very poor. Time permitting, they wanted to take the dingy and visit the geothermal springs, where temperatures of over 500 degrees had been recorded in some of the vents.

“If we want to anchor before sunset, we better sail and motor down to the Saintes. I read that there are several shoals off to port, and I’d hate to ground *Tempête* on them. Supposedly, there is a somewhat undependable, lighted buoy, but why chance it? Mitch and Hal, did you read where the French don’t use “red right return” but the opposite? That must really cause havoc with the Americans. Can you imagine the red buoy off to port going into a port, and finding yourself high and dry? We’ve been forewarned, but it still seems strange.”

Chapter V

They cleared the baleine, which wasn't flashing, about 6 P.M. the sun would be setting in another forty minutes, and their first view of Terre de Haut was breathtaking – the tiny village at noon (straight ahead), and the island's famous Sugarloaf at 2 o'clock. Beyond that, across the narrow channel, was Terre de Bas. Terre de Bas means low land, because of its geographical position slightly to the south of Terre de Haut (high land). Both islands have peaks that culminate at roughly 300 meters. This same nomenclature applies to Guadeloupe, where Basse Terre, very mountainous, juts out to the south of Grande Terre, a flat, geologically-older island, positioned farther to the north.

There weren't many boats in the bay, and they decided to anchor beyond a strange-looking house that resembled the bow of a ship jutting out into the bay. The wind was reduced to a zephyr, and they lowered the sails. The water was crystal clear, and the sandy bottom was perfectly visible. They were wary of gusts during the night and decided to use two bow anchors, just in case. They had all this down to a routine, and were well secured before 7 P.M. A strange phenomenon occurs in the tropics – there is little twilight – it just goes from daytime to nighttime in an amazingly short period of time.

“Okay girls. You can come up now. We've anchored in the bay of the Saintes, and the view is fantastic. If you want to catch a glimpse of the island, you'd better hurry up. It's getting dark fast,” called out John.

Getting the best of her French curiosity, Anne Sophie was the first on deck. Despite the beauty of the moment, and the soft balmy evening, the strain showed on her face. She leaned against Mitch and spoke animatedly in French, which, of

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

course, neither Hal nor John understood. But the body language said that something was very wrong.

“Come on, Tammy and Laura. We got you down here in one piece. The least you could do is come up and admire the view,” admonished Hal. That seemed to do the trick, and creaking planks could be heard below decks before the two heads popped up. Instinctively, Tammy went to Hal and Laura to John.

Laura was obviously in a bitchy mood. “I hope there won’t be any more days like that. I was tossed and thrown about down there, and I think I twisted my ankle.”

“In case you hadn’t noticed, we were also down there with you; we were also thrown around. But maybe we ought to congratulate the men on getting us here, instead of bitching about the weather and rough seas,” spit out Tammy, unable to hold her tongue. A dark fire burned in her eyes, but she didn’t say anything more.

“I’ve got a good idea. Why don’t we all get cleaned up and go into town for dinner. We could find a cozy little French restaurant. After a day battling a tropical depression, we men are famished, and it’ll do us all good to get back on the good old terra firma,” suggested Mitch.

Once inside their cabin, John erupted, “I’ve had it with you, Laura. Nobody here is your inferior, and you’re not going to treat them like lowly law clerks, or one of your legal secretaries.”

“Thank you for your confidence in me, John. As usual, your friends are innocent, and if there’s a problem, I’m to blame. I’m fed up with you and your friends. This is the last time I’ll put up with that jock, Hal, and his Barbie doll. Beyond that pretty face of hers is a vacuum. And that frog who never opens her mouth, and acts so superior. She thinks that because she speaks two languages and has adapted to living in another

MIKE CONNOLE

country, that that somehow makes her better than the rest of us. Fortunately, there's Mitch."

"What do you mean by that, Laura? I've seen you come on to men when you thought it could forward your career. Mitch is a medical doctor. How do you plan on using him? Just let me warn you – keep away from him. He is happily married, and I think I know how he feels about you. So don't go barking up the wrong tree."

"Listen, John. I'm worn out and not at all hungry. Why don't you get dressed and go have a lovely meal with your lovely friends. I'm sure Anne Sophie will take good care of you and translate the menu, and order just the right things."

"Laura, get your ass in the shower. We're leaving in ten minutes, and like it or not, you're coming with us."

Fifteen minutes later, they were all seated in the twelve-foot dinghy. The six-horsepower Johnson outboard started on the first pull, and they weaved their way through the other sailboats before tying up to the dock. The dock led to a cute little plaza, surrounded on three sides by two-story wood buildings with balconies. There were a few local children with curly blond hair and green eyes, sitting on one of the benches that lined the plaza. Their skin was dark café au lait, purportedly the result of the mixing of Brittany sailors with the local women, some one hundred years earlier. Anne Sophie's French did come in handy, and they were soon climbing a small hill to a hotel/restaurant, which supposedly was very good.

"Bonsoir, messieurs, bonsoir, mesdames," said the distinguished-looking gentleman who rushed over to greet them. "Bienvenu chez moi."

For an aperitif, the women each had a planteur punch, made with Guadeloupe rum, but the men stuck to their traditional scotch (Chivas straight up). Mitch did the ordering in French, not so much to impress the others, but because he enjoyed

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

speaking French once in a while with someone other than his wife.

The rum must have been potent (they later learned that it was 110 proof agricole rum from Marie Galante, another one of Guadeloupe's dependencies). The girls all seemed to relax a bit after a few sips of their drinks. The cold Chivas felt good too, and they had a second round before dinner. There was lots of small talk about their trip thus far, what the rest of the world was becoming, etc. Probably just to irritate John, Laura asked Mitch if he would mind looking at her ankle later. She thought it really might be sprained after falling in the galley. Neither Mitch nor John had seen her limping during their ten-minute walk up to the restaurant.

"Okay, Laura. I'll examine it tomorrow morning. I do hope it's nothing serious, because they probably don't have any X-ray equipment on the island. You should have kept ice on it this afternoon, but we'll do it when we get back to the boat. With a good night's sleep and a pillow to elevate your ankle, it should be better tomorrow."

They decided to let the owner choose most of their meal. They started with the entrees, which, in French, is not the main dish but, as the word suggests, the entrance plate of the meal. The locally-smoked shark, marlin and wahoo were absolutely delicious. This was served with fresh French bread, with its crispy crust surrounding lots of soft white bread. The entrée was served with a 1991 Chablis, also chosen by the owner/waiter. They were in heaven, then the main course was served. They each had a 10-inch fresh coffee fish, stuffed with various spices and rice. The fish was perfectly cooked, flaky and easily separating from the tiny bones. They barely managed the flaming bananas and 20-year-old rum, a local digestif. All were mellowed out, sated by alcohol and a superb meal. They took leave of their host, Mitch paying the steep bill. Picking up the

MIKE CONNOLE

tab was never a problem for them, and Mitch knew that the next two bills would be taken care of by the others. Money was never a problem with them – they had shared fairly since they were youngsters, and it felt good not to quibble over a few francs. They headed back to the dock, surrounded by the sounds of singing tree frogs and the music from a radio somewhere in the village.

The next morning at 6 A.M., the three men stood silently on deck, observing the unfolding spectacle of the sunrise over the Saintes. Fort Napoleon, high on a hill, protecting the entrance to the bay, was aglow in a pinkish tinge. Across the narrow entrance channel, on Cabrit Islet, was Fort Josephine, in ruins, but the thick stone walls were still standing.

“A show like this really makes it all worth it,” whispered Hal. “It’s good to be together, sharing such wonders of nature as this.” They stood there, not needing to speak, fully exploiting this special moment.

At about 7 A.M., they got the coffee going, and the smell of it drew the three women out of bed.

“Good morning, ladies. Hope you all slept well after that wonderful meal last night,” greeted Mitch. “How’s the ankle, Tammy? I’ll get a good look at it up on deck when the sun comes up a little more.”

Just then, they heard a small toot, and felt a light thunk against the hull. A small pontoon boat was selling fresh bread and croissants. They readily accepted the offer, and the vendor promised to return the following morning. After several croissants each, with bread, jam and coffee, they all jumped into the 84-degree turquoise water. It felt great, and everybody joked and splashed about. The sun was warm on their heads already, and Hal grabbed a mask and dove down to check out the anchors, which appeared well-planted in the sand.

Chapter VI

They decided to all go in together to deal with Immigration. Straight ahead from the dock was the Gendarmerie Nationale, which they had noticed the previous evening. It was crowded, so only Mitch and Anne Sophie went in with the six passports and boat registration papers. Meanwhile, the others sat on the benches on the plaza, admiring the beautiful trees covered with red flowers. And old, wrinkled woman selling coconut cakes, who didn't speak English, pointed to one of the trees, calling it "flamboyant". A younger local woman, this one toothless, explained in broken English that the flamboyant (flame) trees flower every year in May, and usually stay in bloom for two to three months. These trees bordered the main road and lined the narrow lane up to Fort Napoleon.

A crucial naval battle took place in the Saintes in 1782. The French fleet, under the command of Count de Grasse, tried futilely to fight off the British force, led by Admiral Rodney. In the end the 3000 British cannons proved much more efficient than the 2250 French cannons, and, as a result, the British influence in the Caribbean increased even more. This and other battles are depicted in the maritime museum inside Fort Napoleon. The unusual cactus gardens blend in well with the arid landscape around the fort, and large green iguanas can be seen basking on the warm rocks.

After finishing with French formalities, the six of them took a leisurely walk through the village. The street was lined with small wooden houses, adorned with colorful shutters and porches. Hibiscus and bougainvillea were everywhere, between the houses and in the tiny front yards. Life here seemed to be in slow motion, a far cry from the fast track of Southern

MIKE CONNOLE

California. Everything was scaled down, and one felt comfortable with that – tiny plots of land, the small houses with their red corrugated roofs, the narrow streets, no cars, and only six small buses. Even the fishing boats were small – not over twenty feet, and fishing was the main activity for the men. They often left at 4 A.M., to return with their catch eight hours later. An old fisherman, his face marked with deep furrows, undoubtedly the result of decades of wind and sun, explained to Anne Sophie and Mitch that the fishermen used various methods to catch their fish. There was a season for trolling, and another period of cages called nasses that are anchored in shallower waters. Sometimes nets are used to capture the lobsters which had not been lured into the traps. Apparently, the fishermen had no trouble selling their wares, the restaurants and locals more than glad to buy the day's catch.

After a hot, steep climb, then an even steeper descent, they were on the beach at Sugarloaf. A house was built on the narrow neck of land going out to the Sugarloaf (Pain de Sucre in French), and had a beach in the front yard, and another in the back. They were enjoying a refreshing swim when they noticed three crusty-looking men close to their towels on the beach. One bent down and opened a backpack. Hal yelled out, and started swimming furiously toward the beach. As soon as Mitch and John realized what was happening, they were quick to follow. Since it was 1 P.M., and the heat was at its acme, there was nobody on the beach to discourage the intruders, who, alerted by the screams, grabbed up a backpack and vanished up the path.

By the time the good guys got to the beach, the bad guys had an almost 5-minute head start. Hal slipped quickly into his Reefs and sped off, the other two not far behind. Twenty minutes later, the women saw their grim-faced husbands plodding across the sand toward them.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“We lost them,” lamented Hal. “They just disappeared. And the few people we saw said they had seen nobody coming up the path or along the road above. What did they take?”

Tammy broke the news. “Your backpack, Hal. Everything else seems to be here. What all did you have in there?”

“My wallet with about \$500, along with my credit cards and driver’s license. Fortunately, Mitch had the passports in his pack. I also had my camera, and, oh, shit, the key to the boat’s hatch.”

“Don’t worry,” reassured John. “I’ve got the second key on me. But we should get back, just in case. Unfortunately, the key ring has the name of the boat on it.”

“You don’t really think they’ll pursue this any further, do you?” asked Laura. “They’re probably local punks who would rather steal than work for a living.”

“Let’s move it guys, now,” urged Mitch. A sweaty twenty minutes later, they were relieved to find their dingy at the dock – it also had the sloop’s name written across the stern. They could see their sailboat bobbing peacefully in the bay, and it appeared deserted.

“That’s a relief,” sighed Anne Sophie. “Hal, why don’t you come with me? We’ll go report this to the gendarmes.” Everyone was pleasantly surprised to see Anne Sophie reacting so quickly. Up until then, she had been a follower, rarely initiating anything.

“That’s great, Anne Sophie. Why don’t the rest of you go back to the boat and we’ll signal to you when we’re ready to come back on board,” added Hal.

The Gendarmerie Nationale consisted of one large two-story wooden building, housing four gendarmes and their families. They usually stayed for three to five years before heading back to France.

MIKE CONNOLE

Anne Sophie explained their episode on the beach while the gendarme typed out what she related. His typewriter must have been over thirty years old, and he typed with two fingers, listing the missing items. When asked to describe the thieves, she explained that they were too far away for details, but she thought that at least one was fair-skinned. They all had ski-type bonnets on their heads. She patiently acted as translator, going back and forth between Hal and the gendarme. When they had finished, Anne Sophie reread the statement before handing it to Hal to sign. They were given a copy, and told to check in the following day with him. He explained that he would relay the report to Basse Terre and to Pointe-a Pitre (the main cities on Guadeloupe), but unfortunately, he didn't have much hope in recovering the loot.

That evening, they had an early dinner, their spirits more than dampened by the day's events. Nobody felt loquacious, and they all turned in early. About midnight, Mitch, a light sleeper, heard the floorboards creaking, and got up to explore. He found Tammy in the galley with a glass of water and a handful of pills.

"Tammy, are you all right? I'm not blind. You've changed. What happened to your joie de vivre? I miss that old hearty laugh of yours. Now you're always looking at your watch, and this isn't the first time I've seen you popping pills. What's up?"

"Mitch, why don't you just forget what you just saw and try not playing the doctor. I'm sure I'll be fine, and maybe someday I'll tell you a long story, which you probably would rather not want to hear. It's late now. Why don't we both try to get some sleep?"

Chapter VII

The ordeal of the day before seemed to bring them all closer together, and breakfast was relaxed, no snide remarks or oblique looks. Everyone chipped in with the dishes, and they decided to spend the day relaxing on board – swimming, sunning and catching up on postcards back to the States. Unconsciously, they were worried about being robbed on board, and that their mere presence would surely discourage any uninvited visitor.

Mitch went in with Hal at 5 P.M. to check with the gendarmes. They had nothing new to report, and the two men headed back to the boat. They suggested an early dinner at the pizza place, about 60 yards from their sloop. They cleaned up fast, and brought the dinghy directly onto the beach in front of the restaurant. After dinner, nobody felt like lingering on land, so they loaded up the dinghy and headed back. The women were tired, and turned in almost immediately. The men tarried on board, glad to have a little time together. They sat out under a huge canopy of stars, and talked about everything and nothing. There were very few lights on the island, and the Milky Way was amazingly clear. They rocked gently in the wake of a passing boat, and eventually decided to hit the sack.

About midnight, Mitch was again awakened by the creaking floorboards, and just assumed it was Tammy partaking in her midnight ritual. He didn't feel like prying, so he stayed in bed. Then he heard the sound of glass breaking, followed by a low grunt or grumble. The glass was replaceable, he thought before drifting back off to sleep.

Hal knocked on John's cabin door. "John, did you get up and open the hatch this morning? I can't find Tammy."

MIKE CONNOLE

“Wait a sec, Hal. I’m getting up,” groaned John. Hal was already knocking on Mitch’s door. Mitch had heard the commotion, slipped on his swim trunks, and ducked out of his cabin.

“What’s up, Hal. What’s that you said about Tammy?”

“I got up early, Mitch, when I realized that Tammy wasn’t in bed. I found the hatch open and assumed she was up on deck. I’ve looked everywhere – she’s not on deck, and I can’t see her in the water.”

John made a quick check around and saw that the dinghy was still there. “Maybe she swam in to the beach and took a walk. Why don’t we take the dinghy and see if we can find her on shore. Mitch can stay here with the girls.”

Mitch cast them off, and replayed the soundtrack of the previous evening in his head. He had heard footsteps and breaking glass, then a grunt, then nothing. He went to the galley and was surprised to find the pieces of the broken glass still on the floor. That didn’t seem like Tammy to leave her mess like that. He bent over and picked up a small capsule. He didn’t recognize it right off, read the inscription, and felt sick. What the hell was going on here? He was going to have to have a long talk with Hal, but wasn’t sure that this was the right moment. He pushed the pill to the bottom of the trash bag, already half full, and went about cleaning up the broken glass.

Their bread delivery man came by, and Mitch asked if he remembered the women on board. “But of course, monsieur. I never forget a pretty visage.”

“Did you happen to see the third woman this morning?” Mitch asked, calling the other two women out on the deck.

“Desole, monsieur,” replied the vendor. “I did not see her on shore.”

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Mitch, Anne Sophie and Laura bided their time eating breakfast and cleaning up the boat. About one hour later, Hal and John showed up, grim and sweaty.

“I just don’t understand it,” said Hal. “Tammy wouldn’t just take off like that. I don’t feel right about this. Something’s wrong.”

“Let’s not jump to any conclusions. She probably just took a long walk, and you two just didn’t see her. Why don’t we give her ‘til 11 o’clock before alerting the authorities,” suggested Mitch.

By 11:30, everybody realized that something awful must have taken place. Anne Sophie mentioned the Gendarmerie, which, being a French administration, would probably be closed between noon and three. Once again, Hal and Anne Sophie headed into town, taking Tammy’s passport with them. The same gendarme was at the front desk, and immediately recognized them.

“I’m so sorry, but we still have no news concerning your personal belongings,” offered the gendarme.

“Mais non,” replied Anne Sophie. “We are here to report a missing person. My friend, Hal, who was robbed two days ago, as you know, woke up this morning and discovered that his wife had disappeared. The men have been walking around the island since 7 o’clock this morning, and she is nowhere to be found.”

Hal pulled out Tammy’s passport and handed it to the gendarme, who stared at the picture. He had not seen this lovely woman in the picture during his morning jog that morning. He stated that they would have to wait 48 hours before filing a missing person’s report, unless, of course, there was evidence of foul play. He tried to be reassuring, suggesting that she probably did just take a walk. With Anne Sophie once again translating, the gendarme asked if Hal and Tammy had had a dispute the previous evening.

MIKE CONNOLE

“Not at all,” replied Hal, a little on the defensive now. “We were in bed around 10 last night, and at 6 this morning, I found the boat open and my wife gone. What can we do for 48 hours? The waiting will kill me!”

The gendarme, Mr. LeClerc, said they might try taking the dinghy around the island, checking the little coves, some inaccessible by land. He cautioned that the east coast was sometimes difficult to navigate, due to the easterly trade winds.

Leaving the Gendarmerie, Hal asked Anne Sophie, “What’s going to happen? Do you think that these guys are competent enough to handle a kidnapping?”

“What do you say, Hal? A kidnapping? Do you really think...?”

“I just don’t know, Anne Sophie. I know my wife, and I know she wouldn’t take off like this. We all know that there was some friction among you three women, but for the last few days, things seemed a little more relaxed. The insinuation of the gendarme is ridiculous. Tammy was not upset with me when we went to bed last night.”

“And I hope you’re not insinuating that Laura or I are somehow involved in this disappearance, Hal!”

“Of course not, Anne Sophie. I’m just upset, and that gendarme riled me a bit with his questions.”

Mitch, John and Laura were anxious for news when they tied up the dinghy to the stern of *Tempête*. Hal reported on their meeting with the gendarme.

“48 hours!” yelled Laura. “These frogs are crazy! She could drown or die or God knows what by then.”

John rebuked her sharply, “Why don’t you just shut up, Laura. You’re only making things worse. You’re a lawyer, and you know damn well that in the States there is the same 48 hour waiting period.”

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Hal tried to ease the present tension, which he really didn't need at that time. "Let's get organized, you guys. This island has 3,000 inhabitants, and maybe 200 tourists at any given time. If it's all right with you all, why don't Mitch, Anne Sophie and Laura divide up the island, and John and I will take the dinghy and circle the island. If we leave by 6 tomorrow morning, the wind should be calm, and that east coast should be easier to explore. This afternoon, we'll all take another look around the island, and if Tammy still hasn't turned up by then, we'll put my plan into action tomorrow. In the meantime, why don't we have some lunch, then rest while the sun is still high in the sky. We can shove off around 4 this afternoon."

"I'm not really hungry," replied Mitch, "but I do agree with your plan. You're probably right, Hal. A few sandwiches and some cold beer would do us all some good. But first, why don't we all cool off? Despite everything, the water does look inviting."

They all splashed around, but there was no monkey play, and their voices were subdued. Lunch followed in the same ominous mood, and they all went to their cabins for a nap. Hal went to the small head in their cabin, and found Tammy's make-up bag and her pills. She couldn't have taken off of her own volition. All her pills were there, and to not take them could seriously compromise her condition, or even lead to her death.

"Shit," uttered Hal as he fell onto the bed.

Chapter VIII

Hal's mind wandered back to high school graduation, the trip to Europe, and his early days at SDSU. With Mitch and John, they had decided to rent a house on the beach in Del Mar. With the Southern California freeway system, Hal would have a thirty minute drive to college, John about fifteen minutes to USD, and Mitch a mere five minutes to the UCSD campus. Their parents weren't too far away, and yet they would have their independence, studying when necessary, surfing when the swell was good, and being together.

For Hal, who was in a Liberal Arts program, the school year started with football, football, and more football. He had a partial football scholarship, and was sure to find a place on the freshman team. There were some very good players from around the country, and he had to hustle for a good spot – first or second-string quarterback. He quarterbacked the first half of the first game against Fresno State, and the Aztecs were up twelve points when he left the game, replaced by Ed Rogers. Ed choked, a far cry from the easy confidence he had displayed during their practice skirmishes. With less than ten minutes to go, the coach pulled Ed, and Hal brought the team back from a three-point deficit to win the game with a long “Hail Mary” with only seconds remaining.

That first game against Fresno State clinched Hal's spot as first-string QB, and Ed actually seemed relieved. He often discussed game strategies with Hal, and they became close. They had the same class schedule, and during breaks were always together, discussing football or some lecture they had just left. Their scholastic load was heavy, with practice every day, and they were pressured by the coaches to maintain a decent GPA if they wanted to remain on the team. True, classes

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

were more difficult than in high school, but Hal was adapting to this new situation without too much trouble.

Hal first noticed a physical attraction toward Ed during the early days of practice. Ed had a handsome, virile face on a 6 foot 2 inch muscular frame, and yet there was gentleness about him once off the playing field. He could not help but notice the surreptitious looks of Ed at his naked body in the showers. Hal found this disturbingly pleasant, and was actually aroused by this male attention. At the same time, he was scared – he was no fag, was he? How could he be? Whenever he was alone with Tammy, the heavy kissing and petting always made him hard, and it was always Tammy who had to slow down the action. So he couldn't be a queer – he had a fiancée, and they planned to marry once he graduated from college,

One day at the library, they were cramming for mid-term exams, Ed across the table from Hal. Hal felt Ed's leg brush against his, and thought nothing of it. But Ed persisted, and Hal looked up from his books and into the imploring eyes of Ed. They both understood, and became uncomfortable. They were both glad when the bell rang, signalling the end of the period, and the start of their History exam. They gathered up their books and headed off to the amphitheatre, apprehensive, but for what reason – the exam, or something much more troubling.

Hal slept very little that night, excited, agitated, not knowing what to do. Of course, he couldn't discuss this with Mitch or John, probably the first time he was keeping something from them. But then again, they were growing up, and he was sure that Mitch had already screwed the cute little redhead from his UCSD Biology class, who came by to study with Mitch, and sometimes left quite late. If Mitch wasn't talking, well, he could respect that. He was worried about his attitude toward Tammy, but apparently, she hadn't noticed anything changed. Outwardly, he was still the same Hal, in love

MIKE CONNOLE

with Tammy. Often, she was demanding of his free time, of which he had very little. A full sixteen units at school, plus football, didn't leave him a lot of time for Tammy, and he realized that this didn't especially bother him. Tammy still lived with her parents, and was taking eight units at a local community college.

If she dropped by on weekends when Hal had too much studying to catch up on, she would mope off to the beach, a stone's throw from the house. She knew that Hal wanted her – she could feel his hardness, and she even took it in her hand the last time they made out on his bed. He was kissing her breasts, and put an exploratory finger inside her bikini bottom. She became instantly hot and wet, squeezing and massaging his dick, which was throbbing and red by now. It would have been so easy, but she wanted to wait a little longer – not until their wedding night, of course, but she enjoyed being a cock tease. And besides, she wanted everything to be just right when they would become one, losing their virginity together.

They were now at the half-way point of the football season, and the Aztecs had a 5 win, 2 loss record. Hal remained first-string QB, and was the natural leader of the team. Once or twice, when he got sacked and saw too many stars, Ed would come in for a few plays, but he lacked the skill and leadership of Hal, who, by now, had become both his hero and his obsession.

The football season ended just before final exams for the fall semester. SDSU was eliminated in the quarter finals by Utah State. Hal got sacked in the third quarter, when San Diego was up by seven points. He tried getting up, but quickly realized that something was wrong with his leg. He saw his right foot bent outwards at an odd, unnatural angle. The stretcher came for him, but even before the team doctor arrived, he knew his leg was broken. Shit, shit, and more shit. In eighteen years, I never

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

broke a bone in my body, and at the end of the season, this has to happen, mused Hal. While he was in a local hospital getting X-rayed, his team, with Ed at the helm, let Utah State score a touchdown, followed quickly by a field goal. As hard as he tried, Ed couldn't rally the team, and they lost, 24 – 21.

In the locker room, the coach gave them the good news and the bad news. The bad news was, of course, that Hal had broken his leg, the good news being that he should be ready for spring training. Ed silently crossed himself, relieved for his friend, fully aware, now more than ever, that he could never replace Hal on the football field.

Hal couldn't drive his car with his right foot and leg casted to the knee, and Ed offered to chauffeur him to and from final exams. They had four finals, so it wouldn't be all that much of a hassle. Ed lived in Clairemont, about ten minutes down the freeway from the beach pad, and readily volunteered to help his teammate.

This was a bad period for Hal. He was a little uptight about exams, plus a heavy goddamn cast weighing down his right side, no surfing to ease his tension, Tammy for some reason bitchier than usual, and his having to depend on Ed like this. Ed turned out to be a great help, uncannily by his side when he needed him. Hal leaned heavily on Ed getting in and out of the car, and the physical contact was electric each time. He probably leaned a little more than necessary on Ed, and Ed probably lingered a little too long against him during the various manoeuvres.

Mitch and John felt really bad for Hal, and were relieved to see how helpful Ed was. They, too, were preparing for finals, and each stayed holed up in his room for most of the day. Hal knew he could count on his two buddies to help him wash up. The three of them broke together for meals, and they were all tense, especially Mitch, who, for once, seemed pessimistic. He

MIKE CONNOLE

just wasn't clicking with classes, and couldn't figure out what was going on. Hal seemed preoccupied, which the others attributed to exams and his bum leg. John seemed the most relaxed, and actually enjoyed studying.

The spring semester started at the end of January. Hal had a 3.2 GPA, John a 3.5 and Mitch a lousy 2.6. Hal was glad to regain his independence, even if he did limp a little. He kind of missed the extra attention from Mitch and John, but especially that of Ed. It felt good to walk along the beach, and the cool water seemed to soothe the straining tendons of his ankle, stiff after five weeks of immobilization. He was more relaxed now, and noticed that Tammy also seemed in better spirits. Had she become but a mirror of him, smiling when he smiled, bitchy when he was grumpy or uptight? He didn't like the idea of Tammy being defined in function of his being. He wanted her to be her own person, but she just drifted through life, seemingly unbothered by the happenings in her immediate or extended environment. One day he would try to talk to her about developing her own personality, keeping up on current events, having an opinion on something, anything. He welcomed the company of his male friends, enjoying their independent, opinionated spirits.

Hal knew that Tammy enjoyed being a cock tease, holding out, but for what? One evening, they were alone for dinner, and after an easy meal and too much wine, Hal led her into the bedroom and closed the door. Fondling her breasts while kissing her passionately, Hal decided to go for it. The wine seemed to have lessened Tammy's inhibitions, and she offered no resistance as Hal undressed her, impatiently unbuttoning her blouse and undoing her bra. Pulling off her bra, two full, firm breasts with large hard nipples filled his hands and mouth. She yelped as he bit down too hard on one nipple. They were both now in a hurry. She unzipped his jeans and took his hard cock

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

in her hand. With the other hand she lowered his pants and underwear down to his knees. He helped her by ripping off his tee shirt, then gave a good tug on her pants, which came down together with her panties. This was the first time they had been completely naked together, and without realizing it, had gone beyond the point of no return. Oblivious to this, they fell onto the bed, and Hal clumsily poked his steel-hard rod into Tammy's hole. He met with some resistance, but, too far gone, rammed a little harder and felt something give. Then he was beyond the barrier and completely inside her. She felt sooo good, so soft and warm, a perfect fit. He couldn't hold out, and came after only a few thrusts. Breathing hard, he let his body collapse on to Tammy. She held him tight, nibbling on his ear.

"Let's go take a nice cool shower together," she whispered, after having recovered her normal breathing cadence. The water felt great, and it was so sensual soaping each other down. Hal immediately got hard, and took her again, there in the shower.

"I bloodied your sheets, Hal," she confessed.

He shrugged it off, "No big deal. I'll stick them in the washing machine and they'll be as good as new."

They wrapped towels around them, went out to the back patio, and got into the hot tub. It was a cloudless night, billions of stars visible above them. Hal lazily draped an arm around Tammy, who snuggled in close. They were relaxed, lost in their own thoughts. After about thirty minutes, Hal felt Tammy stiffen.

"Do you realize, Hal, that I'm no longer a virgin?"

"You and me both, babe," laughed Hal.

"I'm serious, Hal. I wasn't ready for this yet."

Hal was stunned. "I didn't notice you fighting me off as we undressed each other, Tam. What's the big deal? We knew it was going to happen one of these days anyway. You want to get

MIKE CONNOLE

screwed and stay a virgin at the same time. Sorry, babe, but it just doesn't work that way!"

"What about if I get pregnant? Did you think about that?"

"Wait a minute, Tammy. I didn't force you to make love to me. Personally, I thought it was heaven. And anyway, this isn't the bad time of month, is it?" questioned Hal.

"You know my periods are irregular. I think we're safe, but what happens if I do get pregnant?"

"No problem," quipped Hal, "We'll just get married."

Tammy shook her head. "No way, Hal. We've already discussed this a thousand times. You get your BA degree, then we get married. Not before."

Hal couldn't help wondering if Tammy wasn't at last becoming her own person.

Chapter IX

Years later, after several years of trying to conceive, Hal and Tammy sought the help of a specialist. It was at this time that Tammy confessed to Hal that she had missed her period, and had gone to Student Medical Services at her college. A compassionate nurse did a quick test, which confirmed her worst fear. She didn't want a baby at that time. For Christ's sake – her first sexual encounter, and she finds a way to get pregnant. The nurse, accustomed to this scenario, listened to Tammy's sobs, trying to console her. She quickly and discreetly wrote an address and phone number on a piece of paper, and handed it to Tammy.

“Go see this doctor. He'll help you out,” offered the nurse.

Tammy was shocked. An abortion! Her? But it was an easy solution. Of course, “Roe versus Wade ” hadn't happened yet, so abortions were still illegal in the United States. She moped around her parents' house for a few days, looking at the small piece of paper from time to time. She finally got up the nerve and called the office. The person on the other end of the line seemed used to this kind of call, and she was given an appointment for the next day.

She arrived at an innocuous looking office complex in downtown San Diego, a half hour early for her appointment. She was so nervous, and almost wished she had brought Hal along for moral support, or rather immoral support, finding her humour rather sick. But she knew he would never hear of an abortion, so she was strictly on her own. A smiling receptionist greeted her, and asked her to fill out a confidential information card. No name was required, only birth date, past medical antecedents, and date of last menstrual period. She took a seat, not daring to look around. There were at least five other women

MIKE CONNOLE

in the waiting room, and they all seemed as ill at ease as she was.

When her turn came, a nurse ushered her into a room, asked her to undress and put on a little paper gown. Within a few minutes, an elderly man entered the room and introduced himself as the doctor. He quickly read over the information card.

“You don’t want the baby. Right?” he stated, more than asked. “It’s a simple procedure, and there should be no complications. I’ll do a standard D and C, and you can go home. There will be some heavy bleeding, so be prepared for that.”

All of a sudden, Tammy wasn’t sure she could go through with this. The doctor sensed this, and tried to reassure her.

“I do this all the time, ma’am. No need to worry. Just lie down on the table, put your feet in the stirrups, and in five minutes, it’ll be all over.”

Tammy was shaking as she lied down, and felt a cold metal speculum violating her. She felt a sharp stab, and almost passed out.

“That should do it, ma’am. You can get dressed now, and check with the receptionist for your bill.”

She felt weak, partly from fear, partly from relief as she dressed. She had been advised on the phone, and paid the \$400 cash, an exorbitant fee, but at least the problem was solved.

For the next two days she feigned the flu, and stayed mostly in her room. Hal didn’t seem at all worried, and she was almost glad to not have him hanging around. After all, if it hadn’t been for him, she wouldn’t be in this mess today. She was bleeding heavily, and on the third day, she developed a high fever and chills. She immediately called the doctor’s office, and explained her problem. The receptionist advised her to come over right away.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Once at the office, she was taken into a cubicle, and once again undressed for an examination. The doctor frowned as he finished examining her.

“Sorry, Miss, but you’ve got an infection which is preventing your uterus from contracting to stop the flow of blood. I’ll write out a prescription for some potent antibiotics, and you’ll have to take six a day for ten days, even if everything shapes up before then. Okay?”

She shook her head. What else could she do? She would see what happened after three or four days of these antibiotics, and if she wasn’t better, she’d go see a real gynecologist.

Sure enough, three days later, the blood flow tapered off and the fever came down a little. She was relieved, and by the eighth day, everything seemed normal. She took the last two days of antibiotics, and tried to forget the whole episode. But one thing was for sure – Hal wouldn’t be touching her for a long time, and when he did, he would be wearing a rubber. She saw Hal only occasionally during this period, as he was wrapped up in pre-spring training and, of course, his classes. Her attitude was cold, very cold, and she knew it. Unconsciously she still blamed Hal for this hell she went through all alone. He must have felt the change in her, but said nothing. Looking back at this period in their lives, Hal did feel some frigid vibrations coming from Tammy, but with his own dilemma of sexual ambivalence, Tammy’s attitude didn’t bother him.

Now, more than twenty years later, Hal understood. She knew, but hoped against hope, what made her sterile. The doctor informed them that her uterus was irreparably damaged by the botched abortion (she had already related her nightmare story to the gynecologist), and that she would never conceive.

Hal was devastated, first by Tammy’s confession, then by the realization that he would never have a child. How many times did he picture his son running out for a pass, or trimming

MIKE CONNOLE

the jib on a sailboat? This couldn't be. Could he accept being one half of a childless couple? Things wouldn't be the same as before, and he knew it.

Hal and Tammy went on with their lives, he the successful real estate agent during the booming building era of the 80's in Southern California. He had his own office building in downtown La Jolla, and Tammy was his chief agent in showing the million dollar homes in and around La Jolla and Mt. Soledad. Their superficial life was satisfactory. They saw a lot of their friends (Hal's), but their sex life gradually petered out. Tammy felt incomplete – less than a woman, not being able to give the most precious gift of all to her husband – their child. She felt Hal cool off gradually, and their once active sex life was now practically inexistent. Hal felt cheated, by Tammy and by life. The physical attraction was gone, and he didn't have the courage to rekindle the old flame. And the old ghost of Ed resurfaced from time to time, which he managed to push back into some dark corner of his brain.

Tammy changed – she became harder and more sharp-tongued. Now, money and success seemed the only important things to her in life. She pushed Hal to close this or that deal, to jack up the price of a unit another \$150,000 or \$200,000. At the same time she became flirtatious with the male clients, especially if they were without their wives. Maybe she needed to prove to herself that she was still capable of getting a man's attention. Hal saw all of this, but just didn't care. He admitted to himself that he didn't even care if she was screwing one or two of the clients. However unethical, she was capable of anything to close a deal.

One day Hal came home from work and found Tammy in bed, crying. Her eyes were puffy and red, and he immediately went to her.

“Tammy. What's wrong? It's not your mom?”

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“No, Hal. I don’t know how to say this. I know you know I’ve been fooling around with a few of the clients for the last year or two. Well, one of those charming gentlemen gave me AIDS.”

Hal was dumbfounded. “Oh no, Tammy. How could you? This can’t be!” Hal took her into his arms and they both cried, and held on to one another for comfort and strength.

Tammy regained her usual control. “I’ve spoken to the doctor, and he wants to do further tests to see how advanced this is. I’ll be going in for some more blood work tomorrow. He suggested that you get tested also, although I can’t imagine your getting AIDS from me, seeing as you haven’t touched me in years.”

Hal questioned her some more. “What made you get an AIDS test? Have you been feeling bad? You have lost weight, but I just assumed it was another one of those diets.”

Tammy responded, “I’ve been so tired. I have aches and pains like a flu, but it doesn’t go away. I’m losing weight because of the diarrhea I’ve had for the last two months.”

Hal offered to cancel his appointments for the next day, and they would go to the doctor’s together and have their blood drawn.

“Then maybe we can take the rest of the day off, and drive up the coast and have lunch in Laguna Beach, then check out the shops,” Hal said, trying to offer a distraction.

Neither slept well that night. Hal was devastated by the news, but tried not to show it. This would only compound Tammy’s grief. Strangely, for his test, he was not at all concerned. After all, there had been only Tammy. But he also felt guilty. If he hadn’t gotten her pregnant, if she hadn’t had the abortion, if she hadn’t been sterile... a lot of ifs, but maybe, just maybe, things would have been different with one or two little ones running around, bringing some life back into their dying

MIKE CONNOLE

marriage. He had been thinking more and more of leaving Tammy, not for someone else, but just because there was nothing left after all those years, going back to high school. But now, even that was out of the question. He still felt some affection for her, unfortunately now sprinkled with pity. Well, this was a huge problem, and they would tackle it together. He wouldn't desert her now.

Tammy also tossed and turned all night, welcoming the first light of dawn. They had an early swim in the pool and a light breakfast, consisting of fruit and coffee. Getting their blood drawn was anti-climactic, and the nurse said the results would be ready in 24 hours. They both felt some tension dissipate as they walked back to Hal's BMW. It was a warm, sunny day, and Hal put the top down heading to Laguna Beach. They felt easy in each other's company, maybe the first time in several years, and the day went well. Hal mentioned to Tammy his thoughts during the long, sleepless night, all the ifs. Tammy admitted that she had been thinking pretty much the same thing, and had wondered if they wouldn't be in their present predicament had things gone differently. They sat on the beach, holding hands, and watching the sun as it approached the ocean. The sun set on two silent figures, each lost in his or her private thoughts.

They went to the office together the following morning and kept busy, especially after having played hooky the day before. At 3 P.M. Tammy buzzed Hal and informed him that the results were ready, and that the doctor would see them at 5. Tammy hadn't felt comfortable having Mitch as their family doctor, and chose another GP down the street from the agency. He was friendly and competent, but today his face was drawn and grim. They could both feel the tension as they sat down across the desk from the doctor.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“First of all, some good news. Hal tested negative for the HIV virus. Things aren’t so good for you, however, Tammy. It would seem you’ve had the virus for quite a long time, or else you have a very virulent form. In any case, the usual lymphocyte markers, T4 and T8, which basically compose a good portion of your immune system, are in the danger zone. We’ll start AZT immediately, and recheck everything in a month. You’ll notice that your platelet count is below 50,000, which is fairly common in AIDS patients. This low platelet count responds well to AZT, so I don’t see that as a problem. You’ll be getting the usual adult dose of 250 mg, twice daily. Take it with meals, and it might help with the digestive symptoms common with AZT – nausea, burning sensation in the stomach, and possibly more diarrhea. I’ve got several patients on AZT, and they seem to be responding. Let’s just hope you’ll be like my other patients. Neither you nor I need any more worries,” explained the doctor, cautiously optimistic.

After a few months, it was obvious that her immune system was not responding to the treatment. Her platelets were, however, back in the normal range, and that was somewhat encouraging. AIDS by this time had become a world-wide epidemic, and people were dying by the thousands. Hal and Tammy battled together, all the while maintaining an air of normalcy, going to parties now and then, working as usual. The pharmaceutical companies saw the AIDS epidemic coming, and spent millions of dollars trying to come up with new substances. It was now clear that AZT alone wasn’t doing the trick for the vast majority of AIDS patients, who continued dying by the thousands, in the U.S. alone, and the situation was so much worse in Africa. Everyone was scurrying around, not only to help those afflicted with the virus, but to make some big bucks as well. Tammy was a willing guinea pig, and tried several experimental drugs. One made her vomit, another gave her bad

MIKE CONNOLE

canker sores in her mouth, and eating and merely talking became painful. Then they introduced a new drug that she seemed to tolerate. Her T4 count stabilized, and even went up a little, the first time since embarking on this road to hell some two years earlier. When the protease inhibitor drugs made headlines after several world conferences on AIDS (Paris, Vancouver), Tammy asked her doctor about it. This was early 1996, and it was available on a limited basis. The overall price of the recommended triple therapy was over \$1,000 a month, and their insurance policy apparently didn't cover it.

Hal and Tammy even discussed taking the insurance company to court, as nothing was clearly stipulated in their policy concerning AIDS. They preferred to remain discreet, however, fearing the publicity that such an action would draw. Fortunately for them, they could afford the costly treatment. At this time, a new biological marker was introduced, a more reliable indicator of the evolution of the AIDS virus in the body, known as the viral load. More bad news – Tammy wondered if she could keep taking all these punches in the gut – her viral load was astronomical. She'd already been through a dozen yeast infections in her mouth and throat, a very painful shingles episode, and she was amazed at her ability to bounce back each time. Hal's presence surely explained at least part of her resiliency.

At times, she was tempted to try natural medical treatments, but decided to place her confidence in the medical establishment. She wanted to see Mitch, who was into acupuncture. Maybe by equilibrating her yin and her yang, her different energies could come together to promote the healing process. But Mitch was Hal's friend, so she was going to stiff this out with only the help of Hal and her doctor.

The anti protease drugs changed her rhythm of living. The huge capsules, six daily, had to be taken one hour before eating,

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

or two hours after eating, and eight hours between doses. But then again, this was a small price to pay for the hope of a reprieve. For the first time in years, she dared to think about the future, something beyond her next relapse or AIDS-related illness. How many times had she been tempted to end it all – it would be so simple – no more physical and mental anguish and pain. Was she too much a coward to kill herself, or was she just simply an optimist?

After three months, the viral load dropped dramatically, while the T4 cells continued to inch up. There had been no new opportunistic infections, and by now there really was hope. Her excitement with the latest results was contagious, and Hal joined in. Something so little, yet so important to those who struggle and live daily with this virus.

It was a few months later that John suggested the Caribbean sailing cruise. Her doctor thought it would be an excellent idea, but cautioned her about taking her medication regularly. If not taken on a regular basis, drug resistance could develop, and the virus would be once again out of control. She would simply have to adjust her schedule on board to her drug regimen, all the while remaining as discreet as possible. Hal promised to help her out in this regard.

Chapter X

Morning finally came. The playback of his and Tammy's life had taken up most of the dark hours, and he fell into an exhausted sleep around 4:30 A.M. He awoke tired and discouraged, the previous afternoon's search having yielded nothing, not the slightest sign of Tammy anywhere. The locals were friendly when shown the picture of Tammy, but she had apparently simply vanished from the island.

They were all up and about at 5:30, and the strain was beginning to show. Despite their tanned skin, the dark circles under their eyes were obvious on all the crew. Still no sign of Tammy, so they decided to execute their plan. Hal and John would pack a lunch and eat on the dinghy, and the others would grab a bite to eat on the island, and stop by the Gendarmerie to see if there were any new developments.

Leaving the two women and Mitch on the pier, Hal and John headed back out of the bay, past the baleine buoy, and around the north coast. The east wind was already coming up, and they pounded through the mounting swell. They hugged the cliffs and coves before heading south along the east coast. By now they were rolling from side to side with the on-side swell, and found some calmer seas in the bay of Pompierre. Unfortunately, there was no sign of anyone in the water or on the beach. They headed back out to sea, then farther south, paralleling the coast past the tiny airport and runway. They veered to the west a short distance later, discovering the high cliffs of the south coast. They were getting pretty beat up by the waves, and headed into several small bays along the south coast. No Tammy anywhere. They pulled up on a beach and had

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

their lunch. Before resuming their search, they stretched out on the warm sand.

“John, I’ve got to talk to you and Mitch about something really important. I know we’ve always shared everything, at least until we all got married, and even then I think we were pretty open with one another. I need to get some things off my chest, and at the same time, get some advice from you two. I thought a lot about this last night, and I really need your help to get me through this,” confessed Hal.

“Wait a minute, Hal,” answered the cautious lawyer. “You didn’t do anything to Tammy, did you?”

“No, John. It’s nothing like that. I swear I haven’t the slightest idea what happened to her. Maybe this evening we can send the women into town and have a little discussion, just you, Mitch and I.” Hal stood up and added, “Let’s go find my wife.”

The afternoon trip along the remaining coast of Terre de Haut was unfruitful, and they tied up to the pier at 4:30 P.M. they were joined by the other three within thirty minutes, each coming in from a different direction, but each with the same bad news.

“Listen, girls,” suggested Hal. “Why don’t you check back with the gendarmes, and explain our thorough search of the island. After that, relax and have some tea or something in the village. I need to talk to Mitch and John. We’ll come fetch you in about an hour and a half. If that’s okay with you.” Laura looked quizzically at John, but shrugged and said sure.

Once on board, Hal headed for the galley, and poured three Chivas on the rocks, his for courage and theirs to dull the shock. They all sat down outside, and without much of an introduction, Hal plunged into the story of his life since college, leaving nothing out – Ed, the pregnancy, the abortion, the sterility, and, of course, the AIDS. Hal was encouraged by the neutral faces across the table from him, and found himself completely naked

MIKE CONNOLE

before his friends. Nothing was spared, and he sighed as he wrapped it up. Doctor and lawyer, these two were used to hearing just about everything imaginable, all the while maintaining the simple attitude of listener. Outwardly, they may have appeared impartial, but inwardly, both were hurting, and hurting badly.

“How could you keep all this from us?” asked Mitch.

“I was ashamed, confused, and so afraid of losing you two,” confessed Hal.

“I don’t know about Mitch, but I loved you before, and I love you still,” replied John, looking Hal straight in the eyes.

“I’m with you,” joined in Mitch. “I only wish we could have helped sooner. That’s a hell of a load to carry. We have broad shoulders, too.”

“Well, maybe not as broad as yours,” chuckled John, “but we’re here and here to stay.”

“If you guys don’t mind,” enjoined Hal, “I really would appreciate your keeping all this to yourselves. And by the way, it’s almost dark, and I can see Laura and Anne Sophie pacing on the pier. Who wants to go get them? I’m going to pour each of us another scotch. I know I can use another one.”

Within ten minutes the women were back on board, probably very curious, but not asking any questions. Anne Sophie brought them up to date. “The gendarmes will start a formal enquete tomorrow morning. They plan to ask around town about the three thieves we saw at Pain de Sucre the other day, and the possible link with Tammy’s disappearance.”

“My God,” exclaimed Hal. “I’d already forgotten about that. Do they really think there’s a connection between the two?”

“The gendarmes say it may just be a coincidence, but they have to consider the possibility,” answered Anne Sophie. “They mentioned that until now there has never been a kidnapping in

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

the Saintes, although several have been reported on sailboats in Dominica within the past year. Monsieur LeClerc went on to explain that Dominica is only a few hours away by boat, and that these modern-day pirates may have slipped up north, looking for wealthy Americans sailing around the islands. He will check with the Dominican authorities tomorrow, and also with the *prefet* of Guadeloupe – something like a governor for an overseas French department – who will coordinate any international inquiries.”

The women had done some shopping in town, and they prepared a delicious lobster feast, while the men sat out on deck sipping their Chivas, and feeling a little better. Once their bellies full, and after this most troubling, emotion-wrought day, the men crashed, leaving the women to clean up.

“I had an idea when I woke up this morning,” greeted John as the others trickled out of their cabins. “Didn’t you say you had several credit cards in your wallet when it was stolen, Hal?”

“Yeah,” yawned Hal. “There were at least two. Why?”

“Since you haven’t yet reported them stolen,” continued John, “maybe we could trace these guys if they try to use your cards.”

“Good idea,” chipped in Mitch. “Let’s just hope they didn’t dump them somewhere. After all, you had a couple hundred bucks to satisfy them.”

“If these are the same guys that kidnapped Tammy, they want more than a lousy \$500, but you’re right. I’ll call the credit card companies and explain what we want. We need to find a fax machine. Hopefully, the *Gendarmerie* has one, and should the cards be used, they could fax us a copy of the location. I’ll leave instructions to limit each transaction to \$200. That way they’ll use the cards more often, and we may be able to follow their tracks.” Hal sounded enthusiastic as he gulped down his coffee, anxious for the day to begin. “And guess what, guys. I

MIKE CONNOLE

even have the codes to my credit cards in my wallet, so with a little ingenuity, they should be able to draw some cash.”

Chapter XI

Tammy woke up from an uneasy nap. Her wrists hurt where they had been tied up that first night. They were obviously at sea. From where she was, she could smell the diesel, and feel the rocking of the craft. She was alone in a darkened cabin, the portholes having been blacked out. She lost track of time, but twice daily, a tray with some food and a pitcher of water was placed on the floor near the door, and the tray from the previous meal was retrieved. No one spoke to her, but once in a while she heard talking. It was a strange English accent, and she surmised that it was a local island dialect remotely related to English. John, Mitch and their wives all thought of her as an airhead. But she could think, and had already come to several conclusions since her abduction several days earlier. The door to her cabin obviously opened toward the center of the boat, and slightly aft. She thus surmised that she was in a forward port cabin. As she could feel the waves slapping against the hull, and since the swell came from the east, she deduced that they were heading south. Although the vibrations of the motor could be felt, she also felt the irregular heeling of the boat, and occasionally heard the flapping of a sail. This meant that they were also using the wind to propel them to some unknown destination to the south.

Sometime after her sixth meal, the door opened wide, and a very black scowling man of about thirty, with long, natted dreadlocks, motioned for her to follow. She squinted as she left her little prison, trying to adjust to the brighter light in the main cabin. Another of her captors was sitting at a table, studying charts and drinking a Hatuey beer. She briefly wondered if they weren't Cuban, but it wasn't Spanish she had heard earlier. He rose and looked at her with sparkling blue eyes, in sharp

MIKE CONNOLE

contrast to his dark brown skin and long dark hair pulled back in a neat ponytail. In a soft, singsongy voice, he asked her to please take a seat. She was disoriented all of a sudden. After having been treated like livestock, this nice-looking, gentle person was asking her politely to sit down.

“I hope you haven’t been too uncomfortable in your cabin. I know the food isn’t too great, but my mate here does the best he can. And if it’s any consolation, we eat the same food.”

“What do you want with me?” snapped Tammy, having recovered from her initial shock. “If it’s money you’re after, you kidnapped the wrong one. You would probably have gotten a bigger ransom from either of the other two women on board. My husband and I are in the real estate business, and things in Southern California are in a deep recession right now. So why don’t you just drop me off at the next island, and nobody will be the worst for it.”

“Jesus Christ, Boss, Let’s throw her back in her hole. Too much talk. Bad for the head,” stated the other captor in a strange heavily-accented English.

The boss chuckled. “Let her talk, Paco. She’s been in isolation for three days, and probably needs to get a lot off her chest.”

At these words, Paco leered at her ample bosom while rubbing his crotch and making obscene movements with his thick lips.

“Calm down, Paco,” ordered the boss. “There will be none of that on my ship.”

“Ah, come on, Boss. Just a little pussy. We never have any women on board. I need some,” begged Paco.

“You heard me. You don’t touch her, or you’ll answer to me. We may be thieves and smugglers, but we’ll not be rapists! And Miss, you let me know if they so much as touch one of those hairs on your pretty head.”

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Once again, Tammy was thrown off balance by this chivalry. “What exactly do you want?” asked Tammy once again, relieved to learn that she would not be taken advantage of.

At this instance, they heard screaming from the deck. “Boss. Land in view. You come up here, yes?” so a third mate was at the helm. She couldn’t see him, but surmised from his accent that he was French. This is great, thought Tammy. I’ve been kidnapped by an international trio of thugs – a horny Hispanic, a charming modern-day pirate and an invisible frog.

The boss clambered up the ladder and disappeared on deck. Paco looked at her lasciviously, but didn’t come any closer.

“Could you spare me some of that beer, Paco?”

Paco seemed surprised to hear his name on the lips of this lady, and also by her request. “Ahh, I don’t know. Boss man don’t say nothing about beer.”

This guy was a real lightweight upstairs, thought Tammy. “Please, Paco. I’m really thirsty, and I really would appreciate it.” The macho in him couldn’t resist this fair damsel in distress.

“Oh, all right. I guess one beer be okay.”

As Tammy sat savoring the cold beer, the boss came back down, gave Tammy and her beer a double take, looked at Paco and back to Tammy, then let it go.

“St. Lucia’s in view,” the boss stated as he approached the chart. After studying another chart, he gave instructions to Paco. “We’ll stay out a few miles from the west coast and avoid Castries. We’ll continue south. We’ll go to that little cove east of Moule a Chique. There, we can fill up on diesel and victuals. Go take the wheel, and tell Pierre to come down and meet our guest.”

Paco executed the orders with amazing alacrity. Within minutes, Pierre was before her, taking her hand and kissing it gently.

MIKE CONNOLE

“Enough, Pierre. I don’t want you or Paco touching this lady.”

“But Monsieur. How can one resist such a beautiful woman?” defended Pierre, all the while his eyes travelling up and down her body. Tammy felt violated, and for the first time realized that she was still clad in a sheer, skimpy negligee. She turned prudishly toward the bulkhead, trying to hide her very visible body.

“You wouldn’t have any clothes I might borrow?” asked Tammy, addressing the boss.

“I’ll see what I can find in my cabin. Maybe in St. Lucia we can get you some things to make your stay more agreeable.” The boss found himself wondering what they would do with their cargo, feeling a strange attraction to her, all the while knowing that they would eventually have to let her go.

“I would really appreciate it,” replied Tammy, feeling better after the beer. She relaxed a little, but still couldn’t imagine what they wanted with her. She was thinking more clearly now, the initial shock having worn off. And it helped to give faces to the up-‘til-then invisible bad guys. What about her medication? Her doctor had warned her that resistance to the treatment could develop should she interrupt the triple therapy. Then her viral load would surely shoot back up, after all the time she patiently fought to bring it down. Shit, she didn’t want to go back along that road, with the aches and fever, and the incredible fatigue. Shit. She tried to shut out the AIDS problem – there was just too much to deal with at the present time. First of all, she wanted to get dressed, then find out what this group of monkeys wanted to do with her.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a clearing of the throat. She turned around to see the boss, who was holding out a light blue cotton shirt and a pair of gym shorts. Although he was slim, his waist size was obviously larger than that of Tammy.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Sorry about the size, Ma’am, but this is all I’ve got that might come close. I’ll get you a small rope to hold up the shorts. The shirt should pretty much cover up the shorts, and at least you won’t be bare-bottomed.”

Tammy blushed at this and gave a throaty chuckle. “I’ll get dressed now, if you don’t mind.”

“You just do that. Then come up on deck. A little sun might do you some good.”

Tammy quickly headed forward to her cabin. She took off her nightie, and was standing there stark naked when the door opened. The boss held out a small section of rope. He stood there gawking, taking in her uncovered body. She had been attracted to him from the start, and enjoyed the feel of his eyes caressing her body. It had been a long time since she had let any man come on to her, much less see her in her present attire. She could see his arousal, and she was hot too. They each took a step forward, and he had his arms around her, kissing her neck, her mouth, her breasts. They were breathing heavily, and Tammy was astonished by the intensity of her reaction. Just being held by a man felt so good, although this time she realized that she wasn’t in charge of the situation, but was the willing captive of this very sexy man. This seemed to excite her all the more. She could feel his hardness through the light shorts he was wearing, and suddenly she wanted him, needed him. With her hands, now in a hurry, she explored his muscular body. Hard, taut muscles everywhere, from his well-developed pecs to his tight little ass.

“Boss, get up here quick,” yelled down one of the pirates. Tammy and her captor snapped out of their spell. Their eyes were glittering as each seemed to plunge into and beyond the eyes of the other.

Tammy broke the stare first. “You better go, Boss.”

MIKE CONNOLE

The boss sighed, regaining his composure and arranging his shorts. "I'm sorry if I took advantage of you," offered the boss.

"Please don't apologize. I surely don't regret it, although I'm not sure what just happened." She gave him a light peck on the lips. "Now I really should get dressed, and you better get up on deck. I don't want your crew getting any ideas."

The boss hurried out of the cabin, obviously flustered. Paco and Pierre seemed busy arguing, but this was not unusual. Those two probably spent half their waking hours bickering over one thing or another.

"Hey, you two. Shut up and tell me what's going on," ordered the boss. The other two abruptly stopped their argument and turned to the captain.

Paco pointed off the starboard bow. "It's the U.S. Coast Guard, Boss. What do we do?"

"We don't do anything," answered the boss. "Both of you know that they patrol these waters looking for drug traffickers. This boat belongs to me, and I have all the necessary papers. Our passports are in order, so just keep cool."

"But what if they come on board?" asked Pierre. "We have the American woman. How do we explain that?"

"Wait! Look, Boss," exclaimed Paco. "They're heading off to Castries. Today we're safe."

All three were startled out of their discussion by the appearance of Tammy on deck. She had on the boss's shirt, tied around her waist with the section of rope. This accentuated her large breasts and slim waist, and her long, tanned legs were visible to mid-thigh. Paco let out a low whistle, and Pierre's mouth dropped open.

"That's enough, you two," barked the boss, all the while trying to calm himself. "You are to act as gentlemen, as difficult as that might be for you. This lady is our guest, even if against her will. You are not to forget that. Understood?"

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Yeah, Boss,” muttered the two goons. “We understand.”

Tammy came back to the helm, not far from boss. “You were right. This sun really does feel good. And after the smell of diesel and humidity in my cabin, the odors up here are heavenly. It smells like vegetation, spices and earth.”

Boss explained, “When we’ve been several days at sea, far from land, the sense of odor becomes dulled, deprived of any odor other than the smell of the sea. Then, when we are downwind of an island, it hits you every time, just as you have described it. It’s almost sensual,” he added, lingering on the last word while hungrily taking in her body. They were alone aft, the other two having gone forward to adjust the sails. Their heading was now more easterly, as they rounded the southern tip of St. Lucia. They would tack farther south, avoiding the peninsula of Moule a Chique, the tip of which separates the Atlantic Ocean to the east from the Caribbean Sea to the west. From there, they would tack back to the northeast, and into a remote little village on Savannes Bay.

“My name’s Tammy. Maybe a little late for formal introductions, but I’m Tammy Thomas.” She was flirting a little, and he was aware of this, all the while trying not to succumb to her charms. “And what’s the skipper’s name?”

“Everybody calls me Boss, so I guess that you should too,” he replied.

“Just Boss?” Tammy inquired.

“Yes. Just Boss,” he answered.

“Can I take the helm for awhile?” asked Tammy.

The boss seemed taken aback. “You know how to sail?”

“Of course I know how to sail. That’s all we’ve been doing for the past two weeks on *Tempête*. Just give me the heading, and don’t go away in case I need you,” replied Tammy, once again flirtatiously.

MIKE CONNOLE

“Okay. Keep us on the present heading of 280. That should bring us into Savannes Bay. We’re now in St. Vincent’s Pass, and the east-to-west current is pretty strong, so don’t let the bow fall off too much,” he acquiesced, not quite believing what was happening. He not only hadn’t allowed women on board up until then, but he had actually relinquished the helm to his supposed captive. Who was the captor, and who was the captive, he mused.

Chapter XII

The boss was perplexed. Who was this person? She was bright, beautiful, seemingly at ease despite her situation, and she actually knew how to sail! He fleetingly fantasized about keeping her on board, what it would be like to... and once again he became hard. He looked up and found Tammy's gaze on his crotch. She smiled, lots of lovely white teeth visible. He did not feel ashamed of his manly erection, as long as the deck hands didn't also notice it. He was feeling good and relaxed, and that was nice. Maybe, at 35, he was getting too old for this life as an outlaw. Maybe it was time to find a woman and settle down. He had everything he needed back in Barbados – hundreds of acres of sugar cane, the family estate, the beach house. His parents would welcome back their prodigal son with open arms. After all, he was their only remaining child, they were getting old, probably close to 75, and he would inherit their vast wealth. Usually after two or three weeks of home cooking, cricket games, parties and the golf clubs, Boss would get bored, pack up and set out to sea. He called home every few weeks, and his parents never asked what he was doing or when he would next return home.

As a child, Boss was always the second-born son of his parents. His older brother, Lionel, two years his senior, was primed from an early age to take care of the family estate and various holdings. Boss didn't mind at all; this left him lots of time to himself. His was a free spirit that couldn't stand to be controlled. The all boys exclusive Codrington Academy was his parents' only requirement concerning him. For the rest, he was amazingly free to pursue his boyhood interests. Then one day, when he was sixteen, Lionel fell ill, diagnosed with having leukemia. His parents were devastated, and made plans to leave

MIKE CONNOLE

immediately for England, where they had obtained an appointment with a world-renowned hematologist.

For the whole family, the following two years were hell. Chemotherapy and radiation therapy couldn't curb the invasion of Lionel's body by the tens of thousands of white blood cells. The climate didn't help. All four of them were cold all the time. It rained and snowed. The sun went into hiding for weeks at a time, and this didn't help their spirits. One day, Lionel just got tired of fighting; he gave up, and it was over. His parents were inconsolable, and Boss hurt bad at this injustice. Lionel was 20 years old, good looking, rich, and now dead. Who decided these things? It just wasn't fair. Boss even briefly wondered if this was the result of something bad he had done during his eighteen years.

The three of them accompanied the body back to Barbados for a quiet burial in the family plot, on the top of a rise, with a lovely view of the Atlantic off to the east and to the south. It was within view of their house, and his grandparents and a baby sister were now joined by Lionel.

Then, all of a sudden, Boss became the center of attention, something he would gladly have relinquished to someone else. Everything was so much easier when Lionel was there. Boss was then as free as the yellow-breasted sugar birds, no responsibilities, and all the money he needed, just by asking. He had fallen in with a group of rastas down in Bridgetown, and seemed to fit right in with their easy-going, mellow lifestyle, accentuated by the ever-present haze of ganga. They didn't do much of anything – just drifted from one beach to another, smoking joints, surfing at Bathsheba, windsurfing off Silver Rock. Everybody knew who Boss was, what his family represented, so everything was cool.

He was spending more and more time on the family sailboat. With his group of rastas, he would take off for days at

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

a time, in the months following Lionel's death. His parents accepted this, allowing him his mourning period. After about six months with his father assuming all the family affairs, instead of being more and more present, he fled, now spending weeks away on the sailboat. His parents knew him well enough not to push him – after all, they had given him free rein for all those years, and intuitively felt that now was not the best time to pressure him into seconding his father. He really was needed, especially when the sugar cane cutting season got under way. Everything had to be organized, from the burning of the fields to the cutting, then to the delivery to the distillery, where the cane is crushed, and eventually transformed into rum. Boss's father owned the company, and oversaw all the details himself. Unfortunately, this part of the business had interested Lionel, who, before his fatal illness, had been a great help to his father.

During those years with his rasta friends, he little by little slipped into the natural role of drug trafficker. No hard drugs, only ganja, and he regularly refused to transport anything else on his boat. Although he really didn't need it, the money was good, and it kept the motors topped off with diesel, and his belly full. There were plenty of women in the various ports to satiate his sexual needs, and once again, he wouldn't be tied down, preferring one-night stands before sailing off to another Caribbean island, and another Caribbean lovely.

Rastas came and went, some victims of drugs or the law, some just drifting away, never to be seen again. After about ten years of this life on the Caribbean seas, Boss met Paco and Pierre at a little bar at Portsmouth, in Dominica. They had heard of him, and knew that he was looking for a crew. Boss had seriously been considering leaving his life of wandering about this time, and try growing some roots in Barbados. He'd seen all the islands in the Caribbean, and was convinced that Barbados was the best place to try to gain some stability and

MIKE CONNOLE

maturity. And, of course, given his parents' situation, why not take advantage of it all.

At first, the newly-formed trio of Boss, Paco and Pierre, took hauls of grass from Dominica up north to Guadeloupe, or farther north to Antigua, St. Barth or St. Martin. Spending a lot of time at sea, they all had more than enough money. They would sometimes leave the boat in a port, and each would fly off for a few weeks to his respective island – Paco to the Dominican Republic, Pierre to Guadeloupe, and Boss to Barbados. They decided on the date of their next trip before separating, but they were always back a few days early, anxious to get back out on the seas. They were a heterogeneous trio, but each respected the others' vital space, this making for a harmonious atmosphere on board. Just the three of them – no passengers. Despite their very different backgrounds and cultures, they accepted one another, and quickly settled into an easy relationship, including the trivial bickering and jesting between the two mates.

Their first run-in with the law was in Nevis, where Paco got picked up for stealing a wallet and camcorder from the beach. Boss quickly paid off the local officials, and restituted the booty. But something unforeseen happened – the little drug-running trio found stealing exciting – much more so than running a couple of hundred kilos of grass up and down the Caribbean. They had never been stopped in all those years, and their business became a drag. But here was a challenge, grab what they could from wealthy tourists, and disappear into thin air. As they knew all the islands and the hot spots, their new distraction was all the easier. They got bolder and bolder ripping off the naïve tourists of their valuables. And they knew all the easy places to unload their hot merchandise, never for a decent price, but what the hell, they were having a good time. They had enough bread to live on, and the thrill spurred them on.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

They just happened to be in the bay of the Saintes when *Tempête* came in. They studied the three couples with their now-professional eyes, and saw the potential there. Three well-built guys with their nice-looking ladies. Why not? They studied them discreetly for the next 24 hours, and followed them from a distance when the little gang of Americans went for a swim at Sugar Loaf. Ripping off the backpack had been too easy – they simply vanished into the dry countryside before the others could even start to follow.

They learned a little about Hal – name, address, business. There were a couple of hundred bucks and a few credit cards. Most interesting for them was the key to the sailboat. That was really tempting. Why not sneak on board in the middle of the night and take what they could find. Afraid of being recognized, they re-anchored their sailboat off Cabrit Ilet, out of sight of their prey.

Boss wasn't in the mood that night, and sent the other two off on their little raid. The truth was he was fed up with his life. In fact, he was thinking about telling the crew that he was hanging it up. His life of debauchery was coming to a close. Then Paco and Pierre showed up with their latest booty, and Boss, furious at first, decided to play it by ear. After all, they had never tried kidnapping. If he was going to leave his criminal life behind, why not do it in style.

“What the hell were you thinking, bringing this woman on board?” erupted Boss, once they had stowed their treasure in the forward cabin.

Paco tried explaining, “Pierre stayed in the dinghy, ready to leave quickly, in case. I had the key, and I open the hatch, not making no noise. I go down, and this lady is standing there, with her back to me. I grab her mouth and haul her outside, and drop her in the dinghy. It very dark outside, so she not really see us.”

MIKE CONNOLE

Pierre added, “That’s when we put a bag over her head, and held a knife to her, so she don’t scream. What else to do? Maybe we get big ransom, no?”

“Are you both out of your mind? This is serious stuff – kidnapping, ransom. I don’t know. Let me sleep on it, and, in any case, we’re out of here at first light tomorrow, with or without the woman. I hope you untied her wrists, and that she won’t cause any trouble tonight. Turn in, and I’ll see you both in the morning,” said Boss, dismissing them.

Boss battled back and forth all night with this latest problem. Just when he wanted to call it quits. They could dump her off on Cabrit Ilet, or on another island tomorrow, then vanish, or they could continue south with her. Then what? And after that?

Having slept little, Boss was grumpy with his crew, something they had never seen in him. They figured he was pissed off at them because of the previous night. Surprisingly, he announced that they would set sail immediately, direction St. Lucia. They would stay a good distance off the coast of Dominica and on the downwind side of Martinique. Now, a few days later, they were approaching the southeast coast of St. Lucia, with Tammy at the helm.

Chapter XIII

By this time, things were in full swing in the Saintes. All the authorities had been notified, including the U.S. Consulate in Barbados, which oversees any problems that might arise with American citizens in the Windward Islands. The Dominican police had been alerted, and a fax of a recent picture of Tammy was sent to Antigua and Monserrat to the north and to Dominica, Martinique, and St. Lucia to the south. Hal wasn't sleeping well and it showed. He couldn't speak French, and was frustrated when dealing with the French gendarmes. He relied heavily on Mitch and Anne Sophie for translating, and was comforted by the moral support he was getting from Mitch and John. Hal knew how important it was for Tammy to take her AIDS medication, and questioned Mitch as to the consequences of interrupting this treatment. Mitch only confirmed what he had already learned from Tammy – she really needed to take all those pills.

Hal was tormented by his feelings. Of course, even before the kidnapping, he felt a certain affection for Tammy, but mostly he felt pity for her, and only hoped that she never sensed this. Now he felt robbed, something precious to him, perhaps more precious than he realized, had been taken unjustly from him, and he wanted it back. He had wondered how he would react if one day Tammy announced that she was leaving him for someone else. He was pretty sure that he could handle that with no problem. He would probably feel relieved, and happy to know that Tammy was happy, and wanted to share whatever remained of her life with someone else. But not this. A kidnapping. That changed everything.

They had already called the local office of the sailboat rental company and explained the problem. They could keep the

MIKE CONNOLE

boat for a few more days, but after that, the following clients would be awaiting their boat in Martinique. From there, Mitch and John would have to get back to their medical and law practices in California. Anne Sophie generously offered to stay on in Martinique with Hal, serving as friend and interpreter until the kidnapping was resolved. The authorities were somewhat perplexed, as there had never been a kidnapping in the Saintes. Fortunately, two specialists from Paris were being flown in. What exactly did these kidnappers want? There had been no ransom note, no one had attempted to contact Hal. She hadn't taken any of her clothes, not even her toothbrush, wallet or passport, so she probably didn't leave the sailboat of her own volition. The local cops were now inclined to believe that Hal was in no way connected to Tammy's disappearance. He seemed genuinely upset by everything that was happening, and was just managing to stay above water. He was lucky to have such friends, literally his life buoy.

Hal waited as long as possible before calling Tammy's parents in Southern California to break the news. They were thunderstruck. They cried, screamed, blamed Hal. How could he not protect his wife? He stoically accepted all the reprimands, and politely informed them that he would keep them posted on any further developments. He then called his own parents, bringing them up to date. They were, of course, devastated by the news, and immediately accepted Hal's suggestion to go and try to console Tammy's parents.

The remaining crew of *Tempête* decided to head south. They would stop and look around Dominica before leaving the boat off in Martinique. They met briefly with the two Parisian experts, who asked a lot of questions, but couldn't offer much hope as to the outcome. They, also, would be in touch through the Gendarmerie. It seemed strange leaving the Saintes. They felt the incompleteness on board, but everybody got busy

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

hoisting sails, weighing anchor, stowing gear and setting the sails for their southeast jaunt across the Dominican channel. There were high, snow-white clouds scattered about the sky, and Dominica was clearly visible once they headed down the windward side of Terre de Haut. Were they following the same itinerary as Tammy? They were pretty much convinced that Tammy was not being hidden on Terre de Haut, so she had obviously been taken away by sea. A quick check of the miniature airport confirmed that no one resembling Tammy had left from there.

The trade winds were blowing a steady twenty knots, and within three hours they were anchoring in the peaceful bay off Portsmouth. The high mountain range protected them from the wind, and the bay formed a perfect semi-circle, lined with hotels, restaurants and shops along the black-sand beach. They were accosted by five or six dinghies within minutes of dropping anchor. The young Dominicans offered to wash dishes, clothes, take them up the Indian River (supposedly one of the widest and most picturesque of the 365 rivers on Dominica), show them a good restaurant, whatever they wanted. Mitch went quickly below deck, and came back up with an enlarged picture of Tammy. Their hopes were short-lived – none of the boys had seen her. Leaving the two women on board, the men headed to the pier, and spent two hours asking around and showing Tammy's picture. The locals were friendly and wanted to be helpful, but nobody had seen her, surely not within the last few days. There was a small police station, but the message was the same. They had, however, received a copy of the fax from headquarters in Roseau, and had been looking out for this pretty American tourist.

Undaunted, they headed farther south, and moored off the main pier in Roseau, Dominica's capital. They pretty much went through the same routine as before, and ended up with the

MIKE CONNOLE

same results. At police headquarters, they were received by an efficient crew that was already up to date on the kidnapping, and that had already distributed copies of the fax to the various substations in the villages of the island. Unfortunately, if Tammy came to Dominica, she remained invisible.

The next day, after about six more hours of cove hopping, they docked at the rental pier in Martinique. The manager and dockhand were there to greet them, and in broken English, expressed their shock and sorrow. Anne Sophie answered them in French, and they seemed relieve to be able to communicate in their mother tongue. She brought them rapidly up to date on the situation, asked them the name of a hotel on the waterfront, and said they would finish packing their gear and be off the boat within an hour.

They all felt guilty abandoning *Tempête*. They had boarded her the six of them, and it only seemed right to leave her the same six. Hal had trouble packing Tammy's things. This made it seem more final, as if they wouldn't be seeing her again. But then again, if and when they found her, she would at least recover her personal belongings. Hal double-checked and made sure that all Tammy's medication was packed away safely in her vanity case.

Anne Sophie called for a taxi, which took them down the road to a nice, clean hotel. The rooms were small, but there was a view of the port, and they were air-conditioned. Hal put his and Tammy's bags in the room, and went out on the veranda where there was a bar. Mitch and John came down an hour later, leaving their wives luxuriating in their hot baths. Hal was feeling better after two Chivas. He ordered a third one to accompany his two friends, and they drank quietly, little small talk that afternoon. Another hour went by when Hal jumped up.

"Look, you guys. It's *Tempête* heading out to sea." They stood reverently watching the sailboat getting smaller and

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

smaller. “Good winds and calm seas,” murmured Hal, a lone tear trailing down his cheek. Mitch and John put their arms around him, hoping to infuse some courage and strength into Hal. He’d surely need it in the days and possibly weeks to come. They felt bad about leaving Hal, but Hal had insisted. What was there to do but wait? And they both had jobs to get back to. The real estate business was really slow, and Hal called his office, informing his employees of the predicament. They promised to keep the office functioning normally, even if it meant doing it without the two principals.

Since the day of the kidnapping, Laura seemed to pull back from the others, getting involved only minimally in the search. Only when specifically asked something would she respond, and even then only laconically. The other four, of course, noticed this and were baffled. Even John couldn’t read her this time. What was going on in that cold, calculating head of hers? She clammed up and wouldn’t even discuss it with him, her husband.

Chapter XIV

Whenever possible, Laura shut herself in her cabin, and curled up in a ball on the bed, trying to chase away all the rapidly-returning memories that she thought had been blocked out for good, so many years ago. But it all came back now.

She was ten years old at the time of her mother's disappearance. Life at home had seemed so normal, her parents apparently getting along fine. Her father had a steady if modest income from his job as an insurance agent, and her mother stayed home to raise her and her little brother. Then, all of a sudden, there were all those policemen in the house. They wouldn't go away, and kept asking her questions about her parents – did they fight often, did they drink, etc. etc. She was only ten years old, and all she wanted was for her mother to come home and take care of them.

Laura didn't know if she believed in God. They never went to church, but now she prayed and prayed that everything would work out. Where was her mommy? Why wouldn't she come back? Was it because Laura had been angry and yelled at her mother that day? Was it her fault?

Laura's little world came to a halt ten days after the search had begun. Her mother had been found shot to death. Why? By whom? It didn't take long to trace the cabin where her decaying body had been found. Laura's father had rented it two weeks earlier. When confronted with this new evidence, he admitted to killing her, and explained that she'd been having an affair with one of his co-workers, and something in him snapped. He lured her to the cabin in the San Bernadino Mountains for a few hours alone, just the two of them, and once there, he killed her. He was convicted and sent to prison. Laura and her brother went to

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

live with an aunt and uncle in Bakersfield, and never again saw their father. He committed suicide in prison, one year after having killed his wife.

Laura was astonished. All those details came back so clearly. She could actually feel that same gut-wrenching pain she had felt when her father told her that her mother was missing. Then the shock to learn that her very own daddy had killed her mother, then the humiliation, the hate she had felt for her father in prison, and finally the relief, yes, the relief, and maybe a little grief, when he ended his own life.

She never talked to anybody about those days, not even to her younger brother, who, at the time, had been too young to remember. She informed her aunt and uncle that should anyone inquire, her parents were dead – period. No details necessary. Although surprised by the maturity of the then eleven year old orphan, they agreed to forget, or at least not to mention, the awful details of that past year. Even after all those years of marriage, John knew no more than the official version, adopted some twenty years before their wedding. She had simply packed it all in some little corner in the farthest reaches of her brain, where she tried to bury it so deep it could never resurface. But Tammy's disappearance showed how shallow the grave really was that she had dug in that far away corner.

Now that Laura had all this macabre past parading before her, she started to better comprehend her present situation. Why, at over forty, was she childless? Why, after more than fifteen years of marriage, was she so cold? What did she really feel for John? She had loved her parents so very much, and they had abandoned her. What about all that love – simple, no-strings-attached love, only to be betrayed. A child psychologist reassured her aunt and uncle that she was adapting well to this psychological trauma, and that the scarring would be minimal. But then, what did the psychologist know? She would never

MIKE CONNOLE

open up to this total stranger, and try to express all those powerful emotions that inundated her. It was so much easier to just block it all out and continue with life. She had managed up until now, or had she? Was she afraid of bringing another being into the world, maybe to be hurt at some time during his or her life, as she had been? She couldn't bear the thought of her child suffering the way she had suffered when she was ten years old.

Even with John, she was afraid to invest her emotions. What if he left her? After all, he handled divorce cases every day, and there were plenty of attractive divorcees looking for a good catch. She knew that people viewed her as a cold bitch – well, she was. She had built her walls high enough around her that it was impossible to get to her. This way she was safe. But just maybe a little warmth, sharing, really loving somebody maybe that was what life was all about. Dare she even think such things? Was it too late? Would John refuse her? Could they possibly start a family now? Would John refuse that? At least she would have tried. She felt better. Now she knew. She didn't want to spend the rest of her life in a safe, sterile, and cold tomb.

The airport at Lamentin was about 10 km. away, and they all drove together to see off Mitch, John and Laura. They promised to keep in touch daily, and the girls moved off to one side, respecting the intimacy of their husbands. After lots of hugging and some tears, the women came back. Laura actually had tears in her eyes, and she warmly hugged Hal and promised she would pray that everything would turn out all right. Everyone noticed this radical change in Laura, and wondered what it meant. Mitch and Anne Sophie hugged and kissed, speaking rapidly in French. The three voyagers gave one last wave before passing through Immigrations, and then Hal and Anne Sophie were alone in the airport hall.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Let’s go check with the gendarmes in Fort de France,” suggested Anne Sophie. “We should leave them our hotel address and phone number, in case they need to contact us.”

Chapter XV

Less than 100 miles away, Boss and crew were dropping anchor in Savannes Bay, in St. Lucia. Boss casually informed Paco and Pierre that Tammy would be accompanying them on land.

“But Boss. You crazy!” exclaimed Paco. “What if she try to run?”

“That’s my problem, not yours,” answered Boss. “You have 72 hours on land. We meet back here in three days.”

“You’re the Boss,” mumbled Pierre.

This bitch had definitely upset their little trio. The three of them always hung out together in the bars and brothels in town, and now they had simply been told to get lost for three days. Pierre didn’t like it, but shut up and nodded. They pulled the dinghy up on the beach, and Paco and Pierre grudgingly took off together.

“Let’s see about some clothes and things for you,” offered Boss. “However, I find you smashing dressed like you are now.”

Tammy laughed an easy, relaxed laugh. “Do you think I could buy a toothbrush, a comb and a few beauty items?”

“Listen, Tammy,” answered Boss, calling her by her name for the first time. “I hate shopping. Here’s some money. Buy what you need, if you can find it. I’ll just wander along the street and see what’s new in St. Lucia.”

He watched her ducking in and out of little shops, each time with another bag. After an hour or so, she exited from a little dress shop in a lovely orange and yellow sun dress. It enhanced her blond hair and golden tan, and Boss told her how lovely she looked.

“Thank you,” she responded, kissing him fully on the lips.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

What was happening to Boss? This woman made him feel different. It was physical, no doubt about that. But there was something more. Was he falling in love with his captive?

“Let’s go have some lunch. I know a good little restaurant on the waterfront,” he suggested, putting his arm around her waist and leading her off. She moved closer to him, and they felt good together.

The restaurant was little more than a wooden shack with a huge veranda over the water. The kitchen was outside, with a charcoal fire. There were wash basins filled with water, apparently for washing the dishes. They were greeted by a huge black woman with an equally large smile, revealing as many gaps as teeth. She hugged Boss, and seemed genuinely happy to see him.

“Mama Jane, I’d like you to meet Tammy,” Boss said, introducing the two women. Mama Jane stared at Tammy, obviously sizing her up.

“Not bad, Boss. You know honey, I’ve known Boss here for over ten years, and this is the first time he brought me home a girl. And what a looker you are!” she enfolded Tammy in her huge bosom and gave Tammy a big hug. “Now you two sit down, and let me get your lunch cooking.”

Without being asked, a young girl brought them a bottle of rum, a sliced lime, and some brown sugar. Boss picked up the bottle of rum, reading the label. He laughed, and asked Tammy if she had already tasted Barbadian rum. She stated that the only rum she had ever tasted was Bacardi rum, with coke, or in the planter’s punch.

Boss groaned. “I’ll teach you how to drink rum like a true Caribbean. First, a spoon of sugar in the glass, then a healthy serving of rum, and then, squeeze in the lime. Stir and drink. It’ll open anyone’s appetite.”

MIKE CONNOLE

Tammy, a bit wary, took a sip and was overwhelmed. She coughed and her face reddened. She courageously took a second sip and allowed it to fill her mouth with the amazing aroma of lime, alcohol, and sugar. Boss warned her to go easy – that this firewater was 110 proof! Boss served them each another round. They were both relaxed, and so at ease in each other's company. Lunch arrived about 45 minutes later – a huge platter of grilled lobster, salad, and red beans and rice, all washed down with icy Carib beer. For dessert, Mama Jane served them flaming bananas with so much taste. Tammy never thought a simple banana could be so flavorful.

“Boss, we need to talk,” her voice soft but serious as she looked at him.

“I've been thinking pretty much the same thing, Tammy. I think I'm falling in love with you, and that's completely crazy. We don't know anything about one another, and I did kidnap you a few days ago. When we touch, when I look into your eyes, it's so electric! I feel like I receive ten thousand volts every time. I hope my heart can take it!”

“I think you know that the same is true for me, and I agree, it is crazy,” admitted Tammy. “But before this goes any further, I want to be one hundred per cent honest with you, Boss. I haven't slept with my husband for years, and the attachment I have to him is affection, and I admit, admiration. Boss, I have AIDS, and Hal has been at my side through some pretty bad moments, encouraging me not to give up. Then the new AIDS drugs came out, and I am physically transformed. I hear the AIDS epidemic down here in the Caribbean is pretty bad, so you probably know some AIDS victims.” Tammy took Boss back through her high school years, the abortion, Hal's college football career, and their real estate business.

“Oh my God. I'm so sorry, Tammy. I would never have dreamed.”

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“It’s okay if you dump me here, Boss,” said Tammy curtly. “I’m sure I can manage somehow.”

“But you don’t understand, Tammy. You need those pills, and we took you away like kids playing a game. But this isn’t a game anymore. This is your life – this is our life. I told you I loved you, Tammy, and I’m going to help you, not dump you. Just let me think a minute... I know what I can do. I have a doctor friend in Castries, and I’m sure he’ll pull through for me. I’ll give him a call and see what he says.”

“But those pills, as you call them, cost around \$1,000 U.S. per month. I can’t ask you to do that, but I am touched by your offer.”

“We’ll talk about that later. Now that you’ve been so honest, I think maybe I should be too. But first, and not too many people know this, my name is Bryan, and I want you to call me that when we’re alone.” Bryan went on to acquaint Tammy with his past – the carefree life of a rich kid in Barbados, Lionel’s leukemia, and his wanderings since then.

“Up until now, Tammy, I had no meaning, no goal in my life. I’ve been searching, and you know what? While Paco and Pierre were off kidnapping you, I pretty much made up my mind to give up being a pirate, and try to settle down in Barbados. My parents are getting old, and my dad can’t continue to manage the estate alone. Remember the bottle of rum before lunch, and how I laughed? Well, that’s part of the estate. We own many acres of sugar cane, and the distillery also. Then you came along, call it fate, good or bad luck, whatever, but we’ve been thrown together, and I plan on doing something about it.” Bryan leaned across the table and gave her a big, juicy kiss. Tammy got the message – he was not afraid of her AIDS and his attitude hadn’t changed. Two big, salty tears dripped down the sides of her nose, and Bryan licked them up.

MIKE CONNOLE

“Oh Bryan. I do love you. Thank you for understanding me. I do believe in fate, and I have a good feeling that we’ll work this out. But I do have a request, captive to captor. Could I try to get a hold of Hal, and let him know I’m all right?”

“Oh, Tammy. Please forgive me. I’ve been so selfish. The rest of the world stopped existing this afternoon. It was just you and me, and so very nice. Of course, you shall call your husband, but where will he be?”

“He’s probably somewhere in the islands, but I wouldn’t know how to reach him... wait, I know. I’ll call his parents. They undoubtedly know what’s happened, and probably know to contact him.”

“Mama Jane will do just about anything for me. Come on, let’s call your in-laws from here, and see what they have to say.”

Tammy got through without too much trouble, and her mother-in-law came on the line. Tammy explained that she was fine, that there had been a mix-up, and that she had been kidnapped instead of some other woman who vaguely looked like her. She was then rescued by a Barbadian gentleman. Did she know where Hal was? In Martinique? Did she have his phone number? “I’ll call right away. Please let my parents know I’m fine. Thanks, mom. Bye.”

Bryan had been sitting next to her, and was amazed by her little story. All of course to protect him, and reassure her family in the States. He squeezed her hand, then decided to take a walk and let her talk to Hal in private.

“Are you okay, Tammy?” inquired Bryan, upon returning fifteen minutes later. Tammy seemed lost in her thoughts.

“I just talked to Hal, Bryan. I told him the same story as my mother-in-law. Only I told him a little about you, and about the wonderful day we spent together today, after your rescuing me from those naughty pirates, the same ones who stole his wallet.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

I assured him that I was in very good hands. I think he was relieved, doubly so. To know I'm safe, and maybe also that I really found someone whom I'm crazy about."

"What's going to happen now, Tammy?"

"Bryan, is Martinique far away? I was thinking we could sail up there. Hal was worried about my medication, and he has it with him. His friends all flew back to the States, except for Anne Sophie. She's French, and has been really helpful dealing with the French cops. I asked Hal to call off the search, and I would not be pressing charges, and have not been harmed. I told him I would discuss things with you, and call him back this evening."

"Martinique is the next island to the north. An easy sail, especially with an experienced crew like you! I'll go try to round up Pierre and Paco, and have them clear out their gear. They've been well paid, and I'll just tell them I've had enough of being on the seas, and want to settle down. They're going to blame you, so you better stay here. I'll be back as soon as possible. Mama Jane will take good care of you. Give me another one of those delicious kisses and I'm off."

There was a hammock at the end of the terrace, and it just too tempting. Tammy reclined in this comfortable Carib bed, and within minutes felt her eyelids ever so heavy. The rum, beer, all those confessions and declarations of love. She fell into a wonderful, peaceful sleep, and was gently awoken by the swaying of the hammock. She opened her eyes, and fell into Bryan's loving eyes. So it hadn't been a dream – this was real.

"Sorry to wake you, love, but I wanted to share this sunset with you."

"Oh, Bryan. It's gorgeous. But what time is it? My God, I slept for over two hours!" she exclaimed, after looking at her watch. They wrapped their arms around each other, and silently watched the sun slide under the horizon.

MIKE CONNOLE

“Did you find your two pirate friends? Were they upset?” asked Tammy, somewhat worried about their reaction.

“It went fine. They understood, and said they’d been thinking about moving on, also. I don’t think that’s true, especially for Paco, but we said our good-byes with apparently no hard feelings. So you see, everything is working out. By the way, Mama Jane warned me that your picture has been posted outside the local police station. It would seem that Interpol has really been moving fast, and you have been seen by a lot of people here in the village. Call Hal, and tell him we’ll be sailing to Martinique the day after tomorrow. Then let’s go back on board for a light dinner, then off to bed. After all, I didn’t get to take a long nap like you, and I could sure use a nice back rub,” whispered Bryan with a twinkle in his eye.

Chapter XVI

Back in Martinique, Hal and Anne Sophie were having a planter's punch. As soon as he heard from Tammy, he asked Anne Sophie to call the gendarmes, and stop the search. Hal knew his wife too well, and he knew that something wasn't right in her story. She was lying about something, but why? But he also knew from her voice that she was fine. Anne Sophie was so excited when Hal told her that it had been a case of mistaken identity, and that Tammy was safe in St. Lucia. But something in Hal's expression told her that everything was not fine. He did seem relieved, but what was really going on? Hal quickly telephoned Mitch and John, and promised more details later.

"What's wrong, Hal? I know you're relieved, and that these past few days have been hard on you. Is Tammy really all right?"

"If you've got a few hours, Anne Sophie, I've got a long story to tell. Usually, I'd confide in Mitch and John, but they're not here, and you are practically family. I need to talk. First of all, Tammy is apparently well, but it seems she's fallen in love with her gentleman rescuer, as she calls him."

"Oh no, Hal. I'm so sorry. After all these problems, and now another one. What will happen now?"

"Let's go back a few years, Anne Sophie. Mitch and John heard this story for the first time a few days ago, and I don't suppose that Mitch has told you anything, so I'll try to tell you a little about the high school sweethearts. Hal and Tammy fall in love, marry, and little by little, fall out of love. Hal pretty much related the same story that Tammy had told to Bryan just a few hours earlier, and on an island a short distance to the south. "Sorry to burden you with all these sordid details, Anne Sophie,

MIKE CONNOLE

but I needed to get it off my chest, and I think I owed you the truth.”

“Oh no, Hal. I want so much to help you. It just seems so ungrateful of Tammy to leave you like that.”

“First of all, she hasn’t left me yet, and secondly, I honestly hope she can find happiness. Nobody knows how long she can continue to ward off this awful virus, although her latest treatment seems to be working. Our couple has been physically and spiritually split for several years now. I guess my macho side is hurting a little, but I truly want the best for Tammy. She sounds in love, and I hope it will last. Wow, what a story, eh, Anne Sophie? Hollywood could do wonders with this one. Everyone’s been so good to me, especially you, this past week. I’ve been selfish enough. I know that you and Mitch are rarely apart, and this really means a lot to me. Now let’s change the subject. Enough about Tammy and me. Why don’t you tell me a little about you? All I know is that you grew up near Paris, and met Mitch in Chicago.”

“For me, there’s not much to say, stated Anne Sophie. “Yes, I grew up about 100 kms. West of Paris, in an agricultural region. Both of my parents grew up in this same village, where my grandparents were farmers. As I was growing up, Paris slowly approached our village, and Parisians started buying up the land, and building subdivisions for the commuters. I was determined to leave that village, and I studied English at the Sorbonne, in Paris. After my master’s degree, I went to Chicago to work on my PhD. Naturally, I contacted the Alliance Francaise to keep in contact with my country and culture. It was there, during one of the monthly parties, that I met Mitch. We were both bilingual/bicultural, and something very nice happened between us. Already that first meeting revealed a mutual attraction. Mitch was very busy with his residency, but we managed to see each other at least once a week. You pretty

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

much know the rest – the wedding in France after Mitch’s residency, then our settling down in Southern California.

I bet I can tell you some things about Mitch you never knew. Mitch adapted well to the French way of life in Paris, during his first year in medical school. He chose the hard way, and stayed more with the French med students, rather than lamenting with the other American students over how rigid the French system was, how much better everything was back in the States. Mitch talked about that first year in France with me, and he had a good attitude to succeed. He decided that the French were at least giving him a chance of fulfilling his dream to become a doctor. I’m sure that you and John knew that there was never any doubt about what profession he would choose.

But I wonder how much he told you about his studies at UCSD. Up until then, Mitch was always near the top of his class. Then, all of a sudden, he was thrown in with some of the top high school graduates in the country. These kids came with their radical ideas, different moral standards, and their brilliant minds. All of this shook up Mitch, and he stayed that way for four years. He hated UCSD. He was maintaining a 2.8-3.0 GPA, and lost all confidence in himself. He wanted to be a doctor so bad, but knew that there was no way he could get accepted anywhere. He took his Medical School Entrance Exam knowing full well that he wasn’t in the race.

That was when a friend of his mentioned medical school in France. He had taken two years of high school French, and actually liked the language. And your vacation in Europe after high school left him with good feelings toward France. So during his fourth year at UCSD, he took several French classes, in hopes of giving it a try in France. He needed to get away from his safe, ordered, predictable life, and, no offense, try it on his own without you two.

MIKE CONNOLE

I must say, I was very proud of him. His four years at UCSD left him wondering if he had really learned anything useful. On the contrary, he had so many unanswered questions, and nobody to ask. To him, this was a personal crisis, and he had to come through it alone.

Fortunately, he studied hard, and his first test results were very good. This encouraged him, he regained confidence, but was becoming someone else. Not the old confident Mitch from high school, nor the self-doubting UCSD Mitch. The new, mature Mitch developed, taking advantage of all his past experiences, and turning into a determined French/American person.

Hal, I wonder if Mitch told you about his changed relationship with God. Did you know that he went to mass every Sunday? For him, this was a consolation, the rock that steadied him when everything was whirling around him, changing. Inside his old church, life stopped, he felt good, at peace with himself enveloped within those old stones, the smell of incense always present, and some choir singing with the aid of a pipe organ. He told me that that private hour with God made him a better person, and he then confidently attacked the following week, more serene and focused.

I think that as Mitch developed, it was his serious, philosophical French side that overshadowed his carefree, happy-go-lucky California side. There were times. Maybe three years after having lived in France, he had moments of an identity crisis. He told me that he could tell that you and John found him changed, pensive, almost melancholic at times, but then you would snap him out of it, and he would become more "Southern California".

As you know, Hal, I've been in the States almost twenty years, and I also went through the same sort of identity crisis. I love Mitch very much, and our life is in the States now. My

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

parents and grandparents are all dead – nothing much to draw me back to France. But once in a while, Mitch and I feel the need to return to our other life, so different, and yet so essential to our equilibrium. Maybe the contrast of life styles puts things in perspective, and I think we both return to the States stronger, in harmony with our beings.

As you know, Mitch's medical practice is very good. But do you know how much he invests in each patient? You should see him after an especially hard day when he's seen several very sick people. Each patient becomes his personal responsibility – he feels they came to him for a very specific reason. He has to make them better. That's all. He loves his auriculotherapy, and the results are almost always astonishing. That's probably why he has so many patients. He's lucky to do something all day long that he loves doing. He sees the results, the patient feels the results, and he doesn't intoxicate them with endless prescriptions of useless, or worse, dangerous, drugs.

When he first started Pharmacology class, he was scared. He knew he couldn't become a pill pusher. That's when he got interested in Holistic Medicine, acupuncture, auriculotherapy and homeopathy. Any doctor, or even a computer now, can make a diagnosis based on symptoms, but they don't get down to the why. I don't understand it all, but Mitch explains it that way. Most doctors are too busy to listen to what the patient is really saying, and sometimes more importantly, what the patient isn't saying. Why are the symptoms there? Do doctors take the time to talk about essential things like exercise, diet, sleep, relaxing – the really important things if one is to feel good."

"You don't have to convince me, Anne Sophie," interrupted Hal. "Mitch has already demonstrated several times his medical philosophy. My smoking problem, then high- blood pressure. A few adjustments in my ear, and some good advice,

MIKE CONNOLE

and I'm under control with no medication. Maybe Tammy and I should have come to see Mitch about her problem."

"You know, Hal, a few years back, Mitch suspected that something was wrong with Tammy, but I really don't think he suspected AIDS. I think that Mitch could have helped her psychologically and made her feel better physically, but as to curing AIDS, I don't think so. Mitch has mentioned several AIDS patients – they seem to have a better quality of life, but they continue to take their medication."

Just then, the phone rang, and Hal jumped up to answer it. Anne Sophie couldn't help but hearing the one-sided conversation – it was obviously Tammy. There really was no bitterness in Hal's voice, but some concern about her pills. Then something about the day after tomorrow at a boat dock in Martinique. Hal hung up and came back out on the terrace.

"That was Tammy. She'll be sailing up here the day after tomorrow with Bryan – that's his name. She really does sound great, and that's a relief. Apparently, Bryan is from Barbados, from a wealthy local family, and he knows all about her AIDS problem, which doesn't seem to discourage him. He was going to see a doctor friend of his in Castries, and get her re-started on her therapy. She has a good month's supply here, and we'll worry about "after that" later. I'd better call Mitch and John. Have you talked to Mitch today, Anne Sophie? We'll call together."

Hal placed the call and Mitch's secretary put him through immediately. "Hi, Mitch. Sorry to bother you again, but I want to keep you informed. Your wife has been a great help, and she gave me some interesting insights concerning your years in college and medical school. I only wish I could have been more help, but then again, you did do it on your own. She was a great listener, too. Yeah, I told her the whole story – she probably knows even more than you, my friend. In a nutshell, here's

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

what's happening. Tammy has fallen madly in love with her Barbadian rescuer. The guy was apparently sailing by and grabbed her away from the three thugs we saw earlier in the week... yeah, the ones who stole my wallet and things. How do I feel? I'm not really sure, but you're not blind, Mitch. You knew that things weren't all that good between Tammy and me. Hey, man. If she's really happy with this guy, then why not? Yeah, Mitch. I'll be okay. Listen, you take care, and I'll let you talk to your wife, who's right here next to me. Oh, and Mitch, don't mention any of this to Tammy's parents. We'll leave that to her. Give John a call. He and Laura deserve to know what's going on. What's that, Mitch? Something strange happened to Laura? She was all snuggly and affectionate with John on the plane? Well, let's hope that things work out for them. But now that I think about it, I did notice a change in Laura at the airport here. I wonder what brought that on? Take care, guy. Here's Anne Sophie."

Hal discreetly left the room and let the "Frenchies" catch up. Things were really happening. Mitch had called John the day before, and John was still in shock. All he would say was that Laura apparently went through some kind of catharsis on the sailboat, and that her attitude since then had completely changed. She was now warm and attentive to others, and was even civil with the secretaries and law clerks at the office. John seemed a bit dubious, and at the same time was observing this new Laura, all the while encouraging this apparent metamorphosis. Can someone really change just like that? What exactly provoked the change? Which was the real Laura? Wow! Things were as interesting in Southern California as they were in the Caribbean, thought Hal.

Anne Sophie came back smiling. They discussed the latest turn of events concerning John and Laura, and wondered as to the origin of her mutation. By now it was 8 P.M. and they went

MIKE CONNOLE

down to dinner. The cook was good, and they often took their meals at the hotel. Tonight they were having a savory local dish called Colombo, a kind of curry, Cayenne pepper and other wonderful spices blended into a sauce and cooked with local goat meat. This is served with rice and more hot pepper on the side. The cook explained that by soaking the goat meat in rum for six hours, the strong gamey flavor was tamed. Just as dessert was being served, a waiter came to the table.

“Monsieur Thomas, there is a Monsieur Christiansen on the telephone for you. This way, please.” Hal flashed Anne Sophie an inquisitive look, and followed the waiter. Five minutes later he was back, chuckling and shaking his head.

“Those two. What would I do without them? Guess who’s coming to Martinique tomorrow night, Anne Sophie? That’s right. Your husband and his friend John.”

“What are you saying, Hal? Mitch is coming back tomorrow? But I can’t believe it! Why?”

“Apparently, Mitch called John, and they talked it over, and decided I needed them. I tried to discourage them, but their minds were already set. Laura took care of the arrangements. They get in here late tomorrow night, so they’ll be here when Tammy gets in. tomorrow’s Friday, they argued, and then it’s the weekend anyway. Tentatively, you, Mitch, John and I are scheduled to fly back on Sunday afternoon to the States. Laura even reserved Tammy’s seat, just in case.”

Chapter XVII

On board the sailboat, Bryan and Tammy were also finishing up their dinner. They laughed, talked, but could feel the sexual tension tainting the atmosphere. Neither decided to bring up the subject of sex, but they were both apprehensive and in a hurry to be together. What could be more romantic? An almost-full moon coming up over the hills to the east, a warm, humid evening with a light breeze, the distant chirping of tree frogs, and the melodious sounds of a steel band (a typical Carib music produced by percussing overturned metal drums), all with a gentle rocking of the boat.

Bryan leaned over and gave her a light kiss on her lips. Encouraged by the response, he delved farther, and again felt an urgency in Tammy. Without releasing his hold on her, they got up and became enfolded in a passionate embrace. Their curious hands were exploring everywhere. He felt her large breasts and erect nipples, her slender waist, her full butt. She appreciated his muscular body, from the well-developed pectoral muscles, to the muscular shoulders and back, and down to his perfect ass and thighs. She lingered on his hard cock, massaging it, admiring the size and the hardness. It had been so long. Kneeling, she pulled his shorts down, and took him in her mouth. He filled her mouth, and judging from the moans, he was starting to soar. He pulled her up and to his mouth. He gently led her down the stairs to the aft cabin. She hadn't seen it yet, and was surprised by the size and comfort.

"Wow," she exclaimed, taking in the room with its large bed. "This is really nice."

"So is this," replied Bryan, undressing her and taking in her full, shapely body. "This time, no one is going to disturb us."

MIKE CONNOLE

“I think I have to set some ground rules, Bryan. You know my problem, and it’s going to be safe sex or no sex. This may sound horrible, but you can kiss my mouth, my whole body – please do, but no contact with any of my vaginal juices. All sex will be with a condom. I love you, crazy as it might be, and I want to keep you healthy.”

“I love you too, Tammy. I get tested every three or four months, and, I have to admit, I’m one of the lucky ones. Since the epidemic, I’ve only practiced safe sex, so I accept your rules unequivocally. Now come here.”

He grabbed her, and they fell together onto the soft bed. They rapidly became aroused, rolling around, him on top, her on top. Things slowed down, and they pulled apart slightly, lightly caressing each other’s body with fingertips, exploring, getting acquainted with the other’s body intimately. As his fingers plunged into her hot, wet center, she let out a low growl. She was now rapidly losing control, and waves of pleasure poured over her. It had been so long since anyone had even held her, and this intimacy, this sharing of her body with the man she loved, was almost too much. Bryan saw what was happening, and continued exciting her, alternately playing with her clitoris, then diving deeper with his fingers inside her. She had an explosive orgasm, wave after wave, and he stopped only when she begged him to.

“I can’t believe what just happened,” panted Tammy. “It’s been so long. I thought I was condemned to be alone for the rest of my life. I felt dirty, my body violated by this horrible virus. I think I was actually getting used to not sharing my love, keeping everything inside me. But you just changed all that.”

With a few light touches on his penis, he was hard and ready. But Tammy wanted to delay their actual fusion. She licked his long hard shaft before taking him again in her mouth. When she felt he was ready to erupt, she relaxed her take on

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

him. Almost instantly, she felt his body tighten as he called out her name, ejecting a huge quantity of sperm onto himself. Tammy lay down on top of him, their bodies sharing the warm, sticky semen against their skin. Neither talked, and Bryan lazily caressed Tammy's back. Both were physically spent, and fell into a deep, contented sleep.

They were awakened by the screams of sea gulls the next morning. They were still in the same position, Bryan on his back, and Tammy on top. Her eyes opening, she took in his handsome face and mussed hair.

"Good morning, darling," she greeted Bryan. "What's for breakfast?"

"You," he replied, flipping them over, he now on top. She could feel him getting excited, and wanted him now. She was ready. He understood, and without a word, reached over, opening a little drawer, and pulled out a condom.

"Oh, yes," whispered Tammy. "Now, my love. Now."

No foreplay this time. They were in a hurry. He plunged his big sheathed cock into her, and she let out a small yelp. He hesitated a second, but she moved her hips up to take him farther into her. They rocked back and forth in a frenzy. They both came at the same instant, a double explosion before Bryan collapsed on Tammy.

Tammy whispered in his ear, "I hope lunch and dinner are as good as breakfast on your ship, Captain."

"I've got an idea," said Bryan. "Wait here." He climbed up the stairs and popped his head outside. When he came back down, he had a mischievous look in his eye.

"Come on. There's no one around. Let's go skinny-dipping."

Tammy hesitated, but only for a second. What the hell, she thought. Why not? She dove in, encouraged by Bryan's goading from the water. His body looked so beautiful, naked in crystal-

MIKE CONNOLE

clear water. It was so sensual, like thousands of tongues licking her everywhere at the same time. Bryan couldn't hide his once-again awakening erection, and Tammy exclaimed, "Doesn't your friend ever sleep?" Bryan laughed, pulling her head under water.

"Aren't we nasty," teased Bryan. "Now that we're clean and refreshed, let's go have a healthy Caribbean breakfast."

They drip-dried in the sun, nobody around for miles. Then they went below for a delicious plate of papaya, orange, grapefruit and banana. They ate heartily while the delicious aroma of coffee gradually made its way from the galley to them.

"Oh, Bryan. What did I do to deserve this? I'm just so contented. I wish it could always be like this."

"And why not, my love? I'm not letting you get away from me. Why can't it always be like this?"

"It's just that I'm afraid of tomorrow. What if my medication stops working? What if I get sick again? You're young, handsome, and carefree, at least until now. You don't need to be held down by a sick old lady."

"It would seem that that's my decision, not yours. And you're not an old lady, are you?"

"Actually, I'll be forty in a few months. That's old."

"Well, I'm 35, soon to be 36. That's only four years difference, and who says I don't prefer older women anyway?" teased Bryan.

Chapter XVIII

Although it was three hours earlier in California, John, Laura and Mitch were already up. Laura offered to drive them to the airport for the 6:30 A.M. flight to Dallas, there connecting to San Juan, arriving at 10 P.M. in Martinique. Laura gave Mitch a big hug and a peck on the cheek. She kissed John passionately, unashamed. Mitch was mystified, and tried to look away.

“You two take good care of Hal. He needs you right now. Give Tammy a big kiss, and tell her I truly wish her a happy life. And Mitch, a big kiss to Anne Sophie.”

Once on the plane, Mitch couldn't help remarking, “Wow, John. I don't know what happened to Laura, but the results are very positive.”

“You're telling me!” responded John. “She promised that next weekend, barring another catastrophe, we'll fly to Catalina, and she'll introduce me to the new Laura, complete with an explanation of all these years since her childhood through law school.”

Law School, thought John. That seemed so long ago. He closed his eyes somewhere over the Salton Sea, and his mind wandered back to those years after their summer vacation in Europe. Adapting to a small university like USD was effortless. He knew all his professors personally, and he enjoyed the camaraderie among the students. His was a pre-law curriculum, political science and business administration mostly. He felt secure in the calm, Catholic atmosphere, priests and nuns walking along the sunny sidewalks, his classrooms in the shadow of the Immaculata, with its huge blue dome. It was all reassuring, and he did well, graduating near the top of his class. The students at USD were there to study. The anti-war

MIKE CONNOLE

movement, the birth of flower power and hippies was all filtered and attenuated before reaching this high hill overlooking Mission Bay and the Pacific Ocean beyond.

Naturally, with his attitude and grades, John had no problem getting into USD's Law School. It had a pretty good reputation, and he didn't feel like adjusting to another city and way of life. Some things did change, though. Hal was marrying Tammy, and Mitch was off to Europe to tackle medical school.

In Mission Valley, below the USD complex, the condominium boom was under way, and John's parents invested in one. Of course, for John, this was the perfect set-up. He could practically walk to school, and the condo was in a young-adult development, complete with tennis courts, swimming pools and gym. He apprehended a little his new life; it would seem strange without Hal and Mitch, and their late-night rap sessions, and their just being around.

His three years of law school went without a hitch. To him, everything was logical, and with his excellent memory, he had no trouble pulling up precedents, references to landmark cases from his library-like arranged grey matter. He saw Hal from time to time, but now that Hal was married, things were different. Tammy, by her body language, informed him that Hal was now hers, and not to be shared as before. Anyway, Hal was busy preparing his real estate license, and they drifted a little apart. Once in a while, when some really good sets were in, the two of them would sneak off and surf for a few hours.

But living alone in a "swinging singles" ambiance, there were always beautiful creatures lounging around the pool, or working out in the gym. His libido, on simmer until then, seemed to heat up, and he sampled just about everything that interested him. Of course, with his good looks and nice body, he had no trouble finding a willing bird for an evening. But John was a one-night-stand man, rarely bedding the same girl for

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

more than one week before moving on. The more he screwed, the greater became his appetite. It seemed that late evenings, he would hurry through his review of classes, and then go prowling for his next prey. This vaguely bothered him, but he chose to “seize the day”, and rather than fight this current, he swam with it. But little by little, he came to the conclusion that most of these young women were incapable of carrying on an intelligent conversation, seemed insecure, and were desperately in search of a good hunk with a promising future.

Laura stood out from all the other women around John during that period. She was a loner at law school, and John nicknamed her the iceberg. And yet he sensed a certain vulnerability about her. She was obviously sharp and opinionated, and knew what she was talking about. She always had a good defense when discussing with the professors, and John was attracted to her mind. They had study/discussion sessions sometimes in the evening, and, little by little, John and Laura were drawn together. Intellectually, they were equals, and the back-and-forth sparring seemed to stimulate them. It wasn't a case of love at first sight. In fact, it seemed more like a convenient arrangement.

John knew that Laura was different from the other women he had been seeing, and approached her much more cautiously. He sensed that if he didn't blow it with Laura, they might make something out of this friendship, something more lasting. God forbid, up until now, this wasn't at all what John was looking for. But soon he would be graduating, he already had a spot in his father's La Jolla firm, and maybe it was time to think about settling down.

His approach toward intimacy with Laura was very gradual. She stiffened when he touched her, even if it was a mere hug between friends. He wondered if the iceberg would or could melt, even a little. But he was patient, and little by little,

MIKE CONNOLE

she warmed a bit, never instigating any physical contact, but finally accepting a kiss or holding hands. John continued wooing her, realizing that something in her past must have been very traumatic, rendering her practically frigid. He also sensed that, in her way, she did love him, and after graduation, it only seemed natural that they should marry. So that's what they did.

Laura invited only her aunt, uncle and brother. All the other guests were friends of John's or his parents, and a few law school comrades. After the wedding, they went on a brief honeymoon where Laura tried to be warm, but John sensed that this was forced. She had actually graduated ahead of John, and his father's law firm thought it natural to include her in the group. She readily accepted, feeling reassured by this family atmosphere. She wanted and needed to belong to something – this would be her chance.

The years passed. Whenever John mentioned a baby, she put him off. For the moment, her law career seemed to dominate everything else in her life. Their sex life was just barely satisfactory. She never let go completely during their sexual encounters, and this didn't exactly encourage John. She seemed to force herself to accept him once in a while, and inevitably, their sex life declined even more.

And now, all of a sudden, here was this warm, smiling other side of Laura. He was anxious for that weekend in Catalina, but for the moment, he needed his energy to help Hal out through this latest turn of events. He hoped he still had enough love and courage to try to rekindle the now flickering flame. He wasn't sure anymore about his feelings toward Laura. He had invested and invested emotionally, with so little in return. He would just have to wait and see what Laura had to reveal, and how he would react.

Chapter XIX

Paco and Pierre felt lost, abandoned by their big brother. As instructed by Boss, they headed back to the boat, their home for all those years, to clear out their gear.

“What will you do now, Pierre? Do you want to find another job like this one? The two of us, again?”

“I don’t think so, Paco. Maybe I’m getting too old. I’ve been thinking about going back to Guadeloupe, and maybe getting a real job. We’ve been lucky up ‘til now. We’ve made good money, and life hasn’t been bad. But it would be nice to find a wife, settle down, maybe have a few little pirates.”

Paco replied, “I’m not ready for all that yet. I think I’ll drift for awhile, and maybe find me another captain.” But Paco was already thinking ahead. That American bitch made him angry. He would get back at her. While Pierre went to his cabin to pack, Paco quietly snatched Hal’s wallet and organizer from the chart drawer, and put them in the bottom of his duffel bag.

Within an hour, they had pretty much emptied the boat of their belongings, and headed back to shore. Pierre was going to take a taxi to the main airport, Hewanorra, and fly back to Guadeloupe. Paco said he would probably hitch a ride to Castries, and check out the boats in the harbor. They shook hands, almost formally, and then that part of their life was history. They would surely never see one another again, but, had it not been for Boss, they probably wouldn’t have stayed together that long.

Paco quickly caught a ride with a German couple vacationing in St. Lucia. They were talkative in their not-too-easy-to-understand English, but Paco’s mind was reeling, scheming, so he barely heard them. Maybe he would demand a ransom from Hal. But how? Did Hal already know where

MIKE CONNOLE

Tammy was? He doubted it – she seemed all eyes for Boss, and they would probably spend the next few days screwing each other’s eyes out. There must be an address and phone number of someone in the States who would know where Hal was.

His loquacious tourists left him off in Castries, and he went to a familiar little hotel and checked in. Once in his room, he pulled out the organizer, and went through the list of names. He found just what he needed. He would call Hal’s office, stating that he might have some useful information concerning the kidnapping of Mr. Thomas’ wife. It was now 6 P.M. in Castries, which meant 3 P.M. in California. He dialed the operator, and asked to be connected to a California number. Within a few minutes, he learned that Hal was in Martinique, and that an investigation was on going. He was readily given the phone number, thanked the receptionist, and hung up.

Now for the credit cards. On his last trip home to the Dominican Republic, he had gambled heavily, and had lost just about everything. He had been counting on a few more runs with Boss and Pierre to replenish his spending cash. But that was all over now. He emptied the wallet, spreading the contents on the table. This was going to be easier than he thought. That jerk Hal Thomas had three codes written on a piece of paper. Since there were three credit cards, he simply assumed that by matching the right code with the right card, he would have some instant easy cash. His hotel was close to several banks, and he knew that in a few hours, after dark, he would be less conspicuous at the ATMs, and would try his luck.

He went down around 9 P.M. The streets were pretty much deserted as he headed for the nearest bank. Nobody in sight. He pulled out the first card and punched in \$500 along with the first code on the list. No good. He tried the second code and bingo, \$200. That seemed strange, since he had asked for \$500, but \$200 was \$200. He tried the second credit card, again punched

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

in \$500 along with the first code, and again he came up with \$200. Someone was approaching from behind, so he gathered up his \$400, credit cards, and code paper, and headed off to a little restaurant/whorehouse he knew in town. Passing another ATM, he easily punched in the right code with the remaining credit card, and again, \$200. This guy had a lousy \$200 limit? He wondered why.

Feeling rich, he invited his favorite Castries whore out to dinner in a nice restaurant. They afterwards retired to his hotel room for a few hours of gymnastics before he pushed her out the door. He needed to be fresh and alert that morning for his phone call to Mr. Hal Thomas.

Paco was up by eight, and went downstairs for coffee. He then cleaned up, killing time until 9 A.M. He then called the number given him the previous day, and sure enough, a male voice answered after one ring.

“May I please speak to Mr. Hal Thomas?” asked Paco, aware of his accent.

“This is he. How may I help you?” replied Hal politely.

“You got it wrong, Mister. I can help you. I know where your wife is, but it’s going to cost you.”

“What? You know where Tammy is?” Hal feigned concern, all the while knowing that Tammy was safe, having spoken to her the previous evening. But this was probably one of the thugs who had stolen his things and kidnapped his wife. He played along.

“She’s fine, and in a nice, safe place. If you want to see her again alive, I want \$20,000 in cash, in 48 hours.”

“\$20,000! I can’t get that much cash at such short notice! I’m in Martinique. Maybe in California, but how can I get that kind of money down here?”

“That’s your problem,” bullied Paco. “I’ll call you in 24 hours. In the meantime, get busy and find the money. Your wife

MIKE CONNOLE

is nice-looking, and I might not be able to control myself much longer.” The phone clicked, dead.

Now it was Hal’s turn to think. He would love to be able to nab this guy, but how? Mitch and John were flying in that night. What a great idea they had had. With their three minds, surely they could devise a good plan.

At breakfast with Anne Sophie, he mentioned the phone call and ransom. She was shocked, especially after the relief of knowing that Tammy was safe. Hal explained that he would play along with his caller, but with Mitch and John helping, he was sure to come up with a fool-proof trap.

After breakfast, passing through the hotel lobby, the registration clerk stopped Hal to inform him that the Fort de France gendarmes would like to see him at his earliest possible convenience. The search had been called off, so he didn’t understand what further need the police would have with him. He consulted briefly with Anne Sophie, and, as they had nothing really planned for the day, they would head north to Fort de France, and after having finished with the police, they wanted to visit the town of St. Pierre, which was destroyed by the eruption of Mount Pelee in 1902. Within a few seconds, the entire population of over 30,000 was wiped out. The only survivor was a prisoner, protected by the thick walls in his underground cell. St. Pierre had been the capital of Martinique, and was considered the “Paris of the Caribbean”. The volcano had been increasing in activity, but as the elections were planned for May 8 of that year, they decided that the situation was not yet critical. The volcano erupted on Ascension Thursday, which also happened to be Election Day. Visiting the ruins and maritime cemetery would probably take up most of their afternoon. John and Mitch were due to arrive at ten that evening, so they had time to kill.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

After battling horrific traffic, a daily occurrence, according to the locals, they finally arrived at the Gendarmerie Nationale. With the usual help of Anne Sophie, they were directed to an office upstairs, where a smiling gendarme was waiting. Through Anne Sophie, Hal learned that the gendarmes had received a fax from Guadeloupe concerning Hal's credit cards. Apparently, all three cards had been used the previous evening, all three in Castries, St. Lucia. As he had instructed, \$200 had been withdrawn on each card. Hal was really puzzled now. He knew that Tammy and Bryan were in St. Lucia, but why would they use his credit cards? Tammy mentioned that Bryan was wealthy, so it seemed unlikely that they would bother to use his credit cards. Besides, he had talked to Tammy less than 24 hours earlier, and she hadn't mentioned anything about his stolen personal belongings. That probably meant that the kidnappers were also in St. Lucia, but not with Tammy. What really was going on, Hal wondered.

He snapped back to the present when Anne Sophie addressed him. "Hal, Monsieur Dumas here, would like to know why you called off the search, and what this means, the credit cards being used in St. Lucia."

"I'm really not sure about the credit cards," replied Hal. "I called off the search because of the phone call I received from Tammy. Explain to Mr. Dumas that Tammy told me about being rescued by a Barbadian gentleman on his sailboat."

Anne Sophie translated, then listened to the gendarme. She became uncomfortable, and Hal sensed that something was not right.

"What did he say, Anne Sophie? What's wrong?" questioned Hal.

Anne Sophie hesitated, then replied, "It would seem that a certain Barbadian, along with a Dominican and a Guadeloupean, have been pirating in the islands down here for a

MIKE CONNOLE

number of years. Mr. Dumas, who handles piracy and trafficking on boats, would love to be able to arrest the three of them. If you renew the kidnapping charges, the police could put a stop to this trio for good. What does this mean, Hal? What's Tammy gotten in to?"

"I'm going to trust Tammy. She sounded fine to me, and she asked that the search be halted, so we'll leave it at that. If I change my mind, I'll let him know. Concerning the credit cards, have him stop any further transactions. I have a feeling that Tammy is with her Barbadian friend, and that the other two split, apparently with my things. Everything should be a lot clearer tomorrow, hopefully. Don't mention the ransom call, but I have a hunch I was talking to the guy from the Dominican Republic, if his accent is any indication. This would confirm that he's no longer with Tammy and Bryan." Tomorrow will definitely be interesting, thought Hal, remembering his reticence concerning Tammy's explanation of the kidnapping and alleged rescue. Having thanked the gendarme, they headed back to the rental car, both lost in their thoughts.

Chapter XX

Back on Sugarcane, Bryan's seventy-five-foot ketch, he and Tammy were stretched out naked on the big bed. All the urgency of their love-making was spent, and they were now gently caressing one another, continuing the exploration of the other's body, begun a mere twelve hours earlier.

Bryan broke the silence first. "I hate to interrupt our honeymoon, love, but if we are to be in Martinique by tomorrow, we should sail up the West Coast of St. Lucia, roughly 50 miles from here. We can drop anchor in a sheltered cove I know, and tomorrow morning we'll have an easy sail of some 20 miles across the channel separating St. Lucia from Martinique. Without too many distractions from my first mate, we'll try to be off tomorrow morning by 6 o'clock, and can thus arrive at the marina in Martinique about midday. One last big hug, then I'm putting you to work," teased Bryan.

"Aye aye, mon capitaine," snapped Tammy, saluting. "A few more scrumptious minutes of snuggling, then I promise to obey your orders."

Fifteen minutes later, they were both busy readying the boat for the day's trek. Bryan had explained that after sailing around the tip of Moule-à-Chique, they would be in sheltered waters for the remainder of the day. Tammy was a bit anxious. This was, after all, some thirty feet longer than *Tempête*, it had two masts, and there were only two of them to handle all the maneuvers. She hoped she was up to it, not wanting to disappoint Bryan.

Fortunately, Bryan was calm and quite clear in his instructions. He had already fired up the motor, and explained to Tammy how to put it in forward, neutral, and reverse, and

MIKE CONNOLE

also how to accelerate. Bryan would be up on the bow weighing anchor, and she would simply follow his hand signals – finger pointing forward for forward, a halt sign with his hand for neutral, etc. He explained that she was to idle forward in the direction he indicated, thus allowing him to bring in the chain and anchor. Once clear, she would maintain the cap until he had the anchor fastened in position.

This went without a hitch, and soon Bryan was behind her, rubbing against her sensually as she headed Sugarcane south.

“Congratulations on your maneuvers. Stay well east of those little islands. There are some shallow spots, and we have a big keel under us. By the way, those are called the Maria Islands. Beyond there, you can make out the tip of the peninsula, called Cape Moule-à-Chique. That’s where we leave the Atlantic and head back up north, in the Caribbean Sea,” informed Bryan.

“Take the wheel for a sec, Bryan,” asked Tammy, her voice grave. “I want to remember this place. It doesn’t look at all the same as when we sailed in here yesterday morning. I’ll never forget this place.”

Now she was behind the skipper, arms wrapped around him, playing back those past 24 hours in her mind.

“Promise me we’ll come back here some day, Bryan,” begged Tammy.

“I promise you, my love, that we will return here as often as you like. This will always be our magic bay,” he stated solemnly, before giving her a big kiss on her willing lips. “Now back to work and the sails.”

Once again, Bryan patiently explained to Tammy that she would head the boat into the wind, roughly 90 degrees on the compass, east. During this time, he would hoist the mainsail, then have her fall off slightly to the south. Once again, she was

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

a quick study, and within minutes, Bryan had trimmed the mainsail and cut back on the motor.

“Now we do the same thing with the jib,” continued Bryan.

“Oh, Bryan. It seems so nice like this. Can’t we just use the mainsail?”

“No, my love. I’d rather unfurl the jib. The boat handles easier, and this way I can stop the motor completely. Unless you prefer the noise and the smell,” teased Bryan.

Once again, Tammy headed to the east, and the jib unfurled easily. After setting their cap and adjusting the sails, Bryan shut off the motor, and as promised, they were gliding silently toward the distant tip of the peninsula. Once around the tip, they changed their heading to northwest, an easy run with the easterly trade winds. Conversation was easy, and the periods of silence unembarrassed. They both felt at peace out there, with themselves, with each other, and with the elements.

Having been below decks on the trip down, Tammy was discovering the west coast of St. Lucia. Bryan pointed out the two rock pinnacles south of the town of Souffriere some two hours later. These peaks were called the Grand Piton and the Petit Piton, each roughly 2500 feet high. Toward the center of the island, beyond the Pitons, was Mount Gimie, over 3000 feet high. Below the twin Pitons were sulfur springs, in a volcanic crater. This was supposedly the only drive-in volcano in the world.

“Tammy, why don’t you take the helm for a few minutes? Our early-morning exercise and fruit have left me hungry. I’ll try to whip up something from the stores. Maintain the present heading. I don’t want to get in too close to shore. Look sharp!” he commanded, re-caressing her shapely appetizing buns.

Tammy felt exhilarated. Here she was at the helm of a huge sailboat, all alone on the deck, trusted by the love of her life (was it possible?). But what would happen tomorrow? She

MIKE CONNOLE

would have to face Hal. He deserved an explanation, but she wondered if she could furnish a plausible one. She herself didn't fully know what was going on, but she did know that she was madly in love with Bryan, and that she didn't want to go back to Southern California with Hal. She didn't want to appear ungrateful – Hal had been so supportive through the darkest period of her life, but the love was gone. Why couldn't she and Bryan just sail around the Caribbean? He was a wonderful guide, and she was learning so much about the geography, cuisine and customs of the area. She hadn't heard Bryan come back on deck, and jumped when he set down the tray.

“What's that black cloud over your head, Tammy?” queried Bryan. “Let me guess. You're worried about tomorrow and Hal's reaction. No?”

“You're not only wonderful, handsome and sexy, you're also a mind reader! I guess I am a little worried. How will he react to you? I did lie about the circumstances of our meeting, so we should probably stick to my story of my being rescued by you. That part shouldn't be a problem, but I just don't know how he's going to react to you, to us.”

“I do love you, Tammy, and you love me. With that as our premise, I think the rest will fall into place. I suppose Hal is a reasonable, mature adult, and has had some time to adjust to the news. Let's just trust in our love to see us through this. Now, after all my trouble, come join me for some lunch.”

Lunch consisted of cashew nuts, smoked chicken, and cold Carib beer. They both ate hungrily, and were lulled into a light sleep, Tammy curled in against Bryan. The winds were light and the seas calm as they approached Castries. Here the shipping activity increased. There was a large, sheltered, deep-water harbor in Castries, and the cruise liners and cargo ships came in daily. Bryan shook the sluggishness from his body, but it felt so good, this physical contact with Tammy. He watched

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

her napping, so beautiful, so peaceful. He really was lucky. Their paths seemed to have crossed at such a crucial moment, when, at last, he had decided to move on with his life. He had meant what he had said to Tammy – their love would help them through tomorrow, and many tomorrows after that. Leisurely admiring her scantily clad body, he wondered how she could possibly have that horrible scourge. He vowed that with the help of the medication and his love, they would conquer the virus. He remembered how he had felt when his brother died. Despite all the love and encouragement from his parents and from himself, Lionel just gave up and died. Why hadn't Lionel continued the combat? Does there arrive a moment in one's illness when it's just not possible to go on? He lived through such an experience once, but he wouldn't allow Tammy to sink so low. They could and would fight this thing together. They could and would vanquish.

He gently slipped away from Tammy, bracing her with some cushions. There were more and more boats and ships, and he didn't want to cause an accident. A few more hours, and they would anchor in Rodney Bay, near Pigeon Island, on the northern tip of St. Lucia. Two hours later Tammy still slept, and Bryan was a little worried. She was in the shade and breathing slowly, so everything was probably all right. Maybe he should slow things down, not exert her so much physically, until she was back on her medication.

She must have felt his eyes on her. She stretched and yawned noisily. "Oh, Bryan. I'm so sorry I abandoned you, but I felt so tired, and the boat rocked me to sleep in your arms. It was wonderful drifting off like that."

"Are you all right, Tammy?" asked Bryan, concerned.

"Of course I'm all right. I told you. I just konked out. Don't worry, Bryan. I know what you're thinking. I really do feel fine, just a little tired."

MIKE CONNOLE

“Okay. I believe you. It’s just that two hours is a long nap. Maybe I’ve been working you too hard?”

“Don’t even think that. I won’t have it any other way! Got that?”

“All right. All right. Back to business. See that little island at 12 o’clock? That’s Pigeon Island. We’ll sail toward there, then turn east into a quiet bay with a lovely yacht club. It’s called Rodney’s Bay. You’ll be at the helm, and I’ll bring in the sails. By the way, remains of the Arawak Indians have been discovered on Pigeon Island. The Arawaks formed a peaceful, friendly tribe, spread throughout the Caribbean. It seems that the Carib Indians, in the early fourteenth century, moved through the islands, slaughtering the poor unsuspecting Arawaks, eating their male victims, and dominating the women before heading to the other islands to the north.”

“What a horrible story, Bryan. It all looks so peaceful now. Those poor Arawaks. But I guess the Caribs didn’t have an easy time with the European explorers during the following two centuries.”

“Well, my love, you know your history of our islands. Unfortunately, it’s been a strange history of peace and war, capturing and re-capturing the islands for some far-away king or queen. But we have managed to survive, some of us even gaining independence, but never without fighting and suffering... enough. Are you ready to execute my orders, first mate?”

“Yes sir. Right away, sir!” kidded Tammy.

Bryan turned over the motor, and let it idle in forward. He went forward, and motioned to Tammy to head into the wind, and, in no time, he had the two sails down. He rushed back to help Tammy pick her way through the moored sailboats to a quiet spot. They dropped anchor, stabilized the boat with the length of anchor chain. Bryan then folded in the sails neatly,

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

before lashing them down with the sheets. He liked his ship neat and clean, and was proud of *Sugarcane*. Her dark-blue hull and graceful profile always drew stares when he arrived in a port. Around them, there were sailboats flying flags from the U.S., Britain, France, Canada and Sweden, and some they didn't recognize.

"Why don't we go below, rinse this salt water off, and take a little nap. Then I'll invite you to that nice restaurant over there," suggested Bryan, pointing to land some one hundred yards away.

"That sounds good, all except the part about the nap. I've got a better idea," answered Tammy, her attitude leaving little doubt as to her intentions.

"But you slept for two hours. Now it's my turn," pleaded Bryan, feigning weariness.

"You can sleep, don't worry. I'll just rock you to sleep," reassured Tammy.

Two hours later, and after very little sleep, they were both feeling good and ready for a big juicy steak. The restaurant was a bit pompous, catering mostly to wealthy tourists. But they enjoyed the rich, hushed ambiance and good service. Bryan ordered a 1984 Château Margaux, which went well with their rare steaks and local vegetables. Tammy was stunning in her sundress, and more than one head turned when they came in. Bryan dressed up for the occasion, in long pants and a dress shirt and tie. Replete, they were back on board by 10 P.M., rapidly falling into a deep sleep, wrapped around one another.

Chapter XXI

The phone rang precisely at 9 A.M. Hal had been expecting the call, but, lost in his reverie, jumped when it rang.

“Hello. This is Hal Thomas.”

“Yeah, it’s me. Do you have the money?” grumbled Paco.

“No, but I’m working on it. I should have the \$20,000 by tomorrow.”

“I hope so. For you and for your wife. And I hope you haven’t gone to the police.”

“No, of course not. I want my wife back, so you’ll get your money. I only hope you keep up your half of the deal,” Hal said, playing along.

“When I get the money, I’ll tell you where you can find your wife. And she will not be harmed, unless you screw up.”

“By the way, do you want me to come to Castries, or will you come to Martinique?” asked Hal, having already thought out this conversation.

“How do you know where I am? I didn’t tell you I was in Castries,” answered Paco worriedly.

Hal was now relaxing. “What about the \$600 you withdrew with my credit cards? By the way, you won’t get any more cash from them. I can even give you the exact time and location of each withdrawal.”

“Okay, you smart gringo. We’ll see who’s smart. Meet me at 8:30 tomorrow morning, Sunday, at the Budget Rent-a-Car desk at the Lamentin airport in Martinique. Just you and me and the \$20,000.”

“Could you possibly return my wallet and organizer along with my wife? I hope you kept the organizer. See, I talked to my office, and the receptionist informed me that she gave this

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

number to a Hispanic gentleman who said he had some information about my wife. I assume you were that caller, and that you got my office phone number from my organizer.”

“Just be at the airport alone. You’ll get your wife and shit later.” The line went dead.

Hal hung up the phone. The conversation had gone well. He managed to rattle the thug, let him know he was no dummy. The mention of Castries and the organizer really seemed to shake up Tammy’s alleged kidnapper.

Hal wasn’t the only one who thought the conversation had gone well. Monsieur Dumas, the gendarme from Fort-de-France, had been busy since Hal’s visit the previous day. He had easily obtained a tap on Hal’s hotel phone, arguing it involved an international drug and kidnapping ring. Although, in reality, he had been following *Sugarcane* and her motley crew for a number of years, he somewhat exaggerated the charges. He felt that from Hal’s and Anne Sophie’s attitude that they were hiding something, and his hunch had paid off.

His subordinate beeped him – another in-coming call for Monsieur Thomas. He turned up the volume on the recorder, and identified the other voice as that of an American. His English had improved over the years, but now he really was perplexed. If he understood well, two friends of Monsieur Thomas were arriving from the States that very evening. The caller asked if Hal had received further news from Tammy. Hal replied that everything was still on – Tammy and Bryan should be arriving sometime the following afternoon on the sailboat. Hal went on to say that there were several new developments, but his friend cut him short, the last boarding call being announced. They said good-bye, and the friend said they’d be there in about thirteen hours.

Monsieur Dumas checked his watch, and deduced that they would be arriving on the American Eagle flight from San Juan.

MIKE CONNOLE

For him, all other plans for a quiet Saturday evening were off. He would be at the airport for the arrival of the flight, and get a good look at the other two Americans. He would have to organize things for the following morning. He would place one of his gendarmes at another car rental booth close by, and a few others scattered around the arrival area. He would have to be more discreet, afraid that Mr. Thomas would recognize him and panic. Too bad for a nice weekend with the family. He would love to be able to put those three pirates from *Sugarcane* behind bars. But why was Mr. Thomas willing to pay \$20,000 in ransom to Paco Hernandez if Tammy was safe and arriving a few hours later with Bryan Harrison? And on *Sugarcane*. He would have to obtain a search warrant for the boat, and arrest warrants for Mr. Harrison and for Senor Hernandez. Nobody had mentioned the French crew member, Pierre LeBlanc. Maybe the three had split up, which would make the arrests more difficult. He would call the gendarmes in Guadeloupe and have them keep an eye out for Monsieur LeBlanc, in case he had decided to return to his native island.

During this time, Hal was having a quick breakfast with Anne Sophie, bringing her up to date on his two earlier phone calls. Anne Sophie sensed his excitement – after days of waiting and worrying, things were going to start happening.

“Anne Sophie, could you ask the hotel manager where we might get access to a computer and color printer? We’re about to go into the counterfeiting business.”

“What are you saying, Hal? Why and what do you want to counterfeit?” asked a surprised Anne Sophie.

“We’re going to counterfeit a \$50 bill, and run off four hundred copies. We’ll play this out all the way, and hopefully, the “kidnapper” won’t realize that all the bills are identical. Don’t give too many details to the hotel manager. I don’t know how legal all of this is.”

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

They asked for the manager at the registration desk, and were shown into a pleasant, cool office. They had already met the manager, who knew about the kidnapping. Anne Sophie explained that they needed a recent computer with scanner and color laser printer. They got lucky. The assistant manager, who would be arriving at 2 P.M., was a computer genius, and had all the very latest equipment in his office. The manager sensed that they might be wanting to do something not 100% kosher, and decided not to ask. He had faith in his assistant manager, and would leave it to him.

Hal and Anne Sophie had four hours to kill, and decided to head south. There was a beautiful beach at Diamant, with its large “rock” some 200 yards off the coast. Beyond, they could easily make out St. Lucia, a mere twenty miles to the south. Hal couldn’t know it, but Tammy and Bryan would be mooring within the next six hours, close to where he was now looking at the north coast of St. Lucia. After a leisurely swim in the almost-bath-water-warm ocean, they went to a little, open-air restaurant on the beach. The menu was simple – fresh, grilled fish with rice and beans. The food was good, and the fish flavor was enhanced by the “dog sauce” served on the side (a mixture of hot peppers, chopped chives, herbs and onions in oil). Hal was jittery and anxious for 2 o’clock to arrive. They would go back and shower, leaving the assistant manager an hour or so to catch up on any business he might have.

As planned, they were met by the assistant manager at 3 P.M. they had already seen him several times around the hotel, and got quickly down to business. Anne Sophie explained in French what they needed to do, but not why. The assistant manager read between the lines, and was happy to foil the kidnapper with fake bills. He explained that copying the bill was easier to do than most people imagined. At least to a superficial inspection, the bills looked authentic. Hal produced a

MIKE CONNOLE

\$50 bill, and they went to work immediately. The first bill was impressive – a little too new and crisp, but it did look real. Within an hour, they had the \$20,000. Later, Hal and Anne Sophie would wrinkle up the bills one by one, making them less suspicious. Hal offered to draw up a contract, taking all responsibility for the counterfeit operation, and also to remunerate the assistant manager for his help. He, of course, declined, saying he was pleased to be able to help thwart an outlaw, especially for such a serious offense as kidnapping.

Chapter XXII

Paco really was shaken. Who was this guy Hal Thomas? In such a short period, he had already learned Paco's whereabouts, and even figured out how he had obtained the phone number. Paco would have to be doubly careful, but what could go wrong? Mr. Thomas sounded anxious to recuperate his wife, and would get the money. That was good news. It meant that Mrs. Thomas hadn't contacted her husband yet. She was surely too busy screwing the Boss, that little bitch.

First of all, he would check out of the hotel, although he couldn't imagine being traced back to there. He had plenty of cash. He could go to the local Liat office and get a ticket for the 7 A.M. flight from Vigie, the little airport near Castries. It was a twenty minute flight to Martinique. There, he could case the airport arrival area before the actual 8:30 transaction. He decided to try one of the credit cards at the nearest ATM, just to see if Hal was bluffing. He quickly found out that the operation was refused, so that wasn't just hot air coming out of the Yankee's mouth. Paco had already figured out what he would do. If Mr. Thomas showed up with the cash, he would merely tell him that Tammy was at the Halcyon Beach Club in Castries, unharmed. By the time that Mr. Thomas got to the hotel in St. Lucia, Paco would be winging his way toward Puerto Rico, and from there to Santo Domingo. Paco would be \$20,000 richer, and eventually Mr. Thomas would hear from his little whore. That wasn't his problem.

Luckily, there was still room on the early-morning flight to Martinique. He knew the airline and its dubious reputation of always being late, if the flight wasn't simply cancelled. Hopefully, tomorrow's flight would be on time, or at least not too late, he mused.

MIKE CONNOLE

He then went to his favorite local whore, waking her a little before noon. He offered to pay her generously for the afternoon and evening in her quarters. He promised to be out by 5:30 the following morning. She readily accepted his more-than-generous offer. He was already undressing as she spoke, and joined her in bed.

Chapter XXIII

The plane touched down only thirty minutes late. As usual, the flight from San Juan had been over-booked, and the company offered interesting incentives to those willing to spend a night in Puerto Rico. Mitch and John weren't even tempted, and stepped wearily off the plane after more than thirteen hours in airports and planes.

Of course, Anne Sophie and Hal were waiting just outside the baggage claim area and French Customs, and heartily welcomed their returning friends/husband. Both Mitch and John felt the fatigue of the long flight, plus the humid heat in the airport.

"I know you guys are tired after a week of work and catching up, plus that long flight," apologized Hal, "but there are a few things we have to discuss, and before 8:30 tomorrow morning. Let's load your bags in the car, and I'll bring you up to date during the ride back to the hotel."

Hal succinctly informed his two friends of the latest happenings – from his two conversations with the "kidnapper" and the ransom demand, to Tammy's phone calls, to Castries and the credit cards, and finally to their counterfeiting scheme. He purposely left out his conclusion, hoping that Mitch and John would come to the same deduction.

"I don't get it, Hal," replied Mitch slowly, trying to think it through. "Why would there be a ransom if Tammy is fine, and arriving with her friend tomorrow? If her friend is wealthy as she claims, why would they use the credit cards?"

"I have a hypothesis," joined in John. "The ransom caller probably doesn't know that Tammy's safe with her friend. And since you played along with the demands, Hal, he'll show up for the \$20,000 and leave you empty-handed, or so he thinks. It

MIKE CONNOLE

sounds like tomorrow is going to be interesting and full of action?”

“Well, John, I’ve basically come to the same conclusions as you. And that’s why the \$20,000 is in fake bills and not the real thing. But there is one more detail I left out. Anne Sophie and I went to the Gendarmerie Nationale in Fort-de-France yesterday for the credit card tracing. But Monsieur Dumas, who heads the piracy bureau, informed us that he’s been tailing a pirate trio – drug traffickers, petty thieves – operating from a sailboat. That goes along with the three we saw in the Saintes. But here’s the problem. For Monsieur Dumas, Bryan is the head of the gang, the other two being a Guadeloupean, and a Dominican from the Dominican Republic. The person who called me about the ransom was definitely Hispanic.”

“Wow! My poor brain cells are working overtime!” quipped Mitch. “The only other possibility is that Bryan was part of the gang, but changed his mind when something clicked between Tammy and him, and the other two were asked to leave, apparently with your wallet and organizer, and are trying to trick you into thinking that they have Tammy. But this caller isn’t too smart. Since Tammy obviously isn’t a prisoner, what makes him think that Tammy wouldn’t contact you, Hal, to let you know that she’s all right?”

“Since I played along with his little scheme, that only reassured him that Tammy hadn’t contacted me. But I think you’re right, Mitch,” agreed Hal. “When Tammy explained her rescue by this Barbadian gentleman, an alarm went off in my brain. I know Tammy, and I know when she’s lying. That part just didn’t jibe with the rest. But the question now is, what do we do tomorrow? I want to go to the airport, pay off the ransom, but after that, I’m not sure. Do I get what information he might supply, then let him fly, or do we jump him?”

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Does this gendarme Dumas know what’s going on, Hal?” asked John. “Kidnapping and ransom are pretty serious charges.”

“No,” replied Hal. “He doesn’t know that Tammy’s with Bryan, of her own accord. Only the thing with the credit cards. I feel better knowing that you two will be nearby. At least we all speak the same language, and we’re already a team.”

“If I may suggest something,” interrupted Anne Sophie, “Why don’t you all three go down to the airport. Mitch and John can take a bag or two, playing the arriving tourists, looking for a rental car. Give the man our funny money, Hal, and see what he has to say. Maybe you can give a sign at the right moment, and Mitch and John can help you tackle the man. After that, you’ll have to call the gendarmes and get them involved.”

“That’s good, mon amour,” chuckled Mitch. “You’ve really changed in just a few days. First counterfeiting, now tackling thugs! Wow!”

“I agree with your plan, too,” added Hal. “What do you think, John?”

“I think Anne Sophie might be right. But we have to involve the police, preferably after the ransom/information swap.”

“Now that we’ve agreed on the *modus operandi*, let’s set the time. Why don’t we get up at 6:30 or 7 o’clock, and be at the airport around 8 o’clock. I have a hunch that our man will also be there early. Unfortunately, we don’t know what he looks like, so I won’t be hanging around with you two. Just keep me in view, that’s all,” suggested Hal. “Let’s all get a few hours of shut-eye. I need the two of you alert and ready, in case something goes wrong.”

Chapter XXIV

Despite the time difference, and few hours of sleep, Mitch and John were up early, and eager to help Hal out with his current predicament. As suggested by Anne Sophie, each had a carry-on bag when they arrived in the parking lot of the airport. Mitch and John took off toward the arrival area to try to blend in with the arriving passengers. Hal took another route, carrying an inconspicuous little plastic bag stuffed with the “ransom money”. It was a little before 8 A.M., so he tried to slow down his gait a little. Once inside, Hal headed for the car rentals, which, at this early hour, were all closed. Hal looked around, noting Mitch and John loitering in a corner, and very few other people. At 8:10, a neatly-dressed gentleman stopped behind the counter of the Ada car rental booth, and tried to appear busy arranging brochures. An elderly French couple with several suitcases walked over to the Hertz counter. The woman appeared irritated, looking at her watch constantly.

Hal noticed him first. He was of medium build, probably Hispanic, with a large duffel bag. He appeared nervous, his eyes darting left and right. He sized up Hal, but didn’t approach immediately, preferring to linger near the back wall where he had a good view of the entire area. John and Mitch picked up Hal’s interest, and discreetly studied their possible prey.

During this time, upstairs and unseen, Monsieur Dumas was coordinating things with his walkie-talkie. The couple at the Hertz counter, the Ada agent, and another roamer were all his men. He was satisfied with his set stage. He easily recognized Mr. Thomas’ two friends, having seen them upon their arrival the previous evening. Also, against the back wall, he picked out his target, Paco Hernandez. His men had

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

instructions not to advance toward their target until he gave the signal. He noted that Hal had a small bag, presumably with the ransom money inside.

Paco made his move at 8:25. Everyone present in the area noticed, but tried to appear casual. Mitch and John sauntered over to the Ada counter, three down from the Budget booth. As they approached, they were shooed away by the gentleman behind the counter. In very bad English, he invited them to leave, stating that he was closed. They noticed that he, too, appeared nervous, frequently looking up to the windows on the second floor. John turned his back on the agent and mouthed the word “cop” to Mitch, who had already concluded the same thing. They moved on to the next counter, a little closer to Hal. They appeared to be comparing prices of the different agencies, and this didn’t alert Paco, who, by now, was conversing with Hal.

“I hope you don’t try to trick me, Senor Thomas. To prove to you who I am, I brought your wallet and credit cards. Do you have the \$20,000?” asked Paco, obviously on edge.

“Right here in the bag,” answered Hal, tapping the tightly-held package. “Let me have the wallet, and tell me where my wife is. Then you get the cash.”

“Here is your wallet and credit cards. Your wife is at the Halcyon Beach Club, room 234 in Castries. Now hand over the money,” demanded Paco.

Hal executed the order in slow motion. “It’s been nice dealing with you, senor. Maybe we’ll meet again some day.” But Paco didn’t appear to be listening to Hal, greedily taking in the numerous stacks of bills.

Paco thrust the bag down in his duffel bag and took off. Hal waved goodbye to Paco, the sign for Mitch and John to react. In three long strides, they were tackling Paco. Unseen by the others, Paco armed the switchblade he had hidden up his wrist.

MIKE CONNOLE

He slashed out, and the blade met with some resistance. He squirmed around and saw the big slash on the stranger's cheek. The other larger hombre wrestled the knife away from him, and then there were bodies everywhere, this time with guns out. Paco knew when to call it quits, and he surrendered.

Hal was also in the melee, and straightened up when he saw that the kidnapper had been neutralized. He immediately recognized Monsieur Dumas, and knew that this was not a chance encounter. But how did Monsieur Dumas know that he would be meeting with his enemy at this time and this place? He quickly went to Mitch who was bleeding profusely.

"Are you all right, Mitch?" asked Hal, horrified at all the blood on Mitch.

"I think so. It hurts like hell, but is probably just a superficial laceration. I need a mirror to evaluate the extent of the damage."

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted Mr. Dumas. "I am Monsieur Dumas of the Gendarmerie Nationale. I have already radioed for a doctor, who should be here momentarily."

Hal was surprised. "So you do speak English! Why didn't you say so yesterday?"

"Because you simply never asked," replied the gendarme. "And besides, your charming friend did a wonderful job translating."

"And how did you know that I'd be here this morning?" snapped Hal.

"Because I had your telephone line tapped after your visit yesterday. I knew you were hiding something, and I've been waiting too long to arrest these pirates. Sorry, but this is necessary and completely legal," defended Monsieur Dumas. "Now, if you'll all please follow me, we'll go to the police bureau upstairs."

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Mitch had applied his handkerchief to his cheek, and with the pressure, the blood flow was checked. By now Paco was handcuffed and surrounded by four gendarmes. The ambulance and doctor appeared, and the two medical men got acquainted. They all went upstairs to the airport authorities' offices and the infirmary down the hall. John went with Mitch, but Hal was summoned by Monsieur Dumas.

"I need you, Mr. Thomas, to identify Senor Paco Hernandez by his voice, and also the package you gave him, which I assume is the ransom money. We'll also go through his personal belongings in your presence."

"I can tell you right now that the voice is the same one that called me yesterday and the day before. I recognized the accent right away. Also, he returned my wallet and credit cards, so I can assume it was he who stole my things up in the Saintes," replied Hal.

The gendarmes had emptied Paco's duffel bag onto a large, cleared table. Mr. Dumas went directly to the small plastic bag that Hal had passed over to Paco. He opened it and whistled. "Not a bad imitation, which, as you know, is illegal in both your country and mine. I won't ask where or how you obtained these bills, but this also will be confiscated. And this, I presume, is your electronic address book," he said, offering the organizer to Hal.

Hal quickly turned it on and checked the contents. "Yes, this is mine. As you can see, my office number, my parents' address and phone number, etc., are all there. No doubt that this is mine."

"You will, of course, press charges," encouraged Mr. Dumas. "You have already lifted the kidnapping charges, which we can have reinstated. Also, in the presence of many witnesses, your declared-stolen property has been found on Senor Hernandez."

MIKE CONNOLE

Hal hesitated. "I'll have to think about it. I want to confer with my two friends, one of whom is a lawyer. How long can you keep him in custody legally?"

"As long as I want. Now that I've got him, I won't let go easily. But your filing charges would obviously be a big help. And by the way, at what time are you expecting your wife, Mr. Thomas? I will have some questions for her and for her friend, Mr. Bryan Harrison, when they arrive this afternoon on the sailboat *Sugarcane*."

Hal was shocked, but quickly found the explanation. "Oh, that's right. I guess you tapped that conversation too. No keeping secrets from you, I guess. I do have one request, though. Would you mind giving me one hour of privacy with my wife, Mr. Harrison and my friends? Nobody will try to get away, and after that, I'll let you know about the kidnapping and theft charges. Have we got a deal?"

"Yes, of course. I will respect your request for privacy if you respect your word about nobody escaping," accorded Mr. Dumas.

"Agreed," concluded Hal. "I'm not sure what time they will be arriving at the marina. All I know is that they're sailing up from St. Lucia. I didn't even know that the name of the sailboat was *Sugarcane*. Thanks for the information. Now, if you'll excuse me, I want to check in on my friend and see if he's okay. Anyway, I suppose we'll be seeing one another in just a few hours."

Hal turned to Senor Hernandez. "Sorry about the cops. I swear I didn't know that my phone was tapped, and that the police would be here. But I did know that you didn't have my wife, so I just went along with your ransom demand to trap you. And as you just heard, the money was fake. I've talked to my wife twice already, and I know she's safe and sound."

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Your wife is safe and sound and fucking Boss. Did you know that, too, Mr. Smart Yankee?” snickered Paco.

“I am aware that my wife has become enamored to a certain Barbadian named Bryan Harrisson. But that’s none of your business, is it?” replied Hal defensively.

“But you are wrong, Senor. It is my business. I have been many years with Boss, who you call Bryan, and with Pierre. Since that whore wife of yours came on board, Boss’s head got screwed up, and he sent us away. I should not have taken her from your boat in the Saintes. This is all her fault, that bitch,” spit out Paco, incriminating himself in front of several witnesses.

“But why kidnap my wife? Why her?” interrogated Hal.

“It was an accident. I went on board your boat that night with the keys we stole from you on the beach. I just wanted the valuables in the main cabin, but your wife was there, unfortunately for all of us. I grabbed her and threw her in our dinghy, where Pierre was waiting. We took her back to Boss, who was really pissed off with us. Now we’ll have to go to prison,” sighed Paco.

“Did you or Pierre harm my wife or abuse her in any way?” continued Hal with his rather good interrogation.

“She’s good-looking, nice body. Pierre and me wanted to try her out, but Boss ordered us to stay away. Now I know why. He wanted her for himself, cavron!”

“So you didn’t set out to kidnap my wife? You’re not in the kidnapping business?”

“No, Senor. We used to run ganja up and down the Caribbean. When we got tired of that, we started stealing from rich tourists. But I think the three of us were tired of that life. We all pretty much decided to call it quits and go home to our countries. Then your wife came along, and, how do you say, everything speeds up, yes?”

MIKE CONNOLE

“Listen, I got back most of my things, except for \$500 from my wallet, and the \$600 from the credit cards. If you would consider reimbursing my \$1100, maybe I’ll go easy on the charges,” proposed Hal.

“What are you saying, Mr. Thomas?” called out Monsieur Dumas, shaken. “Do you not realize that this man not only stole your wallet, money and credit cards, but also your wife? You’re willing to let him off for \$1100? And after he has given you a full confession! Fortunately, I have recorded your rather good interrogatoire of Senor Hernandez,” he added, tapping his coat pocket.

“You’re just full of surprises, Monsieur Dumas!” exclaimed Hal, once again shocked by this gendarme’s tactics. I don’t know how legal that is in France, but your recording would be inadmissible evidence in a U.S. court. Au revoir, Monsieur Dumas,” finished Hal in an acceptable French, walking down the hall to where he had seen Mitch and John go earlier.

“Hey, Mitch. How’s it going?” asked Hal, obviously concerned.

“I’ll live, Hal. Just a few stitches from my very competent colleague, who, by the way, has a special interest in plastic surgery. So who knows, my battle scars might even be minimal!” joked Mitch.

“How did it go with you, Hal?” John asked. “Was it the guy on the phone? Did he have your wallet and organizer? How did the cops know this thing was going down? Did you press charges?”

“Always the lawyer, John,” chuckled Hal. “For your information, I just had a long discussion with Senor Paco Hernandez, who related the burglary attempt on *Tempête* while we were sleeping, and how he happened upon Tammy, grabbed her, and threw her in their dinghy, where a certain Pierre was

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

waiting. Now get this. They took Tammy back to a boat called *Sugarcane*, where Bryan Harrison, whom Senor Hernandez calls Boss, was waiting. Yeah, that's right. The same Bryan. Supposedly, he was furious, and threatened the other two if they touched Tammy. In the meantime, something must have clicked between Tammy and Bryan, and Paco and Pierre became unemployed, men without a boat, so to speak. By the way, John, the entire conversation was taped by Monsieur Dumas, without my knowledge. Could that be used against Paco Hernandez? It was really self-incriminating. And if that's not enough, my phone was tapped – that's how the gendarmes knew we'd be here this morning. Monsieur Dumas assured me that everything was quite legal. When I told Paco that I would reconsider the charges if he paid me back the \$1100, Monsieur Dumas really flipped out! This almost seems like a personnel vendetta – he really wants to nail the “Sugarcane Trio”. I really don't think they purposely kidnapped Tammy, so if he pays me back, why not?”

“I have to agree, Hal. Those are some tactics! Since our own laws in the States are based on the Napoleonic Code, I doubt that the recording would be admissible. I assume he had a court order for the wire tap, but if you really are considering dropping all the charges, then all the rest is moot,” observed John.

“After all that's gone on, Hal, are you really considering dropping all charges? I suppose the three of them could be charged with kidnapping, and thrown in prison. But I don't suppose you want Tammy back under those conditions?” mused Mitch.

“You're right. I told the gendarmes to give us an hour with Tammy and Bryan when they arrive – without the presence of the gendarmes! After that, we'll discuss the charges with Dumas. Your wife is going to love it when she sees your face,

MIKE CONNOLE

Mitch. If you're all done here, let's go back to the hotel and wait for *Sugarcane*."

Anne Sophie was waiting in the lobby, and let out a contained scream when she saw Mitch. He went to her, and the two of them had a rapid-fire French discussion. She calmed down quickly, hugged him, then came over to Hal and John.

"I don't know what you'll decide to do, Hal," declared Anne Sophie, "but we'll all be beside you and support you. Even if this horrible Hispanic has carved the face of Mitch, stolen your possessions and >Tammy, and caused so much trouble for more than a week now, I will stand up for you. But let's see what Tammy has to say first, okay?"

Chapter XXV

All eyes were on the magnificent ketch as it headed into the marina. Although some 500 yards away, Hal easily recognized Tammy on the bow, readying the bow line. Astern, he saw the figure of the man who had not only kidnapped Tammy, but also captured her heart. His own heart pounded in his chest, and he felt short of breath. Why? He didn't really love his wife anymore, but was he ready for this? Part of his anxiety was for Tammy – she was in a much more delicate position than he was. He needed the truth from Tammy, and he only had an hour to obtain it. The three police cars were visible in the hotel parking lot, and he had no doubt that Mr. Dumas was already on his way, if not already there.

The visitors' quai was empty, and Bryan had no trouble bringing his sailboat up to the dock. There were two dockhands available, and Tammy threw the bow line to one, Bryan handing the stern line to the other.

Hal went forward on the dock, and Tammy jumped down from *Sugarcane* and into his arms. They stood there for a few moments without talking, but the emotions were intense. Tammy pulled away from Hal and noticed that his eyes were as moist as hers.

"You really had me worried, Tammy. No, all of us were worried. But you look great. The pirate's life becomes you," kidded Hal, trying to lighten the mood.

"I'm sorry for all the trouble, Hal. And I did call as soon as I was liberated. I didn't ask for any of this, Hal. I was kidnapped, completely against my will, then something just happened between Bryan and me. We both know that our marriage was going nowhere, and I really think I've found someone I want to live with for the rest of my life. And I'm

MIKE CONNOLE

pretty sure he feels the same way. But I do feel guilty – all those years together, and your love and support through some very difficult moments. You were always there, encouraging me, trying to hide the pity. Yeah, as hard as you tried, I know you did pity me. With your permission, Hal, I want to live this experience. Maybe it won't last, but I want to give it a try."

"You've, no, we've been through some pretty scary episodes over the past few years. How could I not let you get on with your life now? I'll let you go conditionally. If things shouldn't work out, you know where I'll be. I think our marriage is beyond repair, but I'll be there if you need me. But Tammy, I sincerely hope you find happiness with Bryan, and that everything will work out for you." He again took her in his arms, this time the tears flowing freely. Hal felt her relax, kissed her forehead, and looked into her eyes. "Now, come introduce me to Bryan."

They walked casually back to the stern, where Bryan was politely waiting. Not waiting for a formal introduction, Hal jumped up on board, and the two men shook hands warmly. If they were nervous, neither showed it, and they engaged in some small talk, each sizing up the other, and surprisingly, liking what each saw in the other. Tammy felt the lull in the conversation, and having remained discretely in the background, now came forward. She further relaxed, sensing that the first contact had gone well between "her two men".

Hal turned to Tammy. "I think the three of us have to have a serious discussion. I need to know exactly what happened since that night in the Saintes. I'm not buying your cute little fairy tale rescue, Tammy. Don't forget. I've known you for almost 25 years, and you can't pull the wool over my eyes that easily. Maybe Bryan should start the story."

Bryan looked over to Tammy before beginning. "All right, Hal. It's time to be honest. I've been what you might call a

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

pirate for some ten years now. Early on, I was a drug trafficker in the Caribbean. No hard drugs, only grass. Then I got bored, and with my crew, we took up stealing. I honestly was fed up with all that, and, believe it or not, that very evening when Paco and Pierre were off to visit your sloop, I was making up my mind to leave it all and go back to Barbados. My father is getting old, and I think I could now be a big help in running the family businesses.

I wasn't on your sailboat, but according to Paco and Pierre, they stumbled upon Tammy, and not knowing what to do, brought her back to my boat. I then panicked, really not knowing what to do. So we locked her in the forward cabin, and headed to St. Lucia. I had decided in the meantime to let her go once we got there. I was afraid that Dominica and Martinique would have been alerted, and I didn't want a run-in with the police at the very time I had decided to leave my life as a pirate and outlaw behind.

I promise you, my men and I respected your wife. She was not harmed, and she ate the same bad food we did every day. I let her out of the cabin a few hours before arriving in St. Lucia, and I have to admit, not only did I find her stunning, but also brave. There were three of us, but she never seemed afraid. We talked, and in a very short period of time, something just happened. I'll be honest, I fell madly in love with Tammy, and did nothing to discourage her. I didn't want to take advantage of the situation. I know all about the Stockholm Syndrome, and prisoners falling in love with their captors. But I released Tammy. She was free to leave once we got to St. Lucia, but I fear that at some time, she did fall in love with me. Since then, Tammy and I have been perfectly honest with each other. Hal, I know all about her present physical condition, and she knows all about my rather dubious past. But I do come from a good

MIKE CONNOLE

Barbadian family, and I'd like to take Tammy back there with me," concluded Bryan.

"Thank you for your honesty, Bryan. Tammy, do you agree with Bryan's version of the kidnapping? Is there anything you want to add?"

"I'm sorry I lied, Hal. I was protecting Bryan, I suppose, and it just came out like that. Somehow I knew you'd see through my little fairy tale, as you call it. But it has become a fairy tale these past few days. I'm as in love with Bryan as he is with me. Maybe we're both acting like selfish children, but we want to give it a try."

"Now that the two of you have been honest with me, I'll bring you up to date on what's been going on in Martinique. First of all, the police alerted me that someone had used my credit cards in St. Lucia. I don't suppose that was you?" asked Hal.

"Wait a minute. I've got your wallet and things in the map drawer, Hal. I'll be right back." Bryan came back shaking his head. "I don't understand. I left your wallet and organizer with the key to your sailboat, and now only the key is there. It must have been Paco or Pierre, when I sent them back to clear out their gear."

"It was Paco, Bryan," clarified Hal. "He called me, demanding \$20,000 ransom to return Tammy. By this time, I knew that Tammy was safe with you, but I played along with him, and Anne Sophie and I made up \$20,000 in counterfeit bills."

"What did you do, Hal? You and Anne Sophie did that? He actually called you?" asked Tammy incredulously.

"In fact, Paco and I met at the airport this morning. I handed over the \$20,000, and he gave me back my wallet. Mitch and John were lurking nearby, and jumped Paco as he was leaving. By the way, he told me that you were at the

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Halcyon Beach Club in Castries, unharmed. Mitch got slashed across the cheek in the ensuing melee. Fortunately, a few stitches did the trick.”

“Are you sure Mitch is all right? I feel horrible about this.”

“Mitch is fine,” reassured Hal. “But this gets better. Unbeknownst to me, my telephone line was tapped, and a certain Monsieur Dumas of the Gendarmerie Nationale learned about my meeting with Paco Hernandez. His men joined in the fight, and Paco was arrested. I had an interesting discussion with Paco, who pretty much confirms your version of the story, Bryan. There are some pretty hard feelings, though. He resented being thrown off your boat after all those years of complicity, and said some pretty harsh things concerning Tammy’s virtue!”

“Maybe I was a bit abrupt,” admitted Bryan. “But I didn’t think that crusty little pirate was so sensitive. I think I just wanted to turn the page completely, which would not have been possible with those two around. I prefer this new page with Tammy, barely written, and I was undoubtedly too much in a hurry when I did turn that page. So the police have Paco and Pierre now?”

“No. Just Paco. Supposedly, Pierre went back to Guadeloupe, and wasn’t involved in the ransom demand. But here’s the problem. It seems that Mr. Dumas has been after you for quite some time, and is very anxious to arrest the three of you. I convinced him to leave you alone for one hour with me, before he comes on board to question you. Paco is willing to reimburse the \$1,100, so it’s pretty much up to Tammy and me to decide if we press charges or not.”

“I know of Monsieur Dumas,” admitted Bryan. “I have many friends in the various islands, and I have been warned of this man. It seems he’s made it his personal ambition to capture us. I’m not really sure why he’s so determined, and why us?”

MIKE CONNOLE

Granted, I have broken the law, and often, but nothing that could be proved, and I never harmed anyone.”

“What should we do, Hal? I can’t press kidnapping charges, not against Bryan.”

“But Tammy, I am an accomplice, even if I didn’t do the actual kidnapping. So legally, I guess I am guilty. But I knew nothing of a ransom demand.”

“I’m willing to drop all charges,” volunteered Hal. “I don’t think anyone set out purposely to kidnap Tammy. I forgot to add that Dumas recorded my conversation with Paco, without either of our knowledge. I don’t appreciate his tactics, and I think he’s gone too far. This has become a personal vendetta against the *Sugarcane* trio, as he calls you.”

“Oh, Hal. Would you really do that? I obviously will go along with you. I was never mistreated, and it would be nice to just drop the whole thing. But can we?” asked Tammy.

Hal glanced at his watch. “Monsieur Dumas should be here in a few minutes, and I want John present for that conversation. He’s waiting with Mitch and Anne Sophie at the end of the pier. If you don’t mind, I’ll call them over here so we won’t be at a legal disadvantage.” Hal signaled, and within minutes, Anne Sophie, Mitch and John appeared with Tammy’s suitcase and vanity case. Tammy, happy to see her friends, jumped onto the pier and hugged the three of them.

“Mitch, I’m so sorry for what happened. I feel somewhat responsible. I hope it doesn’t hurt too much. And the three of you have been so great, helping Hal through all this. I admit, it was pretty scary at first, but things did work out eventually. Come on board. I want you all to meet Bryan, unless the situation bothers any of you,” added Tammy.

“Come on, Tammy. We all know pretty much what’s been going on for the past three years. What’s important is your health and happiness, and that of Hal. He seems to be holding

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

up pretty well, accepting at least outwardly your decision. Don't worry. We'll be there if he needs us," assured Mitch.

The introductions went well, and everyone seemed genuinely relaxed.

"I would like to apologize for all your trouble and worry since Tammy's disappearance. Although I was not directly responsible, I guess some of the fault does lie with me. I hope you believe me when I say that I had nothing to do with the ransom demand. That was all Paco's doing. And Tammy did call Hal several times to reassure him of her well-being," offered Bryan.

"No problem," replied John. "But I think we better run through the actual events, and fast. I think our friend Dumas is heading down the pier now. Give me a quick run-through of what really transpired since the Saintes, Bryan."

Bryan related the same sequence of events, leaving out nothing, basically the same story Hal had heard less than an hour earlier. John's mind was trying to absorb it all, weighing the legal aspects of this rather bizarre kidnapping, ransom demand, and happy ending.

Chapter XXVI

Monsieur Dumas waited patiently along side the ketch, allowing the others to finish their conversation before coming on board.

“Bonjour, Mr. Harrison. Comment allez-vous?” asked Monsieur Dumas politely.

“Très bien, et vous, Monsieur Dumas?” replied Bryan, just as politely.

“Let’s get down to business, now,” said Mr. Dumas, changing the tone. “I have a search warrant for your boat. My men will proceed now, if you don’t mind.”

“Be my guest. I have nothing to hide,” Bryan replied, motioning the gendarmes to enter the main cabin.

“Now, why don’t you tell me all about the kidnapping and ransom,” bullied Mr. Dumas.

“My client won’t be answering any of your questions without my approval,” intervened John. “I am an U.S. attorney, and our law firm has a French correspondent in Paris. However, I think we should be able to draw this whole thing to a rapid conclusion. Tammy and Hal, do you wish to press charges against Mr. Harrison, or Paco, or Pierre?”

“No,” replied Hal without hesitating. “The kidnapping charges have already been dropped anyway, so we’ll leave it at that. As far as the theft goes, they were my personal belongings that were stolen, and since I’ve pretty much retrieved everything, I don’t see any reason to continue.”

“But Mr. Thomas, you still don’t understand! These men are pirates. They’ve been breaking the law for years, and now you can help stop them,” practically begged Monsieur Dumas.

“Now you’re confusing the issues, Monsieur. You came with a search warrant, and your men are now at work. Mr. And

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Mrs. Thomas will not be pressing charges, and if nothing turns up on your present search, I fear you will be left empty-handed. And by the way, should we be coerced to pursue this any further, my colleague from Paris will want to know all about the phone tap, and especially the tape recording, which, I fear, may not be 100% legal. As far as Mr. Harrisson's past is concerned, we'll just have to wait and see what your search turns up. In the meantime, I notice that you have Paco Hernandez handcuffed between two of your men in the parking lot. Why don't you let him come down?" suggested John, taking charge of the situation.

Mr. Dumas, suddenly on shaky ground, motioned for the gendarmes to bring their prisoner down to the sailboat. Paco appeared anxious as he approached, yet relieved to see Boss.

"Hello, Paco. I'm sorry about all this mess, but it seems you've gone out of your way to make things worse," greeted Bryan.

"Sorry, Boss. I was pissed off when you threw us off *Sugarcane*, and I guess I just reacted."

"Don't say anything more," warned John. "Monsieur Dumas, could you possibly remove the handcuffs? I don't think Mr. Hernandez will try to escape, not with all the gendarmes you have around here. And besides, since Mr. And Mrs. Thomas won't be pressing charges, there seems to be little reason to detain Mr. Hernandez."

Monsieur Dumas was sinking. After all those years. He was so close, and now he might lose the trio of pirates again. But this sharp lawyer did have a point. And he was fed up with life in the tropics, anyway. He should have accepted his mutation a few years earlier, but he was driven by the desire to stop piracy on the Caribbean seas. He was aiming for a promotion, and this wouldn't be the best time to get involved in a messy,

MIKE CONNOLE

international case. He motioned Paco's bodyguards to undo the handcuffs.

Paco rubbed his wrists, and turned to Hal and Tammy. Are you really not pressing charges? I'm free to go?" asked Paco incredulously.

John intervened. "As far as the Thomas case is concerned, there will be no charges. Now, man to man, you work out with Mr. Thomas how you will reimburse the \$1100 you "borrowed" from him."

"I have the money at the police station. If I am free to leave, I swear you'll have your money today," vowed Paco solemnly.

Bryan came over and put his arm around Paco. "I'm sorry about the way I treated you, Paco. I should have been more diplomatic about it. But Tammy and I have fallen in love, and we wanted to be alone. I wanted to leave yours and my past life behind, and try starting over again with Tammy."

"You're going to settle down, Boss? Asked Paco, wide-eyed. "You're going to give up our life on the seas? You really must be in love!"

Bryan chuckled, "You're right. I am in love. I'll still sail around, but now it will be with Tammy. But first, we're heading back to Barbados. If you should ever need me, you can contact me through the rum distillery – the phone number is on the bottle. And if you should ever hear from Pierre, tell him the same thing."

"He went back to Guadeloupe, Boss. Says he wants to settle down and have some kids. Maybe I should do the same thing. Head back to Santo Domingo and find me a little señorita, and maybe even get a real job. What's going on below-decks, Boss? What's all that noise?" Paco wondered out loud.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Monsieur Dumas here, came on board with a search warrant. I can’t imagine what he expects to find, can you, Paco?” winked Boss.

“No, Boss. There’s nothing bad on board our ship,” replied Paco proudly.

After a long hour, and a very thorough search, the gendarmes returned on deck, empty-handed. From the look on their faces, Mr. Dumas knew that his last hope had just flickered out.

“Not even some ganja? A few leaves? Some pills? Nothing?” despaired Monsieur Dumas.

“Non, Monsieur. Rien,” confirmed one of his men.

The gendarme chef turned to Bryan and Paco. “It would appear that you are free to leave. However, should I hear of any further illegal activity on board *Sugarcane*, I will not hesitate to re-open this case and many others.” They could not know that he was bluffing. He knew full well that he would never see these ex-pirates again.

“Believe me, Monsieur Dumas, you won’t be hearing from the *Sugarcane* trio again. Things will definitely be different now,” insisted Bryan. With that, Monsieur Dumas left the ketch, discouraged, but already thinking about his next life in Paris.

“One more thing, Mr. Dumas,” interrupted John. “Could your men accompany Mr. Hernandez to the police station to retrieve his belongings, and return him here within the hour, as we will be flying out of here this evening.”

Mr. Dumas just shook his head. “Pourquoi pas?” He walked slowly toward the parking lot with Paco a few short steps behind.

“Are you really leaving today?” asked Tammy.

MIKE CONNOLE

John answered, "We all have to get back to work. We're booked on this evening's flight to Puerto Rico, and Laura reserved your ticket, just in case."

Tears formed in Tammy's eyes. "That was very nice of her, and please thank her for the thought, but I think I'll stay here with Bryan. I feel I'm getting some control on my life, which I lost several years ago when I was diagnosed with AIDS. For the first time since that awful day I learned I had AIDS, I am looking to the future. I truly believe that there will be a future now. Please try to understand."

It was Anne Sophie who responded, "Tammy, we all want the best for you. If you think you can find happiness with Bryan, then we're all with you. Just remember, we'll always be your friends, and we'll be there if you need us. Personally, I'll be glad to get back to Southern California. I'm kind of tired of gendarmes, phone taps, kidnappings, and counterfeiting. But we will miss you." By now, her eyes were welling up with tears, and she hugged Tammy.

Bryan broke the emotional mood. "Would you all like one of my delicious rum punches? We can all probably use one about now." They all went down into the main cabin and Bryan went through the ritual of putting a teaspoon of cane sugar in each glass, then a dose of rum, and a slice of squeezed lime. As they sampled their drinks, Tammy explained that the rum was from Bryan's family's distillery. Bryan modestly added that the sugar, also, was from his father's fields. After a few sips, they all mellowed, especially after the tension with the gendarmes.

"I would like to propose a toast," proclaimed Bryan. "To happiness, for all of us. And health. And I would like to thank you all, especially Hal, for everything. I sincerely mean that."

Mitch came to the rescue. "Bryan, do you think we could visit your ketch? We all do some sailing, and she really is a beaut."

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Of course. It’s not fancy, but she’s sea-going and comfortable. These are the forward cabins, each with its private head and shower.” The others sensed Bryan’s pride and love for *Sugarcane*. “If you like, we can take her out for a spin,” proposed Bryan.

Hal answered, “We might just take you up on that offer, but not today. We have a plane to catch in a few hours, and we have to finish packing, check out of the hotel, and leave off the rental car. I’ll wait for Paco to return, then we’ll head for the airport.”

The visit terminated in the spacious aft cabin. Hal couldn’t help the pangs of jealousy. This had to be where Tammy and Bryan were sleeping. The others felt Hal’s discomfort, and they quickly retreated to the main cabin.

“Why don’t you all go finish packing, and be ready in an hour,” suggested Hal. “I’m pretty much packed, so I’ll just wait here for Paco.” The others understood what Hal needed to do. They left him alone with Tammy and Bryan, after another tearful round of good-byes, hugging, and promises to keep in touch. Hal came back down into the main cabin with Tammy’s suitcase and vanity case, having accompanied his friends back on deck. To him, this symbolized his acceptance of his wife’s departure.

“Tammy, why don’t you put these things away somewhere? I want to talk to Bryan, just him and me.” Tammy shook her head, took her things and headed for the aft cabin, shutting the door behind her.

“Don’t worry, Bryan. I’m not going to make a scene, try to kill you, or anything like that. Tammy and I have been together for about 25 years. We’ve had some wonderful times together, and more recently, some very trying times. But now she’s made a choice, and I’ll respect that. I’ll also hold you responsible for her well being. She sometimes seems to forget her pills, or eat when she’s not supposed to, which delays her following dose.

MIKE CONNOLE

She'll explain all that to you, if she hasn't already. And should you have trouble obtaining her medication, give me a call and I'll Fed Ex them down to you. Tammy can be stubborn, but she's sensitive, and has a big heart. Take care of her, Bryan, and make her happy. I can see that something special is going on between the two of you, and I admit that I'm a little jealous. At the same time, I am truly happy for you both. And please let me know if anything should go wrong with Tammy's health, God forbid. Together, we'll work things out, and make any decisions at that time." Hal offered his hand, and Bryan clasped it firmly.

"Thank you, Hal. I'll do everything I can to make Tammy happy, and I promise you, I will take good care of her. Good-bye, Hal. Why don't you and Tammy take a walk, and I'll wait here for Paco."

Bryan knocked on the aft cabin door, asking Tammy to go up on deck where Hal was waiting. He reassured her with a big kiss, and she hesitantly left him, knowing that the next few minutes were not going to be easy. Hal was waiting on deck, and they ambled down the pier to the far end.

"Well, Tammy, I guess this is it. I don't know how to say goodbye to my wife, and wish her happiness with another man. But that's what I wish, Tammy. For you to be happy and healthy. I'll nag you one last time. Take your medication seriously. Don't forget what the doctor said about drug resistance. You've been off your treatment for almost a week already. Your pills are in your vanity case, so you can get started right away. Don't forget. Should anything go wrong, if things don't work out, if the medical facilities are insufficient, please let me know. Now come here, and give your husband one last hug." Hal's voice cracked on the last words, and he broke down, hanging on to Tammy, sobbing.

"Oh, Hal. I'm so sorry. What have I done? I'd never purposely hurt you. Do you want me to go back to California

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

with you?" by now, Tammy, too, was weeping. They stood there, holding each other, feeling all those shared years flowing through them, and now coming to an end.

"I'll be fine, Tammy. I already told you. I want to see you happy, and from what I've seen, you can achieve that with Bryan. Why don't you go back to the boat, and I'll be by in a few minutes."

Tammy walked off, and Hal sat down on the edge of the pier, gazing into the water. His reaction, the force of it, had surprised him. Of course he still loved Tammy. After 25 years, they were a unit, even if many things had gone out of their marriage. Essential things like sex, sharing intimate thoughts and dreams, feeling really good in each other's company. But Tammy had made a choice, and for now, that was how it was going to be. Hal breathed deeply, wiped the remaining tears from his eyes, and headed back to *Sugarcane*. As he approached, he noticed Paco leaving the ketch, and heading back up to shore. He turned and waved to Hal. "Adios, amigo. Muchas gracias." Bryan held out the money to Hal, who carelessly folded it into his pocket without even looking at it. He followed Paco's path, turning briefly from the top of the pier. A quick wave to Tammy and Bryan, and Hal was gone.

Chapter XXVII

Tammy pulled herself out of the swimming pool and shook the excess water from her long blond hair. It was warm for 9 A.M., but then, here in Barbados, the weather was usually warm and sunny. She settled at the table in the shade, and one of the maids brought her out a pitcher of fresh tropical juice. Today it was passion fruit. Tammy, herself, the previous evening had gathered a dozen or so of the round, thick-skinned fruit from the vine some fifty yards beyond the pool.

She and Bryan had sailed from Martinique to Barbados the day after her emotional goodbye to Hal and their friends. The adieus had shaken her, and Bryan was sensitive enough to realize this. He seemed to be nearby, but let her come to grips with her new-dawning life. As night fell on the marina, she went to him, needing to be held and reassured. Bryan seemed to feel what she needed, and just wrapped her in his arms, and willed his love to be felt, to soothe the pain of the rupture. He had even offered to take her to the airport and catch the flight back to California.

But she wanted to be here with Bryan, and told him so.

They had a quiet dinner in one of the hotel restaurants in Pointe du Bout, then back to the boat and a subdued, exquisite session of touching, feeling, kissing and finally joining as one. As they were about to drift off, Tammy got up and went to the head. Bryan followed, worried that something was wrong. He found her swallowing her pills. She turned to him, smiled, and took the other pills. Back in bed she explained that the pills were to be taken every eight hours, two hours after meals. Bryan promised to help with the meal schedule, acknowledging the importance of her treatment.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

They were up early the next morning, Bryan explaining that Barbados was off to the east of the Windward Islands' arc. They would have to navigate throughout that day and night, as there were no islands between there and Barbados. They should arrive some time the following day, wind and seas allowing. There were several shipping lanes, and Tammy tried not to nod off, but several times during the long, dark hours, her eyes couldn't resist the temptation. Bryan had *Sugarcane* on automatic pilot, but he kept busy trimming sails and keeping an eye out for any lights moving in their direction.

Tammy didn't want to distract Bryan too much, but she wanted him, needed him. She surprised him by pulling a rubber out of her shorts' pocket. She quickly fitted him with it and he took her standing up on the deck. The seas were fairly calm, millions of stars the only witness to their lovemaking. Just as they were finishing, a flaming sunrise off to the east illuminated their naked bodies. Tammy went down to the galley and prepared a fresh pot of strong coffee. She found some stale bread rolls and took the meager breakfast back up to Bryan. She noticed that he hadn't bothered to put his shorts back on, and she hadn't either. They shared a sensual cup of coffee, and marveled at the changing colors the sun was affecting on the scattered clouds. By 10 A.M. land was in sight, and Tammy felt a twinge of excitement, mixed with some anxiety. Bryan regretfully suggested that they dress, not wanting to shock any passing boats. He explained that they would dock right in downtown Bridgetown, at the mouth of the Constitution River. An hour out of Bridgetown, he radioed to the harbormaster, informing him of his impending arrival, requesting that he contact Bryan's parents.

Bryan skillfully maneuvered *Sugar Cane* through the busy harbor to the allotted slot. Tammy noticed an impeccably-dressed, diminutive white-haired woman on the dock, complete

MIKE CONNOLE

with white gloves and parasol. By now Tammy was a seasoned hand, and threw the bowline to the deckhand. She headed toward the stern, but Bryan was already on the dock, wrapping the little woman in his arms. Tammy held back, respecting this moment of reunion, presumably between mother and son.

Shortly after, Bryan turned and motioned Tammy over. She felt self-conscious in a halter-top and short shorts. Bryan introduced Tammy to his mother, calling Tammy the woman who changed his life. Despite Tammy's attire, Bryan's mother appeared warm and sincere in welcoming her to Barbados. Tammy instinctively felt that she would get along with this woman. She commanded authority, and instructed the chauffeur to go on board and help her son to remove Ms. Thomas' belonging to the boot of the car, a long, sleek Jaguar. She took control of the situation, requesting Bryan to gather his essentials, and then joining the two women in the car. Bryan and the chauffeur headed below decks as Tammy and Mrs. Harrison settled into the pleasantly air-conditioned soft-leather interior of the Jaguar. Tammy hadn't discussed the situation with Bryan, and hoped that Bryan's mother wouldn't ask her any questions about their meeting, etc. But Bryan arrived just in time, surely feeling Tammy's sudden impatience to have him there. But she needn't have worried. This little lady was intuitive, and knew better than to pry. Bryan jumped in the front, and the chauffeur drove slowly across the bridge that spanned the Constitution River. The bridge was allegedly built on the sight of an old Indian bridge. Thirty minutes later, they left the main road and headed through sugar cane fields, and up a small rise. Suddenly, they were driving under a canopy of flamboyant trees, now covered in various hues of red and orange flowers, and stopped in front of a large, two-story plantation-style mansion. The wide, ground level veranda appeared welcoming with its rocking chairs and casual

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

furniture. Three young black women dressed in madras, and a tall, rigid Indian were there to greet them. Bryan jumped out of the car, warmly greeting the three maids and the butler. The butler broke away from Bryan and went over to help Mrs. Harrison out of the car. A huge black woman came out on the veranda and smothered Bryan into her more than ample bosom. Tammy later learned that this was Miss Rose, the cook who had been in the family since before Bryan's birth.

By now it was about 1 P.M. A steady breeze made it pleasant outdoors, despite the time of day. Bryan introduced Tammy to Miss Rose, who stared at and through Tammy, trying to size up this long-legged tanned beauty. Bryan almost never brought a woman home, so she concluded that this must be serious. And from the looks back and forth between Bryan and Tammy, something definitely was happening here. Miss Rose informed them that the meal would be served in the informal dining room in one hour, giving Tammy and Bryan time to clean up.

The butler, Edmond, brought Tammy's suitcase upstairs to a guestroom, designated by Bryan's mother, and strategically situated next door to Bryan's since-childhood bedroom. Tammy was touched by the thoughtfulness of Mrs. Harrison, and silently thanked her. Bryan led the way, and showed her into a magnificent room, dominated by the high, columned bed with its mosquito net. The furniture was all dark mahogany, from the tree grown and worked on the island. Wood-louvered windows and doors afforded a breath-taking view from the balcony of the gardens, across the sugar cane fields to the ocean beyond.

"Oh, Bryan, it's absolutely beautiful," exclaimed Tammy with schoolgirl excitement.

"And your mother is perfect. I have a feeling the two of us will get along fine."

MIKE CONNOLE

“I have to admit, she seems to have taken to you from the start. That’s a relief for me too.”

Edmond had already deposited Tammy’s suitcase, and left the two of them alone. “Come on, Tammy. I’ll show you the bathroom, which, by the way, we’ll be sharing. If you want more privacy, just lock the door on my side, and I won’t disturb you.”

“I have a feeling that the door won’t be locked very often, not if I can help it,” teased Tammy, giving Bryan a big kiss.

The bathroom had a large old-fashioned sink and a large tub with its four feet visible. It was tiled in a sparkling white and blue pattern, and a more recent shower stall was visible in the corner. Bryan then led her to the terrace, and together they marveled at the view.

“It feels good to be back home,” sighed Bryan. “I’d almost forgotten how lovely it is. By the way, that’s my door onto the balcony, just in case.” Now Bryan took Tammy in his arms, hugging her, feeling good.

They heard some commotion from below, and looking down, saw a Range Rover pull up to the entrance. A medium-built, very handsome man exited from the car, the door having been opened by the ever-present Edmond.

“My father,” offered Bryan. “He is getting on in age, I can see now. His hair and moustache have whitened considerably since the last time I saw him.” Was it her imagination, or had Bryan’s style of speech already altered? Would she discover another Bryan?

“He’s so handsome, Bryan. Will you look like that in another thirty or so years? I sure hope so. With his skin coloring and white hair, he’s really very handsome.”

“Easy, girl. I saw you first,” laughed Bryan. “Why don’t we take a quick shower, put on some fresh clothes, and go meet the real boss.”

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“How should I dress, Bryan? Will lunch be very formal?”

“Don’t worry, Tammy. We are more formal in the evening, but for lunch you can just dress comfortably.”

Bryan locked Tammy’s door, then headed through the bathroom and locked his door, also. He stripped quickly, throwing his dirty clothes onto a chair. Crossing back into Tammy’s room, he found her shuffling through her suitcase, looking for the appropriate attire, he supposed.

She turned and noticed his nudity and excitement. “Mmmm,” she groaned, “It looks tempting, but I think we should shower. That shower looks big enough for the two of us. Come on.”

The warm water felt good on their bodies, and soaping each other down was so very erotic. Their skin tingled, but Bryan turned off the hot water, giving them a fine spray of cool water.

“That should dampen our spirits, at least until nap time. I’m sure my father is growing impatient by now, so I’ll take a raincheck.”

“If you insist, darling,” conceded Tammy, rinsing the soap off her body.

“Will ten minutes be enough, love?” asked Bryan.

“I’ll need five,” answered Tammy. “I don’t wear makeup, so I’ll just run a brush through my hair, and slip on a dress.”

True to her word, in less than five minutes, Tammy stood in the doorway admiring her good-looking man. Bryan had slipped on casual slacks, a short-sleeve dress shirt, and soft leather shoes. They made a stunning couple as they descended the large staircase and entered the library.

The room was dark and cool, and lined with books. Adapting to the lack of light, Tammy vaguely made out some motion to the left. Bryan left her side, and went forward, shaking hands and clapping his father on the back. Tammy approached, and Mr. Harrison took her hand, welcoming her to

MIKE CONNOLE

his home. His eyes were the same color as the Caribbean waters with a white-sand bottom - somewhere between turquoise and light blue. His eyes twinkled warmly, and Tammy immediately relaxed. Mr. Harrison motioned to a chair next to him, and Bryan went over to the sofa, joining his mother. After a few minutes of getting acquainted, Bryan's father stood, and asked the women what they would like to drink before dinner. Tammy hesitated, and Bryan came to the rescue, suggesting a Barbados bombshell, made with rum, fresh-squeezed lime, Pernod and grenadine syrup. Tammy agreed, requesting easy on the rum. Bryan's mother had a very small glass of sherry, and the men each had the traditional sugar cane, lime and rum drink. They all toasted Tammy's arrival, and she felt the warm family ties between Bryan and his parents. She sipped the bombshell, very flavorful, and surely meriting its name. Bryan's father was as discreet as his wife, and avoided any potentially embarrassing questions.

At precisely 2 P.M., a clock chimed and the butler entered, announcing that dinner was served. Tammy followed Bryan's mother down the spacious hall to a large dining room at the back of the house. The table was formally set, and the china was magnificent. There were three overhead fans turning, and Tammy noticed a large air conditioner in the far corner.

"My dear, if you find it too warm in here, please let me know. The breezes come from the other side of the house, and if the fans are insufficient, we can turn on the air conditioner," offered Mr. Harrison hospitably. "In another few weeks, the heat and humidity will increase considerably, and we usually air condition the dining room from July through October."

"Thank you, Mr. Harrison, but this is fine," answered Tammy.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Please call me Lionel,” requested Mr. Harrison. Tammy instantly recalled that Bryan’s older brother had been called Lionel.

“And my Christian name is Emily, my dear. We’re really not all that formal down here, and Emily and Lionel will be fine.” Bryan was pleasantly surprised by these friendly overtures, surely a good omen.

The meal was delicious, and the main dish consisted of a traditional Barbadian dish, flying fish. Bryan explained to Tammy that the little six- to eight-inch fish abounded in the waters off Barbados. They were halved, cleaned, and cooked over a wood fire, on an aluminum sheet, and basted with a flavorful secret sauce. The cook came out once to see if everything was all right, addressing Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, but keeping a sharp eye on Tammy. When Tammy achieved eye contact with Miss Rose, she flattered the cook, sincerely finding the fish plate delicious. This, of course, pleased the cook, who proudly turned and left the four of them to finish their meal. After dessert, Bryan’s father suggested that they go out on the veranda for coffee. There were four rocking chairs arranged around a low table, which was already set with a silver coffee pot, with matching cream pitcher and sugar bowl. The exquisite, paper-thin porcelain coffee cups were extraordinary. This time it was Bryan’s mother who served the delicious rich coffee. If this first meal was any indication, Tammy felt she could easily become close to Bryan’s parents. Bryan leaned over and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. Mr. and Mrs. Harrison were surprised by this spontaneous show of affection from Bryan. Since their son Lionel’s death, Bryan had become much more reserved, rarely showing any emotion at all, be it joy or sorrow.

The breeze was wonderful, and Tammy felt completely relaxed. After another thirty minutes, Mr. Harrison suggested that Tammy might want to get settled in her room, and relax for

MIKE CONNOLE

a few hours, especially after a night on the high seas, as he described it. He asked Bryan to accompany him to his study, and the women retired upstairs.

Tammy was surprised to find one of the maids finishing up her unpacking, closing the door of the beautifully-carved armoire. Her suitcase was empty, and the maid explained that she would find her clothes in the armoire and in the chest of drawers, also in dark mahogany. She explained that she was the upstairs maid, and could be reached at any time by ringing the bell near the bed. Her name was Grace, and she offered to turn on the air conditioner, if Tammy wanted to nap. Tammy thanked her, preferring the trade winds through the open doors and windows.

The bed was incredible - the mattress was at least three feet off the floor, in a dark wood frame with four columns. After an eventful afternoon, she was pleased, and stretched out languorously on the bed and within seconds was sound asleep.

Some time later she awoke, disoriented at first, not understanding what she was seeing. The lighting had changed, and it took her a few minutes to find her bearings. She lay there for a while longer, then ventured into the bathroom and beyond, into Bryan's room. He had turned on his air conditioner, and closed the louvers and doors. The room was cool and Bryan snored softly on the bed, clad only in his boxer shorts. She sat across from him on a comfortable fauteuil, watching him sleep. The room was pleasant, a typical boy's room. On his desk was a picture of two boys, maybe fourteen and fifteen years old. She recognized Bryan as the smaller of the two, deducing that the taller, thinner boy must have been Lionel. The smell of freshly-polished wood permeated the room. Tammy was at peace with herself, and with this place now. She felt she had made the right decision, and only hoped that Hal was getting on with his life. When she returned from her mind wandering, she realized that

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Bryan was watching her. He stretched, and kindly requested her presence in his bed.

“But Bryan, what if someone comes in?”

“Don’t worry, Tammy. At this hour, everybody is resting or busy downstairs. I’m cashing in on that raincheck now.”

It didn’t take any convincing, and Tammy was almost instantly in his arms, kissing him passionately, as aroused sexually as she could feel he was. They were in a hurry this time. Bryan quickly put on his «raincoat” and penetrated her with little foreplay. They came together within minutes, panting and sweating, appreciating the air-conditioned room now. After a ten-minute respite of cuddling, Bryan was again aroused. Tammy also

“Bryan, are we expected downstairs any time soon?”

“No, my love. We’re expected for cocktails at 7 and dinner is served at 7:30. So we have time for another quickie or not so quickie, according to. Trust me. I’ll have you downstairs on schedule.”

This time Tammy was on top, riding him while he sucked on her nipples. Their bodies took over, and each felt what was good for the other. Their mutual pleasure became intense, and once again they erupted in simultaneous orgasm. Tammy collapsed on top of Bryan, and they slowly regained their normal breathing rhythm.

A bell chimed softly somewhere in the distance, and Bryan reacted. “Now, my love, we must get ready. It’s 6:30, so a quick shower à deux, and we should get dressed. If you have a fairly dressy attire, it would be preferable. However, I think you’ve already seduced my parents, so you could probably get away with wearing your bras and panties to dinner, but I wouldn’t advise it.”

MIKE CONNOLE

After another sensual soap-down, they dressed this time, Bryan in a sports coat and tie, Tammy in a sober black silk dress with sleeves.

The afternoon ritual of cocktails prepared by Mr. Harrison was repeated, then dinner, this time in the smaller, more formal dining room, off the sitting room at the front of the house. The trade winds always died down in the evening, and here, also, the ceiling fans were hard at work.

Another perfect meal. Tammy could easily adapt to this life - a cook, the butler serving, the hushed, moneyed atmosphere, and, of course, Bryan at her side. After dinner, the ritual continued, Mr. Harrison serving aged rum as a digestive. Tammy declined, tasting a little of the amber fluid in Bryan's snifter. It was so quiet up there on the hill - the wind softly rustling through the flamboyant trees, the tree frogs singing, and the fairyland-like fire flies twinkling off and on in the garden. Bryan's mother was the first to rise, exhorting the others to remain. Bryan's father also excused himself, and told Bryan and Tammy that breakfast was served at 7:30, but if they wanted to sleep in, not to worry about it. The cook would take care of their breakfast when they were ready. Tammy and Bryan sat there, holding hands and staring out into the darkness. Tammy was glad to once again have Bryan to herself. It was ridiculous, but she was almost jealous of the attention and complicity between Bryan and his parents. In just a few short days on board *Sugar Cane* with Bryan, she had grown accustomed to their intimacy without reserve. At the same time, it warmed her to see the love and tenderness that was almost palpable between the three Harrissons. She really did like this family.

"How are you holding up, Tammy? I hope my parents haven't been too trying," wondered Bryan.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Oh, Bryan. Your parents are wonderful. They’ve made me feel so much at home. I was a little worried before, but my fears have been dispelled.”

“We finished dinner at 8:45, Tammy. So you should stay awake until 10:45 for your medication.”

“Thank you for worrying for me, Bryan. But I’ve already pretty much figured out my pill schedule to coincide with your parent’s schedule. Let’s talk about other things besides my pills. Trust me, I love you, and I intend to hang on for a long time, so I’ll take my pills, I promise. But try not to mention it too often. I have to worry about it. You shouldn’t have to.”

“But I do love you Tammy, and that’s why I worry. I want you around for a while longer, maybe even longer than that. But if you promise to take your pills, I promise not to bring up the subject. It’s 10 o’clock now. Why don’t we go upstairs, and I’ll try to distract you for another 45 minutes.

The house was quiet as Bryan closed the front door. Upstairs, the beds had been turned down, and the air conditioners whispered softly in the two rooms. Bryan playfully lifted Tammy onto her bed, then jumped up next to her.

“Let’s see how your bed is. I’ve never slept in this room before.” Bryan was already undressing Tammy, and she wondered how she could possibly become aroused again, after a more than active afternoon in bed.

“Bryan, we’re so naughty, and it feels so good,” sighed Tammy, succumbing to his charms and exploring hands. This time, everything was in slow motion, their love-making mellow, compared to the frenetic, earlier pace. By 11 o’clock, they were fast asleep in one another’s arms, a deep, contented sleep enveloping them.

Chapter XXVIII

A week had gone by since their arrival in Barbados. Just one week, and she felt such a part of this family. Weekdays, Bryan was busy with his father at their offices, or at a factory somewhere on the island. Bryan seemed to understand the businesses, and his father was encouraged by his son's enthusiasm and willingness to learn. Bryan had been away for a long time, and father and son were re-discovering one another. The men came home for lunch every afternoon, and were usually home by six every evening. Tammy's drug regimen was made easier by this weekday schedule, and Bryan had made her an appointment to see an infectious disease specialist at the main hospital in Bridgetown. They decided to keep Tammy's malady between them, not wanting to cause any unnecessary concern with Bryan's parents. Bryan couldn't help noticing his parents' attitude towards Tammy, and only hoped that their attachment wouldn't terminate in the same fashion as with Lionel, his brother. Bryan pushed these thoughts quickly from his mind. In just a few short weeks, he now couldn't envisage life without Tammy. Besides, she looked great, and if her sexual appetite was any indication, she was in top shape.

Bryan also worried about Tammy's becoming bored. He was away most of the weekdays, but almost always managed a little nap with her after lunch. For the moment, she seemed contented lying around the pool, or discovering various flowers and fruits in the garden. Her teacher was Bryan's mother, who never went outdoors unprotected from the sun. Her alabaster-white skin was protected by pants, long-sleeved shirts, and a large-brimmed hat. She explained to Tammy that, as a child growing up in the upper-class society of Barbados, tanned skin was looked down upon. She later thanked her parents, because,

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

at almost 70, her skin was almost wrinkle-free, compared to many of the women who had spent hours on the beach getting tan, and later paying the price in wrinkles, blemishes, and skin cancers.

The cane-cutting season was now ending, and the last stalks were being crushed and transformed into sugar. Due to good weather with little rain in the most recent months, the sugar concentration was above average, and the tonnage was excellent. The factory ran night and day, and the locals were preparing for their annual Crop Over Festival.

The previous Saturday, Bryan commenced Tammy's geographical education of the island. He decided to start with the coast, leaving the island's interesting interior for later. Tammy marveled at the magnificent beach at Crane's Bay. There were some decent waves, and she and Bryan managed to bodysurf a few. Farther up the East Coast, they visited Sam Lord's Castle, an early nineteenth-century Georgian mansion. The local lore states that Mr. Lord would lure ships onto the rocks in front of his house with lights, and at night he would then plunder the wrecked ships. Tammy jokingly asked Bryan if he and Sam Lord were somehow related.

Bryan next showed Tammy his former school, Codrington College, which dated back to the seventeenth century. The long alley leading to the college is lined with tall king palms, making the drive to the entrance quite impressive.

They admired the unchained fury of the Atlantic at Bathsheba, a favorite surf spot on the island. Today the waves were enormous, due to an approaching tropical depression from the east. Only a few surfers were out, and from Tammy's experience with surfing on the West Coast, the waves were blown-out and huge. They had lunch on the cliffs overlooking Bathsheba, and when the first squall touched land, they decided

MIKE CONNOLE

to head home, and, weather permitting, they would visit the tourist-favorite west coast the following day.

But the tropical depression stagnated over Barbados the next day. That meant gusty winds and frequent tropical downpours. But despite the inclement weather, the sun did manage to pierce the heavy gray clouds once in a while. Bryan seized the opportunity to show Tammy around the family estate. They visited the family cemetery, the little-used stables, and the family orchard and vegetable garden. A beautifully-proportioned single-level house caught Tammy's eye. It was all wood, with a wide veranda all the way around. The shutters were all closed, but Tammy felt drawn to this dollhouse.

"Bryan, who lives there? It's exactly how I would imagine a typical house here in the tropics," inquired Tammy.

"That house over there? My grandparents lived there while the big house was being built. If I remember correctly, it was meant for Lionel and his future bride. Actually, the renovation was under way when Lionel took ill. There was no plumbing or electricity before. The workmen had time to modernize some of the interior before my father called a halt to the whole project. It's been abandoned since."

"Do you think we could visit it? It's like a life-size dollhouse."

"Come on, then. I think I know where the key is hidden." Bryan easily found the key and opened the front door to a large dusty room with bits of piping and electrical wires lying about. The windows had small glass panes with wooden louvers above each panel of glass.

"It's wonderful, Bryan! Let's open the shutters and let some light in. I want to see it all." With Tammy's trained professional eye, she could see beyond the current state of disrepair, and could easily imagine the perfect tropical demeure. The sun came out just as they finished opening the many

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

shudders on the three outside walls. The lighting was perfect - a soft glow seemed to illuminate the room.

“I know what you’re thinking, Tammy. But I don’t know. This was supposed to be for my brother, and I’m not sure how my parents would react.”

“Don’t worry, Bryan. But now my professional curiosity has been aroused. Please show me the rest.”

The interior was as well thought-out and proportioned as the exterior. There was a small dining room off the main room to one side, with the kitchen beyond. A hall off the middle of the main room led toward two bedrooms and a bathroom. The bathroom had been entirely tiled, and a modern bathtub, shower and sink were in place. The two bedrooms were large, with again, plenty of windows and double doors leading onto the veranda.

Tammy was intrigued by the interior walls of the house. They stopped about six inches from the ceiling, and were replaced by a decorative latticework in wood. Bryan explained that the house, having been built over 100 years earlier, had had no electricity. By leaving doors and windows open, the air circulated easily, a kind of natural air conditioner, as Bryan explained it. Only the small room with the toilet had walls all the way up, ventilated by a high louvered square high on the outside wall.

“It really is lovely, Tammy. I haven’t been in here since I was maybe fifteen. Do you think you could be happy here?”

“I’m already in heaven, Bryan. All I need is you to be happy. But I have to admit, this house does have potential.”

Bryan pulled her to him, kissing her deeply, still not satiated by her physically. “We won’t rush things, but I’ll gently drop some hints to my parents, and we’ll see what happens.”

The kitchen had obviously been left for last in the renovation plans. Bare pipes and drains stuck out from the

MIKE CONNOLE

cement floor, but, once again, the spacious room could easily become a warm, yet functional kitchen.

“Let’s leave it open to air out, and we’ll come back this afternoon to close up,” suggested Bryan.

At lunch one hour later, Bryan’s mother brought up the subject. “I see you’ve been to the old house, Bryan and Tammy. It must be in such a state. How did you find it, Tammy?”

“Oh, Emily. It was wonderful! The proportions, the natural lighting and ventilation, and all that wood! Who was the architect?”

Lionel laughed. “My father, actually. Not exactly an architect, but he had an eye for such things. With some practical suggestions from my grandmother, they lived there until moving in here. I was about four or five at the time.”

“So you lived in the old house, father? I never knew that,” stated Bryan, somewhat surprised.

“As you might remember, we closed up the place after your brother’s death, and we haven’t talked much about it in all those years since,” replied Bryan’s father.

“Your father and I have been talking, Bryan, and if you’d like, we could fix it up for you and Tammy. But, my dears, we don’t want you to get the feeling that you’re not wanted here. You’re welcome to stay here as long as you like. We just thought you might be more at ease in your own dwelling.”

“You’re so thoughtful, Emily. You’re both the perfect hosts, and I feel so much at home here with you. But the other house, it is lovely.,” admitted Tammy.

“Bryan, what do you think about all this?” asked his father.

“I think Tammy’s enthusiasm is contagious. And it is just up the lane, so it’s not like we’ll be leaving you. How much would be involved in fixing the place up, father?”

“If I remember correctly, the kitchen hasn’t been touched yet. The parquet floors were to be replaced, and I think we

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

actually have the necessary wood stacked in one of the storage barns. The factory is closing down for the season, so I will have plenty of available help. I'll contact our usual plumber, tiler and carpenter, and maybe Tammy can oversee the operation."

"I would love to. If you're sure it's all right with you both."

"Nothing would please us more than to see the old house open and living again," added Mrs. Harrison.

Chapter XXIX

TTrue to his word, Mr. Harrison arranged for the plumber, carpenter and tiler to meet with the women the following morning, Tuesday. Meanwhile, on Monday, Mrs. Harrison took Tammy first up to the attic, then to some storage rooms off the garages. She explained that she had inherited many beautiful pieces of Creole furniture from her parents, and, except for her actual bedroom set, all the rest had been in storage for many years. All the furniture was in perfect condition, having been polished and cleaned regularly by the maids.

“My dear, please don’t feel obliged to use any of this. If you would prefer another style of furniture, we can drive into Bridgetown and shop around,” proposed Mrs. Harrison.

“But this is perfect for the house. Are you sure you wouldn’t mind loaning it to us?” asked Tammy.

“Tammy, I haven’t seen my son so happy in a very long time. And just having him around, well, he’s all we have left.” Her voice cracked, and tears welled up in her eyes. She quickly regained her usual self-control. “I’ve worried that after all those years of wandering, Bryan might never return home. So don’t you see? Not only I have my son, but also a wonderful woman who loves him dearly. An old woman could ask for little more.”

Tammy, too, was touched by the scene, and leaned over, giving Mrs. Harrison a big hug. “Your son is warm and sensitive and I love him so very much.” This was the first real contact between the two women, and both cherished it, letting it last a while longer. Mrs. Harrison broke the spell. “Once the house is ready, you can come back and choose what you like. As for the kitchen, we’ll see the specialists tomorrow, and you can decide what kind of kitchen you want. Then the two of us

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

will go shopping to choose the appliances for the kitchen. It'll be fun. I don't get out very often, and shopping alone is, well, not very exciting."

That night, in Bryan's bed, Tammy related the day's events, mentioning, of course, the furniture. Bryan was vaguely aware that the furniture from his maternal grandparents' various houses was in storage.

"Tammy, I trust you on fixing up the house and choosing the right furniture. Whatever you need to buy, let me know. By the way, if you need anything, please let Edmond know. He usually does all the shopping. Since you don't know your way around, should you need to go out, just let him know, and I'll give you the necessary money."

"Thanks, Bryan, but until recently, I was a working woman. I have my credit cards and money in the bank. I want to participate in fixing up the house, making it our home."

"Don't forget, Tammy, we have an appointment with the doctor on Friday. I won't ask you how you're feeling, because you look so absolutely delicious. But if our lovemaking is tiring you, just send me to the cold shower."

Their ardor hadn't subsided in the least, and they continued to marvel at the things they could do with each other's body, never forgetting the basic rule of safe sex. But with a little imagination, that still left lots of possibilities.

"How is everything at work, Bryan? Do you regret your life on the seas with your buddies?"

"Actually, Tammy, I think I'm good at what I do with my father. And I do like it, besides. My pirate days are over, unless the two of us decide to take to the seas, and to a life of plundering," teased Bryan. "What more could I ask for? I'm with the most wonderful woman in the world, whom I love, and who loves me, if I'm not being too presumptuous. I'm glad to get re-acquainted with my parents after all those years, and I

MIKE CONNOLE

like my work. We'll soon have our own lovely home, and who knows, maybe we'll just live happily ever after."

"I sometimes wonder, Bryan, what I did to deserve all this. Since there is no answer, I'll just accept it and keep you as long as I can, or as long as you'll have me."

"I'm seriously considering keeping you on a permanent basis, my love. Now to change the subject, there is something I'd like to mention. If and when you decide to call Hal, please feel free to do so."

"I probably will call him, Bryan. But not yet. Maybe in another few weeks." Then, as with every other night since their arrival, they fell asleep, their bodies entwined.

Tammy slept little that night, excited by the prospect of the following day. She had several ideas, and she would test these on the workers and Bryan's mother in the morning. Dawn finally arrived, and Tammy was up and showered before Bryan stirred.

"Aren't we up early! Would this have anything to do with the old house, by any chance?" inquired Bryan.

"I am excited, I must admit. I hardly slept at all last night. But I did come up with some good ideas for the kitchen, and what furniture I'll put where. Go take your shower now, and if you ask me nicely, maybe I'll wash your back for you."

Bryan bounded from the bed, smothering Tammy with kisses. "Please come wash my back, and all the rest too." Tammy had no trouble understanding what the "rest" was, by now stiff and erect.

"Hey, you. No time for that now. We can't keep your parents waiting. I said your back. For the rest, maybe I can squeeze you in at naptime."

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

At breakfast, Mrs. Harrison was already dressed in her «outdoor clothes», as they were scheduled to meet with the workers at 8 A.M. Tammy and Mrs. Harrison had a hurried breakfast before leaving their men and heading up the lane. The workmen were waiting, and after introductions, went first to the kitchen, at Tammy's suggestion. Tammy described how she pictured the future kitchen, where she would place the sink and appliances, cabinets and shelves, and a small breakfast area. She diplomatically included Mrs. Harrison, often asking her opinion. Mrs. Harrison suggested large, red-clay tiles for the floor, and something bright for the tiles around the sink and counter area. The three workmen asked several pertinent questions, and offered their professional advice. The five of them worked well together, the carpenter making several sketches, indicating where to place which appliances, where to tile, etc.

They followed the same procedure in the other areas of the house. The carpenter inspected the wood beams, finding them surprisingly sound. The bathroom was basically finished, but Tammy expressed her desire to add a large countertop to either side of the sink, with a large mirror behind all this. The tiled walls and floor were in perfect condition, so very little would have to be done there. The bedrooms, dining room and main room needed little attention, except for the electrical outlets, and switches, and, of course, the parquet floors, which, all agreed, would be perfect throughout these rooms. The carpenter suggested that the women choose the appliances, and that he would build the cabinets around them. The tiler volunteered to get them samples of the tiles for the kitchen walls and floor, and meet with the women the following morning. The plumber suggested that Tammy choose the kitchen sink, dishwasher and washing machine, so that he too could get started. They would discuss the color scheme for the interior and exterior of the

MIKE CONNOLE

house, and advise the carpenter, who would then contact his usual painter.

Feeling good with their decisions of the morning, the two women headed back to the main house to get cleaned up for lunch and their subsequent shopping expedition that afternoon. Their sacrosanct before-meals drink, and lunch itself, were filled with enthusiastic descriptions of their project, and all they had to do. The men listened patiently, and seemed pleased by the women's reaction.

Once again, the women couldn't tarry after their meal. They had notified the chauffeur/butler, who was waiting near the main entrance of the house to drive them to the warehouse district of Bridgetown. The kitchen in the main house had been completely redone and modernized one year earlier, and Mrs. Harrison knew exactly where to go, and gave the instructions to the chauffeur.

The women's taste was amazingly similar. Mrs. Harrison insisted on the dishwasher and washer/dryer, which Tammy thought could wait for later. Tammy liked the combination microwave/traditional oven, and convection stove top. Mrs. Harrison mentioned the occasional electrical outages on the island, and suggested two electric and two gas burners. Tammy never expected to find such state-of-the-art appliances in Barbados, and she found the perfect refrigerator/freezer unit. Mrs. Harrison pulled the manager aside, and they talked for a few moments. Then Mrs. Harrison politely asked Tammy if she could think of anything else for the house. Tammy mentioned ceiling fans, wondering if they wouldn't suffice in what appeared to be a well-ventilated house. These were then added to the list, and Mrs. Harrison ushered Tammy towards the door. When Tammy asked about paying, Mrs. Harrison informed her that it was taken care of, and that everything

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

would be delivered by 8 the following morning. All Tammy could do was thank her.

Chapter XXX

The following days whirred by, everybody doing their jobs with amazing alacrity. Tammy and Mrs. Harrison were there mornings and afternoons, and Mrs. Harrison seemed a bit surprised when Tammy announced that she and Bryan would be spending that Friday morning together, if she didn't mind. Mr. Harrison had also been informed by Bryan, and was perplexed by this change in their now-established routine. Without having to vocalize, each of Bryan's parents wondered, hoped, that just maybe Tammy was pregnant.

That Friday morning, they were warmly received by the infectious disease specialist, and Tammy rapidly went through the chronology of her struggle with AIDS, not omitting the various symptoms, different medication protocols, and her recent one-week period without her therapy. The doctor decided to do some blood work, including viral loads and lymphocyte counts, which he explained, could now be done in Barbados, no longer needing to be sent out. Her medication would automatically be ordered monthly, and she should be encouraged to stay on her strict drug regimen. The doctor patiently went over the precautions involved with each of the three drugs, then discreetly brought up the subject of safe sex and Bryan's HIV status, suggesting that he be tested every six months as a precaution. Bryan agreed, and said he would stop by each month and pick up Tammy's « supply ». The doctor asked Tammy if she wouldn't mind leaving her doctor's name and California address with his secretary, as her records might prove helpful some day. They left him, feeling reassured by his apparent competence, and obvious warmth.

Bryan suggested lunch, tete-a-tete. Tammy was pleased with the idea, as she and Bryan had little time together during

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

the day. Bryan took her to a restaurant on the West Coast, so different from the untamed Atlantic side. Here the water was turquoise, with white-sand beaches and many hotels and restaurants. Bryan explained that Barbados achieved independence from Great Britain in 1966, and that tourism played a major role in the economy of the island. The many hotels and tourist-related activities employed many of the islanders, which helped to keep the unemployment from soaring. He added as a point of interest that the Queen of England was the head of state, represented by a Governor-General.

They were relaxed as always in each other's company, and Tammy let Bryan talk about his work, his thoughts on things in general. Most of the conversation this past week involved the re-modeling, and Tammy instinctively felt it would be good for her to do a little listening now.

Bryan seemed genuinely pleased with his new life. He was amazed with his father's stamina, after all these years. Their holdings were vast, more than Bryan ever imagined, and Bryan seemed to thrive with this new challenge. And without saying so in so many words, Bryan's father admitted that as the boys were growing up, he became closer to his older son, who was always asking questions, following his father to his various offices and factories, whereas Bryan seemed a wilder, free spirit, which his father respected. For Mr. Harrison, it was a discovery, this prodigal son returning, and he honestly appreciated what he was discovering, this son who grasped some complicated notions rapidly, was opinionated but fair with his subordinates, be it the simple cane-cutter or a factory manager. And his father confided all this to him, along with his pride in his son.

Tammy was a good listener that afternoon, asking questions occasionally, encouraging Bryan to talk about

MIKE CONNOLE

himself. It was about 4 P.M. when they finished their leisurely lunch. Bryan mentioned that he was supposed to be in a meeting at that time, but would run Tammy home first, preferring this to sending her off in a taxi. Tammy was scheduled to meet with the carpenter before 5, so she had time still.

Another ten days, and the house was ready. Bryan had purposely stayed away, waiting to be surprised once everything was in place. With Mrs. Harrison's help, they chose the appropriate furniture, and this was hauled up the lane and installed, after having had the parquet floors waxed one last time. Bryan promised to come early that evening, in time for a personal tour of the premises.

At noon, Tammy could hardly contain her excitement. The last remnants of the workmen had been cleared out that morning, and the flurry of cleaning and arranging ended just before noon the two women had lunch alone that day, their men retained in town for a luncheon meeting.

As promised, Bryan was home by 4, and Tammy didn't waste time encouraging him up the lane. The house had been painted a pure white, with blue-green shutters and trim. The doors and windows were all open, and the sun illuminated the whole scene brilliantly. The furniture was placed in such a way on the wide front veranda as to make the house immediately welcoming.

"It's amazing, Tammy!" exclaimed an astonished Bryan. "In just a few short weeks. It's beautiful, my love."

"There's lots more. Come on, Bryan," replied Tammy, excitedly pulling Bryan by the hand onto the veranda and through the front doors. The atmosphere was immediately different - inside was cool, hushed, homey. The smell of floor wax still lingered in the air, and the main room looked like something directly out of a magazine.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“It’s overwhelming, Tammy. It’s perfect, our home,” whispered Bryan, pulling Tammy close to him, rewarding her with a long passionate kiss.

“No distractions - yet. I want you to see the rest.” She briefly showed him the stately dining room, and the bright, functional kitchen. Tammy explained that the area with the small table and chairs would be the breakfast nook. The guest bedroom and bathroom were equally impressive. Then Tammy showed Bryan her favorite - their bedroom. The color scheme was also blue-green, but a few shades lighter than the shutters. The room was quite large, so the two armoires and desk fitted in easily. A queen size, typical Creole bed was off to one side, allowing room for a low table, and two fauteuils.

“Tammy, this is truly beyond words! It’s all wonderful, but I have a slight preference actually - our bedroom. Not only for the obvious reason. However, that bed does look inviting right now. But it’s so restful in here. It’s like going back 100 years, a place of peace and harmony after a laborious day out in the world. Let’s go out on the veranda.” Tammy was curious, but followed. Bryan easily picked her up in his muscular arms, carrying her across the threshold, then gently depositing her on the bed. He climbed up next to her, kissing her face and neck, whispering his admiration at all she had accomplished in such a short period of time.

“You’re so romantic, Bryan. Nobody ever carried me across a threshold before. I’m glad you like it. Your mother is to be credited too, Bryan. She’s been a great help these past weeks. Which reminds me, don’t get too riled up now. I promised your mother that we’d go get your father after our private tour. After all, this was his boyhood home.”

His first view of the old house stopped him dead in his tracks. “This is uncanny. It’s exactly how I remembered this house as a child of 5 or 6. It’s beautiful, my ladies.” He

MIKE CONNOLE

carefully acknowledged the achievement of both women, very much aware of the dedication of Tammy and of his wife these past weeks.

Aside from the kitchen and bathrooms, the setting was so very close to how Mr. Harrison remembered the house, including his old bedroom (now the guestroom) and where they had placed the bed and armoire.

“My congratulations, ladies. It’s really lovely. Maybe Emily and I can move in here and leave you the big house,” he added jokingly.

“That’s very generous of you, father, but I think Tammy and I will be very happy right here,” thanked Bryan, noticing a beaming, approving Tammy.

“You’re right, Bryan. This really will be perfect for the two of you. The kitchenware, china, towels; everything is ready except your personal belongings. But don’t feel you have to move out just because the house is ready,” said Mrs. Harrison.

“If it’s all right with Tammy, I think we’ll wait until next weekend. I’d like to help Tammy at least with this one last detail.” Bryan put his arm around Tammy, giving her a gentle kiss on her forehead.

They moved in two days later, and the following year was a blur. Nothing short of bliss could describe their relationship that first year. Sexually they remained very active and very compatible, enjoying their sometimes gentle, sometimes rougher sex. They agreed to have lunch every day at the big house, but Tammy diplomatically suggested that she would prefer to fix breakfast and dinner for Bryan and herself at the small house. They really were compatible in so many ways, and Tammy remained in relatively good health. They decided to take off a few weeks on *Sugarcane* after that first year, after the Crop Over Festival.

Chapter XXXI

Back in the States, the year had also been eventful. As promised, Laura and John went to Catalina the first weekend after John's return from Martinique with Hal, Mitch and Anne Sophie. The old Laura would have sent a company chauffeur to pick up the remaining members of the *Tempête* gang. But she was there in person, warmly greeting each one, to the amazement of everybody.

That first week after John's returning from Martinique, Laura was suddenly the perfect wife, and a great person. They went to the office together each morning, and she tried to free herself from noon appointments to have a quiet lunch with John. John's curiosity was definitely aroused, but Laura had promised to explain this sudden metamorphosis once in Catalina.

On Saturday morning, they boarded the four-place Cessna that Laura had hired some days earlier. The morning was beautiful and clear, and the views were spectacular as they headed across the channel to Catalina. Buffalo were grazing on the rolling hills, and scattered as they swung in low over the ocean and landed on the high plateau.

Laura had already reserved a suite in a very chic hotel in Avalon, and a taxi was at the airport to transfer them down the country road into Avalon. Laura unpacked the single suitcase and asked John if it would be all right if they had lunch on their private terrace overlooking the bay.

Laura ordered for them, adding a bottle of Dom Perignon champagne at the last moment. John was very receptive to her body language, and she was definitely all sex since their arrival at the hotel. She walked around in a bikini bottom with no top, and even took this off for a few minutes in the sun. Until now,

MIKE CONNOLE

she seemed to go out of her way to hide her large yet firm breasts. But today she was almost flaunting them. Sunbathing together, John got in the mood and reached over, not resisting the temptation to suck on the fast-hardening nipples. Laura was instantly aroused and boldly lowered John's swim trunks, caressing his rigid rod.

"John, let's make a baby," whispered Laura.

John started. "Are you serious, Laura? After all these years? This sudden change of everything - your attitude towards me, towards our friends, and now, you want to have our baby? I just can't believe it."

"Okay, John. You're right. I owe you an explanation, and I'll keep my promise. I can't help but noticing that our little friend has gone quite limp, so the baby will have to wait. If, after I'm done, you still want to have our baby, we'll see about bringing him back to life," joked Laura, obviously nervous.

Laura leaned back on the chaise lounge and patiently took John back through those very painful years. She had more or less rehearsed this moment, like a closing statement in a courtroom, but vocalizing those horrible days after her mother's disappearance, then the arrest and eventual suicide of her father, was almost too much for her. John sensed this fragility, so foreign to his wife, and took her in his arms. Secure in his embrace, she broke down, allowing herself to expurgate all the hurt, hate and fear that she had hidden away some thirty years earlier.

John was absolutely stunned. He continued holding her while she sobbed and sobbed, judging it better to just be there comforting her. This catharsis was long overdue, and he hoped it would be complete. How had she been able to keep all this bottled up all those years? Of course, it had to affect her attitude in general, and her relationships with others. But what had caused this about-face? Why, after all those years, had she

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

decided to stir up a very painful past, and eventually share it with him?

Unfortunately, someone knocked on the door, and John gently withdrew from Laura's hold. Lunch was served in their small dining room, and when John went back out on the terrace, Laura wasn't there. He heard the water running, and found Laura in the bathroom, showering.

"Are you all right, Laura?"

"I think I'll live. Ouf. I wouldn't want to go through that every day, but I'm glad I finally confided in you."

"But Laura, why did you wait all those years? What finally changed your mind?"

"I guess I was afraid of your reaction, or maybe my reaction. Thank you for being there when I needed you. When Tammy disappeared, everything came back all at once. My initial admission, then catharsis of those horrible days so long ago, liberated me. I changed, and I'm sure you noticed it. It was like being released from prison. No more prison cell, no more handcuffs. I was free. I'm only sorry for all those years we were together, but not really together. Do you think we could try all over again?"

"The only regret I have, Laura, is that we didn't have this discussion 25 years ago. I know it took a lot of courage to relive those years, first by yourself, then with me. I must admit, I like the new Laura a lot, although the old one did have many qualities. I've changed over the years, too. So if you're willing to stick it out with me, I'm sure willing to do the same with you. Now let's go open that bottle of champagne and have some lunch," suggested John. "After these revelations, I'm hungry, and if we're going to make that baby, I need lots of energy."

By the end of the meal, each was feeling very good - Laura for having at last revealed that long-kept dark secret to her husband, and John for having at last gained the confidence and

trust of his wife.. Of course, the bottle of champagne did help to relax them, and they fell lustily into each other's arms for a long «nap ». Laura admitted to John that she had stopped taking the pill after returning from Martinique, and she just happened to be at the beginning of her fertile period. "But John, I'm not pressuring you. I understand perfectly if you prefer to wait and see how your new wife will turn out. After all these years, a few more months isn't going to matter all that much."

"I think I'll go ahead and risk it," replied John. "We're not getting any younger, and I do love you and trust you. So come here and make love to your husband."

Even in their lovemaking, Laura had changed. There was no holding back this time. The reticence that John regularly felt had dissipated, and they spent the rest of the afternoon re-discovering each other, marveling at their mutual sensuality, even after all those years. They acted like the typical honeymoon couple, that weekend in Catalina, reluctantly returning to the mainland Sunday evening, relaxed and sated.

Their honeymoon continued through the following months, but after four months and three menstrual periods, they began to worry.

"John, do you think I'm sterile? Maybe I took the pill too long and screwed up my hormones."

"Maybe it's not you but me," worried John. "I read somewhere that men are responsible for almost one-half of sterility problems. Remember that dinner at Mitch's last month when he jokingly said that he was the co-father of over seventy babies? With his auriculotherapy, he seems to re-equilibrate the energies and hormonal levels and both men and women. Why don't we make an appointment and see what he can do for us?"

"I listened to every word he said, John. I wanted to talk to you about seeing him, but you two are so close. I wasn't sure you'd agree."

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“Why not? Why didn’t you say something earlier? No more secrets between us, okay?” scolded John.

John called Mitch that very evening, explaining that he and Laura had a problem they’d like to submit to him. John didn’t seem willing to say more, and Mitch told him to come in with Laura after his last appointment the following day, around 6 P.M.

By 6 P.M. Mitch was intrigued, but quickly put John and Laura at ease. John summarized their fears rapidly, and Mitch reassured them that three months didn’t exactly qualify them with a sterility diagnosis. Mitch went through the usual questions - last birth-control pill, last three menstrual periods, frequency of sexual relations, etc.

Laura’s period had begun the previous day, and Mitch suggested seeing them three times before her ovulation date. He suggested stimulating John’s hormonal functions at the same time. If, after a few months, there were still no results, they would go through the regular sterility work-up. But Mitch was optimistic, once again citing his numerous “miracle babies”.

“So, shall we start now,” asked Mitch.

“Already?” replied Laura, obviously worried.

“Why wait? If you’re both decided, we may have just enough time to set up your bodies before the ovulation date.”

“Let’s go for it!” answered John, taking Laura’s hand. “This means a lot to both of us, Mitch, and I don’t know how to thank you.”

“Thank me when the time comes. But the satisfaction of seeing you two pregnant is all the thanks I need.”

A painless, bloodless thirty minutes later, Mitch had stimulated various parts in Laura’s and John’s ears. Mitch’s competence and very positive attitude encouraged them, and they agreed to come in three days later, at the same time.

MIKE CONNOLE

Their third appointment was on day eleven of Laura's cycle, and Mitch again reassured them. "Now we wait. Should your period come, Laura, give me a call, and I'll see you both on the eleventh day of your next menstrual cycle. Like I said, we'll give it a few months, and I don't want anybody panicking and getting uptight. Try to have sex every day, or at least every other day for the next week, if you can manage it, John," kidded Mitch.

"Are you kidding? Since you started playing with my ear, I feel like an 18-year-old just discovering sex! My hormones are definitely doing their job," bragged John.

"I'll vouch for that, Mitch. We both seem to have more energy, and not just sexually speaking. I really do feel great. We'll try not to worry, but we'll be counting the days anyway. And you'll be the first to know, one way or the other," promised Laura.

The three of them decided to let Anne Sophie and Hal in on their little secret the following evening, when they all would be meeting for dinner at John's and Laura's house. Anne Sophie and Hal got caught up in the excitement, and baby talk dominated the conversation that evening. Later, in bed, Mitch brought up the if-not-taboo-at-least-ignored problem he and Anne Sophie also had.

"It's been over five years, and we're still not pregnant. Being a doctor's wife isn't easy, I know. We've been letting things ride, and five years have gone by."

"But Mitch. We agreed from the beginning to let nature take its course. If I get pregnant, so much the better. If not, well, tant pis."

"I'd only be helping nature along, Anne Sophie. No medication, no lab work. Just you and me and our ears."

"But Mitch. You never offered to treat us up until now. Why, all of a sudden, have you changed your mind?"

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

“I guess it’s the same with all doctors. After a day seeing patients, a doctor can’t come home and admit that there may be a medical problem close to him. I think John and Laura broke the ice, and if I can treat them, then I can treat us, too.”

“But what if nothing happens, Mitch? What if I don’t become pregnant? I don’t want to see a gynecologist, and I don’t want to take all those pills and shots I read about.”

“How about this, Anne Sophie. After your next period, we’ll try three sessions for each of us. Don’t worry. I can manage to treat myself. Then, before your ovulation date for the following six months or so, I’ll re-zap our ears. What do you think, mon amour?”

“I guess I’m afraid, Mitch, but we’ll probably both regret it later if we don’t at least try. I’m willing, if you don’t mind treating your own wife.”

“Why don’t we get in a little practice in the meantime,” Mitch suggested, snuggling in close to Anne Sophie.

Three weeks later, and seven days late for her very regular menstrual period, Laura dared hope that she was really pregnant. But could Mitch’s therapy be that efficacious, and so quickly? Mitch was holding his breath, almost as anxious as John and Laura. He suggested waiting another few days, then trying an at-home pregnancy test. Laura bought the test immediately, and the following Sunday morning, she and John anxiously went through the simple procedure. And wonder of wonders, Laura was pregnant. They were both jubilant, and tears of joy streaked their faces. It was an intense moment of sharing, one they would long remember.

The news having sunk in, they called Mitch and Anne Sophie with the good news. Mitch was ecstatic, and content with his participation in this miracle of conception. Anne Sophie was very excited for Laura and John, and only hoped that she and Mitch would have the same results.

MIKE CONNOLE

Unfortunately, her period came right on time the next two months, but Mitch continued the auriculotherapy sessions a few days before Anne Sophie's ovulation date. Then, after their third attempt, Anne Sophie was late - two, then four, then eight days. She also bought an at-home test, and with knotted stomachs and thumping hearts, they went through the same procedure, and they also discovered that they were to be parents some nine months down the line. Mitch cried unashamedly, joining his wet-cheeked wife in their expression of the acknowledgment of this wondrous happening.

Mitch called John an hour later. "How are the parents-to-be holding up?" he asked.

"Great, Mitch. Laura is a little nauseous in the morning, but that seems to be better these last few days."

"Do you think there's room on your future parents' train for two more?" queried Mitch nonchalantly.

"Are you saying what I think you're saying, Mitch?" replied John, suddenly excited.

"Yeah, John. We just found out a while ago. After all these years, we decided that I should tickle Anne Sophie's and my ears. It worked for you two and those countless other couples, but I never got up the nerve to try it on my own wife and on myself. I guess I was afraid it might not work. Not bad for a doctor, eh? Then seeing how excited you and Laura are, we decided to give it a try."

"This is amazing, Mitch. And you say that over seventy women became pregnant with your technique. Have you thought about publishing?"

"The medical community is pretty rigid, John. When it comes to alternative medicine, they put on their blinders, and don't even try to understand, much less admit, that maybe there are other techniques in healing people."

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Due to their ages, both Laura and Anne Sophie submitted to additional tests during their pregnancies, including an amniocentesis, where a small quantity of amniotic fluid is taken from the liquid surrounding the fetus. The chromosomes are then examined. As the maternal age approaches 40, the risk of an additional chromosome to the twenty first pair increases greatly. Thus, mongolism can be diagnosed during the fourth month of pregnancy. Fortunately, both babies-to-be were normal - a girl for Mitch and Anne Sophie, a boy for Laura and John. All four were ecstatic, and joked that one day their children might even marry one another.

Hal was included in all the excitement of those early pregnancy months, and he jokingly referred to himself as the future uncle. Maybe somewhere, deep down, he was little jealous, but refused to feel sorry for himself. But who could have imagined all that had happened to the perfect high school sweethearts - the botched abortion, the AIDS, and Tammy's leaving him, preferring her kidnapper to him. It did seem like a lot.

Tammy called about a month after their Martinique goodbye. She sounded happy and well, and her occasional calls confirmed Hal's initial impression. She couldn't resist the professional side, and described the new house in detail. Hal admitted that it sounded wonderful, and asked her regularly about her health. She didn't dwell on the subject, mentioning that the results of her tests weren't what they had hoped for, and that her doctor had changed her medication, once again.

Hal didn't insist, but he knew Tammy, and he knew she was worried. He brought her up to date on the happenings in Southern California, especially the wonderful news about Laura and Anne Sophie. Tammy was shocked but sincerely happy for the two couples. She half jokingly asked Hal if he didn't want to follow his two friends down the parenthood path. But Hal

MIKE CONNOLE

replied that he almost felt like a father, sharing many of the happy moments with John, Laura, Mitch and Anne Sophie.

Fortunately for Hal, he had two wonderful friends, who did everything to include him in their celebrations. But somewhere inside, something had died. He tried dating women a few times, but dating in the 90's was definitely too sex-oriented. It seemed understood that every date should terminate in his bed after an evening out. True, this sexual outlet was good, but it always left him with a hollow feeling.

Once or twice, he even dared go to a gay bar, where, of course, everything was sexually oriented. He really didn't know what he wanted, but decided that close companionship, real friendship, like an evening with his four friends, left him feeling much better than what he felt the morning after a roll in the hay with some unknown.

Hal kept Tammy informed of the two births, stating proudly that he was the godfather of both babies. She, in turn, sent a small congratulatory note to each couple, with a small present for each baby. Hal saw his godchildren frequently, marveling at their development. His real estate business had definitely picked up, so he kept very busy.

About a year after their Caribbean trip, he became instantly alerted by the tone of Tammy's voice during one of their infrequent telephone conversations. Her energy seemed down as she informed Hal of her and Bryan's pending sailing expedition. When Hal asked how she was feeling, she laconically replied «okay ». Hal wished her good sailing, and asked if Bryan was around. Tammy was somewhat surprised, as Hal hadn't spoken to Bryan since Martinique. She said goodbye, and put Bryan on the line.

“Hello, Bryan. I know you can't really answer because Tammy is probably in the room. She's not well, Bryan. I've known her too long, and I know when something's wrong. She

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

mentioned some test results that weren't good a while back, and that her doctor had changed her medication. I guess the new medication isn't working, is it?

"That's right, Hal. I'm glad you understand," Bryan answered, hoping Hal would get the message, daring not say more with Tammy within hearing distance.

"Why don't you fly her up here. Maybe there's something new we can try. We can't leave her like this!"

"We'll give you a call when we get back from our trip. Good bye, Hal."

Chapter XXXII

After the Crops Over Festival, Bryan had much more free time, and could start thinking about their itinerary for the next few weeks. But Bryan wasn't blind, and he was worried about Tammy's rapidly-declining state of health. Mrs. Harrison had also noticed a dramatic change in Tammy. Gone was the enthusiasm, the forever-present projects for the house, for the gardens, etc. Tammy seemed to lose all her energy, and just went along with the current. There didn't seem to be any tension between Bryan and Tammy, and Mrs. Harrison wondered if Tammy wasn't simply depressed, maybe even homesick for the States. She would talk to Bryan after his return from his and Tammy's sailing trip. Maybe a few weeks on the seas would snap Tammy out of her maudlin physical/psychological state. Even the doctor was more reserved, tempering his usual optimistic attitude. He had already had several such patients, where resistance develops to the medication, and the opportunistic infections take over the body, inevitably leading to death. Of course, he didn't discuss this with Tammy, but did have a man-to-man discussion with Bryan when they accidentally ran into one another at the hospital's pharmacy, when Bryan had come in to pick up Tammy's supply before their trip.

"I'm sorry, Bryan. We've tried everything available. I've even talked to some AIDS specialists in Britain and in the States. Unfortunately, they didn't have any new suggestions. All we can do now is hope that her body will react to this latest medication combination. Her mental status has helped her up until now, but even Tammy seems discouraged now. I'm glad the two of you are getting away together. Be there for her, Bryan. At this point, I think you can help her more than I can.

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

Please don't hesitate to call me if something comes up. You have my phone numbers, and I'll be available. Good luck, Bryan, and say goodbye to Tammy for me. Have a safe and happy trip."

That night, Bryan mentioned that he had run into Tammy's doctor, and that he had reiterated the probable beneficial effect of fresh air and open seas. But Bryan was obviously upset, and Tammy sensed this immediately.

"What's wrong, Bryan? What else did the doctor say?"

"Nothing, Tammy. Honest. But you're tired, and I don't want to tire you any more with this trip. It'll be just the two of us, so you'll be working some."

"I can handle it, Bryan. I really am looking forward to this trip. Hopefully, it will get me back on track."

"Is it that bad, Tammy?"

"I must admit, I am really tired. The old aches and pains have come back to haunt me, and I sleep so much. Up until now, science and research have been one step ahead of my AIDS. Please, God, let these meds reverse the trend. Don't worry, Bryan. I've been down this road before, and I'm still here, aren't I? I don't plan on checking out yet. I need more time to more thoroughly enjoy my man and our home. I do love you, Bryan. Even if I'm not up to my old sex-starved self, I do love you, more and more all the time."

Bryan felt a little reassured by Tammy's optimism and insistence that they maintain their sailing expedition. They discussed the itinerary, and decided to head southwest, presumably staying south of any future-developing tropical disturbance. This was the hurricane season, but almost always, any hurricane developing off Barbados headed northwest. With the trade winds, they would be sailing mostly downwind, or on a broad reach. Their westernmost destination was Aruba, the farthest island to the west in the ABC group (Aruba, Bonaire,

MIKE CONNOLE

and Curacao). They counted three to four days on the high seas before arriving in the protected harbor at Oranjestad, then sailing along the northern coast of Venezuela. After that, they would play it by ear, probably sailing through the Grenadines, then maybe St. Vincent, and then back east to Barbados.

They planned to go shopping together the next day, stocking up the boat, which had already been cleaned up, the motors tuned, and the hull scraped and re-painted with antifouling below the waterline, and up several inches above the line.

Tammy actually awoke the next morning with a little energy, even instigating a mellow love-session with Bryan. Those past weeks had been demanding on Bryan, during the final days of the cane-cutting season. He was up very early every morning, and there was never any time for early morning playing around in bed. And anyway, Tammy didn't have the energy, at least not until today.

They weren't planning on leaving until the following morning, so they tarried in bed, then an unhurried breakfast and packing of their bags. Tammy seemed to be tiring, so Bryan suggested a quick nap, a light lunch, then shopping in the afternoon, stocking *Sugar Cane* with victuals and some of their clothes, after the shopping expedition.

That evening, as agreed, they had drinks and dinner with Bryan's parents. Bryan and his father talked shop, trying to wrap up the details on one of their latest projects. Mrs. Harrison surprised Tammy by revealing that she had done a lot of sailing from an early age, including long trips with Mr. Harrison and their two sons. She even gave Tammy some helpful hints for preparing meals while navigating on rolling seas.

As Bryan wanted to be off early the following morning, they headed back up the lane for a good night's sleep in a non-

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

rocking bed. Bryan shook Tammy gently at 6 A.M. She moaned, then realized that they were leaving that day. She gave Bryan a quick kiss and headed for the kitchen to make coffee. At 7, the chauffeur and Mrs. Harrison pulled up in the car, and the last of their personal things were loaded into the trunk. By 8, they were ready to shove off. Bryan's father arrived just in time, and good-byes were said all around. Mrs. Harrison gave Tammy a big hug and told her to come back with lots of energy, as Mrs. Harrison had several new ideas she wanted to discuss with Tammy. Tammy assured her that she would be ready for whatever project she had in mind.

Tammy and Bryan stood together at the helm, but Bryan was handling the delicate task of steering out of the busy harbor. They both turned around for a last glance at Bryan's parents, who, after a final wave, were lost behind the buildings of Bridgetown.

Sailing between two points is rarely a comfortable situation. Even with the steady trade winds and for the most part calm seas, the next 48 hours were tiring, especially for Bryan. He would doze off occasionally during the long night hours, especially when he insisted that Tammy go below and get a decent night's sleep. When she was rested during the day, he would stretch out on the bed and nod off, always aware of any changes in the motion of the boat, or a not-normal flapping of the sails. But he trusted Tammy, and did manage a few hours of sleep now and then.

Before noon on the third day, Oranjestad came into view off the starboard bow, and off to port, Venezuela was also visible. The port was very pleasant, and two cruise ships were at dock. Bryan had only briefly stopped in Aruba in his trafficking days, and had never actually visited the island. He rented a slip for the next four days, knowing that a little rest and sightseeing would be good for both Tammy and himself.

MIKE CONNOLE

They got cleaned up, and had lunch in a little restaurant built on pilings over the water. Bryan suggested a good nap for the two of them, then maybe a taxi tour of part of the island, if they felt up to it. The food was decent, and the people were friendly. They both felt the strain of the past three days at sea, and welcomed a good siesta. Bryan stripped in the cabin, and sprawled out on the bed. A twinge of regret went through Tammy as she lustily examined Bryan's naked body. It was definitely enticing, but she barely had the energy to consider making love, much less actually doing it.

Bryan saw her look, and invited her to join him.

"I'm sorry, Bryan, but I don't think I have the energy. My mind is more than willing, but my body says no. Let's see how I feel after our nap. I'm really sorry, Bryan."

"Don't worry about me. Did those two and a half days at sea tire you out? We'll spend a few leisurely days here. I want you feeling better, not more tired after this trip. Take your clothes off now, and come take your nap.

They both slept soundly for the next two hours, and were awakened by the sound of a jet passing overhead. Tammy really did feel better, even a little horny. Her hands caressing Bryan's back and buns sent out the message. She was definitely feeling better, and they spent the next hour making passionate love. They again dozed off, and another hour passed. By that time, it was too late to go sight-seeing, so they decided to lounge around the boat, get cleaned up, and walk around the downtown area, then have dinner somewhere in town.

Tammy talked animatedly during dinner, and Bryan recognized something of the old Tammy emerging once again. He hoped, he prayed, that this would continue. She pointed out the melange of Dutch colonial style and Spanish influence in the old part of town, where they enjoyed a stroll after dinner. Unlike most of the Caribbean, the trade winds were still

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

blowing strong, even at 10 P.M. The next day, their taxi driver pointed out several of the divi-divi trees, which are windswept towards the west, influenced by the strong easterly winds. They marveled at the ragged eastern coast, with its crashing waves forming many interesting rock formations and caves, including a tourist-pleasing natural rock bridge. They visited some Indian caves in the center of the island, where Arawak engravings are still visible in some. Tammy was curious, and asked what language their chauffeur spoke to the locals. She seemed to understand some words, but didn't recognize the language as Dutch. The driver informed them that Papiamentu was spoken among the islanders. It was an interesting mixture of English, Spanish, Dutch, Indian, and Portuguese. He went on to explain how the island had once been a big gold producer, then aloe harvesting for medicinal purposes, and in 1930, possessed the world's largest oil refinery. The oil is imported from nearby Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela to be refined and exploited by the international oil companies.

They had lunch in the center of the island in a little restaurant suggested by their driver. Tammy was tired after lunch, and asked Bryan if they could continue their visit the next day. She wanted to take a nap, then maybe walk through the Wilhelmina Park in Oranjestad. Bryan immediately agreed and asked their taximan to take them back to *Sugarcane*, agreeing to meet him at 9 the following morning for a visit of the west coast.

Tammy was already in bed when Bryan came down from checking the mooring. Tammy was very pale, and breathing strangely.

"Bryan, I don't think the medication is working. I've been trying so hard to pretend that everything will be all right, but it's not. I think I may even have a fever. I honestly don't think I have the courage, either physical or spiritual, to combat this

MIKE CONNOLE

thing any longer. I knew this day would come eventually, Bryan, and now I need your help. I want to stop taking my meds. They're not working, and they make me nauseous. My stomach burns every time I swallow all those pills. I know the protease inhibitor drugs cause the shooting pains in my legs. I just didn't tell the doctor. I wanted so much for everything to work out. I swear to God, Bryan, I tried. I've been trying so hard these past few weeks, I just don't want to continue like this. I want to stop taking all those horrible pills and enjoy with you what time I have left. Please don't say no. Say you'll think about it, and we'll discuss it tomorrow. Come hold me tight. I want to fall asleep in your arms. I want our love to heal me, to give me the strength to continue, but not with the medication. Tammy was too exhausted for emotion, and drifted off rapidly, comforted by the security of Bryan's embrace.

But now Bryan's mind was whirring. What could he do? Should he play the devil's advocate, or accept Tammy's proposal outright. Should he tell her about his discussion with the doctor back in Barbados that day? He loved her so much, and it was killing him to see her like that. Maybe he was being selfish in wanting to keep her alive for him and his happiness. If he truly loved her, he should accept her decision. Or maybe she was just tired and discouraged. Tammy was right. They would each think about it for the next 24 hours and then re-discuss Tammy's decision. In any case, Bryan had to be sure that she really was at the end of her rope, and not just tired and depressed. He closed his eyes, and eventually fell asleep reliving all those marvelous moments they had shared that past year.

Tammy slept all afternoon, awakening at 6 P.M. She was still feverish, her eyes too sparkly. Some of her fatigue had dissipated, and she actually did feel a little better. Unknown to Bryan, she had not taken her medication in the last 24 hours,

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

and had definitely decided not to recommence. Was she digging her own grave? She thought not. That grave was already dug, but she wasn't in it yet.

Bryan had patiently lain beside her, afraid that any movement might disturb her sleep. They showered together, and Bryan sensually soaped down Tammy. This soapy massage felt good on Tammy's febrile body, and Bryan's wandering fingers actually aroused her. She, in turn, soaped down Bryan, who, in turn, became aroused. Their shower seance ended in bed, where they made love. But it was different this time - there was something more urgent in their lovemaking, as if each had accepted the inevitable, but decided to exploit the present to the maximum. Tammy felt Bryan's non-vocalized resignation, welcoming it. She suggested a quiet dinner on board, not wanting their intimacy interrupted by outside sights and sounds. They worked together preparing a delicious meal, and Bryan opened a bottle of wine. They became more and more mellow as the level of wine in the bottle ebbed. They talked about life, and death, and «after». Both were convinced that there had to be something after life. All that energy, all that untapped brain capacity, it couldn't just stop, like turning off a light. Their discussion was easy, and they even managed to talk about their actual demise, and how they would like to be «disposed of». Tammy and Bryan were in full accord - cremation, followed by the sprinkling of their ashes in the ocean. Instead of going to some awful gravesite, it would suffice to walk along a beach, watch a sunrise or a sunset over the water, to be in full communion with the departed soul. Tammy made Bryan promise that he would respect her last wishes, with only himself present for the cremation and sea burial. Tammy would write a letter to Hal, another to her parents, and still another to Bryan's parents, explaining that Bryan had acted on her request, concerning her funeral. Bryan could mail these letters «after the

MIKE CONNOLE

fact”, thus avoiding any complications from any of the concerned parties. Although the conversation was anything but gay, they relaxed even more, having taken care of these morose details.

Without the pills, Tammy’s appetite was on the rise, and her energy was returning. She was up the next morning before Bryan, and prepared him a big American breakfast before waking him up. The chauffeur was there at 9, and they enjoyed the day on the West Coast of Aruba. The coast was protected by the island, and the miles-long stretches of beach featured white sands and turquoise waters. The tourist boom had resulted in side-by-side hotels, up and down the beach. They rented a boat and snorkeled around a German cargo ship, sunk by its own captain during World War II. Bryan even managed to convince Tammy to try parasailing, which afforded a magnificent view of the entire island. The soaring sensation was exhilarating, and Tammy came back on board transformed. Something had changed in her. She had experienced something almost religious up in the sky, and suddenly came to grips with her life.

Bryan noticed a change in Tammy, but said nothing. He suggested lunch in one of the many beachside bars, then a nap back on board. If they didn’t wake up too late, they could take in the park in the evening. She ate ravenously, and Bryan understood that her medication really did affect her appetite. She slept until 4, awakening Bryan with her kisses.

“Where did you get all this sudden energy, Tammy? Mind you, I’m not complaining, quite the contrary.”

Once again, there was certain urgency as Tammy made love to Bryan, as Bryan made love to Tammy. After more snuggling and showers, they dressed for their walk through the beautifully flowered and tended gardens. They stayed until sunset, then decided to try a restaurant that the cab driver had suggested. The food was good, but they were in their own little

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

world. Tammy and Bryan didn't appreciate, didn't need, any outside distraction. They decided to buy some local fruits and vegetables from the large outside market the following day, then leave the day after that. Tammy, for the first time, talked about the future. She mentioned to Bryan that she was intrigued by Bryan's mother's last remarks before their departure. Bryan said he couldn't imagine what project she had in mind, but that they would find out in a few more weeks.

Tammy held up well the following day, as they shopped and prepared *Sugarcane* for her long trip back to the east. But late that night, a strange shaking of the bed awakened Bryan. It took him a few seconds to realize that the boat wasn't rocking, only the bed. He reached over - Tammy's skin was wet and on fire. She was shaking badly and mumbling. Bryan quickly uncovered her, put a wet, cool washcloth on her forehead, and got her to swallow two aspirin. He had some rubbing alcohol on board, and used it on Tammy's body. After a good hour of rubbing her down, the fever broke, and she gradually became more conscious.

"It's all right, my love. You had a high fever, and you were delirious. I couldn't understand what you were saying, but you did mention Savannes Bay several times."

"Oh, Bryan. I feel awful, and I'm so thirsty. Could you get me a glass of water, please?"

She actually drank three glasses of water, and drifted back off to sleep. Bryan slept little the rest of that night, touching her often, reassuring himself that the fever hadn't come back. She woke around eight the following morning, with aches and pains, and a slight fever.

"Tammy, if you're not up to it, we can stay here a few more days. Do you want to see a doctor here in Aruba?"

"No, Bryan. Let's stick to our plan and leave this morning. But you were right. I kept dreaming last night of Saint Lucia

MIKE CONNOLE

and Savannes Bay. Do you think we could sail there from here?"

"Saint Lucia? From here?" replied a surprised Bryan. "Let me check the charts. We'd be going pretty much into the wind, so we'll have to do some tacking to get there. But if it's what you want, then we'll do it."

Bryan studied the chart - Saint Lucia was east by northeast from Aruba. The trade winds that time of year were pretty much straight east, so it would be a close reach, and undoubtedly with some tacking. Not the most pleasant conditions, but no tropical waves were in formation, so the swell shouldn't hinder them too much.

For the first day and night, they managed to keep their heading, with the help of south-easterly winds. Aspirin controlled Tammy's fever, but every four hours, it came back. She drank lots of water, and on Bryan's advice, stayed out of the sun and wind, which would only dehydrate her more, thus aggravating her fever.

The wind swung around to east the following day, and their easterly progress slowed. Tammy looked like hell now. She couldn't hold anything down, vomiting after every meal. Fortunately, she could keep down liquids, and when she wasn't sleeping, she would drink lots of fluids. When Bryan asked her if she wanted to re-start her AIDS' treatment, she immediately replied in the negative. She stated that she preferred fever and vomiting to being slave to all those pills again. Bryan accepted her response, feeling that he had at least suggested another solution to the actual one. But Tammy's mind was made up, and he respected that.

It took another two and a half days and nights of hard sailing to reach their destination. Bryan was exhausted, and Tammy was practically bed-ridden, getting up only to use the head, or to get more water and juices. Well off land, Bryan

TEMPEST ON BOARD THE SUGARCANE

headed into the wind, and dropped all sails. He motored slowly into Savannes Bay. Tammy was awakened by the commotion, and came on board. Bryan was shocked by her appearance - her cheeks were sunken, her skin waxen. It hurt him so much to see her like that. He quickly regained his composure, and asked Tammy if she could take the helm, so he could go to the bow and drop the anchor.

Once *Sugarcane* was securely anchored, Bryan and Tammy went down into the main cabin, where Bryan fixed them a quick and easy dinner, which Tammy barely touched. They were both asleep by 6 P.M. During the night, Bryan vaguely felt Tammy stir, asked if she was okay, then crashed again until 8 the following morning. Tammy was sleeping fitfully, and Bryan gently extricated himself from the bed, badly in need of emptying his bladder, and a cup of coffee. As the coffee finished brewing, Tammy staggered into the galley, giving Bryan a peck on the cheek. Bryan could feel the heat emanating from her body and she now smelled bad, almost a decaying odor. In such a short period of time, it seemed her body was shutting down.

“How bad is it, my love?” asked Bryan quietly.

“It’s bad, Bryan. I don’t know how long I can last like this. Could you get me a couple of aspirin, please? At least they lower the fever and pain for a few hours. I’m having trouble breathing, now,” confessed Tammy.

Bryan had noticed her cough the past few days, and it had definitely gotten worse.

MIKE CONNOLE

“Tammy. Let me give my doctor friend a call in Castries. Maybe it’s only bronchitis, and a few days of antibiotics will make you well again.”

“We agreed, Bryan, and I want you to keep your word. I’m coughing up blood, and there’s also blood in my urine. I’m not sure why, but I can guess what is causing all this.”

“But Tammy. What’s going to happen? I can’t just leave you like this!”

“We both know what’s going to happen, Bryan. I was honest with you from the beginning. We both hoped against hope. I love you so much, Bryan. I don’t want to die, but I don’t want to go on living like this, either.”

“Oh, Tammy. What will I do without you? You’ve changed my life, brought me back to my parents, made me an honest person again.”

“You’ll go back to Barbados, Bryan. Your parents will be there. Lean on them for awhile. They will be more than willing. Throw yourself into your work. You’ll gradually forget me.”

“I swear to God, Tammy. I’ll never forget you. Maybe one day the pain will lessen, but you’ve given me the most wonderful year of my life.”

“Remember this past year, Bryan. And remember I’ll be out there somewhere in the universe. When you’re out sailing, or swimming in the ocean, we’ll be together. I’m going to die soon, Bryan. That’s why I had you bring me back here. You promised me last year that we would return to our honeymoon spot. I have one last request. Do you think we could go in and have lunch at Mama Jane’s restaurant, today?”

“But Tammy. Are you up to it?”

“It’s where we confided in each other, when things were happening so fast between us, Bryan. I’d like things to end where they began, one wonderful year ago.”

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Tammy managed to nibble on a dry toast with her coffee, then asked Bryan for some writing paper and a pen. She wanted to write the three letters she had mentioned earlier in the week, knowing full well she couldn't go on much longer. She was sad, but not scared. Her life had been good, and now it was time to leave, this being her lucid analysis of the situation.

They took the dinghy into the village. It brought back strange memories to Tammy - her ambiguous status at that time - somewhere between kidnapping victim and mistress to the kidnapper. They walked past the little shops where Bryan had brought her.

Mama Jane threw her arms up in joy on seeing Bryan, then started at Tammy's appearance. She took them both in her arms, and only now did Tammy break down and cry. It was too much for Bryan, and he, too, sobbed. Mama just held them, rocking back and forth, tears trickling down her cheeks, too. She regained control, wiped her face with her apron, and stated that lunch would be served in thirty minutes. They sat at «their» table, and each had a rum punch. They held hands across the table, looking into one another's eyes, and beyond. Their spoken conversation was minimal, but they were communicating intensely. They didn't do justice to Mama's sumptuous meal, despite their joint effort not to offend Mama. They picked at their food, and when Tammy fainted, Bryan picked her up and placed her in the hammock. Mama wanted to call the doctor, but Bryan simply stated that that wouldn't be necessary. From the tone of his voice, she decided not to insist. Once again, she took him in her thick black arms, reassuring him that she would be there when he needed her.

One hour later, Tammy stirred, and asked Bryan to take her back to the sailboat. She weakly thanked Mama for their meal, and asked her to look after Bryan for the next few days. Mama

MIKE CONNOLE

Jane understood what Tammy was saying, and shook her head, giving Tammy a goodbye hug.

Bryan carried her back to the dinghy, then on board and into bed. Her breathing was labored, and Bryan couldn't arouse her. He sat in a chair across from her, watching her die, so helpless, wanting so much for a miracle to happen. He had loved her so much. And now this. When she sat up and screamed Bryan's name, he went to her immediately, holding her, quieting her, loving her. Her eyes opened briefly, but they were expressionless. Her breathing became irregular, and Bryan sat there holding her, whispering in her ear. He talked about their house, about future projects, how much he loved her. He talked and talked, and sometime much later, he realized that she was no longer breathing. He let out a long low wail, and sat there rocking back and forth, with Tammy in his arms. Then there were no more tears. He felt Tammy's liberation, freed from that disease-ridden body, and gently laid her down on the pillow.

