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Prologue

“The Indian Monsoon has been known and used by mariners for centuries; indeed in the age of sail it shaped the patterns of trade between China and Africa. Now, the monsoon seasons are closely linked to piracy in the Indian Ocean and mariners would be well advised to renew their understanding of the phenomena. While vigilance and proper precautions should at no time be relaxed, it is worth knowing that certain weather conditions are more conducive to pirate attacks than others, and when and how these conditions arise”

(Extract from The Nautical Institute magazine ‘Seaways’ Jan. 2012; Author Huw Davies.)

Southwest (Summer) Monsoon. During the hot summer months over Asia, the earth heats up but the oceans remain cool. Hot air rises and cool air from the Indian Ocean rushes in to fill the gap.

Northeast (Winter) Monsoon. During the winter months over Asia, the earth cools down below the temperature of the Indian Ocean. Now the wind blows from the cold earth to the warmer sea but not as strong as the summer monsoon.

Book One –Gulf of Aden and London

At ten thirty on Monday morning, 26th October 2009; Jim Turner walked into the Company Head Office, causing pandemonium. Good Old Jane collapsed in a flood of tears.

Chapter 1 – April 5th 2009 0549 LT

Was it really a fishing boat or a boat load of Somali pirates awaiting daylight to attack; silhouetted by the rising sun? As he trained his binoculars on her, Jim Turner saw her aspect changing. She was altering course to starboard, threatening to cross the bows of the ***Dawn Splendour***. The turbulence of her wake diminished as if she'd stopped her engines.

Jim swore and ran to the radar; her echo was now only two miles away and closing fast. He dived for the steering wheel, de-clutched it and swung the helm hard over to port; at the same time yelling for his lookout man to come and take the wheel.

Quickly checking the radar again, he saw the fishing boat was now dead ahead just under a mile away; the bow of his ship slowly swinging clear. Worried about the developing close-quarter situation, his fears of piracy were temporarily forgotten.

Without warning the main engine stopped and blacked out, unable to cope with a violent helm manoeuvre at full sea speed. The Emergency Generator cut in, restoring steering and some electrical circuits. Due to her residual

speed through the water, the ship finally passed the fishing boat less than three cables to starboard - before coming to a stop.

The ***Dawn Splendour*** was now drifting helplessly on the calm sea, vulnerable and fully exposed to even the most leisurely hijacking attempt.

Men came pouring out of the fishing boat's accommodation on to her deck; far more than seemed normal for a boat that size. Certain they were about to be attacked, Jim sounded the General Alarm. Running across to the VHF set, he broadcast a ***Mayday*** on the pre-selected Warship channel; stating the ship's position and she was under attack.

The Polish Captain and two deck officers arrived on the bridge, shouting questions over the jangling din of the Emergency Alarm, until Jim switched it off. The silence was then total, except for raised voices. No engine noise; only the slap slap of the sea as small wavelets encountered the ships shell plating.

Some engineers and Filipino sailors ran out of the accommodation on to the main deck; where Jim had gathered some assorted weapons for use against pirates. On the bridge they were all tense, waiting for the attack.

Nothing happened, there *was* no attack. The fishing boat that caused the alarm calmly started shooting her nets; her crew pointing at the ***Dawn Splendour*** and laughing. One or two of the older men were shaking their fists, realising they had very nearly been run down.

The boat's attempt to cross the ship's bows, plus Jim's manoeuvre and the subsequent blackout had nearly caused a collision. Jim was still shaking; his heart hammering; sweat pouring off him despite the relative coolness of the early tropical morning.

A Dutch frigate appeared over the horizon in answer to the ***Mayday***. She was a glorious sight, cleaving through the calm sea, throwing a bow wave almost as high as her main

deck. A light machine gun on board the Warship broke the silence, causing a line of small fountains in the sea; aimed deliberately short of the fishing boat. The Somali fishermen screamed and frantically waved a tattered white flag and some white shirts.

Closing to half a mile, the frigate stopped with a dramatic Full Astern movement. She lowered a launch which sped across to the fishing boat; putting an Officer and armed sailors on board for a thorough inspection. At the same time a helicopter took off and searched the area, looking for other boats in the vicinity.

Jim, having caused all this pandemonium, apologised to the Captain and Chief Engineer; the latter having arrived on the bridge in a foul mood. By VHF he apologised to the Dutch Captain, who laughed and said they'd needed the exercise. The frigate then recovered the launch and helicopter, circled the ***Dawn Splendour*** at full speed; listing heavily on her side away from the turn, then sped off. Before leaving the scene altogether, she called up again by VHF:

"Dawn Splendour, Dawn Splendour, Dawn Splendour, this is the Royal Netherlands Warship ***Groningen***. Please call your Captain. I wish to speak with him. Over."

"Ja, this is Kapitan Wladislaw Jalansky speaking. Thank you for coming, but now I must get my ship moving again. Over."

"Dawn Splendour, Good Morning Captain. Please note your ship is South of the new *International Recommended Transit Corridor*. I would strongly advise you to head north and wait for a convoy to be formed. Your ship is not safe here. Over."

"Kapitan of Dutch warship, it is only a *recommended* safety corridor, no? It is not compulsory and is going the wrong way. The course of my ship is Zero Eight Five degrees to the north of Socotra Island then down to Beira in Mozambique. This will not be changed. Over and out!" The

term 'over and out' signifying the finish of the conversation.

Jim was angry on hearing this, so evidently was the Dutch Captain who; abandoning all Communications procedure and etiquette, called the *Dawn Splendour's* Captain 'a fucking maniac'.

The Chief Engineer called Jim a 'nervous old lady' and grumpily returned to the Engine room; restarting the main engine after several abortive attempts, restoring all electric power. The Captain scowled at Jim, on the point of shouting at him, but went down to his cabin – followed by the other Deck Officers.

Jim Turner wearily resumed his four to eight morning watch, feeling totally under appreciated. At 0800 the Third Mate arrived on the bridge ready to take over the watch, rubbing sleep out of his eyes and yawning.

"There you are then Three-Oh, she's all yours now." Jim said, indicating his neatly pencilled position on the chart. "I'm going down now to have another row with the 'Old Man', following this course is taking us further and further away from the patrolled safety zone?"

He, as Chief Mate handed over the watch to the Syrian Third Mate, telling him the course to steer and pointing out a couple of ships in sight. The two men studied the radar screen, satisfying themselves that none of the echoes menaced their ship. The sea was calm, the day starting to heat up. The only breeze was that created by the ship, piddling along at just over ten knots.

The straits of Bab al Mandeb were some six hours astern of them now. Jim gave a final caution to the Third Mate before leaving the bridge; reinforcing the minimal Standing Orders the Captain had left:

"Watch out for fishing boats that could be disguised Pirate boats, as well as high-speed skiffs. Keep the standby man on the bridge and use him as an extra lookout. If you

think there is problem or if you're in any doubt, then don't hesitate to sound the alarm"

Hiding an amused grin, the Third Mate acknowledged. Jim however was still worried; sailing through the Gulf of Aden, with neither a Naval Escort nor any Security Guards on board was not his idea of a safe transit. Not in April 2009 at any rate. And, to crown it all, the ship was well outside the IRTC!

He'd already had one blazing row with the Captain over this. The Southwest Monsoon had not yet started and it was a perfect scenario for Pirate attacks; the sea being as calm as a lake, not even a swell to worry them. The ship, a tanker, was fully laden with only a small freeboard, almost inviting the pirates just to step aboard.

The Captain was Polish, a stubborn old bugger who still thought himself 'Master under God'. He followed as near as possible the same route he'd been following for years, pirates or no pirates. Jim Turner's appeal to him was again ignored, his carefully thought-out arguments repudiated with scorn.

He'd even suggested doubling the watches through the Danger Zone, thereby earning himself another caustic refusal. The ship was going to stay on her course, come Hell or High Water. No menace from an improbable gang of Pirates was going to make the good ship *Dawn Splendour* deviate even one degree from that course.

A course that took her North of Socotra, then southerly keeping the Somali Coastline about sixty miles away to starboard; gradually turning in towards Mombasa and then heading down to Beira. Foolhardy perhaps yes; but then again, most attacks had occurred in the Gulf of Aden, rarely in the Indian Ocean. That changed soon after, the Indian Ocean soon becoming the Pirates' favourite haunt.

Had Jim been in command, he would have used the IRTC as the Dutch Warship Captain had recommended, despite the extra fuel costs involved. At least Captain

Jalansky was not aiming to sail *between* Socotra and Cape Gardafui; hoping to catch the south-going Aghulas Current sooner rather than later. Until the advent of Piracy, this had been the normal route for ships heading south.

Reflecting on this over a mug of tea in his cabin some two hours later, Jim dozed off in his chair. He'd been on watch since four that morning; having been awake until midnight the night before, finishing off some stores lists. Feeling sleep creeping up on him, he drowsily anticipated his imminent relief by helicopter; scheduled when passing Mombasa in a few days' time.

Dozing he smiled, visualising his wife Angela and their two children meeting him at Heathrow. These visions soon turned into anticipated marital sex. Jim felt himself drifting...drifting...the vision of Angela becoming more and more erotic when:

Bleugh...Bleugh...Bleugh...Bleugh...and then a final Bleugh from the ship's air whistle shattered the calm.

Jim sprang to his feet; spilling his tea on the carpet and ran to his forward facing window. There he saw a large container ship about three miles off the port bow on a possible collision course. The whistle blasts were a signal to the other ship, that she was the 'give way' vessel and must keep clear. Her two masts slowly converged, then opened out the other way, until both ships were safely on opposite courses.

"Where in God's Name is that 'Box Boat' going?" Jim asked himself out loud. "She can only be heading for Berbera, on that course and this far south. By the look of her, she's likely doing eighteen knots so their speed will probably protect them."

Satisfied the *Dawn Splendour* was safe from collision, he bent down to pick up his mug and dabbed the spilt tea with a towel. It was yet another stain the cheap cabin carpet had acquired over the years. His cabin was shabby, clean only through his own efforts and insistence. Since the

whole ship seemed to be held together only by string and chewing gum, Jim wondered if she was even *worth* hijacking. One bullet from a Somali pirate's gun and the ship would shudder and fall to bits!

Wearily he sat down again. His eyes started to close, his mind desperately trying to catch up with his dream featuring Angela and her normally passionate welcome home. He was just about getting there; his worries fading into a blissful peace when...

A violent explosion rocked the ship, followed by the shrill of the Alarm Bells.

Heart thumping, Jim raced to the bridge, arriving the same time as the Captain, where he saw his worst fears confirmed. What he'd been dreading was now happening; a boat load of Somali Pirates half a mile away to port was easily keeping pace with the ship. The port side Bridge Wing was now a mess of blackened steel, having been hit by a Rocket Propelled Grenade. The blast, or shrapnel from it, had shattered the side window of the wheelhouse, littering the interior with broken glass. By sheer good luck, neither the Officer of the Watch nor his Lookouts had been hurt.

The pirates fired another Rocket Propelled Grenade, which arced over the foredeck, exploding in the sea on their starboard side. Heavily armed pirates in the Boat were pointing assorted weapons at the bridge. The Third Mate, recovering his wits, ran to the VHF set and broadcast another ***Mayday*** message, which may or may not have been picked up.

"Bloody Hell" exclaimed Jim bitterly, "I've been all through this before on that Kuwaiti ship."

"Stop your ship," roared a voice from a loudspeaker on the pirate boat, "or the next grenade will be right into your cargo tanks."

"The tanks are full of Fuel Oil and inerted, but I think we'd better stop." Jack said, his heart sinking.

“Bring her hard round to port Mister Mate,” shouted the Captain, **“and I’ll ram the bastards.”**

There was no lack of courage in his makeup. Before Jim could get to the wheel and de-clutch it, the pirate boat had increased speed, altering course to come alongside. Some Filipino sailors and a couple of Engineers came running out of the lower deck accommodation again, in a futile attempt to stop the pirates boarding. A line of bullets, fired from the boat rattled off the bulkhead above their heads. Throwing themselves flat on the deck, they made no further attempt to resist.

The fire hoses; water cannons; old shackles; unused steel blocks; fire axes and galley knives, which Jim had put in place to repel boarders, were never used.

A couple of grapnels thrown from the boat snagged the ship side rails and seven active Somali Pirates swarmed aboard. They fanned out through the accommodation, herding Officers and crew at gun point into the main saloon, confiscating their cell phones. A couple of them darted through unlocked Officer and Crew cabins, taking any drink they could find and obvious items of value.

Two pirates came running up to the bridge, screaming orders for the ship to alter course and head for Eyl, on the Somali Indian Ocean coast. The Captain's temper, never far off boiling point at the best of times, exploded. He tried to bluster, knowing much of the blame for the hijacking was the result of his own stubbornness, compounded by his refusal to listen to neither his Chief Mate nor the Dutch Warship Captain.

“You have fired upon my ship and badly damaged it; also you have shot at my crew, maybe killing or wounding some of them. I protest very strongly and demand you release my ship **now**; so we can continue our voyage; send the wounded men ashore to hospital and repair the damage

you have done.” Captain Jalanski shouted wildly, pointing to still smoking Bridge wing.

The Captain's speech visibly enraged the over-excited, sweating and high on *Khat* Pirate. Holding his gun horizontally in both hands, he jammed it against the Captain's throat; forcing him back against a bulkhead, nearly choking him. The other pirate covered Jim and the Third Mate with his gun, taunting them to interfere. Unnoticed, a third Pirate had already arrived on the Bridge and overheard the Captain's words. He was older, far more sober and less excited. Brutally pulling his man away from the Captain, he said in good English:

“Be quiet Captain! Your men are not wounded or hurt.

As

the damage to your ship is not much, it can be made safe by your crew at anchor. Now, both of you come with me to where your men are being held.” He pointed with his gun, indicating the two Senior Officers.

Leaving an armed pirate on the bridge with the Third Mate, the man who appeared to be in charge followed the Captain and Jim down to the main saloon. There, he told the ship's company they were now hostages; any moves to recapture the ship or other hostile actions would result in their deaths. They would only be released with the ship, after a ransom had been paid.

Shocked by the rapidity of the events, real fear could be seen on many faces, their bodies tensed to control trembling. The air conditioning unit was fighting its usual noisy battle against the accommodation's increasing warmth. The ship, meanwhile, was still chugging along on her original course at ten knots; the pirate on the bridge covering the Third Officer with an enormous gun.

Most of the Pirates were in a manic, totally hostile mood, laughing wildly, jeering and sometimes jabbing the captives with their guns. The atmosphere was fraught with danger. Slowly, the Chief Pirate harshly established some

sort of order with his men; detailing them off. Some to lookout for Warships and helicopters; others to patrol round the accommodation; another to keep guard on the Bridge and communications area.

Although understanding nothing of their language, Jim could see most pirates resented their chief's orders, hotly disputing them, but ending up by obeying. They seemed to change in seconds from manic laughter to hot faced rebellion.

* * * * *

The Pirates' malevolent behaviour puzzled Jim. He'd sailed with a Somali crew a few years previously on the '*Amersham*'. A couple of Somali ABs had signed on with the British Crew at the Isle of Grain and turned out to be good competent sailors. When the ship came back to her next UK port, all the British crew left or were sacked.

The two Somali ABs, now the only ratings left on board apart from the Cook; told the Captain they could recruit more of their own countrymen attached to various Merchant Navy pools around the coast. With his agreement, the two sailors quickly phoned round the various ports again and they'd ended up with a full Somali crew.

They were all good sober sailors, properly qualified in their ratings and entirely different to this present crowd of crazed, probably drugged Pirates. So much so that Jim had difficulty relating the Pirates' present behaviour to the crew picked up by chance, some twelve years previously.

Thinking back over the years, Jim realised that crew had been capable technically of carrying out Piracy operations on this scale. Fully trained in seamanship by the British Merchant Navy.

Jim was sorry Radio Officers no longer existed on most ships now. Both he and the Captain had passed their GMDSS Certificates of Competency, allowing the ship to

sail without a ‘Sparks’. Had an R/O been there when the pirates were first seen, he could have been calling for help during the attack. Both senior officers were far too preoccupied to even think about it at the time.

But, basically, what difference would that have made? Had that Dutch Frigate been on the spot, then yes; maybe they could have foiled the hi-jacking. Being out of sight from a Warship meant they were literally on their own.

Even if Jim or the Captain managed to make a surreptitious SOS call to a Warship at this stage; there was nothing the latter could do, without risking the lives of all on board the *Dawn Splendour*. They would just have to sweat it out and hope things would calm down.

To prove the point, the Dutch Frigate *did* come back, in answer to the second *Mayday* message but could do nothing. By then, the pirates had forced some crew members outside the accommodation on to the main deck, lining them up at gun point, daring the warship to carry out an attack.

The helicopter took off, searched for and soon identified the probable boat that had carried out the attack. The Frigate then closed with her and sent the launch across with an armed boarding party. Either the evidence had long since been dumped overboard and fishing tackle streamed – or it was a different boat. They could prove nothing since the boat was peacefully fishing. Warships in 2009 were wary of world opinion and often let the pirates go, if there was the slightest element of doubt.

The Dutch Captain called them up by VHF, asking if there were any casualties but got no reply. He cursed in Dutch, said he was sorry but he’d have to go back to his patrol area. Watching the frigate leave the scene, Jim felt totally abandoned and swore out loud, using words and phrases he’d never used in his life before.

The Pirates locked the Captain up in his cabin and threatened him with death if the ransom was not paid within

a month. Jim went back up to the Bridge with the Chief Pirate; laid down the courses to Eyl; measured the distance to go and calculated the ETA. He then altered course to pass between Socotra and Cape Gardafui. The engineers were singled out and herded down the Engine Room, where they were warned not to sabotage the main engine. Jim then took the third mate aside and angrily questioned him:

“How in hell did that bloody pirate boat get so close without you seeing her? Were you asleep or something? The standby man, what was he doing? Messing around making coffee for you?”

The Third Mate protested strongly, only too aware it was on *his* watch the ship had been attacked. If only he'd seen and understood their manoeuvre in time, then maybe they could have put some distance between them. At ten knots full speed though, this would have been a forlorn hope. He tried to justify his apparent lack of action:

“The boat must have been hiding on the other side of that container ship we'd just passed, you know; the one I sounded the whistle signal for. She must have slowed down and turned towards us when abeam. We were obviously a much easier target.”

“There were three of you up here supposed to be keeping a lookout. You should have organised an all-round horizon view.” Jim yelled, becoming more and more angry.

“The Lookout reported a fishing boat fine to starboard, which we thought could be a disguised pirate boat, as you yourself pointed out before leaving the bridge. We were concerned about her, watching her closely, worried you may have been right.” The Third Mate hotly replied, his dark Arabian features becoming suffused with temper.

“What? All three of you? Well, you've landed us in one hell of a fucking mess now, haven't you?” Jim said, knowing he was being totally unfair, but unable to stop.

“*I’ve* landed us in this situation?” The third Mate gasped, unable to believe his ears. “I didn’t lay down this course, the Old Man did. And *you*? You said you were going down at eight to confront him again. You didn’t have much success did you? Why didn’t *you* contact a Warship yourself, instead of arguing with the Captain? Why didn’t *you* alter course up to the safe zone, like the Dutch Captain said?”

Jim calmed down then, taking into account the unexpectedness of the pirates’ manoeuvre. He realised the lad had kept his head; sounded the alarm and made a VHF call for help; despite being shocked and very nearly killed by the Rocket Propelled Grenade.

In any case was the Captain all that wrong? The *International Recommended Transit Corridor* was only two months old and headed East-North-East, close to the Yemeni coast until 53° East longitude. The deviation would have meant a delay and extra fuel costs. It was OK for ships going to the Arabian Gulf or Pakistan; but extra steaming for ships heading south, although far better than their present situation.

Also, did the ship have sufficient reserve Fuel Oil bunkers for the extra Distance? Ships in his proper British Company always carried five days reserve, but on this ship, it was a close secret between the Captain and Chief Engineer.

“Aye OK then, you’re probably right about us being an easier target.” Jim said, sighing. “The Container ship was probably doing about eighteen knots, compared to our ten.”

Jim thought it a pity she’d altered course to comply with the ‘*Rules of the Road at Sea*’ after the Third Mate had sounded the whistle signal. If she’d kept to her original collision course; the *Dawn Splendour* would have been forced to take a complete round turn to starboard to avoid her.

This could have confused the pirates. Maybe even ending up in a position to ram them, as the Old Man had wanted to do. He shook his head; no way could that have happened with this clapped-out old wreck of a ship – well beyond her ‘*sail by*’ date. In any case, the engine would have probably stalled again.

Later they worked out that the Pirate boat had indeed been sailing on the starboard side of the container ship, hidden by her bulk. When the two ships were almost abeam, port to port, the boat must have dropped back, crossing the wake of the container ship and steering a course to intercept the *Dawn Splendour*.

The first Rocket Propelled Grenade was meant to miss the ship, like an old-fashioned warning shot across the bows. The pirate handling the weapon had badly misjudged the boat's rate of turn; the grenade exploding against the Bridge Wing.

* * * * *

The Dawn Splendour

The *Dawn Splendour* was an old Liberian tanker, some 35,000 tonnes deadweight, from Banyas in Syria to Beira in Mozambique. She was scheduled to slow down when passing Mombasa to relieve Jim by helicopter. The Captain was Polish, heavily built and coming up to sixty. He had a square head, a grizzled crew cut and a truculent, unsmiling expression.

Jim Turner was Chief Mate, just short of forty years old, on loan from a British Company for a three month voyage; the one on the *Dawn Splendour* having deserted in Italy. The Second and Third Mates were Syrian, the Engineers Ukrainian and Egyptian. Jim had been thankful to find a full Filipino deck and engine crew aboard. Perhaps not the

best crew in the world but pleasant willing workers, glad of a job and usually sporting wide grins on their faces.

Jim's *real* employer, the ***Buckinghamshire Steamship Company***, had started many years ago as General Cargo carriers. They now ran Container Ships and Tankers, as well as a couple of RoRos carrying Japanese cars to Britain – and British cars to nowhere much. The ships were named after towns and villages in rural Buckinghamshire, the three tankers being christened the ***Amersham***, ***Chesham*** and ***West Wycombe***.

Since, on occasions, there were more Officers than ships to man; spare Officers were occasionally loaned out to other Companies for short spells. This was Jim's second time out on loan, the first occasion being a few years previously, sailing on a Kuwaiti dry cargo ship.

The ***Dawn Splendour*** was old, scruffy; her hull and accommodation block streaked with rust; much of her equipment no longer working. Jim had been on the point of refusing to join her when he first saw her alongside at Brindisi. Her mooring ropes were slack; no gangway safety net; nor even a gangway watch and her decks were in a right bloody mess. Most of the Officers appeared to be drunk.

Over the three months he'd had been aboard, he'd tried to put things right, but was up against total indifference. The SMS procedures were all in place. Check lists were faithfully filled in and produced when demanded by authorities ashore. A pack of lies they were, nobody except Jim ever checked anything. He'd refused to sign the check lists, but found out later the Captain was forging his signature on them. So far, the ship had got away with it, trading to ports that did not believe in making too vigorous safety and seaworthiness inspections.

Jim had tried to initiate '*Tool Box Conferences*' before starting special dangerous jobs on the ship. All concerned

would carry out a risk evaluation, making sure they all knew exactly who would be doing what and when. He got nowhere! The Filipino sailors politely listened, but didn't contribute. The Engineers involved laughed in his face and the Captain flatly told him to stop wasting valuable Company time.

For Jim, this was the end result, captured by pirates when sailing outside the *International Recommended Transit Corridor*. No attempt to call up a Warship, or to join a convoy; or even to join a gaggle of other ships hoping there really was 'Safety in Numbers'.

Jim cursed his bad luck; being due to sign off and go home on leave when passing Mombasa, which would have been only a few days later. It was yet another blow 'below the belt' on an already bad voyage. He, along with the rest of the crew, must now resign themselves to a minimum five or six month's captivity; waiting for the ransom to be paid by the ship's Owners.

Since this usually amounted to several million U.S. Dollars., Jim wondered if it would *ever* be paid. He was doubly sorry now he hadn't followed his first instinctive refusal to join, happily paying his own fare home.

He would have preferred the hijacking to have taken place on one of his *own* Company ships. Not that he would have been any better off, but at least aware who the owners really were. He would also know who would be dealing with the hijacking and what sort of decisions would be made. But what now? He was not even on a Company ship and certainly not sailing under the Red Ensign.

What in God's name could his own Company do for him, sailing on this Flag of Convenience scrap heap of a ship? The Liberian Company would have to pay the ransom. His own Company would not be involved – apart from his own presence on board.

He'd been looking forward to being home in a week, but now what? Six months captivity? With the Captain locked up in his cabin, Jim was now in command, although being forced to acknowledge orders issued by the Chief Pirate. The Polish Captain had been a '*Master under God*'. If the old bastard was ever let out of his confinement; Jim would happily give him back his crappy old ship.

Looking at a distant cruise liner as it passed by to port, he saw a pair of dolphins leaping into the air and landing with a splash, back into the sea. They came and inspected the ***Dawn Splendour***, cheerfully trying to play games with their eyes twinkling with mischief. At only ten knots, the dolphins seemingly got bored, speeding away to find a more worthy playmate.

What a bloody mess this trip had turned out to be. Even the dolphins pissed off when they saw the state of the ship!

Chapter 2 – London 0830 BST April 6th

Unaware of all this, Captain Thomas Murchison entered his office in London, on a bright, breezy Monday morning. He'd spent his working life with ***Bucks County Steamship Company***, as it was generally referred to. First of all at sea, but now working ashore as Chief Marine Superintendent. Jane their secretary was already at her desk, sorting out the mail. She looked up with a smile and said:

“Good Morning Tom. Have you heard the news this morning? There's been another hi-jacking yesterday in the Gulf of Aden, but not one of our ships. A tanker called the '***Dawn Splendo...***' hey, hey wait a minute! Isn't that the ship you loaned that Chief Officer to? Mr Turner wasn't it?”

She looked up enquiringly, holding a half opened envelope, emblazoned with the logo of one the Oil Majors. Tom felt his heart dropping down to his boots.

“What’s this then? April fool’s Day again?” He said, hoping it was some kind of joke.

“Tom, I’m not joking!” Jane said sternly, her face reddening. “The ship really has been hi-jacked and Jim Turner’s still on board her - isn’t he?”

She looked distressed, probably having a soft spot for the man. She was in her fifties, single and happy with it, but with obvious favourites among the sea-going Officers. Tom felt an oaf and was sorry to have replied the way he had; his apparent levity often causes concern.

“Sorry Jane. Aye, he’s there all right. My God what a mess! Can you get through to their management in London, please? No... No, hang on a minute, they’ll be in a state of chaos right now, I’d better speak to his wife first. I only hope she doesn’t take the news too badly.”

“Of course she will,” Jane replied tartly, “I certainly would if he was my husband, so would any wife in the same

circumstances. Here you are then. Mind you break the news gently. Try to give her a bit of hope.”

He’d met Mrs Turner previously when he’d still been at sea; she’d visited his ship a couple of times to see her husband. He told her, as gently as he knew how, about the hijacking. She’d been shocked, asking to be put in touch with the Company Chairman straight away. She wanted to plead with him, demanding he pay the full ransom as soon as the demand arrived. The Prime Minister as well! Tom explained the situation as best he could:

“I’m sorry Mrs Turner, but the ship’s Liberian and your husband could well be the only Brit aboard. The Company *owning* the ship will have to pay the ransom since it’s their ship, not ours. Your husband is part of *their* crew as far as the British Authorities and this Company are concerned.

He is, however, normally employed by us and we'll do our very best to hurry things along for him."

Not that there was a great deal they *could* do at this stage; nor, as far as he could see, at any future stage. The phone went silent for a few seconds and then seemed to explode in his ear.

"For God's Sake, why did you send him there? Especially after the bad do he had on that Kuwaiti ship off Singapore. He was a hostage then, forced to open the ship's safe with a parang at his throat! *And* they tied him up as well! Isn't that enough for one man to go through, just for the sake of a Shipping Company?" She'd sounded livid.

Tom finally managed to calm her down a bit, without mentioning that her husband had gone willingly, attracted by the extra money on top of his salary. He got through then to the Liberian Company's London representative; but there was nothing much they could add. The ship had not contacted them. All they knew was that a VHF *Mayday* call had been picked up by another ship and relayed on to a Warship. They could only wait now for the Pirates to make a ransom demand.

"Get the Editor of Lloyd's List on the phone please, Jane.

Let's see if they've got any more information."

She got the call connected, then finished opening and dishing out the mail. As she usually did afterwards, she scratched her head with the paper knife, disturbing her straight reddish hair. A trick some of the junior staff copied when they thought she wasn't looking.

She had to leave Tom then and work with some of the other Superintendents, the days of personal Girl Fridays having long gone. Everyone has Desk Top Computers now, as well as Internet, enabling them to type and even mail their own letters. Jane's job now is secretary and general dogsbody for the entire Department.

The Editor of Lloyd's List came on the phone; Tom asked him what news he had of the ship.

"Very little." Was the reply, "A Turkish general cargo ship bound for India picked up the '*Mayday*' on VHF channel 16 and relayed it on. Apart from that, nothing. One thing seems strange though. The position the '*Dawn Splendour*' gave was well to the south of the IRTC. If that position's accurate, then their Captain was asking for trouble. Anyway, Captain Murchison, why are you asking about the *Dawn Splendour*? She's not one of your Company ships, is she?"

"One of our Chief Officers is sailing on her, on loan to them for a couple of months. I'm worried about him and the implications of all this. It looks as if it's going to be a right bloody mess." Tom replied sighing, looking at the pile of telexes and faxes on his desk.

Terminating the conversation, he switched on his personal computer, then had to shout across the open plan office to Jane; asking her to remind him of his password. It had gone clean out of his head; nor could he find the piece of paper he'd noted it on. '*Tokyo*' several voices shouted back, Jane's amongst them.

Foreseeing a really busy day ahead, he took off his coat and loosened his tie. For the first time in ten years, he felt like smoking a pipe. The bright spring morning now seemed to have dulled.

The *International Recommended Transit Corridor* is 464 Nautical miles long in the Gulf of Aden, considered to be the safest passage through. It had only been established in February, just over two months previously by the Horn of Africa Maritime Security Centre (MSCHOA), run by the Royal Navy at Northwood, near London.

Looking at the chart, Tom could see that its prime use was for tankers bound to and from the Arabian Gulf. It would be a fair deviation for ships bound for East Africa.

After leaving the IRTC, southbound ships were then advised to keep East of Longitude 60° East. Obviously the *Dawn Splendour* had ignored the Corridor and would have probably ignored the distance off recommendation too.

The IRTC was changed later; bringing it more into the centre of the Gulf of Aden, with two lanes for two-way traffic.

Tom phoned the MSCHOA in Northwood to confirm the hi-jacking. After a lot of hassle identifying himself, he was told that several ships had reported *Mayday* messages but at widely differing times. This made no sense; surely they hadn't been hijacked twice! He put another call through to the Liberian Company's London Representative; demanding if it was their practice to ignore recommended Safety Zones; repeating what Lloyd's List had told him.

"I trust your Company's going to keep paying us his salary during this period. I don't give a good Goddam what you do about your other Crew Members, but Mr Turner's salary must be paid to us on time each month. If your Captain is found to have ignored the IRTC, as the Mayday position seems to suggest, then you may also be compelled to pay Mr Turner and us too, an adequate compensation."

Tom was getting his points in early, expecting delays and procrastination on their part. He repeated his Company's demands by telex. The London representative said he'd pass the message on to the parent Company – whoever they may be. These days, to find out who actually *owns* a 'Flag of Convenience' Shipping Company is a bit like solving a complicated jigsaw puzzle - the pieces all there but some blanked out.

Tom passed all the information on to the Management and Personnel Departments. Human Resources the latter like to call themselves now, the term being more politically correct. Also far more flattering to their managers. Sighing, he sent a fax to the Helicopter Company in Mombasa;

cancelling the trip out to the *Dawn Splendour* with Turner's relief and its return voyage with Turner. He also telexed their appointed Agent there, who would have met him at Mombasa and flown him back to London via Nairobi.

Thinking over the ramifications of this particular case, he went upstairs to quiz their Insurance Department, to see if any of their policies covered anything like this. They reckoned the Liberian Company would have a policy covering anything happening to Turner, since he was signed on their ship; which made sense, of course. Could the Liberian Company though, or its insurers, be depended upon to pay up if the worst happens to him?

Tom sensed this was a vague area that had never been fully investigated. European Companies would present no problems this way. Even the Kuwaiti Company they sometimes loaned Officers to would ensure adequate cover for him. This Liberian Company though, flying a Flag of Convenience, was an unknown factor. He had a gut feeling he'd made a mistake sending Turner there. The desk phone rang, it was the Company Chairman:

"Good Morning, Captain Murchison, please explain why we are sending our Officers to Liberian or other Flag of Convenience ships? In future send them only to either European or other better known National flags like Kuwait or Saudi-Arabia. We are now in a bad situation, with one of our senior Officers on a hi-jacked ship belonging to a little-known and dubious Company." He rang off quickly without waiting for an answer, almost tripping over his words.

Tom was staggered! The Chairman knew damn well they occasionally sent Officers to those ships, happily counting the money saved; since their salaries plus a bit extra were paid by the Company they were loaned to. Otherwise Officers whose paid leave had finished would be a drain on Company resources if none of their ships were available at the time.

It seemed as though the buck passing was starting to happen – with Tom being the first recipient. No way could he pass the buck on, since it was *he* who had sent Turner there; over-ruling the Human Resources Superintendent - whose job it was to allocate Officers to ships. Tom had the last word though, at least concerning the appointment of Masters and Chief Officers.

He felt too concerned to concentrate on the rest of his work and hurried along the corridor to Personnel to have a good look at Turner's file. He knew him pretty well, having sailed together on various occasions. Tom had been Chief Mate on board the old General Cargo ship '*Beaconsfield*' when Turner was an Apprentice there. There were two of them, both still with the Company and both now in line for a Command. Jim Turner and Jack Knowles, two good lads, nicknamed the two Jays.

Jim Turner is good looking in a sartorial kind of way. Even in working gear, covered in paint or grease, he gave the impression of being well dressed and in fashion. Being tall, dark haired and slim certainly helped, but he was certainly, what – classy? No. Not really, not classy. Self-contained if you like. At any rate he seemed good-looking enough to attract his fair share of girls. Tom sighed, visualising the hell poor fellow must be going through now on a hijacked Flag of Convenience ship.

Jack Knowles, on the other hand, looked much more of a sailor. He had, even then, a broad weather-beaten face, even pugnacious except when he grinned, which was often. His face is, to quote a book Tom had been reading by Peter Ustinov, 'Pleasantly Pugnacious.' That sums him up to a 'T'. Jack is a power house where work is concerned, whereas Jim Turner tends to be a bit lazy and to leave things to the last minute. They got on surprisingly well together and even now are still close friends. Let's see, they'd both be coming up to forty by now. A good age to get their commands,

always supposing there would be enough ships left for them to command!

As well as being unlike physically, they differed mentally. Jack Knowles had fought his way up from a Secondary school in Romford; followed by a year at a pre-Sea Training College before being accepted by the Company. Intelligent determined doggedness is his way of getting to the top.

Whereas Jim Turner relies on his memory and a good retentive brain getting him through all the exams. He was born in Bournemouth into a reasonably well off family, completing his pre-sea training at Warsash Maritime Academy, near Southampton.

As cadets on the old *Beaconsfield*, they had the time of their lives. It was an eighteen month voyage in the Asia Pacific region; running between New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines and Japan. Also occasional side trips to Tahiti. In 1996, this was about the last of the General Cargo ships, before containerisation took over completely. The Company considered converting her to carry containers, but nothing came of it. Both Cadets had relatives in Australia and took as much shore leave as Tom could reasonably give them.

They wondered how to contact girls in Australia and New Zealand. Having spent several months as a Cadet on those coasts several years earlier; Tom advised them to try local Nurses' Homes. Nurses and sailors always seem to go well together. Both live away from home, both do worthwhile disciplined jobs and both are eager for distractions. This had worked well for him as a cadet in the late 1970s and early 80s, with off duty nurses coming to parties on the ship. After a while they'd found Nurses' Homes were not the fortresses they were made out to be, so long as there was a willing nurse to act as a guide.

There were plenty of girls in Manila and Cebu, very tempting some of them were; but the less said about that, the better!

'Oh well,' he sighed, 'no time now for sweet memories, back to the files!' He stopped dreaming about bar girls in Manila and opened Turner's dossier; However, one last thought crossed his mind: 'How good those days were and how dismal now.' This was before New York's Twin Towers had been attacked on September 11th 2001. Before the IMO, driven by America, had introduced the ISPS Security Measures.

These draconian rules attempt to make ports and ships safe; thereby curtailing or even prohibiting normal shore leave in many ports round the world. Seafaring unions are fighting this but are unlikely to win; not against the might of the USA.

Jim married Angela Patterson, a friend of Jack Knowles from Romford in Essex working as secretary to a fashion magazine. Jack, to everybody's complete astonishment, had married an exotic Italian girl while standing by a New Building at the Fincantieri shipyard at Monfalcone – about halfway between Venice and Trieste. They live there now, visiting the UK most years to see his family.

A few years later, when Tom was Captain of the product tanker *West Wycombe*, Jim Turner had joined as Second Mate. All three of them; Turner, Tom Murchison and Jack Knowles, had each individually decided to transfer to tankers, during one of the many recessions. Shipping is usually the first and worst hit during these periods. The oil market generally keeps going, while cargo ships carrying manufactured goods are often laid up.

It was now getting on for noon, his usual time for a pub lunch close by the office. An old fashioned pub that continued cooking good plain food like Shepherd's Pie or Steak, kidney and Mushroom pies; no funny food from the continent. He thought this time though, he'd stay in the

office with the computer and try to find out what was happening in Somalia and why.

This afternoon, he'd take a trip to Colchester and have a word with a friend working for Lloyd's List, also some of the staff there. They'd give him some idea of the length of time it took for ships to pay the ransom; if the pirates were usually open to negotiation; if crew members had been threatened or hurt; what the Warships in the area were doing and anything else he could think of on the way down.

Lloyd's List is a daily newspaper dedicated to shipping. It is a real list, listing the voyages of hundreds of ships weekly when known. It also details casualties and court cases involving ships and Shipping Companies. Articles and a blog are published most days on many subjects concerning various aspects of shipping; written by experts who really know their business.

The newspaper has nothing to do with Lloyds Insurance Company, apart from having the same name. Nor to Lloyds Register either, which is a Classification Society. All three, though, are vaguely joined by the sea. At Colchester, Tom's contact told him:

"The Lloyds Agent at Rotterdam has reported two *Mayday* messages from the ***Dawn Splendour***. One at dawn, which turned out to be false, the other timed at 1025 local time. The same Warship answered both; her Captain told the ship after the first ***Mayday*** that they were in an unsafe area but his advice was ignored."

'Good old Rotterdam' Tom thought, 'they know everything there, way before anyone in London does.' He liked Rotterdam, arriving there as Captain of a ship, everything falls immediately into place. The ship's agents are first class, the Customs and Immigration are unfailingly polite, which is sadly lacking in most other ports. The only trouble is – that it is such a hell of a job getting there, along the busiest waterway in the world. Going across there as a

Superintendent to arrange repairs is a joy as well. Repairs are swiftly and well done.

* * * * *

Tom remembered an occasion, not long after he was promoted to Captain on the *Buckingham*; a 350,000 tonne ULCC. Sailing from Rotterdam, Tom had received orders for Mina al Ahmadi in Kuwait but, due to financial problems they were ordered to sail round the Cape of Good Hope; instead of the shorter voyage via the Suez Canal? A thirty day passage.

After loading Crude oil, the ship was again ordered to sail back round the Cape to Rotterdam, another thirty day voyage. No mail was received at Mina, nor at Cape Town, where the ship had slowed down twice to take stores, nor at Rotterdam. This was before the days of easy communication

By this time the Crew were getting pretty mutinous, more than seventy days with no letters from home. There were mutterings about refusing to sail until their mail caught up with them. Tom was on the phone complaining bitterly to the Company Head Office when the Dutch Agent walked into his office. Knowing what Tom was complaining about and sympathising with him, the agent asked to speak to the Personnel Department in London. Tom agreed and listened with no little astonishment to the Agent's proposal:

"Give all that ship's mail to one of your staff. Tell him to take it to Paddington station and to put it on the 1030 train to Paignton in charge of the guard. Phone your agent at Brixham, tell him to meet the train and deliver the mail to the ship by launch in Lyme Bay when she slows down there. It's only a slight deviation for the ship, which can easily be made up over the thirty day passage."

That is what they did, but it took a Dutchman to think it

out. The two men chatted generally after that. Before parting Tom had asked him if he'd known from which platform the train had left.

* * * * *

While in the area, Tom thought he'd drop in on Mrs Turner at Chelmsford on the way back to London. He could then tell her what he'd discovered that afternoon at Lloyds. The first time he'd met Angela Turner was when her husband had been his Second Mate, before they'd got married. She had come down to the Isle of Grain to be with him during the ship's stay in port. On another occasion she'd come across on the Harwich/Hook of Holland ferry to Rotterdam. She is a pretty woman with dark hair, naturally wavy, framing a good-looking oval face. A good figure too, despite having had two babies.

Tom felt sorry for her, now that her husband was a hostage on a hijacked ship. But at the same time glad it was not Jack Knowles superb, excitable Italian wife he had to deal with. The taxi dropped him outside a pleasant detached house in what was obviously a good leafy area, with a field abutting the back garden. Angela Turner was at home, her mother there as well. Both seemed pleased to see him and offered tea and cakes.

The sitting room was colourful but subdued, with a lot of thought put into it. Both women were pleasant and apologised for what had been said on the phone that morning. Although still shaken by the events, Mrs Turner realised she'd have to wait for the ransom to be demanded and paid, as they'd all have to. Just before he'd left she said:

"What makes the whole thing far worse is that Jim was due to be relieved in a few days."

"Yes I know, I'd already arranged for a helicopter to take him off while passing Mombasa."

"You haven't cancelled it have you? After all, the whole

thing could be a mistake.” She said hopefully, but not really believing it.

Tom went home to his three bedroomed flat in the North West suburbs. Making his usual cup of cocoa before going to his solitary bed; he changed his mind, poured it down the sink and treated himself to a generous tot of Scotch.

Three days later, The London representative of the Liberian Company phoned, saying they had received a ransom demand for Six Million US Dollars.

“We are negotiating this figure and hope to halve it.” The representative continued. “Even halved, this is an awful lot of money and the Company I represent is a bit shoestring. They want to reduce Mr Turner's salary by at least half, in line with our own Crew.”

“No way,” Tom replied, becoming angry. “I’m not going to reduce Mrs Turner and her kids to near poverty, simply because your Captain happens to have made a big mistake. He was told by the Dutch Warship that he was sailing in an unsafe area. He didn’t keep to the recommended Safety route, did he? I insist your Company keeps on paying the same agreed rate as before.”

He'd half expected something like this to happen, but it didn't make him any the less angry. ‘Maybe we’re lucky at that,’ he thought to himself, ‘after all we do have one man on that ship, so it’s a wonder they haven’t asked us to participate in the ransom as well!’

They argued for a while more, neither of them giving in and then rang off. As far as Turner was concerned, he'd be alright since his salary was going straight into his bank as normal, plus a bonus when working for a different Company. The Liberian Company paid Bucks County Steamship Company an agreed monthly sum for the loan; it was this sum they were trying to cut down by half. Tom would fight his *own* Company Management to make sure all of Turner’s salary and bonuses were still going into his Bank.

His desk was overflowing with work, reports from ships; new regulations to be absorbed; the latest IMO considerations and anticipating Charterers' complaints. Even complaints from within his own Company. The Accounts Dept. moaning about overtime on certain ships, totally disregarding the run they were on. Once their Manager had asked Tom why the crew overtime for a certain month on a certain ship was higher than the previous month; seeing that the ship had been at sea for both those months.

"Because there are five Saturdays or Sundays in one of the months." He'd replied. "Cooks, Stewards and lookouts have to work these days too; else we'd have a mutiny on our hands."

Stores people questioning whether certain stores ordered by ships were really needed.

"They cost money you know! All these things that ship wants, are they *really* needed? Can't we halve the number of toilet rolls for the *West Wycombe*?"

The Chairman's latest economy lecture seems to have got through with a vengeance!

Thinking about the Stores Department and toilet rolls reminded Tom of an occasion when they'd loaned a Chief Engineer Officer to a Kuwaiti ship for a month. The Company to which they'd loaned him, appointed him as extra-chief to a ship with a full South Korean crew from top to bottom. Thinking the Koreans used other means of wiping their bottoms, he'd asked the Company to supply twenty toilet rolls, just for him.

The Stores people had looked at the order and had gone berserk. Mistaking it for part of a ship's full order, they'd added two zeroes and supplied two thousand. The poor old Chief had joined the ship by boat from Khor Fakkan, surrounded by the bloody things, a second boat carrying the excess. The Koreans were laughing like drains as they'd

lifted sling after sling of them aboard. It turned out they had plenty of toilet rolls anyway.

Another lonely night at home at Harrow. He sat down and

reflected about the way his life was going, or even if it was. As senior Marine Superintendent, having been promoted up from Captain, he'd pretty well reached the top of his profession at the age of forty-nine. How to go on from there? He was already a member of the Nautical Institute, could even become a Fellow if he devoted more spare time to them. What about the Honourable Company of Master Mariners then? Or even one of the Younger Brethren of Trinity House? Although that's an elected post, many years in the future.

He came from a seafaring Tyneside family, having deserted the Tyne after being promoted to his present job in London. If he wanted to continue on these lines, then he'd pretty well have to remain there. 'Why not?' he thought, 'I'm reasonably well off, have time on my hands, divorced with no children.

He felt good enough to achieve at least some of this, in which case he'd be an academic rather than a 'hands on' sailor.' In order to fulfil these dreams, he'd have to start writing more articles for the Trade Magazines, such as the *Safety at Sea* and *Seafarer* Magazines, as well as technical articles for the Nautical Institute.'

Or!! Should he stay where he is and get married again and have children running around his legs? To whom though? There's Good Old Jane here in the office, he thought she'd possibly say yes if he approached her, although she's about five years older than him. A younger woman then? The wives of some of his senior officers certainly catch his eye when they occasionally accompany their husbands to the office.

Chapter 3 – Indian Ocean – April 12th

Things on board the Dawn Splendour had settled down to a routine after a couple of days. Meals were served as normal; anchor watches grudgingly kept; the Chief Engineer and his gang changed a piston liner that had been on the cards for weeks; the sailors did some desultory chipping and painting. Jim tried to keep the morale up but it was hard going, they were completely in the dark.

Nobody knew if the Liberian Company had received the ransom demand, whether it was going to be paid in full, or negotiated. Some of the Officers reckoned the ship would be abandoned by her owners, leaving the crew to its fate. Possibly a lethal fate if the Somali Pirates were not paid at least some of the ransom.

It was not the first time, by any means, that an FOC ship had been abandoned in a port; normally after an inspection when state authorities found major faults. The vessel would be detained, sometimes abandoned should the repairs prove too costly. The crews were often stuck there with no money to pay their fares home, some of them not having been paid for months. The '*Mission to Seafarers*' always helped out as best they could, often with local volunteers. Up to now though, no ship hijacked by Somali Pirates had been left high and dry.

(In 2009 nobody realised that this was not the case. Only now, in the year 2015, stories are emerging of crews having spent over three years as hostages there! Their Shipping Companies being unable or unwilling to pay. The crews' families unable to raise the sums demanded. One of the ships had apparently sunk, the hostages taken ashore and are probably still there).

Jim regarded the shore, some two miles away. Outside the town of Eyl, it looked desolate, a semi-desert with a few stunted trees, some shrubs and not much else. The sea was

still calm; awaiting the Southwest Monsoon to whip it up, as it did every year. It should be starting in six weeks or so.

The Pirates had not calmed down much after their initial rampage through the ship; although a couple of them seemed steady, like the Somali crew on the *Amersham* had been. The others were constantly sullen, excitable and mostly high on drugs. The atmosphere on the ship was appalling. All the pirates carried what seemed to be the latest weaponry, which they brutally used as cattle prods. Hardly any of the ship's company was free from cuts and bruises.

After the Captain had been released from his cabin, they tried to reason with the Chief Pirate but made no headway. As far as meals were concerned, the Somalis appropriated the galley for several hours daily and cooked their own food brought out from the shore. Jim wondered how long the ship's own food supplies would last and what were they were going to do about it.

As far as he could see, they would have to buy from the boats themselves, after their own stocks started running out. Worried, he broached the subject with the Captain and Chief Engineer, pointing out the obvious dangers they would be running, taking food from the boats without a proper accounting.

He'd noticed the Somali Pirates rarely if ever signed for anything, often not even counting the items received. No delivery notes, no signatures, nothing. Jim however, was determined to account properly for foodstuffs supplied from the boats, either paying in cash or when that ran out, to make sure every supply note was legibly signed.

It would be difficult to cut down the food for the Filipino crew, since they were all '*eating machines*'; however they were fishing daily and drying out a major part of their catch in the hot sun. In a way, they were more self-sufficient than their Officers. Being Easter Sunday, the all Catholic

Filipino crewmen were sullen, having been looking forward to a party on this day.

The senior Officers were worried about the state of the evaporators, which were dodgy to say the least; years of poor maintenance showing itself. If these evaporators failed, no Fresh Water could be evaporated from the sea and Jim doubted a water barge from the shore would be available.

He and the Chief Engineer persuaded the Captain to introduce strict water rationing. This became unpopular with the crew and vetoed by the pirates, although necessary. Jim tried explaining this to the Chief Pirate but got nowhere. He was told that if the ship ran out of Fresh Water, they would all be taken ashore to live and the ship abandoned.

Worried, Jim went down to the Officers' Smoke-room, where the two Syrian Deck Officers were chatting together. He asked how they were getting along, if they were keeping themselves busy and incidentally who was on anchor watch? They said they were OK, but thoroughly bored, not so scared now.

The Captain had relieved the Second Mate for a spell, without saying why. Jim liked the two Syrians, he had met others before on the Kuwaiti ship and normally got on well with them. During the conversation with the Second Mate he casually remarked:

"I'm surprised to see you've got blue eyes. Isn't that a bit unusual?"

"No. Not really," came the reply, "quite a lot of us have got blue eyes, because we've lived high up in the mountains for many generations."

"That's right," the other, more junior Syrian Officer chipped in. "Haven't you noticed my flat head. It's flat because those buggers up there on the mountains keep throwing rocks down at us in the valleys." It was the first laugh Jim had heard all that week since their capture.

A boat pulled up alongside, four heavily armed Somalis came aboard and went straight up to the bridge, where the Captain and Chief Pirate were busy ignoring each other. After a long and heated conversation, the Chief Pirate turned

angrily to the Captain and said:

“Your Chief Officer must go to the shore with these four men right now.”

The Captain’s eyes jerked wide open as if he’d been punched in the stomach. Squaring up to the leader of the newcomers, he attempted to intimidate the slighter man by his bulk.

“***Nobody leaves this ship!***” he roared, his ham-like fist striking the Chart Table. “I refuse to let my Chief Mate go...”

He got no further, the butt of a gun smashed into his face and he went down on the deck, almost unconscious. The Chief Pirate quickly spoke to one of his own men; telling him to take the four newcomers down to the Officers' Smoke Room and point out the man they wanted. The Captain groaned and tried to sit up; his lips were split and some teeth broken, blood streaming from a nasty looking gash on his face.

A few minutes later, a commotion was heard coming from the Officers' Smoke Room where Jim was still chatting to the two Syrians and a couple of Engineer Officers. Shouts were heard, both in English and Somali and a scream of pain. On the bridge, the Chief Pirate brutally lifted the Captain to his feet.

They both watched through the Bridge windows as Jim Turner was dragged along the deck to the Accommodation Ladder, then forced down into a boat at gun point. The last man to disembark turned and fired a burst from his automatic weapon, aiming over the top of the accommodation block.

The scene in the Smoke Room was horrifying; they were all badly shocked at the rapidity and violence of the event. A Ukrainian Engineer was laying on the deck unconscious, a lump forming on his head. Some of the pirates seemed almost as shocked as the crew over the events, but were ready with their guns for any possible backlash from them.

On the boat, Jim was shaking with fear, certain they were taking him ashore to be executed. Or at the very least, to read out a video message to the Company; begging them to pay the ransom on pain of his death. None of the four hard men in the boat would speak to him; his hands were roughly pulled behind his back and lashed with a cord.

Above the hiss of the waves and the noise of the outboard engine, Jim and the four boat men suddenly heard the thrash-thrash sound of a helicopter overhead. Jim shouted and looked up before one of the Somalis pushed him down and poked a gun in his face. The other three panicked, pointing their weapons haphazardly at the helicopter and started firing wildly. The bullets missed, since the man threatening Jim had let go of the tiller and the boat was being pushed round in high speed circles by the outboard motor.

The chopper stayed out of range for a while, following the boat to pinpoint its destination. Being short of fuel, it was forced to return to its Mother Ship before it could do so. By the time another helicopter was summoned, the boat had resumed steering and reached the shore.

In the boat, the Somalis had belatedly covered Jim with a tarpaulin. They were arguing heatedly with each other, almost it seemed, coming to blows. Landing at a crumbling jetty, they blind-folded Jim and thrust him into a car.

On the ship, one of the Officers had taken a pair of binoculars and had seen Jim taken into a car blindfolded. The car was seen heading North.

Book Two – Events in London

Chapter 4 – London April 14th

Tom Murchison was in his office on the phone to Lloyds Registry, the fleet's Classification Society. He was arranging a Class Survey for the ***Gerrard's Cross***; when Jane broke into the conversation, saying dramatically:

"Sorry Tom, there's an urgent phone call for you from France. I'm putting it through now, on line two."

"Hell, can't it wait Jane?" Tom said, annoyed. "Who on earth can be calling me from France of all places?"

"You're going to want this one." She said ominously, and told the caller to go ahead.

"Captain Murchison? Good Morning. My name's Bob Carter, the uncle of Mrs Turner, the wife of one of your Chief Officers. Has your Company loaned him out again, this time to a Liberian tanker?"

The accent, like the name, was English and the voice carried a touch of authority. Totally astonished, Tom felt his temper rising. He was already pissed off because his phone call had been interrupted. 'An uncle for God's sake!' He thought to himself incredulously.

In his opinion, uncles of his Officers' wives have no right to phone up for information. He was about ready to explode, when he realised the Chief Officer in question was Mr Turner; the man he'd loaned out to the ***Dawn Splendour***. Before Tom could reply, Bob Carter spoke again forcefully:

"Look Captain Murchison, I'm calling you because I think this is important, not just an idle question that could be handled by your Personnel people. Was, and I mean ***was***, Mr Turner loaned out to a Liberian tanker called the ***Dawn Splendour***?"

Something in his voice alarmed Tom; also because the ship had been named. Swallowing his irritation he replied: "Aye he's there all right. You probably know the ship was Hi-jacked in the Gulf of Aden nine days ago. So why are you phoning me? Do you know something else? Something I don't know?" Tom asked, a sense of dread forming in his mind.

"Maybe I do at that. Has Mr Turner been taken off that ship by force?"

"*What?* Kidnapped you mean? Not as far as I know. For Christ's Sake; tell me what you know. Also how you know." Tom shouted, horrified. Heads were raised in the outer office.

"OK. I live here in France and read about the hi-jacking in the local newspaper *La Provence* this morning. They also published a photo showing a boat leaving the ship, which could have been taken from a helicopter. Four Somalis were aboard the boat, three of them seem to be firing their guns into the air, maybe aiming at the chopper. The fourth man was holding a gun at the head of a white Officer sprawled out on the bottom boards. That Officer looks very, very much like Jim Turner, the husband of my niece. I'm faxing the clipping through to you right now."

"Hang on a tic; it's just coming through... Yes, yes you could be right; it certainly looks like Mr Turner, a bit fuzzy though. My God, if this picture's true, then there's something terrible happening. But where in hell did that newspaper get it from?"

"Damned if I know. It wasn't even Front Page news! *La Provence* is a local newspaper usually covering the area outside Marseille - La Ciotat, Aubagne, Cassis and other small towns locally. It was included in a section near the end covering odd bits and pieces of International News. Being more interested in local news, I very nearly missed it. I take it the British Newspapers haven't published the photo yet?" Mr Carter replied.

“No, not yet. It’s strange; the pirates don’t normally harm ship’s crews, not like the ones off Nigeria and other parts of the world. Why the hell hasn’t the Liberian Company contacted me? They must have been told as well.” Tom said angrily, a sinking feeling in his stomach.

“Maybe the ship can’t use the telex or radio, or their Company’s going to get in touch later. Don’t forget it happened over the Easter weekend. The newspaper also states the port bridge wing of the *Dawn Splendour* is damaged, possibly by an RPG. I suppose Jim could be a casualty from that and they are taking him ashore to hospital. I doubt it though, his hands are tied and there’s no need for the gun in that case.” Mr Carter insisted.

“Have you told Mrs Turner yet? You did say she’s your niece, didn’t you?” Tom asked.

“Yes, she’s my niece, and no, I haven’t told her and I certainly don’t want her to see the photo in *La Provence*. Will you tell her or shall I do it?” Mr Carter replied.

“OK, I’ll tell her officially; it’s my job anyway, as her husband’s Chief Marine Superintendent. I’ll get on to the Liberian Company straight away to see if they confirm it. Hell, they should have told me long before this.” Tom said, savagely.

“Right then, I’ll leave that sad job to you. Better not tell her about my part in all this and please, please don’t tell her that photograph exists. Hopefully the French won’t follow it up; after all it’s only a Liberian ship, an old ‘rust bucket’ by the look of her. They may not be interested in taking it any further. My sister will probably phone me as soon as you break the news” Mr Carter said, replacing the phone in his pocket.

Tom saw Jane was holding a handkerchief to her face but did not realise she was silently crying, having listened in to the conversation between the two men. With a sense of impending doom, he called the Liberian Company’s London

Representative. While waiting for an answer, Tom loosened his tie and undid the top button on his shirt.

“What in hell's going on? I have just received a photo of Mr Turner. It looks as if he is being abducted from your ship by force. There are four Somalis in the boat, three of them firing at the chopper and the fourth covering Turner with a gun. Has the ship contacted you at all? Has he been injured?

The port Bridge wing has been damaged too, which may have been caused by a Rocket Propelled Grenade. Surely they weren't taking him ashore to hospital, not with a sodding great big gun at his head?” Tom said.

“Photograph? What photo are you talking about? How did you know he's been abducted from the vessel?” The man asked. He seemed genuinely puzzled.

“The photo or rather the clipping was in a local French newspaper and was faxed to me by a relative of Mrs Turner. Has the Captain contacted your office?” Tom asked.

“Nobody's sent us a photo. But yes, the Captain telexed the Head Office in Monte Carlo late Sunday afternoon about the abduction. They telexed me on Easter Monday but I was away for the holiday.”

“For God's Sake, your Monte Carlo office should have informed *this* office straight away. There's always someone on duty here, even on Bank Holidays.” Tom said angrily.

“I don't know, I spent the whole weekend at home. It was a French Naval helicopter that overflew the ship on Easter Sunday and saw the boat leaving with your man in it. The crew of the helicopter must have taken the photo you're talking about, I know nothing about that.”

“Look it's past eleven now, why didn't you tell me before? For Christ's Sake, it was his *wife's Uncle*, of all people who phoned me, having after seeing it in the *French* newspaper. You can confirm then, that it's true, the man really has been abducted?” Tom asked.

“Yes it’s true, I’m sorry but I didn’t get into the office until late this morning. Anyway, the four men who took him off the ship seem to be a different gang, not the original Pirates. They even tried shooting the helicopter down from the boat, but missed. The Pirates on board said they knew nothing about the proposed abduction and seemed to be having a furious argument with them. They’d all been studying the crew list, but since nobody knew their language; we can’t judge what’s true and what isn’t. Hang on, there’s a telex just coming through from the Captain... Yes, a French Frigate has arrived on the scene and is circling round the ship. That’s all I can tell you at the moment, Captain.”

Tom abruptly broke off the connection and tried to work out just what the hell was happening there in Somalia – or even in France. It had been bad enough having one of his Officers on a hijacked ship belonging to a different Company and flag. But now abducted as well! What on earth was he going to tell poor Mrs Turner? He’d better tell her straight away, before more newspapers get hold of the story. Hopefully, her mother would still be there with her.

He paused, thinking it should really be up to the Human Resources Superintendent to inform her, but in the end decided to tell her himself. He was concerned the HR man would be too formal and lacking sympathy; not that *he* was much better at telling people bad news.

He delayed a bit, forming the sentences in his head until he saw Jane looking at him reproachfully, tears staining her plain but good natured face. She had obviously been listening to the phone conversation. Tom wondered if she realised how often she’d acted as his conscience. He pulled himself together and dialled Mrs Turner’s number.

He wished there were better ways of telling people bad news. He would have gone to Chelmsford again, to talk to her personally, but was afraid she might hear about it from another source before he arrived. What could he tell the

poor girl anyway? That everything is going to be all right and not to worry, when the possibility of his coming out alive is grim. Tom couldn't even begin to guess why her husband had been taken ashore. He was glad her mother was there, looking after the kids when he broke the news.

After putting the phone down, Tom went along to the recently installed machine and poured himself what he hoped

Would be a nice cup of coffee. It was terrible, too bitter and not even hot.

Realising the best way to help Turner is to get to know your enemy, he logged on to internet and with the help of Wikipedia, read about Somalia again; its recent history; who's fighting who and why.

In the Colonial era, there were three countries. From West to East there was French Somaliland; a small country with its port of Djibouti controlling the Straits of Bab al Mandeb. Then British Somaliland along part of the South coast of the Gulf of Aden until it met Italian Somaliland; part of which was also on the Gulf of Aden coast. The rest of that country extending south-westerly as far as the border with Kenya.

During the war, Wikipedia told him, the Italians briefly held British Somaliland and formed a union with Eritrea and Ethiopia (formerly Abyssinia). Britain invaded in 1942, taking back British Somaliland and occupying the whole former Italian union.

After Independence in 1960, the country of Somalia was formed – except for Djibouti which remained French. President Barre was overthrown in 1991, since then no proper government has existed. All Somalia seems plagued with tribal Warlords, each of them intent on carving out a piece for his own tribe.

The former British Somaliland before independence broke away from Somalia in 1991 and renamed their country Somaliland, They formed what appears to be a

proper government and restoring all the services, also restoring some links to Britain.

The Northern part of what was left of Somalia also broke away and is now semi-independent, taking the original name of that area - Puntland. The Land of Punt. There are constant border disputes between Somaliland and Puntland. The capital of Somaliland is Hargeisa, its principal port Berbera; Somalia Mogadishu and Puntland what? Nobody seems quite sure. Probably Gorawe, its main port Bossaso. Therefore Jim could either be in Puntland; Somalia itself or even Somaliland.

The piracy was originally thought to be the fishermen's reaction against foreign fishing fleets illegally fishing their waters, Somali fishing boats being unable to compete. Also Toxic Waste illegally dumped along the Somali coast over several years had poisoned much of the inshore fish stocks. These days, most of the original fishermen/Pirates have been taken over by criminal gangs, recruiting young men with no chance of a normal job.

Tom went up to the Insurance Department again and asked them what they thought, in view of the latest developments. They repeated that Mr Turner's abduction would also have to be administered by the Liberian Company. So they reckoned, but nobody really seemed quite sure.

Nothing like this had ever happened before, at least not to them. A British Officer employed by a British Company, on loan to a FOC ship invaded by pirates; that same Officer then being abducted ashore was thankfully a rare occurrence.

Tom had little faith in their statements, feeling the cover for Turner should have been arranged by his own Company. He made a mental note; all future Officer Loans to other Companies must be protected by their own Insurance Company, or even the P and I club normally used. The

Insurance Department promised to look into the feasibility of this.

Lunchtime came again and Tom didn't have the will to go to his favourite pub, nor did he want to stay in the office staring at the computer, hoping it would come up with some answers. Putting on his coat, he went for a stroll in a local park, badly needing to smoke a pipe. It soon began to rain. The brilliant spring morning had abysmally failed to keep its promise, with lowering clouds mirroring his thoughts and fears. Even the trees drooped forlornly, the paths slippery with rain.

* * * * *

Back in the office, Tom took off his damp coat and hung it up, dried his hair with a towel he kept in his desk for such occasions and rethought the whole affair through. So far the British Press had not been involved, which he was glad about for Mrs Turner's sake. Perhaps it could be kept that way, keeping the Press jackals away from her door, at least for the time being. How many knew about the abduction? The Liberian Company was based in Monte Carlo; Mrs Turner's Uncle and the La Provence Newspaper were in Southern France.

In England, the Liberian Company's Representative in London knew; Jane probably knew as well, but only few others in the Company. Maybe, just maybe, the kidnapping could be kept away from the media. Tom arranged an interview with the Company Chairman, Mr Harding and hurried along to his office where they discussed the latest blow. Tom gave his view on keeping the whole thing away from the Newspapers and Television; surprised when the Chairman agreed in principle.

Thinking it over afterwards, Tom wondered if the Chairman and Board of Directors were scared Treasury authorities might investigate their cosy little arrangement. Were the monies received, when loaning Officers out to foreign Companies and flags ever declared? The Officers

themselves could also be on the firing line, if they hadn't declared every penny of the bonus they received from the same source. He made a note to send a fleet circular letter to all ships stating this.

"However," the Chairman added. "I must tell the Foreign Office about the abduction. *They* must protest to the Somali government, such as it is. Seeing that a ransom demand is involved for the ship, with a possible demand for Mr Turner as well, I think they will agree to keep it away from the Press, at least for the time being."

Tom was subsequently told in no uncertain terms, that it was a mistake to keep the kidnapping away from the Press. They should have been told, with a tearful Mrs Turner and her two children pleading with the kidnappers to release her husband. But what's the point? Has this ever worked before? In his opinion almost certainly not; the Somali kidnappers would not be at all impressed!

The following morning, Tom was shocked to discover that Lloyds List had also got wind of the affair, but they only knew and printed that an Officer had been abducted from a Liberian ship, his name and nationality unknown. Thankfully The British Press hadn't taken it up.

Tom wondered how Mrs Turner would cope, whether she'd be strong enough to keep going for the sake of the children. During the few brief occasions he'd met her, including his visit over a week ago, he had the impression she'd pull through, even if the worst happened and her husband had been killed. The house was obviously well kept and tidy, her mother seemed to be a reliable no-nonsense type of woman who would probably largely take over.

Both women, Mother and Daughter, gave him the impression of an inner toughness. There was little enough he could do for Mrs Turner, apart from doing his utmost to keep her husband's full salary going into the bank as long as he possibly could.

Her face kept haunting him at intervals throughout that day, interfering with his work at times. Occasionally he found himself pushing papers aside in exasperation, after reading the same line several times. ‘A guilt feeling?’ He wondered. After all, it was he who’d sent her husband to that ship; overruling the Human Resources Manager, who’d lined up someone else for the job.

Feeling thoroughly depressed, Tom cleared his desk, put his still damp overcoat back on and walked through the rain to Green Park underground station, where he caught the train to South Harrow. Annoyingly, he was unable to get a seat before Greenford, since he’d left the office far earlier than his normal time. At the station, Tom started the car and drove through the pelting rain to his flat on the Hill at Harrow, found an empty parking space and got thoroughly soaked on the short walk to his flat. Altogether a depressing and eventful day that he would have gladly missed.

* * * * *

Next day, Tom went to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but found the Company Chairman had anticipated him. He managed to talk to a junior official there, who said that no way the British Government was going to pay ransom demands for anyone – let alone to terrorists groups. Later that week, the Chairman told Tom that he’d been told the same thing, however enquires were being made to the Somali Government. Which Somali Government though, Puntland, Somaliland or Somalia? The whole country had virtually no working government anyway, except maybe Somaliland. Tom murmured out loud:

‘What a fouled-up mess I have created by sending Turner to that that Flag of Convenience wreck of a ship.’

Chapter 5 – Chelmsford – April 14th

Angela Turner put the phone down after Captain Murchison's call, shocked speechless. It seemed her whole life was falling apart, a relatively happy life up to that point. By then she had accepted Jim's ship being taken by pirates, a situation that normally ends safely after several months. The kidnapping though, was something new, unpredictable and terrifying.

She told her Mother and Aunt; who'd been staying with her and the children over the Easter Weekend, to go home and leave her alone for the rest of that day. She felt the need to let herself go; if she heard another word of compassion, she'd start screaming.

"Please take the children back to Romford with you; I need to be alone; I'll call for them in the morning." She'd insisted, tears not far off.

They'd protested, saying she'd be better off with company, but were eventually compelled to go, the children as well. After seeing them off, she sat down on a comfortable armchair made from buffalo leather. One of a suite bought last time Jim was home.

She let herself go, screamed once and cried bitterly, tears streaming down her face. She felt a block of worry settle on her mind, echoed by her stomach. Unexpectedly, visions of their married life flashed through her head. She gave in temporarily to these memories; trying to gain comfort from past happy times before descending into the black pit of despair again.

They'd met at a party given by Jack Knowles and Jim when they had both been studying for their Master's Certificate. Having sailed together as Apprentices, they were still friends, although no longer on the same ship. With two other embryo Master Mariners; they'd rented a flat at Kilburn for the six months it would take them to

study for and pass their exams. All four of them were bachelors then, making the most of their opportunities in 'Swinging London'; going by car or tube each day to their school at Aldgate. The few evenings not studying were spent in the pubs round Shepherds Bush.

They had all been at sea for seven or eight years, having already passed two previous qualifying examinations. It had been Jack Knowles who'd invited her to the party, along with a few other girls from the Romford area, most of whom had known each other since secondary school.

She'd known Jack all her life. Their families were close friends and the two of them had more or less grown up together. They'd lost contact after he'd sailed on his first trip to sea as an Apprentice. She thought Jack had invited her to the party to renew the close relationship they'd enjoyed when she was fifteen and he seventeen.

She may well have agreed, except that Jim had been at the party and had claimed her straight away. Or rather she'd claimed him, she admitted to herself. She'd been attracted to Jim and made good and sure he was captivated by her, not that he'd ever realised it. As she knew he would, he'd asked her out the following evening and then almost every evening afterwards.

A week later they were in bed, two weeks after that, all four men sat for their Master's certificate. Jack Knowles, Jim and one other passing. By this time Jim had more or less left the flat at Kilburn and moved into Angela's flat at Willesden. It was far smaller, just an overgrown studio, with a separate kitchen and bathroom. Her fashion magazine had sent her on a course with the London University of the Arts at Lime Grove, Shepherds Bush.

The following day, he'd received an emergency call from his Company and had to go back to sea. The Second Officer on board one of the Company ships, the *West Wycombe*, had been injured in an accident. Jim had to fly

out to Dubai, joining the ship by launch as she passed by, taking over the injured man's job.

After he'd gone, she'd realised that Jim was the man she wanted and she'd better try and keep him interested in her. She'd been sure that two weeks of sex had pleased both of them equally; judging by his reluctance to get out of her bed each morning. Three months is a long time though, she didn't want him thinking of her only as an easy lay. She could write letters to him of course, phone calls by Satellite were possible, he'd told her, but very expensive. Apparently there was no way to get in touch by E-mail, but that could happen soon.

Five weeks later, Jim phoned her from the ship by satellite, saying they'd received orders to load at the Isle of Grain, a tanker port on the river Medway near Rochester. 'Would she,' he'd pleaded, 'take a couple of days off work and join him on board, until the ship sailed out again?' 'Would she?' The answer to that was an unqualified 'Yes'.

However she'd hesitated a little, letting him persuade her some more, before finally agreeing. Excited, he'd given her instructions on how to get there, also the telephone number of the local agent, who would arrange for her to board the ship. Jim's obvious excitement over the phone had excited her too, but she'd managed to keep her voice cool. Pleasant but cool, as if she was doing him a favour.

Boarding the ship was a bit like stepping into a different world, a world of steel with the constant hum of machinery. A sailor at the gangway had met her and escorted her to Jim's cabin, where he was talking to the Captain and one of the other Officers. His cabin was nice and comfortable, with a separate toilet and shower. Untidy though, clothes flung all over the place. Which he'd explained later was due to an early arrival in port and no time to make the cabin presentable.

Jim introduced her to his Captain, who was Captain Murchison shortly before going ashore as a Superintendent.

The same man who had come down to Chelmsford the previous week and consoled her on the day the *Dawn Splendour* had been hi-jacked.

On the *West Wycombe*, Jim had been so excited and keen

to get her into bed, that his immediate Senior Officer, the Chief Mate, had taken over his watch for a couple of hours. Even after that pleasant interlude, he couldn't keep his eyes off her or stop touching her, even to the extent of occasionally embarrassing her. It had all been a bit of a whirl, she'd hardly expected to be taken to bed within half an hour of joining the ship.

At dinner that evening she'd felt embarrassed entering the saloon with him, wanting to wipe the smug grin off his face. By then though, the wives of two other Officers had joined and were sitting with their husbands. After smiling at the memory, she dissolved into tears again.

After the ship had sailed out, she'd felt far more certain of his interest and their future together. She also had an inkling of what his job was. A month later, the ship had put into Rotterdam and she'd gone across on the Harwich/Hook of Holland ferry, boarding the ship again at Europoort. This time a new Second Mate had arrived, Jim being promoted to Chief Mate.

At this rank, his accommodation was a lot better. He had a Dayroom; a bedroom with a double bed; a separate toilet and shower, plus an office. Being a corner cabin with windows, not the portholes she had mistakenly assumed, she was able to look out over the fore deck and could see the port installations from the side window. The accommodation was light and airy by day and cosy by night.

They'd celebrated his promotion with the Captain and other Officers, but there was little time for them to be together, due to his new workload. She was able to help him move into his new cabin.

Once more she'd been swept up in the novelty of shipboard life. This time they were loading a cargo of Gas Oil from the shore. A small Inland Waterways tanker barge or Spit was transferring Aviation Spirit on their offshore side. The barge, she learned later, had brought the cargo down the Rhine from Strasbourg in France. At the same time, the ship had been taking stores from a barge, using a crane from a gantry near the stern; some Officers and crew had joined and others left the ship; a repair gang was aboard and the whole experience was a complete novelty to her.

She'd had boyfriends before, one or two of whom she'd slept with. Jim was a sailor with much experience in various ports, especially it seemed with Australian and New Zealand nurses. They'd discussed living together or even marriage, deciding on the former right away and the latter as soon as possible. Did she want him to leave the sea? Discussing this, they'd decided he would stay at sea for a while, until a good shore job came along. She wished to God now, she'd insisted he'd taken *any* shore job in those days - when he was head over heels in love with her.

Three months later they were married; a white wedding in Bournemouth, hosted and largely paid for by Jim's large family. She'd persuaded him to have part of their honeymoon at La Ciotat in Southern France, followed by a week in the Alps where he'd taken ski lessons.

His next appointment at sea had been on the *West Wycombe*, again as Chief Officer, where she'd sailed with him for the four month commission. This was followed by two other voyages until finding herself pregnant.

William had been conceived at sea on their second voyage. The ship was on that long haul between Ras Tannurah in Saudi Arabia and Adelaide. A week from Adelaide she'd run out of birth control pills, told Jim to be careful until she was able to get a new supply. He'd laughed at her concern over his enforced celibacy for the next week.

“That’s OK, I’ll either tie a knot in it or withdraw in time. Your choice!” He’s said, an amused look in his eyes.

That had been OK until Jim came off-watch at eight one morning and she’d still been in bed asleep. Normally he always called her by phone at seven-thirty and she’d be up, showered and dressed by the time he came down at ten past eight. During the last hour of his watch, he’d told her afterwards, visions of her asleep in bed had excited him and he’d deliberately not called her. Startled at being kissed awake and overwhelmed by his exploring hands, it had been she who’d stopped him from withdrawing in time.

That was it then, pregnant. They’d been late for breakfast too, with no time for Jim to shower and shave. The other Officers had tried to hide their amused grins; having guessed the reason why; which hadn’t been too difficult, her face was still flushed and Jim was all cock-a-hoop.

In between these trips at sea, they’d lived with her mother at Romford; staying there during her pregnancy and for three years afterwards until young William was old enough to go to a Nursery School. She’d then applied for and got her old job back at the fashion magazine, which by then had moved its offices to Chelmsford.

An 'on loan' job had come up then, Jim being sent to a Kuwaiti dry cargo ship with the odd sounding name of ***Kuwait Horizon of Kuwait***. With the extra bonus money earned on that ship; they’d been able to put down a deposit for a good three-bedroomed house in Chelmsford, which they could scarcely afford at the time. These on loan jobs were few and far between, if the Officer agreed to the option, he’d earn extra money on top of his salary. If he refused, it didn't matter to the Company. They could always refuse the request.

She’d been shocked when realising what Jim had been through when the Kuwaiti ship had been attacked by pirates, just outside the Singapore Straits. One night, shortly

before four a.m., he'd told her; three men had climbed up over the stern rails from a pursuing speedboat. Nobody had seen them, they'd made straight for the Captain's Cabin, who was woken up with a parang at his throat.

Jim, about to go on watch, happened to be passing by on his way to the bridge. He'd been seized and forced to open the ship's safe, also at parang point. The pirates had tied Jim and the Captain up and then left over the stern, taking several thousand US dollars from the safe; also whatever they could steal lying around the Captain's cabin, including an expensive camera. The whole thing had taken about ten minutes.

Her memories faded, fear for Jim taking their place; fear that he may be undergoing torture at that very moment; fear for the future supposing Jim never came home; fear too, for her children and their reaction to his disappearance and possible death. Laura, their daughter, was now six; William coming up to ten. Her Mother had been and still was good, always available to look after them.

She was worried about the possible loss or drastic reduction of their combined income; luckily her job was a good one, working here at Chelmsford for a fashion magazine. She'd lately been promoted to a managerial position. When Captain Murchison had offered Jim another chance to earn extra cash by sailing on this Liberian ship for a three month voyage; she hadn't wanted him to go.

Thinking back to the arguments they'd had about the offer; she realised her main reason had been to keep him home a little longer. Their daughter Laura was aching to try out the new bicycle she'd received for Christmas.

Looking round the pleasant living room, she remembered all the things they had done together to make it a home; especially the bric-a-brac Jim had brought home from foreign ports. Some of which she'd unobtrusively hidden from sight. She got up and walked over to the window again, saw the rain clouds had cleared and watched

the sun set over the houses opposite. It was a good area they lived in, but sometimes they barely managed to keep afloat, what with the mortgage repayments and increasing cost of living. God help her if Jim's income was stopped at source. Her job was a good one but by itself it wouldn't cover the mortgage for the new house; as well as her other expenses. A tempest of fresh tears suddenly overwhelmed her and she stretched out on the sofa, crying as she hadn't done in years. Her tears diminishing, she wondered what was going to happen to their finances now.

Captain Murchison had seemed positive that the Company would continue to pay Jim's salary into the bank during the hi-jacking; even if the Liberian Company reduced *their* payments. But what now? Now that he'd been abducted from the ship?

She remembered Jim and Jack; on one of the rare occasions their leaves had coincided, telling her about an engineer who'd walked off a ship in Singapore one evening, never to be heard of again. His widow had been compelled to wait seven years until her husband had been pronounced dead and she could get his insurance money – or even remarry.

She felt sure the Company would continue paying his full salary, if there was evidence that Jim was still alive. Maybe the Pirates had abducted Jim to increase pressure on the Liberian owners, forcing them to pay the ransom sooner without extended negotiations. In which case they must be *seen* to be keeping him alive. Taking him off the ship just to kill him didn't make any sense at all. It had to be one way or the other.

But what if Jim was never heard of again? How long before the senior management would assume his death - if no word came from Somalia? Then what? Would the Merchant Navy Officers' Pension Fund insist on waiting seven years before admitting she is a widow? The Social Security too? Widow's benefit? What about Death Duties in

that case? She felt her mind leaping from problem to problem and nearly screamed again. The Insurance Company too, Jim had taken out a policy a year ago. What about that?

Thinking about Captain Murchison's previous visit more than a week ago, she felt the need to talk to someone about the prospects of Jim's survival. She needed advice about the situation she now found herself in. She also needed to stop crying and face some unpleasant facts.

A thought struck her. Was she really a widow now? In which case she'd better do something about it. But was she? Who could she contact about a kidnapped husband? Which authority? The Foreign Office? Wait a minute now, Captain Murchison had mentioned over the phone something about contacting them.

She phoned the number he'd given her and asked to speak to him. He told her that he'd already contacted the authorities, his Chairman as well and hoped the Press wouldn't get hold of the story for her sake.

"Oh yes, please, please keep the Press away from me." She'd pleaded, "I'm in one hell of a mess and they'd be the last straw."

Who to turn to? Her father was living in Canada, her Uncle Bob in France. Her mother was good but was unable to advise her properly. After hesitating, she phoned Captain Murchison again.

Chapter 6 - London - April 21st

It had been a bad week for Tom since Mr Carter had phoned from France the previous Tuesday. Tom and the Company Chairman had again asked the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office for help, asking them to make a strong protest to the Government of Somalia about the abduction.

“What Government of Somalia?” The Foreign Office official had replied. “We have some contacts with Somaliland, once British Somaliland, but they know nothing. In all probability he's not in their territory anyway. They reckon he is far more likely to be in the Puntland breakaway part of Somalia itself.”

Tom wondered when, or even if, a separate ransom demand would come for Turner alone. To whom though? The Liberian Company would receive the demand, since he had been signed on their ship. They would quickly pass it on like a hot potato. That this had happened to one of his best Chief Officers and there was very little he could do about it, was weighing heavily on his mind.

“Good Morning sir.” a familiar voice disturbed his thoughts, “what's all this buzz going round the office about Jim Turner in Somalia?”

It was Jack Knowles with his exciting looking Italian wife. Although Tom was nearly fifty years old, he realised she was a woman dreams are made of. She seemed to radiate sheer sex, although he learnt later that she was a faithful and dutiful wife – despite her ravishing looks and inviting eyes. Jack Knowles doesn't know when he's well off!

“Yes Jack, it's a very bad business. He was loaned out to the *Dawn Splendour*, a Liberian tanker; you probably heard about her capture in the news. What hasn't been broadcast is that Jim has been taken off the ship by four heavily armed men. A French Naval helicopter witnessed the abduction and photographed them in the boat leaving the ship.”

“Sounds bad,” Jack said, solemnly. “As far as I've heard, they don't normally take men off ships. But why Jim? Do

you know if he was the only Brit aboard? Are you sure it really was him?"

"Oh, it was Jim Turner all right, no mistake about that. The photo shows him sprawled out on the bottom boards, his hands tied and one of the men holding a gun at his head. The others in the boat seem to be shooting at the chopper with their Kalashnikovs, or whatever the guns are. They missed but the chopper was low on fuel and had to go back to his ship." Tom said, pausing to take a breath then continued.

"Two days later a French warship arrived and is now in the vicinity, maybe to stop others being abducted. One thing is strange though, the whole thing was published *only* in a local French newspaper." Tom said, rummaging in his desk for the cutting.

"A French newspaper? Haven't our papers got hold of this as well?" Jack demanded. His brow furrowed.

"Apparently not, nor do I want them to - for the sake of Mrs Turner. I only heard about it because a relative of Mrs Turner phoned this office from France and told me. The Liberian Company have since confirmed the abduction took place on Easter Sunday. Here's the clipping, you can see for yourself it really is him." Tom said, handing the clipping to Jack.

"Aye it's him alright." Jack confirmed, looking grim. "It could only be Angela's Uncle who sent the photo from France. There has been no word from the Somali Government, I suppose, assuming one exists?"

Jack was shocked at the sheer brutality the clipping showed. He passed it to his wife who gasped and choked back a sob; on the point of tears. The photo was brutal, Jim's face was white and his eyes wide open with terror, his normally pleasant features contorted with fear.

"Nothing at all, we've been pressing the Government, the

Foreign & Commonwealth Office since it happened. They're getting right sick of us, but why should they bother? It isn't even a British ship. They even said it was up to the Liberian Government, but later retracted that statement. British policy is to refuse paying ransoms, even for British subjects. We'll have to wait and see what happens next." Tom replied.

"I wonder how poor Angela is coping" Jack said, "I think Sonia and I will go down and see her in Chelmsford. I suppose the Liberians are still paying his wages?"

"No, only half for this month; nothing at all after that since he's no longer working on their ship! We're still paying in full though, but God Knows how long that'll last. Go and have a drink or something for half an hour, I'll pack up here and come down to Chelmsford with you. You got your car handy or did you come in by train?" Tom said, making up his mind on the spur of the moment

Tom was glad Jack Knowles and Sonia were going down to Chelmsford to see Mrs Turner and having made a decision to join them. Her phone call a couple of days previously could have been a cry for help, a plea for somebody in a senior position to advise what to do next. She'd mentioned an Uncle Bob living in France, who Tom thought was probably Mr Carter. The man who'd phoned him after Easter with news of the abduction. Tidying his desk he told Jane where he'd be if needed and joined Jack and his wife.

They picked up Jack's car and drove down to Chelmsford. On the way through London's East End, they decided *not* to tell Mrs Turner about the photograph. Why add to her distress by showing her the violence her husband was undergoing?

Arriving in the pleasant suburb, they found her at home; her mother back staying with her. When she opened the door, Jack gave an audible gasp when he saw her pallor and obvious distress.

“Hallo Jack, it's nice to see you and Sonia again.” Angela Turner said politely. “Good afternoon Captain Murchison, thank you for coming all this way again. Come in and have a cup of tea.” She said, holding back her sobs with difficulty. “You remember my mother don't you? This is Captain Carter, my uncle who lives in France.”

Tom was glad Jack Knowles and his wife had agreed with him about keeping the newspaper cutting secret from Mrs Turner. The presence of Carter posed an unexpected problem, until a slight nod from Tom answered the query in Carter's eyes. Mrs Turner was in no state to see the photo of her husband's terrified face. They tried commiserating with her, searching for adequate things to say; unable to decide whether to jolly her along, making light of the whole affair, or to increase the already gloomy atmosphere.

Her mother came to their rescue, saving a potentially embarrassing situation by asking questions about Jack's family. She knew the Knowles family well and talked about the days when Jack and Angela had been at school in Romford. They had pretty well grown up together since both families were close friends and the two of them were nearly the same age.

The atmosphere in the house was unreal, like the time interval between a death in the house and the funeral. The three men ended up by talking together, Sonia was trying to console Angela Turner while Mrs Patterson busied herself making tea for everyone.

“I haven't told the children yet, not about Jim being kidnapped.” Mrs Turner said later, “They only know the ship's been hijacked and he'll be coming home later than normal. What's so terrible is not knowing whether he's alive or dead, OK or being tortured. It's the not knowing that's driving me mad. Do you think we'll ever know? By the way, Captain, how did you manage to keep it from the newspapers?”

“Please call me Tom. Oddly enough, neither the Liberians nor the French have made it public, as far as I can tell. Don’t forget it happened over the Easter Weekend and it was only on the Tuesday that I was told. I’ve warned our office staff to be discreet about the whole thing. Lloyds List did print something, probably from another source. They only knew that an un-named Officer of unknown nationality had been taken off a Liberian ship. Our newspapers seem to have either missed or ignored it.” Tom said, thankful the atmosphere had eased.

“Yes I see. Thank you Tom, my name’s Angela.” She said, having difficulty holding back her tears.

“Are you sure you’re right about keeping it from the Press?” Mrs Patterson asked, doubtfully. “It might even pressurise the Government into doing something?”

Tom told her that both the Chairman and he wanted to keep the Press out of it; Jack and Captain Carter agreed with him but Sonia didn’t. The clipping he’d received from France seemed to be burning a hole in Tom’s jacket pocket and he wondered if he really *was* right not to show it to Angela. The photo was too shocking and could even cause a problem between uncle and niece. Tom also hoped he was doing the right thing by not informing the Press. The afternoon grew dim, heavy clouds covering the intermittent sun.

“You know, I’ve got a feeling that Jim is alive and well.” Angela said defiantly. “The pirates must have taken him ashore as a hostage, in which case they *must* be keeping him alive. Why doesn’t the Government want to get involved? After all he *is* a British subject.”

She was starting to get angry, her tea cup rattling in its saucer. Outside, seen through the window, it began to rain. Her mother shivered and turned on a bar of the electric fire, then poured out more tea.

“As I mentioned before on the phone, the ship’s Liberian, your husband was signed on their articles and

consequently a member of *their* ship's crew. All the officers are probably different nationalities anyway, not one of them being a Liberian National. It's up to the Liberian Government and Company to negotiate with the pirates. I've also been told the British Government *never* pays ransoms to discourage other potential kidnappers. For all we know, your husband's abduction could be part of the original ransom demand to increase the pressure; or even a separate ransom demand just him alone." Tom advised her, feeling inadequate.

"In that case, who would pay it? Your Company or the Liberians?" Angela asked. "Sorry, please go on. I've been thinking about the consequences of this; it's been a week now since it happened and I don't know what to do. Who do I see about a husband being missing? What is the Government doing about it? Can they help sort my finances out? What about the mortgage on this house if the Company stops paying?" She said, then turned to Jack.

"Do you remember Jack, the time you and Jim were talking about the engineer who'd disappeared ashore somewhere. His wife had to wait seven years before he was officially certified dead?" Jack nodded.

"I'll help as much as I can," Tom said, holding his cup out for another refill. "Is your husband a member of the Officers' Union, the Nautilus UK branch? If so, they'll help you, they have all the contacts and legal advisors necessary, I'll phone you tomorrow with their address and phone number. You'll have to ask them not to publish any details in their Newssheet if you want to keep it from the Press."

"I was on the point of suggesting that before you all turned up." Bob Carter said. "They would deal with the MNOP fund and the various Government organisations as well."

"OK Thanks. Nautilus UK? Yes I think he is a member, in any case I can get the details on Internet. But I'd still like to know why the Government won't help."

“Call me if you need any help contacting them. The persons we spoke to in the Government say there is little they could do, except diplomatically. Diplomatically to whom though? That's the problem. The country is in a right mess with no proper government or infrastructure. In other words, it's a messy mixed-up affair and I'm really sorry I sent him to that ship in the first place. Right then, if your Mother will look after your two children, I'll take you all out to dinner. What's a good restaurant locally?” Tom asked hopefully, trying to lighten the atmosphere.

Angela started to protest, saying she couldn't possibly face a meal out. Her mother told her she was talking rubbish and urged her to go. Sonia added her pleas and Angela finally capitulated.

* * * * *

In the restaurant, the three men had a lot in common and were discussing life at sea and comparing notes. Sonia and Angela Turner were talking softly together. Tom discreetly watched the two women; Angela's hair was dark with a slight tawny hint, Sonia's raven black. They did not know each other well, since their husbands were rarely on leave at the same time, but they were chatting together.

Sonia could speak good English but with a slight accent which added to her charm. She was doing very well as a trilingual secretary at the Fincantieri shipyard at Monfalcone, where one of the Company ships had been built. Jack Knowles had been standing by that ship on behalf of the Company. He'd been working with the Company's New Building Superintendent; the shipyard and RINA; the Italian Classification Society; inspecting cable runs; the cargo tank coatings; the accommodation block and deck fittings.

She had apparently fallen for Jack but had kept him at bay for a couple of weeks. It must have been explosive

when he eventually climbed into her bed. Jack had married her, neither sets of parents were overjoyed, the main reason being that Sonia was almost fifteen years younger than Jack. She'd been eighteen at the time and he thirty-three, but they'd all accepted the marriage in the end.

Realising he was supposed to fit in with her family, Italian

style, he'd objected right from the start and had insisted on having their own flat just outside the town. They live in Italy permanently. Since Jack's job takes him away for seven or eight months of the year, it seemed fairer if he was the one who moved.

After all, within reason, it makes little difference *where* he lives in Western Europe. He has no office to go to and can fly to join a ship from Italy as easily as he can from England. He is trying to learn Italian, but it's a hard slog. They try to come back to Romford every year to see Jack's parents.

Sonia looked decidedly Mediterranean, with a slightly olive coloured skin, black hair down to her shoulders and eyes man could drown in. Superb figure too and intelligent, she had it all. Angela Turner though, when you really looked at her, did not come off at all badly compared to Sonia. Although older than Sonia, she still had a good figure although more modestly clothed.

Long dark brown hair closely framed her oval face; emphasising her fair skin and slightly slanted deep brown eyes. Appealing rather than beautiful. Understated sensuality rather than flagrant like Sonia's. Underestimated at first, a second look always confirmed her attraction. Especially when one notices her strongly defined jawline.

They were both good managers, as seamen's wives have to be, with their husbands so frequently absent. The two women were whispering together. The aperitifs, plus a bottle of good red wine, followed by a digestive seemed to

have a calming effect on Angela. She and her uncle Bob had chosen Calvados, instead of a liqueur.

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Her Uncle Bob was a good raconteur and some of the stories he told made them all laugh. Especially when he'd described a time when his ship, a Kuwaiti tanker, had discharged at Constantza in what was then Communist Romania. His crew were all South Korean, whose Government would not permit *any* Entry stamps in their passports or discharge books from *any* Communist country. Which meant the Koreans could not go ashore there.

He, the crew bosun and the Romanian Immigration officials came to an agreement so that the crew *could* go ashore and spend their dollars. The Officials cut out passport size pieces of paper, sellotaped them into the crew passports and stamped them for Entry.

When the ship was ready to sail, the same Immigration officials collected all the passports, stamped them for Exit and carefully removed the stamped pieces of paper from the Korean ones. Their passports were clean, no evidence the South Koreans had ever been to Communist Romania.

"When we were ready to sail from there," Captain Carter continued. "The pilot was aboard, the tugs handy, the mooring gangs all there but nothing happened. The pilot went to the offshore Bridge Wing and refused to answer my questions. The Chief Mate told me over the Walky-Talky the shore gangs wanted soap. Not cigarettes which was normal in most ports, or whisky – just bars of toilet soap."

"However this was a problem. For some stupid reason all the soap not in use was locked up in the Bonded Stores Locker, which had been sealed by the Romanian Customs. In the end, I had to break the seal, gave the Mate forward and Second Mate aft bars of soap which they threw down to the waiting gangs. We sailed then with myself desperately

hoping the Customs wouldn't suddenly come alongside to check the seal as sometimes happens.

We dropped the pilot and sailed down the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, through the Suez Canal to Mina al Ahmadi where I had to buy more soap and store it another locker. Not the Bonded Stores Locker, where it should never have been in the first place."

Tom reached his flat at Harrow-on-the-Hill about midnight after a long complicated journey back.

Chapter 7 - Seattle - April 22nd

Shortly after two in the morning, Tom was woken up by the phone ringing beside his bed. One of the Company tankers, the *West Wycombe*, had inadvertently spilled some of her cargo of Diesel Oil into the dock at Seattle. There was all hell to pay; the US Coastguards were already there taking statements.

The ship's Captain had already put a phone call through to the Company DPA - the Designated Person Ashore in London who was permanently on call for that ship. Using the dedicated telephone he kept with him all the time, the DPA had quickly phoned the Qualified Individual in the United States. The QI started to put the Oil Spill Clean Up procedures into action.

The local representative of the Company's P & I Club had been summoned, but was too late to stop the ship from saying too much. The Designated Person Ashore decided to call Tom as well.

Speaking to the Captain by Satellite phone, Tom realised the ship's staff had done their best to minimise the spill by reacting quickly. They had instantly put oil barriers in the sea in an attempt to contain the spill; until the US Coastguard arrived and used their own containment system.

Tom asked if all the ship's documentation was in order, especially the Oil Record Discharge Book and the Oily/Water Separator log. Assured all was OK, he went back to sleep, only to be woken up again at Quarter to Five. Blearily grabbing the phone, he hoped nothing worse would be divulged. It was Captain Forbes with another problem.

"Sorry to wake you again Captain Murchison, but the US Coastguard inspectors have found an extra pipe by the Oily/Water Separator; but not fitted. They're accusing us of pollution here in Seattle – also using this pipe for illegal discharges at sea."

By this time, Tom was sitting bolt upright in bed, hoping it was not true so that he could tuck himself up under the sheets again.

"Christ Almighty." Tom exploded. "Did nobody see this pipe? Is there a whistle blower involved? What does the Chief Engineer say?"

"He's already been arrested. Look, the Chief Mate's just told me the pipe is old, has been there for years and never been connected. Maybe used some time in the past, but certainly not recently. The bloody fool has been meaning to throw it away, but never got round to it. We're trying to convince the US Coastguard of this but they won't listen. They are talking about arresting both of us." Captain Forbes said quietly.

"Did the Oily/Water Separator *work* properly?" Tom asked him, sitting up in bed with a worried frown on his face.

"Yes it worked perfectly; no oil was discharged into the sea, above the legal limit for the zone. The Coastguard accept that but they are deeply suspicious of the extra pipe there." Captain Forbes replied.

On certain ships, Officers have been caught, having fitted an illegal pipeline to bypass the Oily/water Separator. Sometimes the OWS shuts down too early through lack of maintenance, which leaves the ship with far too much tank

cleaning or ballast slops. More oil-contaminated water from the slop tanks can be discharged overboard through this bypass, so that more cargo can be loaded and satisfy the charterer.

This is commonly known as the '*Magic Pipe*' which is illegal. If caught, the ship and Company, as well as the Officers involved, can face heavy fines, even prison sentences.

More and more often nowadays, a disgruntled rating will '*Blow the Whistle*' by reporting the existence of this '*Magic Pipe*' to the authorities; usually the US Coastguard, for a lot of money. However, in this case, no whistle-blower was involved. Nevertheless, the USCG was actively considering taking the Senior Officers and the Company to court. The original minor diesel spill into the dock at Seattle had been completely overshadowed by this '*Magic Pipe*'.

Reaching for his agenda, Tom phoned the Chief Engineering Superintendent, since both of them were going to have to fly out to Seattle later that morning. Also the Human Resources Superintendent, telling him the story:

"Get hold of Captain Wilkinson and Chief Mate Jack Knowles straight away. *Now!* Tell them what's happened and try and get them on a flight to Seattle today; hopefully their visas are still valid. Knowles is in England, by the way, staying with his mother in Romford; you've got the address and telephone number somewhere. Also liaise with the Engine Super for another senior engineer to go as well. Also please arrange a flight for myself and the Chief Engineering Super, also for today if possible."

Tom got up and packed a few clothes into his ever-ready Emergency Kit, where he kept his passport and other papers, visa applications, Discharge Book, a change of clothes and various other necessities. This was obviously going to cost the Company mega-bucks. America's OPA90 (Oil Pollution Act 1990) put into place after the *Exxon Valdez* spill in Alaska, states categorically that the polluter

pays. For everything! The ship was on charter to and had been vetted by an Oil Major which may or may not help. He wondered how much of the blame was going to fall on his head.

The only saving grace is that it was only a minor spill. Minor or not, spills shouldn't happen nowadays, but they do! This one was caused by someone inadvertently opening a ship side valve. The damned thing should have been lashed shut, or rather the button immobilised. The backup valve must have been open also, or leaking. How did the Diesel get into the ballast discharge line anyway?

Captain Forbes told Tom later that the normal Overboard discharge valve had been opened by mistake instead of the *Permanent* Ballast Overboard Discharge valve. A stupid mistake that should never have happened. Other valves must have been open.

All of this could have been overcome, the clean-up operation successful and the affair put down to a costly experience. After all, it was only a thimbleful of oil that escaped and it was Diesel not Heavy Fuel Oil. Except for that sodding '*Magic pipe*' found by the separator, even though not attached.

Driving into Central London was easy at that hour of the morning. Later that day, he would have to drive to Heathrow airport, park in the short-term car park there and catch a flight to Seattle. The whole *West Wycombe* pollution was a nuisance, especially if the Company is taken to court in the USA.

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The following afternoon after a gruelling flight, Tom arrived at Seattle and found yet another problem. First of all there was an armed Security Guard on the gangway, also a "*No Shore Leave*" notice posted by the Immigration authorities. Upon reaching the ship's office, Captain Forbes

told him that the wife of the Electrical Officer did not have the correct passport. It was biometric, but the details were wrong – even the Christian name did not agree with her name on the crew list.

“You’ll never believe this Tom,” Captain Forbes said grimly, “she’s not the Electrician’s wife at all, she’s his Sister-in-Law!”

“What!! You mean he’s run away with his wife’s sister? But the name...” Tom demanded.

“No, it’s his brother’s wife and of course she’s got the same surname. Maybe they’ve been taking turns voyage by voyage over the years and nobody’s noticed.”

“Well *you* obviously didn’t notice the deception, did you Bill? Now we’re in a right bloody mess with the US Bureau of Immigration as well. Where is she now?” Tom asked.

“In their cabin, with two Security Guards watching her every move. They seem to think she’s on her way to blow up the White House. And yes Tom, of course I checked her passport. She had the right surname and resembled the photograph. She said she didn’t like her Christian name and called herself *Gloria*. Maybe I should have stood her up against a bulkhead and marked her height with a pencil, then weighed her on my bathroom scales?”

“Next time perhaps you should. How long has she been on board?” Tom asked, badly worried now.

“She and the Electrical Officer joined at Dubai three months ago by launch, so she got through the controls at Heathrow and Dubai OK; Since then we’ve called at Ras Tannurah and loaded for Pusan in South Korea; then back to Shuaiba in Kuwait where we loaded another cargo for Pusan; then in ballast to load Diesel here at Seattle.” Captain Forbes said nervously, knowing he was at fault for using the name Gloria on the crew lists.

“You said it’s the brother’s wife? Surely the details in her passport were correct?” Tom asked.

“Apparently she didn’t have one, so he took his wife’s passport. As far as her Christian name’s concerned, after three months, I’d been accustomed to calling her, and typing her name as Gloria.” Captain Rogers replied.

“So they’ve been getting away with up until now. Obviously her passport must have been examined at all those ports. Pity in a way the ship came to the US – about the only place in the world they would find out, especially since 9/11. OK Bill, I’ll go and see her now.”

Expecting to see a real sexy beauty like Sonia or even Angela Turner, it came as a shock when Tom met the woman. Oh she was nice enough looking, although a bit on the plump side, not at all the kind of woman a man could go mad for. She had faded blond hair, wore pebble glasses and was primly dressed. For Tom, she was a typical ‘*Nine to Fiver*’, one of thousands of young girls going daily by underground or bus into London or other cities. They were secretaries, shop assistants, maybe librarians or even Government employees.

Talking to the Immigration Officer, it seemed that Illegal Entry into the USA was the least of her crimes. Especially since the ‘*Department of Homeland Security*’ was involved as well. One of the Guards had told her she was bound to go to prison and the poor girl was terrified.

They were both deported, after Tom had pledged a sum that would cover both the Company and their personal fines. The two of them were taken to the airport at Seattle handcuffed to Security Guards until the plane took off for London, which also had to be paid for. The accounts department could deduct at least some of the money from the Electrical Officer’s wages. Before they left the ship, Tom asked why she called herself Gloria.

“It was the name my Daddy called me when I was a little girl.” She said. Tom suppressed an unpleasant remark and let her go.

Never two but three! It never rains but it pours! The *West Wycombe* up to her tricks again! Captain Wilkinson, Chief Officer Jack Knowles and Chief Engineer Officer Ray Younghusband had arrived and taken over. They were getting the ship ready to sail to Vancouver, where she would complete loading for a port in Japan. Luckily, there was a Company ship in New York, staying there for a few days and Tom was able to get her Electrical Officer transferred to join the *West Wycombe* at Vancouver. He would be replaced by another 'Lecky sent out from London

Captain Bill Forbes and his Chief Officer were taken ashore and put up in a hotel to await trial. Since no whistleblower had come forward and the Company had no previous convictions, the US Coastguard eventually dropped the case, sending them home to the UK cleared of any misdemeanour. The Chief Engineering Officer was a bit disgruntled, having spent the intervening time in prison, while the Captain and Chief Officer had been confined in a hotel. The spill that had caused all this bother was prosecuted by the USCG and the fine paid for by the Company.

Chapter 8 – London – April 27th

It had been two weeks now since Jim Turner had been taken off the *Dawn Splendour*; no sign of his whereabouts, nor any clue to tell the world if he was alive or dead. The ship was still anchored off Eyl waiting for the ransom to be paid; the owners trying to strike a hard bargain with the pirates and losing - the latter having all the time in the world to wait. The danger of piracy for ships navigating the Gulf of Aden was less now, due to the pressure of several Navies there.

The Pirates had largely shifted their operations and were now striking further afield from their previous haunts, often thousands of miles into the vast reach of the Indian Ocean. More so than ever before, especially during the calm periods between monsoons.

Tom wondered if the kidnappers were going to try for a separate ransom, just for Turner alone. It seemed far less probable now, since no demand had been received. Neither was there any video showing him pleading for his life, surrounded by heavily armed and hooded kidnappers.

It seemed increasingly likely that he had been killed, something the Pirates had largely been avoiding up to now, but Tom was not at all sure of this. They could have easily killed him on board had they wanted to; added to that, the Captain of the *Dawn Splendour* had said that the abductors were not the same gang as the original pirates.

The ugly question of his salary was still hanging around like a bad smell. This month's was paid as before, next month's promised, but after that, what?

Tom wondered if a Private Detective would be able to find Turner in Somalia, but it would take weeks even to get him there. The Company top management would have to agree to the expense, which he doubted; a detective found, one who was willing to go there. Visas would have to be applied for with probably a long wait. In any case where would he look? And what would he look for? As a thought, it was not worth following up.

He felt so very helpless, since he was directly responsible for Turner joining that ship, having overruled the Human Resources Superintendent. He'd known Turner had just bought a new house and was probably strapped for cash, which was a problem he should have avoided, playing favourites. Not that it would have made any difference as far as the Company was concerned, but he wouldn't have felt so bad about it personally. The Human Resources Super

had been angry when Tom had overruled him and was still feeling sore now.

Tom thought about going down to Chelmsford again, but what to say to the poor girl? She'd be anticipating good news as soon as she saw him at the gate. He was due to take a few days leave from the office to visit his sister and her family at Monkseaton, near Newcastle. Tom had been born there and lived in Whitley Bay before accepting the Superintendent's job in London. He might even look up Doreen, his ex-wife, as he usually did when he went up North on visits.

Despite the divorce, he still wanted to live with her again and often pleaded with her to join him in London. Sometimes she felt sorry for him and they spent the night together but there was no way she would consider moving to London, where his job was located. He couldn't really blame her though. Her job prospects are good and she'd been promoted to a senior position in the hospital. With no children, they'd parted with less hostility than he'd deserved, since the parting was entirely his fault.

It was Tom who had caused the rupture. What in God's Name had made him take up with that young student nurse, in the same bloody hospital too! A youngster, it turned out, that his wife was actually training at the time. Doreen had told him later, sometime after the divorce, that the girl had confessed to seducing him deliberately, being sick of Doreen's constant criticism of her work. Using simple minded Tom as a sort of revenge.

The telex machine rattled a message; it was the agent at Vancouver stating that Captain Wilkinson on the *West Wycombe* had been paid off into hospital with suspected cancer. Tom groaned and telexed Jack Knowles, now Chief Mate of the ship, telling him to take over the command temporarily. However adding that if he proved himself at the job and Captain Wilkinson was beached permanently, then he would very likely keep it. The ship was delayed by

a day, so that Captain Knowles, as he now was, could present himself to the British Consulate at Vancouver and register his assumption of command.

Jack would be short-handed, there being no time to send another Chief Mate out to Vancouver, but he assured Jack one would be waiting for him at the discharge port, either Inchon or Kashima. In the end it turned out to be Osaka. Later, over the phone Tom said he could use the senior cadet on board to take over the eight to twelve watch on the sea passage across the Pacific. The good news was that the Electrical Officer had arrived from New York and had joined the ship at Vancouver.

That bloody *West Wycombe* again, always some Goddamn thing happening on that ship. If it wasn't a mystery pipe close to the Oily/Water Separator, it was an oil spill; or the Captain paid off into hospital. It was on that ship, back in the days when he was in command of her, that Jim Turner, the Pumpman and two ABs had nearly been killed down a tank.

Once, a couple of years back, the ship had been stuck on the mud, aground in the Arabian Gulf. Captain Wilkinson, then in command of the *Amersham*, had manoeuvred her alongside the *West Wycombe* to take some of her cargo off. This lightened her sufficiently so the tugs could pull her free of the shoal. Now the poor man was in a Canadian hospital.

Tom envied Captain Knowles his coming voyage.
From

Vancouver a British Columbia pilot would take his ship through those lovely wooded passes and Narrows as far as Victoria on Vancouver Island. From there he would steam up the Juan de Fuca strait; with Washington State on his port hand side and Vancouver Island to starboard until abeam of Cape Flattery; the most northerly headland of America.

Then he would take a Great Circle route to Japan, which would take him briefly into the Bering Sea between two of the Aleutian islands; then out again into the North Pacific between two other islands. More or less the same route a plane would take.

He glanced round his office, which had been modernised lately. It was now a glassed-in portion of the larger open-plan office. He could see his whole department, what there was left of it. They could all see him too; he felt rather like a person in a glass house who shouldn't throw stones. He preferred the old style closed office with a secretary in an adjoining room. Not that he had a secretary to himself now anyway.

He debated with himself whether to call Angela Turner, to find out how she was getting along; whether her husband's union was helping her and... and what else? The poor woman was often on his mind since the abduction. He decided not to, in case she thought he may have some news of her missing husband. He phoned anyway. After discussing the possibilities of her husband's life, the talk turned to general subjects.

Chapter 9 – Chelmsford. – May 25th

Angela paused before ringing Captain Murchison on her mobile telephone. It was now forty-three days since her husband had been kidnapped. She no longer phoned every day since there was little she could ask him. He'd certainly tell her if there was any news of Jim; either good news or bad news. So far it's been no news, which in a way she supposed was good news, but was it? She was seriously starting to doubt that her husband was still alive.

As she always did when Jim was away at sea, she was coping with the housework, the kid's schooling and her job. Jim's union was helping her deal with the Government and other administrative concerns. Thankfully his salary was still arriving on time to pay off the hefty mortgage.

Jack Knowles was back at sea; Sonia called her from Italy at least once a fortnight to have a chat. Angela liked her and found herself looking forward to her calls. She was still thinking about Sonia when her mobile rung. It was her again, excited as only Latin races can be. While listening, Angela looked through the kitchen window at the garden, congratulating herself that her efforts, Jim's as well, had improved things. They even had a vegetable patch where tomato plants sometimes thrived.

"Hi Angela, how are you? I've got some *fantastic* news today. Really *fantastic*!! A couple of weeks ago, the Captain of Jack's ship was taken to hospital in Canada and *Jack's taken over the command*! The Company told him today that poor Captain Wilkinson is gravely ill with cancer and will probably never go back to sea again. Of course I'm very sorry for him being ill like that." She exclaimed, then paused for breath before continuing.

"The Company told Jack that if he did this first trip in command with no problem, *he could be promoted permanently*! Oh dear, I'm so very sorry that Jim missed the opportunity to get his command as well. Sorry too for the Captain in hospital." She said, her excitement abating.

She'd suddenly remembered Angela's husband was still missing and belatedly realised the effect the news could have on the older woman. Apologising, Sonia wished she hadn't been so keen to talk about promotion.

"That's OK Sonia," Angela said, acknowledging the apology. "Both Jim and Jack were next in line for promotion and laid bets on who would be first. Jack won, so please give him my best congratulations when you next call him. I mean it; I'm very glad for him and hope he

keeps his ship well clear of the Gulf of Aden. He's on the *West Wycombe* now, isn't he? Captain Murchison told me Jack had been sent there in a hurry. Wasn't there some kind of trouble in Seattle?" Angela said, almost in tears.

Sonia confirmed this then started giggling and was unable to stop.

"Why are you laughing? Come on now, let's share the joke." Angela asked her, astonished.

Sonia hesitated, still giggling; wondering if she dare tell Angela about the embarrassing experience she'd had the day Jack had gone to Seattle. When the two women had first met, she had been a little in awe of Angela, so cool so... so English! So old too, she must be about forty! So was her own husband, but that was different. She seemed almost unapproachable, not at all like her girlfriends in Italy, with whom she could share anything that entered her head. She tried hard but couldn't stop laughing;

"Come on then," demanded Angela, "Are you going to tell me what you're giggling about or not?"

Unable to keep it to herself any longer, Sonia eventually squealed with laughter and blurted out:

"Yes that's right; he had to go out to Seattle in a hurry. It was three weeks ago, the morning after we'd all had that dinner in Chelmsford with Captain Murchison. Remember? We were staying with Jack's parents then for a few days before going home to Italy." Sonia said, between giggles.

"Of course I remember, I was really miserable about Jim that evening and that dinner cheered me up a bit, but it can't be that you're laughing about?" Angela enquired.

"No it's what happened afterwards when we were in bed; the phone rang very early the next morning. Oh... It was so *embarrassing*, I felt like dying of shame!" Sonia said, between giggles.

"Embarrassing? What was so very embarrassing? Who was phoning who?" Margaret asked, curiously, watching the rain steadily falling from iron grey clouds.

“It was the Company phoning about five or so in the morning. Jack’s mother had answered it but it woke me up as well. It was hot in the room so I turned the sheet back, but I couldn’t get back to sleep again. Jack was still fast asleep so I, you know, I... Well I decided to wake him up too.” Sonia said, giggling even more.

“Oh, the poor love! Fast asleep and you wide awake, I can guess how you woke him up.”

“Well why not? Sometimes he wakes me up in the morning when all I want is to carry on sleeping - *even* when we’re in England! He says he can’t wait until I wake up naturally; so this time I’d thought I’d wake him.” Sonia said indignantly.

“Yes, I know what you mean; Jim liked his little bit in the mornings too. What do you mean *even* when you are in England?” Angela demanded.

“These things seem more natural in Italy. Anyway, he woke up and started climbing all over me. I was helping him when his mother came running in all excited and turned the light on.”

“Oh my God, what happened then, did she throw a bucket of water over you both?” Angela asked laughing.

“She saw what we were doing and the position we were in and screamed. I think through surprise. The scream made Jack’s father come running in as well in his pyjamas. I screamed as well then and tried to pull Jack down on top of me so his father wouldn’t see me naked.” Sonia said.

“What happened then?” Angela exclaimed, she knew all the persons involved and could visualise the scene.

“Jack’s mother apologised and started laughing, but his father didn’t. Jack was in a bad temper and told his mother to knock at the door in future. His father said that we should have locked the door if we wanted to do that sort of thing. Jack shouted back that the key had been lost years ago and that we were married and perfectly entitled to do that sort of thing.”

“Then his mother dropped a bombshell as you English say, she said it was the Company that had phoned and said Jack had got to go to Seattle right away. They left the bedroom then to phone the airport, his father was still grumpy and his mother almost in hysterics.” Sonia said, laughing. Before Angela could say a word, the younger woman added:

“Jack started to get up in a furious temper, but I pulled him down again. He still had two weeks leave left and I didn’t want him to get up and go to Seattle. I wanted him to stay in bed with me and continue with what we’d been on the point of doing. Each time he tried to get up, I pulled him down again and kissed him and... and... you know, played with him until he wasn’t angry anymore. It became as big as *that!*” She exclaimed,

Holding the phone on one and she extended her other arm wide as a measurement, forgetting Angela was unable to see her.

“OK I can guess what you mean. So did you...?” Angela asked, curious now.

“No! His mother came back, again without knocking and said we must get up immediately and catch the eight o’clock flight to Trieste, if he wanted to be in Seattle that same day. He went all limp then and that was that.” Sonia said scornfully. “He still had two weeks leave left.”

“Good God, you mean you didn’t have all your stuff with you and had to go back to Italy?”

“Yes, Jack’s father drove us to the airport and we caught that flight to Trieste. I’d telephoned my boss at work before we’d left London; he met us at Trieste and drove us home. Jack quickly packed his uniform, discharge book, ticket and whatever. My boss had arranged a shipyard car to drive us to Milan airport; there was just enough time to catch the flight to Rome and then another one on to New York. Then he’d have to wait for a connection to Seattle. ” Sonia exclaimed.

“So he made it then? Did you have time to...?” Angela asked, guessing the answer.

“No we didn’t have time, the driver was outside waiting for us. We were late and didn’t have even time to make love.” Sonia said indignantly.

“Oh you poor things!” Angela said in mock sorrow. Sonia started laughing, almost choking, then said:

“I asked him to phone the Company and ask for another flight, since we’d had to come back to Italy to get his things, tell them we won’t have time to get to Milan. But he wouldn’t.”

“Well, it is his job after all. The Company probably had no one else senior enough to send.”

“I decided to do something about it. So I locked the front door and put the key down the neck of my dress, then I ran into the bedroom and got into the bed. By the time he’d found the key, it was too late and he...”

“He what?” asked Angela slightly shocked.

“Well he did what I’d wanted him to do since five that morning at Romford. I phoned my boss then and explained that we’d missed the flight and why. He found Jack a flight from Trieste to Geneva, and a connection from there direct to Seattle. He arrived there before the others!”

Putting the phone down, Angela remembered the time when she’d fifteen and Jack seventeen.

“Good God!” She said to herself out loud. “Sonia would have been about two years old then.”

Their two families had not only been next door neighbours but close friends as well. A week before Jack had gone to sea on his first trip, she’d tried to seduce him when both sets of parents were out for the day. Would have succeeded too, if only her sister Wendy hadn’t come into the room to retrieve her scarf. Guessing Angela had borrowed it without her consent, she’d gone into her bedroom, screamed and pulled Jack off.

Both sets of parents were informed and a full-scale row developed. Jack was accused of attempting to rape a fifteen year old girl. His father had said it was a good job he was going away to sea the following day, where he would learn to control himself. None of them were quite sure whether the Age of Consent for a girl was fifteen or sixteen, but she was considered too young to consent anyway.

Jack was powerless to defend himself, having been caught in the act. She'd been seen as the victim, modestly looking at the floor in tears. Looking at her daughter, her mother had immediately guessed who had led the way, but kept silent.

The following morning, Jack had gone to join his ship, a voyage lasting five months. Coming home on leave unexpectedly, he'd seen her walking arm in arm with Derek Giddings. Having spent five months at sea in love with her, he'd stormed off out of her life, without waiting for an explanation.

Chapter 10 – London – June 22nd

Tom Murchison had arrived back in London the previous weekend, after staying with his sister and her family at Monkseaton. He'd contacted Doreen and spent an evening with her, once again trying to persuade her to join him in London, but with no success. She was now a highly respected senior matron at her hospital at South Shields. With her share of the house after the divorce, she'd been lucky to get a flat at Tynemouth and was happy there. On a nice day, she was able to walk down to the ferry in the mornings, cross the Tyne to South Shields and walk to her hospital.

The three Senior Officers from the *West Wycombe*, who had been taken off the ship in Seattle by the US Coastguard, had quickly been released. There was no Whistle Blower involved and none of their Company ships had been in trouble before. When their leaves had finished three days previously; Tom, with the agreement of the Engine Superintendent had sent them straight back to same ship, telling them:

“Right, the three of you are going back to the *West Wycombe*. As we all know, that ship has a reputation for bad luck, which everybody just seems to accept. For me, ships are made of steel and it is a series of bad Officers who’ve created that reputation. Officers joining are just letting things slide, blaming bad luck for everything, until the inevitable cascade occurs.” He paused then, getting ready to counter any arguments. There were none so he’d continued:

“You three are to go back there and make that Goddam ship work properly; I don’t want to hear any more tales of bad luck. You can have a Riding Squad with their own cook whenever you need one - *but get rid of that reputation*. You’ve got four whole months to do it. I’ll put extra Deck and Engineer Officers aboard, if you can convince both me and the Engine Superintendent you’ll need them.”

Tom saw that Captain Knowles had signed off the *West Wycombe* two days ago and should be at Head Office on Monday June 22nd. He’d already faxed the ship, telling Jack to come straight to the office before going home on leave. The flight had arrived late Sunday night and he’d stayed at one of the airport hotels; arriving at the office by nine Monday morning. They’d chatted generally for a while, then Tom confirmed his appointment as Captain. He then introduced Jack to all the Departments - Stores; Accounts; Human Resources; Engineering; Chartering; and New Building.

Not so grand as it sounds, since there were only a couple persons in each department; finally meeting with Mr Harding, the Company chairman. Most of them knew Jack or at least knew of him, but now would have to deal with him directly as Captain.

Jack mentioned that he'd be staying over the Tuesday to attend his mother's Sixtieth birthday party. He also needed to renew his ENG1 health certificate which he was unable get done in Italy. Tom arranged for him to see the MCA appointed doctor on the Thursday, his surgery being fully booked until then.

Jack had been a bit upset about this, being eager to get home to his fabulous Italian wife; nor could he stay with his parents overnight since their house was full of relatives. Tom told him to book an inexpensive hotel for the two nights, claiming them on his next expense demand; reminding him that all meals claimed must be backed up by receipts and all alcoholic drinks paid for by him. The Human Resources Department booked him a flight to Italy on Thursday afternoon.

Since the purchase of another Liquefied Petroleum Gas Carrier was under way, adding to the two already in the fleet, Tom toyed with the idea of sending Jack on a two week course at Southampton once his leave had finished. The first week concerns Crude Oil Washing on tankers or COW, a revision for him since he'd already got his Dangerous Cargo

Endorsement for Crude Oil. It would serve as an update anyway, with the second week detailing the carriage of Liquefied Gas Cargoes; Propane, Butane and Ammonia, certifying him able to sail on these ships.

Tom considered eventually sending Jack to Keelung to stand by the building of the LPG carrier that was being built there, so he could learn the practicalities of the job. That would have to be after his next voyage on the ***Chesham***, by which time they should know some definite dates for

launching and fitting out. Yes, that would do, Tom thought. First the Gas Course at Southampton, then directly on to the *Chesham* for three months, take some leave; then off to Keelung. Pity Jim Turner had to miss all this.

After his medical on Thursday, Jack popped into the office again on his way to Gatwick and told Tom he'd visited Mrs Turner the previous afternoon and had taken her out to lunch. He mentioned that she seemed to be in better spirits, but now considered that Jim was no longer alive. Tom had thought it a bit odd though, Jack going to see Angela Turner without Sonia, then remembered him saying they'd been good friends once.

But even so, she was Jim Turner's wife and there was still no indication whether he was dead or alive. So far, Tom had heard nothing from various sources in the world of shipping. It was now seventy-one days since he'd been kidnapped.

* * * * *

Tom began thinking of his own circumstances; he'd been living alone since his wife divorced him some years ago. His only real holiday had been visiting his sister and her family at Monkseaton each year; at the same time looking up some old pals and their wives from Whitley Bay, Tynemouth and Cullercoats. He'd had girlfriends occasionally, one or two of them lived in for a while, but no-one he could think of as being permanent.

Perhaps if Jim never came home... No, no – for Christ's Sake, don't let's continue thinking like that. Unable to help himself, a vision of Angela Turner came into his mind. Lovely dark hair, falling in natural waves down to her shoulders, framing an oval face. Her brown eyes are very slightly slanted. What else? A generous mouth and a firm chin, with a defined jawline. In all she's pretty, no dammit,

she's more than just pretty, not really beautiful but definitely very attractive, with an understated sexuality.

Suddenly Jane appeared in front of him to sign some papers, the difference between Good Old Jane and Angela was almost shocking. Good old Jane is tall and thin, even gawky, which her long calf-length skirts seemed to exaggerate. Her face was long and full of character, her hair a surprising shade of red usually pulled back in a bun. The red of her hair always clashed with the colour lipstick she used. She was the only secretary in an office full of men, to whom she laid down the law. Trouble is, she lacked sex appeal. As for comparing her with Angela!!

She must have overheard Jack and him talking about Angela Turner, because she smiled and shook her head, as if she could read his thoughts. As she left, Tom said to himself 'That's it, No more daydreaming Tom, Angela's still in her middle years, about thirty-seven. And me? What am I? Middle-aged I guess, or nearly so. Lonely too; oh well, there's always Good Old Jane.' Good Old Jane looked up then and he could swear she actually winked at him. For a minute he'd thought he'd spoken his thoughts out loud and she'd heard him!

* * * * *

Tom was due to go out to Taiwan the following week to see their new LPG Carrier being built at Keelung; hoping to clear up a couple of disputes between their representatives and the shipyard. A new building ordered when times and freight rates were good; the Company had tried to cancel the order but the shipyard wasn't having any of that! After Taiwan; to Manila in the Philippines, to sort out some crew matters with the crew suppliers. He'd been invited to inspect a brand new Officers' Training College there as well.

Then on to Singapore to interview various agents there, regarding the increased costs for supplying ships offshore.

How much more would it cost using a helicopter instead of a boat? Whether the extra cost would be worth it in time saved through the Straits? Was this even possible? Maybe it would even deter the pirates in that area to a certain extent, since the ships would not have to slow down and stop while taking stores from a boat.

Also at Singapore, he'd complain about the barges supplying Fuel Oil Bunkers to anchored ships. About ten days in all for the round trip. Jane had hinted that it might be advisable if he took a secretary along, meaning her of course. No way, for a start the Company would baulk at the extra expense.

In Manila, maybe that bar still exists where that lovely young girl danced with a full tankard of beer balanced on her head. He remembered how good she'd been in bed that night. Christ, what the hell was he thinking about? She'd be in her fifties by now, hopefully married with children and grandchildren. Oh well, back to work, He studied the papers Jane had left, trying to cast visions of Angela out of his head; Filipina bar girls too.

Chapter 11 – Chelmsford – June 24th

Angela opened her front door, surprised to see Jack Knowles standing there alone, waiting to be invited in. It was a lovely summer day, cloudless and warm. She wondered why he'd come without Sonia.

"Hullo Jack" she said, as they embraced. "Lovely to see you again, but where's Sonia then? She always comes with you, By the way, congratulations on getting the Captain's job, is it confirmed yet?"

"Thank you; yes I was in Head Office Monday and they told me it's been confirmed."

“Good for you. Well, since you’re here you’d better come in. Have you just come up from Italy then without Sonia?” She’d asked him.

She stood aside for Jack to enter and followed him into the lounge. Looking up at him, she waited for an answer.

“No, I came straight from the *West Wycombe* late Sunday evening and I’ve not yet had a chance to go home. I spent all day Monday at Head Office talking to Tom Murchison and other department heads. Yesterday I had to stay because it was Mum’s Sixtieth birthday; she would have killed me had she’d known I was in London yesterday and hadn’t come to see her. My brother had organised a party for her.” He said, a shade awkwardly.

“Yes I know, my mother was there. I’d been invited too, but I was in Paris at a fashion show, which is why I’ve got the day off today. And Sonia, she wasn’t able to come to the party then? Or at any rate come and spend a couple of days with you?” She asked, her eyebrows raised enquiringly.

“I did ask Sonia to come up, but there’s a big French ship coming into the yard at Monfalcone for her guarantee dry dock and her language skills are needed.” Jack replied.

“But why are you still here? You could have been home by now if you’d left straight after the party.”

“No such luck! I’ve got to wait ‘til tomorrow because I need to renew my ENG 1 health certificate, which I can’t get done in Italy. Well I can of course, but the MCA won’t give me the certificate unless one of their doctors does the examination. Tomorrow’s the only time I can get an appointment. Then I’ll be on the afternoon flight to Trieste and home before I lose any more of my leave. I take it you’ve heard nothing about Jim yet?”

Jack looked around the room, appreciating its subtle colour scheme. The Buffalo skin suite melded nicely with the light grey striped wallpaper. Nearly hidden in one corner was a real mahogany bar. The room was quietly

pleasant with a high ceiling and enormous bay windows, overlooking a pleasant garden backing on to a meadow.

“No, not a word, Captain Murchison said the Liberian Company hasn’t paid the ransom yet and the *Dawn Splendour*’s still at Eyl. In any case, Jim’s not on her now. It’s been nearly two and a half months now since he was kidnapped and I feel sure he’s no longer alive” She said sadly, then changed the subject. “You’ve been staying with your Mum and Dad at Romford then?”

“No, the house is full of Uncles and Aunts, including two from Australia. I spent last night at the King’s Arms, you remember it? We used to go there occasionally for drinks when we were young.” Jack said and look round for a chair, they were still both standing.

Angela pointed to one of the armchairs, but remained standing herself.

“Yes I remember, I was only fifteen then and you were under-age as well. Have you contacted Sonia at all since you’ve been here in England? Tell me about your Mum’s Birthday party. Did I miss anything exciting?” Angela asked him. She sat down then, folding her arms.

“The party was fine. I spoke to Sonia from Mum’s yesterday, she asked me where I was and when I was coming home. I told her about the delay and that I’d be home Thursday evening. What she said then over the phone in a low sexy voice made me blush in front of the whole party. One of my cousins had turned the loudspeaker on and they were all laughing at me.” He said, grinning.

“Oh you poor thing,” Angela said laughing. “Two months away at sea, then three or four days romping around England, with Sonia talking dirty sex over the phone. It’s a wonder you didn’t catch the first flight back to Italy. It’s nearly noon, how about a drink? Gin and Tonic as usual?”

Without waiting for his answer, she stood up and went across to the bar in the lounge and poured out two drinks. She raised her glass in a toast, again wondering why he had

come to see her. OK, he had a spare day with not much to do, although he could have stayed at Romford with his parents for the day. Why come to her instead? How did he know she'd even *be* here and not at work?

"Thanks and cheers." Jack said, raising his glass. "Look, the reason I've come today, is to take you out to lunch somewhere. Your mother told me yesterday at the party that you've got the day off today, so I thought I'd take advantage of it."

"Christ! You might have warned me." She said, putting a lump of ice in both glasses. "Look at me; I'm nowhere near ready to go out, I've not even had a shower yet. If you like I'll make some sandwiches here for us."

"Go and have a quick shower and we'll have a pub lunch. OK? I promise I won't peek."

"Don't worry, you won't get the chance." Angela said, laughing. "Think about poor Sonia waiting for you."

She wondered if he really appreciated Sonia. She was so much younger than him and so lively in comparison. What she'd related to Angela over the phone that day, now over a month ago, seemed to indicate that Sonia treated sex as a delightful game; whereas poor old Jack probably wanted to maintain his dignity.

Ever since Sonia's call, her thoughts had been with Jack more and more. She'd never forgotten those few days before he went away to sea, nor had she ever told Jim about them. By this time, she had a pretty good idea what Jack had come for; in fact she'd known it all along, as soon as she'd seen him at the front door. So now what? Show him to the door and close it firmly behind him? Or to make love with him and finish what *she* had started all those years ago, but only on a one-off basis.

Well why not? She decided to defer that decision until they'd had lunch.

After taking a shower, she took a birth control pill just in case. Would one be sufficient though? Normally it's every

day in the cycle, but she'd stopped taking them when Jim had gone back to sea. Anyway, taking the pill didn't commit her to anything, did it? Nobody knew but her.

They went to a nearby pub; Jack ordered beer and Angela a Martini Bianco. Sitting at a table, eating prawn curry with brown bread, they were talking easily and laughing together. More beer and Martinis were ordered and consumed. After finishing the meal and the last of their drinks, Jack drove them back to her house where she knew she must make a decision. Should she let him make love to her? Well why not? Jim was probably dead and Sonia need never know?

Jack kissed her as soon as the front door closed, taking his hand she led him upstairs to the spare bedroom. There they made love a couple of times, which she frankly enjoyed. At four-thirty, she pushed him out the front door, tidied the bedroom, got into her car and picked up her children from school.

* * * * *

“Mummy, have you made some cakes and things for the school fete tomorrow?” William asked, as she drove home from the school. He was thoroughly excited and Laura was jumping up and down in her seat. She'd forgotten all about it. She'd planned to do it that afternoon, but Jack's visit had put a stop to that. She should have been cooking, not ...!

Phoning her mother she asked her to come and spend the evening with her. After putting the kids to bed, they started cooking together for the following day's school fete. Angela decided to have it out with her mother.

“Hey Mum, why did you tell Jack at that party I had the day off yesterday?”

She'd guessed why, of course; both their mothers had wanted Jack and Angela to get married. As it turned out, they had both married different partners; she with Jim and

he with Sonia. She'd overheard both mothers some years ago, commiserating together and saying what a pity it was. Now, with Jim missing, the idea had probably occurred to them again.

"Oh that, it was only just a bit of the conversation we were having, I think he was saying something about you, and I just mentioned it. Why? Did he come here then?" Her mother replied, turning the oven on.

"Yes he did, and took me out to lunch." Angela said, her eyes accusing.

"Oh, wasn't that was nice of him? Was that all? Where'd you go?" Her mother asked innocently.

Angela took a deep breath, saw the beginnings of a smile on her mother's face and said:

"Mum, I think you know bloody well that wasn't all. You

deliberately told him I was here all alone, didn't you? *After* his phone call to Sonia." Angela stated, holding a loaf of bread in one hand, a breadknife in the other.

"Well yes, now you come to mention it, I think it probably was after he'd been on the phone to Sonia. Why do you ask?" Mrs Patterson said, hiding a smile. "Stop waving that damn bread knife at me!"

"So it was you; my dear old Mum, who pointed him in my direction." Angela said accusingly, cutting a thin slice of bread from a loaf.

"Not so much of the 'dear old'." Her mother said. "I mentioned to Jack that it was a pity you weren't able to come to the party, and was having the following day off as compensation. So he came and took you out to lunch, did he? What the two of you did afterwards is certainly no business of mine. I would have expected you to have behaved yourselves, no?"

The oven then went *ding, ding, ding*; she bent down and took a tray of doughnuts out, putting the makings of a chocolate cake in – her shoulders shaking with subdued laughter.

“No!” Angela said forcibly, busily cutting more bread for sandwiches and filling them with strawberry jam.

“No what? You didn’t behave yourselves? In that case I hope you enjoyed it.” Her mother said. Angela took a deep breath.

“Mum, you’re a wicked old woman. And Yes, I did enjoy it; it was an unexpected pleasure. I should have shut the door in his face. If he comes again, I might just do that.” Angela said, but not really meaning it.

“Look Angela, I know you very well, I’ve kept an eye on you all these months. I can count you know, and it’s been well over five months since Jim went to sea. Unfortunately he’s probably dead. Jack was there at his Mother’s party and it was obvious his phone call to Sonia had excited him. I even felt like taking him outside myself! He fitted the bill nicely and only needed a shove in the right direction. I’m certainly not going to apologise. Well, I’m off home now, the dirty deed done! Any time you feel like doing it again, then call me.” Her mother said calmly.

Angela gasped and tried to visualise her mother and Jack together in the tiny junk-filled back garden at Romford, with

everybody looking out of the windows and cheering.

“Wait a minute now; did you deliberately tell him I’d be here all alone, when you could see the state he was in?” She demanded. Her mother laughed.

“Well, I couldn’t actually *see* the state he was in, but I could imagine it, having overheard Sonia’s phone call. I told him you were here all alone and sort of suggested he do something about it.”

“How do you mean, sort of suggested? Come on, tell me exactly what you said to him.” Angela snapped.

"I can't remember now dear, but he certainly looked interested. I don't imagine he got much sleep last night, all alone in the King's Arms or wherever he slept."

Mother and daughter looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"Probably climbing up the walls, what with Sonia's sexy chat and fantasising about you!" Her mother exclaimed. while Angela wrapped the sandwiches in grease-proof paper, still laughing.

Her mother thought back to the time Angela at fifteen had very nearly seduced seventeen year old Jack. Both families had blamed Jack at the time, but she'd known very well that Angela had been the culprit. After a crest-fallen Jack had gone to sea on his first trip she'd got Angela to admit it.

"Well then, will you agree to do it again if he wants to?"

A

repeat performance as it were." Her mother asked.

"Be difficult with him living in Italy and me here in Chelmsford. Did you think I needed a man? I was always faithful to Jim when he was at sea?"

"I'm sure you were. Look Angela, you think Jim's dead, unfortunately I do too. You are only thirty-six and not the type of woman to remain a widow. If Jack ditches Sonia for you, then take him. Otherwise, take someone else. You need a man in your life, not only for sex."

"Wait a minute Mum; would you have done the same thing if Jim had *still* been on the ***Dawn Splendour***, captured but alive?" Angela said, making a point.

"I honestly don't know. Would you have made love with Jack if I had?" Her mother replied.

"I honestly don't know, I think perhaps...Yes? No, I honestly don't know." Angela replied, and wondered If she really would have.

"Think about it Angela. Is it Jack or Jim you want? Since Jack is now safely in Italy with Sonia, poor Jim

unfortunately appears to be no longer alive, so why not try another man? If not Jack, then another sailor perhaps since you appear to favour them. What about that nice Captain Murchison who came to see us a couple of times when Jim went missing? From the way he was trying not to look at your legs, he'd be a pushover for you."

"God Almighty Mum, you ought to be running a brothel, he's about twenty years older than me, but not bad though. More your age. Looking at my legs was he? I was too miserable to notice." Angela said, finishing the washing up and wiping the draining board.

"No dear, only about ten years older, I'd say. Anyway, it's up to you, my girl."

"I'm sure he's not the type of man to go running after other men's wives, especially if their husbands are dead or missing." Angela stated categorically.

"Don't you believe it love. A woman like you, recently widowed, with a good job as well? Tell you what, dear. Encourage him just a little and see what happens."

Her mother said good bye and left. Some years ago, her father had accepted a job in Toronto; her mother didn't want to go, neither did Angela. Her Father had met another woman there and divorced her Mother; after which, the other woman had left him.

Her sister Wendy had joined him in Canada, having broken the engagement with her civil servant fiancé. She was married to a Canadian civil servant now, with a family. Her mother had been out once or twice to see her other grandchildren, but there seemed no prospect of her Mum and Dad living together again, although she suspected they'd probably slept together.

That Saturday afternoon, she and her friend Cynthia went to the school fete together, with their children. They both wore summer dresses with Cynthia's blonde hair cascading down over her shoulders, blending nicely with Angela's dark waves. They made an attractive sight, pleasing the few

fathers and even grandfathers who'd been pressed into attending.

Thinking back to the previous afternoon, she felt she should have been a lot angrier with her mother for pushing Jack her way, but she'd not been angry at all. And as for suggesting she should jump into bed with Captain Murchison!!

Angela confided to Cynthia, telling her about the afternoon with Jack and what her mother had done to bring it about. They were looking at Laura on the big slide, hoping she'd be safe. William came up and said that the chocolate cake Grannie had made was *too* good. All the kids wanted a bit and there was not much left for him. He went back to the swings and roundabouts.

"It would have been better if Jack had quietly gone to the reception desk and taken a room for the afternoon, when you were both full of food and drink. That way, it would have been a logical end to a good meal. Now you've taken him into your bed, you'll never be rid of him." Cynthia remarked, smiling. Angela wondered if she was right.

She wondered about Cynthia. She was divorced, now living with her daughter Sharon – Laura's Best Friend and boon companion. They had never talked about sex, at least not much. What about Cynthia then? Angela had confessed her afternoon with Jack and was now waiting for a similar confession on her friend's part.

Cynthia looked at her and laughed. "You're wondering about me aren't you? I've got a lot of men lined up. The Milkman for a start, then the Postman, three of the Dustmen every Thursday. The butcher, the baker but I'm still searching for a Candlestick Maker. I fancied your Jim but he refused, I bet your Jack wouldn't though."

"Wow!" Angela exclaimed laughing, realising Jack had never met Cynthia. Jim had of course but Angela was sure he'd never tried it on with her best friend. Or had he?

“OK, there’s only the one, but only on the rare occasions he can get away from his wife.” Cynthia said.

They watched the children playing games in the school grounds until it was time to go home. Angela thought about her afternoon with Jack, decided keep it as a memory to be played back on occasions. If he wanted her again, when in England and at a loose end, then why not? She’d keep things at a friendly level and never try and replace Sonia.

Chapter 12 – London – July 2nd

Tom had hardly entered the office that morning, when a Junior Deck Superintendent started telling him something about Emails from Somalia. Having just flown back overnight from Singapore, Tom scarcely listened and waved him off, pointing to the work piled up on his desk. He spent the rest of that day going through the backlog of reports from ships and Superintendents; as well as sorting out the stack of new regulations.

Finally, before going home he read some ‘*Near Miss*’ reports sent in from Company ships, as required by their Ship Management System. While trying to decide which ones were worth promulgating to the rest of the fleet, he felt his eyes blurring with fatigue.

The internal telephone rang; it was the Company Chairman wanting to see him. Tom had a pretty good idea what it was all about. Putting his jacket and tie back on, he went upstairs, knocked and entered Mr Harding’s office, who pointed to a comfortable chair and told him to sit down:

“Good Afternoon Captain Murchison, sorry to drag you away, but it’s about Mr Turner’s salary. Some persons on the Board of Directors are beginning to ask questions about it, how long it is going to last etcetera. There’s a

Shareholders AGM in two weeks' time and the subject is bound to come up then. What are your views on the matter?"

"You already know my view, Mr Chairman. I think it is incumbent upon us morally as a major British Shipping Company to continue paying his salary. The loan bonus has already been stopped, which is fair enough, since Mr Turner is no longer on their ship. But as far as I'm concerned, the salary stays put." Tom replied, yawning.

'A bit too pompous a speech that, and somewhat over rehearsed,' Tom thought to himself. 'I must sound like a 1960's Trade Unionist up against the bosses.'

"Yes Tom." The Chairman stated, dropping his previous formality. "I agree to a certain extent, but I am already employing East European Officers and Filipino crews for lower wages. I don't think the shareholders, or even some of the Company Directors are happy to pay his high salary. He is the highest paid Company Chief Officer, certainly receiving a lot more pay than the Ukrainians get."

"Mister Chairman" Tom said, deciding to stick to formality. "I was frankly shocked when Polish and other East European Officers appeared on our ships. In some British Companies now, it is difficult to find even one British Officer on board, not even the Captain. I'm glad we haven't gone that far yet and the Poles and suchlike are still only holding junior ranks, at least on our tankers. Nor do I agree with these Certificates of Equivalent Competency the MCA are handing out almost upon request. What do you propose doing about his salary?" Tom said, angry at the way things were going.

"At the very least, I will propose half pay going to Mrs Turner. After all she hasn't got to feed him, she can really be looked upon as a widow in a way, enjoying half her husband's retirement pay when he dies. I'm sorry to put it like that, but there is really no other way to describe it. If we knew he was still alive but a captive, this would be a

completely different situation. That then, is what I'm going to propose and hope the AGM accepts it. They certainly won't accept paying his full salary, about a third of the Board members are ready to stop it altogether." Mr Harding stated definitely.

The Chairman started fiddling with his pen, a sign that usually meant he wanted to end the interview, or at any rate to change the subject. Tom desperately wanted to get home and into bed, but he made one last forlorn bid to try and stop the inevitable.

"I'll have to disagree; this Company has always taken pride in being one of the last Family Type Companies that look after their personnel, even in this day and age. Like the Old Prince Line used to do, or Bibbys, and Companies like Maggie Booth's used to be. Are we abandoning that policy? Look she's already contacted the Union, maybe they'll put pressure on us to continue the full pay."

"Times have changed, Tom. It was abandoned long ago. Look, she's received his full pay for all of April, May, June and we are now one day into July. From today, his salary will be halved; nor can I promise how long the half pay will last. Not long I guess. Obviously, we can't keep paying it over seven years until he is officially pronounced dead." The Chairman said, with a sigh.

They went on to discuss other subjects, especially the Designated Person Ashore (DPA) for the tanker fleet. Tom thought the present one not good enough, not strong enough to stand up to top management when it came to safety issues on board the ship or ships he was looking after. Although to be fair, the man had acted correctly during the *West Wycombe's* Oil spill incident.

They also discussed the Company and Ship Security Officers for the ISPS regulations. The Chairman phoned the Human Resources Manager and told him to advise Mrs Turner on the coming pay cut.

“While we’re talking about the *West Wycombe*,” The Chairman continued. “How are those three Senior Officers getting along? Any signs of the ship’s bad luck changing? I think you ought to go out and see for yourself at the next convenient port.”

“But, Mr Harding, they’ve only been there for a month. I’m still counting our luck that the case was so quickly dismissed; with the court believing the pipe was never used by the ship; it just hadn’t been thrown away. The US Coastguards must have accepted it as well. That in itself is a change of luck.” Tom stated.

“Have you forgotten about the oil spill, Tom? If it hadn’t been for that spill, the pipe would never have been found. I want to know the cause of the spill, who was responsible and

what steps you have taken. I also want to know if the ship has been badly run.”

“We know what happened, but I see what you mean, Mr Chairman, a well-run ship would never have left the pipe there in the first place, or even spilled some of her cargo. The ship does have a reputation of bad luck, which probably affects the men joining the ship. Anyway let’s see what the three come up with.”

Tom found time later to phone Angela and apologise for the Chairman’s decision over her husband’s pay. He was sorry she’d learnt about it from the Human Resources manager.

“That’s OK Tom; I was more than half expecting it. Anyway thanks, I’m very grateful for what you’ve done so far. I am certain it’s through your efforts alone that the full money’s been coming in up to now. Maybe my Mother can help out, or else I’ll have to put the house up for sale. I don’t want to do that because we’ll not get anything much for it, over and above our mortgage. We’ve not had the place long enough and the down turn of house prices has come at a bad time.”

Her voice was bright, brittle even, probably not far off tears; he even thought he could detect a hidden sob in her voice. He asked her then how she was coping, if the union was helping to solve her problems? After discussing this, he told her:

“Sorry I’ve been out touch for a while, but I’ve just come back from a trip to Taiwan, Manila and Singapore, ten days out of the office. I only came back today after an overnight flight from Singapore.” Tom said, feeling sad for the woman.

“Oh My God, what wouldn’t I give to be able to get away on a trip like that, all paid for. By the way, please thank your secretary, Jane I think she said her name was, for the lovely e-card I received and the sympathy she expressed. I really appreciated it.”

Surprised, he turned to look at Jane sitting at her desk, her

pleasant but plain face half hidden behind the desk top computer she was fiddling with.

“Right then, will do. I gather too, that Jack Knowles came

to see you last week; he said you were feeling better about things. Look, I must go soon, I can hardly stay awake.”

“Yes that’s right; he took me out to lunch but didn’t stay long. I’m more or less convinced Jim is dead and that I’ve got to stop mourning for him and get on with my life. Jack cheered me up and then went back to his mother’s place in Romford.” Angela said. She felt like blushing as she told the lie. It was her first lie due to her new circumstances, which she didn’t think was any of Tom’s business anyway. They chatted for a while and then said their goodbyes.

‘Yes’ Tom reflected ‘It would have been nice to have had a woman like Angela Turner on that Far East trip as a secretary.’ After all, plenty of business men do take their Secretaries with them on trips. In any case she couldn’t just leave the kids and run away with him; even if she’d wanted

to, which he doubted. He went over to the desk where Jane was working and thanked her for her email card to Mrs Turner. She blushed and said:

“As you are aware, I have never married, and I feel that Jim Turner could have been the son I never had. His wife too, the couple of times I’ve seen her here in the office, looks like an ideal daughter-in-law. I feel so very sorry for the ordeal they are both going through.”

Tom’s car was still at Heathrow’s long-term car-park. He felt too tired to take the long ride by Underground to Heathrow and then find his way home from there to Harrow. He decided to leave it there and go home by tube, collecting his car the following morning. He fell fast asleep and woke up at the terminus, Uxbridge. In a foul temper, he took a taxi to South Harrow station to collect his car, remembered it wasn’t there and had to walk up through the town to his flat at Harrow-on-the-Hill.

* * * * *

Once home, he sat down in his chair and drifted off to sleep. It had been one hell of a trip out to Keelung. From London to Hong Kong, about eight hours in the air; a two hour wait there, followed by a couple of hours flight to Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, then by taxi to Keelung. For Tom, the town is the real China, more so than Hong Kong, which still seems to be the same as it was before, when the British were in control.

He loved wandering around these places, trying to absorb the atmosphere, aware of being totally out of place. The LPG or Liquefied Petroleum Gas Carrier the shipyard was building was coming along nicely. They had a New Building Superintendent in place, a steel inspector, an electrical Superintendent and a Chief Engineer Officer, to look after the Company’s interests.

Soon he'd be sending a Captain and Chief Mate there to learn about the ship in her fitting-out stage. Then gradually more and more Officers, then crew members, would join until the ship was fully manned, ready to sail on her maiden voyage – Perhaps with Jack Knowles there in command? This would have to be discussed fully later.

At Manila, he'd inspected a very modern Officers Training College. It was run on military lines with uniformed youngsters running from classroom to classroom, or to and from the dining area. They ran with their arms held straight down against their sides, as if they were lashed there or were wearing strait-jackets. Tom wondered if they ran to bed as well; going to sleep by numbers. It was certainly well-disciplined and hopefully the training they received was on a par.

The bar he remembered had been replaced by a modern office block. Other bars and hotels catering for the sex trade existed, but he felt no temptation to indulge. His past as a young, or not so young officer, was behind him now.

Then Singapore! Ah Singapore, what a fabulous city it is, thoroughly modern but with traces of its old colonial days. He went along and had a look at the Tiger Balm gardens; drank in swish hotels staffed by exquisite tall Chinese girls wearing Cheong-sams, split so high he wondered if they were even wearing panties. He had tiffin in the old Raffles hotel. They are even building a Formula One racing Circuit there in Singapore.

* * * * *

At Chelmsford, Angela replaced the phone after Tom Murchison's call; so he's been on a jamboree to the Far East, where was it he'd said? Oh yes Taiwan, Manila and Singapore. What a pity he didn't invite her and the children; or even without the kids, since her Mum would have looked after them. It would have fitted in nicely with her summer holidays; a couple of weeks with him in the Far East, the

remaining three weeks during the children's school holidays.

Obviously he would expected more than just companionship! Something she was not prepared to do – certainly not with Jim's Boss despite what her mother had suggested! Maybe at some future date? The occasion with Jack had been quite enough, thank you. She ought to be ashamed of herself, having made love with him, but she wasn't. In reality, she'd wanted him as soon as she'd seen him at the door.

Why not become a '*Merry Widow*'? Taking a man when a suitable opportunity occurred. She didn't want to take Jack away from Sonia, but she wouldn't say no to another one-off occasion with him. Tom Murchison now, was her mother right? No. He would want a commitment, marriage the lot! That was out, she couldn't marry anyone for seven long years anyway.

That trip on the Liberian ship seems to have landed them in one hell of a mess.

Chapter 13 – Le Havre – July 3rd

It was not until Tom reached home that evening that he remembered Bill telling him about something odd happening in Somalia. He looked up the Bill's home number in his agenda and spoke to his wife; who told him he was on the overnight ferry from Southampton to Le Havre. Christ Almighty, he should have remembered that, he must still be groggy from lack of sleep.

He thought of calling him on his cell phone and then decided 'to hell with it' - let it wait until morning. Why interrupt the man when he might be enjoying a party far from his wife. Tom had crossed several times on that same ferry and guessed what could be happening.

If the ferry was carrying some Deep Sea Pilots, Superintendents from other Companies plus sea-going officers joining ships there, then they would probably all congregate at the bar. The Deep Sea pilots would be joining ships and piloting them through the English Channel and North Sea to other North European ports; Superintendents like Bill would be going there to sort out problems on their Company ships; Officers whose leaves had finished would be signing on ships at that port for voyages lasting anything from three to nine months or more. Occasionally all three, a Deep Sea Pilot, Superintendent and a Seagoing Officer would be joining the same ship.

Occasionally, if there were enough of them, a party would form, sometimes joined by girl tourists, although their boy-friends were discouraged. Bill would probably have a bit of a sore head in the morning. The Hull/Rotterdam and the Harwich/Hook of Holland overnight ferries had the same reputation on occasions.

Bill was visiting the *Aylesbury* at Le Havre, a large Container ship, which is pretty well the Company's flag ship. She was having a problem with the French Authorities regarding Pakistani stowaways from Karachi; as well as other, more technical problems. The overnight ferry from Southampton must have arrived at Le Havre by now, so he should be on board there pretty soon. Tom got on with some other work in the meantime, then phoned the ship and asked to speak to him. They chatted for a while about various problems on board; then Tom asked Bill what was happening about the stowaways, since the Company would have to have to arrange for their flights back to Pakistan.

"We're still discussing it with the French Immigration people. Look Tom, they aren't Pakistanis anyway, they're Bangladeshis. It's unbelievable, but somehow they walked from the outskirts of Dhaka, right the way across Northern India and ended up at Karachi, illegally entering both India and Pakistan." Bill said, then continued:

“I feel sorry for the silly buggers though, they didn’t want to come to France anyway. They saw the ship alongside at Karachi flying the Red Ensign, with London as the Port of Registry and thought she’d be coming straight to the UK. They smuggled themselves on board, probably helped by the stevedores and hid in that small space in the lower peak stores. You know the little space I’m talking about, don’t you?”

“Yes, but what about the Stowaway Search Certificate?” Tom asked. “Was it fully signed up by all the deck Officers and the Chief Engineer Officer? Did they even *make* a search? What does Captain Twiddy have to say about it?”

“It was all signed up Tom. But *you* know Karachi don’t you? You’ve been there yourself. They hadn’t even completed securing the last few empty containers before the pilot came running aboard, then it was all a hurry to get away before the tide turned. A full stowaway search would have meant waiting several hours for the next tide. The jetty master was screaming for them to go, the pilot too, since another, smaller ship was waiting to berth there, probably with more back-handers. Even the bloody mooring gangs joined in the hullabaloo. I’ve been through the same thing myself and frankly, I don’t really blame the ship’s staff.”

“*Well I do!*” Tom said harshly, thinking of the difficulties ahead. “Tell the Captain that he should have been making the search *during* the time the last containers were shipped aboard. Was there no gangway watch? Also he should have stood up to the jetty Master and pilot a bit more, even said no! Make sure you tell him it would have been better to have missed the tide, rather than to sail into the teeth of the Southwest monsoon with unsecured containers in the stow. He should know that!”

Tom gritted his teeth and continued. “Also tell Captain Twiddy and all the Officers that the Stowaway Search Certificate is not just another piece of paper. It’s there to

stop this sort of thing happening. In future these certificates must be faxed to this office fully signed up, before sailing.”

Tom remembered Karachi alright. As a junior Master on the *Amersham*, he'd once discharged at the tanker berth there. The cargo of Gas Oil and Mogas had all been discharged and they were ready to sail, the pilot was on board and the mooring gangs standing by to let go the ropes and wires. For some reason a row broke out between the after mooring gang ashore and the Filipino sailors on the ship.

One of the Filipino crew had lowered his trousers and underpants, presenting his bare arse to the shore gang. That was it; the shore gang were terribly insulted, the pilot horrified and the Jetty Master summoned all his men and walked off, even the tugs hooted before leaving. Tom had had to send apologies, followed by *Notes of Protest* to the Harbour Master, the Pilotage authorities and anyone else he could think of. He'd received a few Notes of Protests in exchange as well.

They'd missed the tide which hadn't pleased his bosses in the Company Head Office one little bit. Oh yes, Tom remembered Karachi alright. By flogging his ship through the monsoon he'd just managed to arrive at the loading port in time to tender his Notice of Readiness for the next Charter Party. Bill broke into Tom's memories, saying:

“Well OK I'll tell him, but there's still the problem of what to do with these stowaways.”

“OK Bill, organise repatriation with the French authorities.” Tom said sighing, then said “What happened at Suez, the authorities there should have taken them off? I take it they were declared?”

“Yes they were. The pilot advised Captain Twiddy to keep them on board and out of sight until the discharge port, Le Havre. Otherwise they would have been stuck for a couple of days at the Bitter Lakes or Port Said while sorting

things out.” Advice that had probably cost the ship a couple more cartons of ‘Marlboro’ cigarettes.

Thinking about the extra costs involved, he gazed round his Office before concentrating on his faxes, when his phone rang again. It was the same Superintendent at Le Havre.

“We’ve got a problem with these stowaways, Tom. They don’t want to go back to Bangladesh, nor to Pakistan. They are claiming the French have no right to take them off a British flag ship and are demanding to see an international lawyer. They seem determined to stay aboard until she arrives at a UK port, which may not happen for months. The French have more or less shrugged their shoulders and said they’ll put a twenty-four hour guard on the gangway – to be paid for by us. Either that or we’d have to pay a large fine if the two manage to escape ashore here.”

Another bloody mess. Tom could leave them on board the ship where they would have to stay and work their passage – unpaid; which could cause problems in all future ports and probably impossible under the ISPS regulations. He made his decision and told Bill to arrange with the French authorities to put them on a plane to London under guard, calling in the police if necessary. Then it would be up the British Border Police to decide their fate. Like Bill, he felt sorry for them, but there was no real alternative. Tom sometimes had hard unpopular decisions to make. Changing the subject, he asked Bill:

“Another question for you, Bill. What was it you were saying yesterday morning about receiving something from *Brice and Somerville* about Somalia? I’d only just got in from an overnight flight from Singapore and didn’t take it in.” Tom said, his anger cooling.

“I was just wondering what’s going on in Somalia, Tom. My wife and I were dining with an old sea-going pal and his missus the night before last. He’d gone ashore some time ago and is now working for *Brice and Somerville*.

During the meal we started talking about the piracy problem off Somalia generally. He then mentioned some peculiar Emails his Company were receiving from that country, mainly requests for information concerning charts and publications.”

“You didn’t mention Turner’s kidnapping, I hope!” Tom said sharply.

“No Tom, you’ve made it pretty plain it’s to be kept secret; although I don’t know why. It’s the first time anybody could remember being contacted directly from that country. The last request asked about a hand-held battery operated Echo Sounders with rolls of recording paper inside. Nothing like that exists of course, at least not yet. It seemed a bit bizarre and I wondered if it could have anything to do with Jim Turner?”

“OK Bill thanks, it could be something interesting. I’ll get in touch with them. Give me the name of your friend, please.” Tom said, concluding the conversation.

Tom phoned *Brice and Somerville* and introduced himself as Bill’s Senior Superintendent, asking him for more information concerning the E-mails coming in from Somalia. Who was sending them? Had they had any before? The call was passed on to an Assistant Manager, who wanted to know why Tom was asking:

“It’s a hell of a long shot.” Tom admitted. “One of my Chief Officers was abducted from a ship after she’d been pirated and anchored off Eyl. He’s been gone over three months now and we’ve heard nothing. We don’t even know if he’s alive or dead. I wondered if any of the emails you’ve been receiving from Somalia could have something to do with him. As I say, it’s really a long shot.”

“I didn’t know there were any British lads or even ships involved in the hijackings. If a British officer had been taken off a ship, I feel sure we’d have heard about it by now from the media.”

The man sounded wary and totally unconvinced. Tom had fully expected a certain amount of caution in his reply. After all Companies with the reputation of *Brice and Somerville* don't release privileged information about their customers without a very good reason. He wished now that he'd taken the trouble to go and see them personally instead of telephoning. Face to face is often much better when doubts surface.

"Yes you're right of course. He was contracted out on loan to the Liberian Company running the ship. Also, it was a French helicopter that saw him in a boat going towards the shore with four armed Somalis. They took a photo before the boat crew started shooting at them. They were unable to contact the ship, so neither his nationality nor his rank were known – only that he was white. The photograph *only* appeared in a French newspaper and was forwarded to me by a relative of his wife." Tom explained, leaning forward in his chair. He knew he must convince the man.

"This sounds *fantastic*! Does the British Government know about all this? Are they doing anything about it?" He was still cautious, unwilling to commit himself.

"Our Government has tried the best they can, but as you know, Somalia is in a right mess at present with no proper government or police force. He was abducted from the anchorage at Eyl in Somalia, or rather the Puntland the breakaway part of Somalia, which is even more lawless than Somalia itself. The ship he was abducted from, the *Dawn Splendour* is still there at anchor, waiting for the ransom to be paid."

"*Dawn Splendour*? We used to deal with a ship with that name, but I thought she'd been scrapped years ago!"

"She should have been, according to the reports we've had from Turner during his three months stay on her. Since no separate ransom demand has arrived for him, the Government and most of my colleagues have assumed his death. But not me. For a start, I can see no sense in taking

him ashore to kill him. Also they would have exhibited him by now, had he been kidnapped as a hostage to make the Ship-owner pay faster. The only other alternative I can think of is that he is being forced into some kind of slave labour.”

“Sounds incredible. What kind of labour? They must have plenty of local labour of their own.” He had a point, but he sounded partly convinced now. At least he was listening.

“I would imagine it would have to do with ships and the sea, something technical. This is why I started wondering about the emails you’ve been receiving from there. If they happen to specify charts and publications, or similar things, then my Chief Officer could be behind it. I know it’s a long shot but it’s all I’ve been able to dig up.”

“If that is indeed the case, the poor man must be going through all kinds of hell. You’re assuming he’s actually working for them. But surely he would refuse?”

“Would you, if you were the only White Man in a Black, obviously hostile country? Don’t forget there’s virtually no police force there. I may be completely wrong, but I feel he is alive and working there against his will.” Tom said, feeling the man was nearly convinced.

“It still seems a bit weird to me. Surely those days are past when a white man commanded a dozen natives? It just doesn’t sound right to me.”

“I’m assuming he is still alive and that could well be happening. I agree those days are past but what else could he be doing there?” Tom countered. “Unless he is dead.”

“Alright then, what can my Company do to help?” The manager asked Tom.

“Those E-mails you have received from Somalia may just be an indication Turner is alive, in fact it’s the only thing that’s come up so far. Of course I realise there’s little or nothing our Government can do since theirs barely exists; nor is there any question of invading the country just

to rescue one man – even if proved to be alive. It's his wife I'm thinking about. She's in a terrible state and I'd like to be able to give her a ray of hope." Tom said hopefully.

He was aware that he should have chosen a more compelling reason than talking about Turner's wife, who thought he was dead anyway. He was unable to think of one offhand.

"Yes I understand, but I would have thought the newspapers would have picked it up by now."

"The press haven't cottoned on yet because we didn't want his wife hounded by newspaper reporters. Perhaps you would be good enough to honour that silence and to help me concerning the emails you have received." Tom said.

What was left unstated, but understood between them was the good customer relationship established over the years.

"I certainly will, although I think you're wrong about keeping it from the Press. Anyway, I don't know if this comes under Client Confidentiality or not, but I can see no harm in telling you that the emails *do* come from Somalia. They are originated by an organisation called the 'Somali Marine Agency', using the word 'Solimar' as a signature. I have no other details apart from that. I've never heard of this Agency before."

"If they are asking for charts and suchlike to be sent out to them, they must have given a postal address to send them to." Tom asked him, hopefully.

"They only ask for advice, at least so far. One question was how often is the coast of Somalia surveyed, and in what depth? Or is it left to the Somali authorities to do the resurveying. Would they promulgate the results to all interested parties, such as the UKHO? It's a strange question to ask us, isn't it? They should know the answer to that themselves."

"Aye, it certainly is." Tom said. It was indeed a strange question.

“Another Email was asking, way back last April, if chart No. 2970 covered the anchorage at Eyl and how far north did it extend? The chart doesn’t even go down as *far* as Eyl. Another strange question”

“April? It was mid-April when he was kidnapped. Who do you send the answers back to? Or do you reply on the same email you received? I suppose there’s been no area stated? After all, Somalia is a big country.”

“Yes, for queries we use the incoming mail and answer it directly back to the sender. The full email address is a bit strange for an organisation – *solimar91@hotmail.co.uk* Why not try sending them a message? Here, I’ll read out the emails we’ve received. Hang on a minute.”

There were only three, which he dictated to Tom over the phone.

“Thanks, I’ve got them OK. It might not be a good idea my sending them an email, could even risk his life. Well, thank you very much indeed for all your help. It’s going to need a whole lot of thinking about. Please be discreet about this, for the sake of his poor wife who doesn’t know whether he’s even alive.”

They concluded the conversation, it was an interesting point but inconclusive at present.

So far, it was the only indication that Turner may still be alive, after eighty-one days of patient listening.

Tom had never seen the sense of taking the man off the ship just to kill him! He had thought, for a fleeting moment, that only Jim Turner could have heard of *Brice and Somerville* and knew about the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office. But this wasn’t strictly true; all these things were on Internet and could easily be found. Also, there were plenty of Somalis who either had been in the British Merchant Navy, or still are. He idly wondered if any other Companies supplying goods or services to merchant ships had received similar emails.

Deciding it was worth a try, Tom phoned round other firms

supplying technical equipment to ships; asking about emails received from Somalia, naming the Agency. One of them said yes; but was equally as cautious as *Brice and Somerville* regarding Client Confidentiality. They'd received a message the other week enquiring about their GPS system. Whether Way Points automatically measure distances between two positions. They'd thought this was odd, because the Instruction Booklet covers that point lucidly in many languages.

"Including Somali, or would it be Swahili?" Tom asked, by no means sure which language they spoke there. The answer to that was a definite 'No'.

The manager gave Tom the date and time as well as reading the message out. They also said it was the first time they'd received any communications directly from Somalia.

Tom had doubts about the relevance of these emails as far as Turner was concerned, but was intrigued; certainly the managers of these two firms thought the questions and email address odd. What he should do now is to find a computer expert and ask him if an email address with Hotmail as the Provider could be traced back to a certain area in a country. Again, there might be Client Confidentiality involved. Anyway, that would be a start, something to keep the pot on the front burner.

He asked round the office if any of his colleagues had sons who were computer buffs. One of them said yes, his daughter might know.

"Then please ask her this question. Can an area in a country be identified from an Email address by a hacker? Tell her that the service provider is Hotmail and is a *dot so*, not a *dot org*, nor a *dot com*. Ask her how easy it is to communicate with them? Can an email address be obtained easily by fraud? Don't explain why please. Just pose the questions as a kind of test."

He said he'd ask her as soon as she got up; she was at home from university at present, relaxing after a term studying complicated computer operations. She was evidently up and awake, since his colleague soon waved him over and said:

"I've been talking to my daughter; she feels sure it's possible for a hacker to find the area of origin from an Email. She says the email address seems more like that of a person rather than an organisation. As far as Hotmail itself is concerned, you'd have to get in touch with them and ask. Sorry but she doesn't know the question concerning fraud.

Tom thanked him wondered if he was on the trail of something, or was he being foolish to waste all this time on a chimera? Even if it was Jim Turner behind these messages, what could he do about it? He decided to contact the Chairman and asked for an interview, which was granted immediately. After the greetings and initial chat had finished, Tom stated:

"I've come to talk about Mr Turner's salary again. One of my Superintendents has a friend working at *Brice and Somerville*, who mentioned that his firm had been receiving strange Email messages from Somalia. One was concerned with hydrography, the other two concerning marine instruments and charts. I have a suspicion that Mr Turner may be behind it and is being forced to work there."

"Then why doesn't he contact us normally, if he has access to a computer and internet? Does Internet really exist there?" Mr Harding demanded, raising his eyes to the ceiling.

"I don't know", Tom replied, "I would assume that he is being carefully watched, and this is all he can achieve at present. I phoned round and found another firm that had had a similar enquiry about Way Points from the same Agency."

"It seems a bit far-fetched to me. I think you are grasping at straws, Captain Murchison." He was told.

“Maybe I am, but let’s think about the whole thing from the start, shall we? First of all Mr Turner was taken off the ship. We know Somali pirates don’t kill crew members if they can help it. In any case; if they really wanted to kill him, they could have done so on board. Since there has been no ransom demand for him; we must now consider that he has been taken ashore for a specific purpose. This must have something to do with ships or the sea, or why bother? In my opinion, it could well be him asking for this advice from *Brice and Somerville* and other firms. If it is Turner, he could be exaggerating hoping someone will pick it up.”

“You’ve been doing a lot of thinking about this, Tom,” the chairman said. “What do you think he is doing there? Why do you think it is Turner who is sending these messages?”

“The only reason that occurs to me is to put a bomb in a ship to blow up New York or another port somewhere, but I’m pretty sure Turner would never agree to do that, even if menaced. Can you hold on and keep him on full pay until I find out more information?” Tom asked hopefully.

“I’ll try but I’m certainly not hopeful. If I give the Shareholders Meeting the information and guesswork you have just developed, they will laugh me out of the Chairpersonship, not to mention the Board of Directors.” He went back to his papers and Tom returned to his office, not happy about the interview.

‘SOLIMAR’ Tom thought, what kind of a name is that? Obviously a contraction of the Somali Marine Agency, although SOMILA would be more to the point in computer language. Did it really exist? B&S had never heard of it before, neither had the other firm he’d contacted. He was still on edge, after the cold water thrown over his theories by the Chairman, who obviously thought he was wasting his time.

There was something in his head that just would not let go, so he decided to call up Lloyds List again, plus the Baltic Exchange to try and track down this agency. After several years at his desk, he had contacts in both those organisations who he knew could be relied on for help.

It took them two full days of enquiry to come up with a blank regarding the name Solimar. To all intents and purposes, the Agency didn't exist. So what now? Could it possibly be Jim Turner using a non-existent Agency name to raise the alert? Or might it be an old Email address from long ago, one that only his wife and friends would recognise. Tom felt he was digging himself deeper and deeper into a web of self-deception and make-belief.

What about his idea of a hacker to break the message somehow to find out where it came from? What then? No point in paying a hacker without more information; in any case, how would he go about even *finding* a hacker? He wouldn't know where to start. Did they advertise themselves at all? As far as he knew, they are illegal.

Before abandoning the project altogether, Tom thought he'd ask Jack Knowles if he knew any of Jim's old email addresses. Let's see where is he now? Oh aye, he's just come home from the *West Wycombe*. He'll be going on that Liquefied Gas Course at Warsash near Southampton, before joining the *Chesham* at Rotterdam. Tom caught him at home in Italy; after chatting generally, he broached the subject of Jim Turner's possible old email addresses.

"SOLIMAR" Jack replied thoughtfully, "no, sorry Tom, never heard of it; it sounds like some sort of Agency somewhere. As far as I know, it's nothing to do with Jim, but you'd be better off checking with Angela Turner to be sure."

"OK Jack thanks. Have a good time at Southampton and a good trip on the *Chesham*."

They talked for a bit after that. Jack mentioned that he'd called and taken Angela out to lunch on the Wednesday and

she'd seemed a lot more cheerful. Putting the phone back in his pocket, Tom decided he was chasing a phantom and would not phone up Jim's wife, at least not until he had some more definite information or clues. That was twice, Jack had told him about the lunch with Mrs Turner; being promoted to Captain must have gone to his head!

Maybe he could do what the manager of *Brice and Somerville* suggested and send an Email to the supposed Agency, sort of asking if they were satisfied with the answers received. Even including something personal only Jim would know; like Angela Turner's middle name for instance or the name of their dog. He knew that was out. Apart from probably making Jim's captors suspicious, Tom couldn't involve another firm in this – even if they were willing, which he doubted.

He felt sure Angela would think he'd gone bloody daft if he phoned her up to ask if she had a dog or a middle name!

Another way to go was to the British Government via the Company top management, asking for help from the Special Forces, both to find out where Jim was and possibly rescue him. This would inevitably be leaked to the Press, seeing that a British Officer had been abducted from a pirated ship and not found. It would distress Mrs Turner and surround her with a swarm of reporters, which would be OK if he knew for certain that Jim was still alive.

Thirdly he could do what they do in adventure stories and films. Find an ex-SAS or SBS drop-out with a grudge, persuading him to use his acquired skills to solve the problem. He and Jim fighting their way out together through a crowd of Whirling Dervishes, with Angela Turner and Tom wiping their eyes in the foreground. Or wiping away tears of laughter!

Or!!!! he could shelve the problem altogether and concentrate fully on his normal work that he's been neglecting, if the amount of phone calls, telexes and emails are anything to go by.

Angela Turner phoned up again, as she had been doing most weeks over the last two and a half months. They were on Christian name terms now, since the calls were no longer just queries about Jim; they were more protracted with general conversation between them. In fact Tom was starting to actively look forward to her calls and found himself thinking up subjects to talk about. He'd even thought about complaining about his glassed-in office to her.

He never called her, in case she assumed the news was good and be bitterly disappointed. Tom visualised her in that nice comfortable home in Chelmsford; which she might have to sell if Jim has totally disappeared and his income stops, or the half of it that's left after the Board's decision.

Calling the other Deck and Engineering Superintendents together into their meeting room, he asked their advice. Most of them thought the top management should go to the Government and advise them on all that was known and guessed at, letting them decide what to do. They were cautious about the message option suggested by *Brice and Somerville*, although one of them thought it might be a good idea.

"By the way," said a Junior Engineering Super. "I heard something odd the other day when I was over in Rotterdam waiting for the *Two Chalfonts* to arrive. We were in the usual hotel bar and the Captain of a Maltese ship was complaining about Somali pirates stealing one of his charts. In fact the very chart he needed after sailing from Eyl. He said it was a British Admiralty chart showing the Gulf of Aden region. The pirates denied any knowledge of it."

"Thanks that could be useful. Do you remember the name of the ship?" Tom asked him.

"Not really, *Brave* something, *Brave Spirit* or something like that. The Captain said it was a bloody nuisance because they needed that particular chart soon after sailing. He also

said it was strange because it was not the chart in use, neither was it the top chart in the current chart drawer. It seemed as if somebody had stolen a specific chart.”

Tom thanked him and went to the bookshelf and got out the chart catalogue. There were no large scale charts of the area, except for the major ports, which was only Mogadishu anyway. From North of the anchorage at Eyl to the Red Sea, the missing chart could only be the chart Number 2970, *Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden*. Another coincidence? Or another clue to be added to the two possibilities he might have?

Wait a minute now! Didn't the man at *Brice and Somerville* mention a query about this same chart in one of the Emails? Referring to his notes he saw that was indeed the case. If the chart had been stolen towards the end of April, it would coincide nicely with one of the emails from Somalia. B&S had told him the chart was the '*Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden*'; which chart didn't cover the anchorage at Eyl.

It could be Jim's abductors who had requested the chart to be taken. If that was the case, it could place Jim in the Northern part of Somalia, now called Puntland. Somaliland had categorically denied he was in their territory. He thought Jim must be in Puntland and probably in an area north of Eyl. Assuming, of course that all his assumptions were correct.

Tom wondered if this was the only theft and decided to telephone a friend at Lloyds List, asking him if he knew anything about the theft of the chart from the *Brave Spirit*, also the owner's address.

“By the way Bob, do you know if any other pirated ships have had navigation items or charts stolen while they were at anchor off Eyl?” Tom asked casually.

“I don't know Tom,” he said and read out the name of the *Brave Spirit's* owner and their address. “We have heard about general looting from pirated ships at anchor, but not

specifically for charts and the other items you mentioned. Why do you want to know?"

They knew nothing and they chatted on for a bit, talking about the days they had sailed together, a few years previously. Still thinking about the theft of a navigation chart from the Maltese ship, Tom got through to the Maltese Company, who confirmed the chart had been stolen by the pirates on April 28th. Suddenly out of the blue, the London Representative of the Liberian Company phoned:

"Good Afternoon, Captain Murchison. This call is just to let you know we're going to pay the ransom, as we all knew we'd have to in the end. A light plane is going to fly out from Berbera and drop the cash by parachute into the sea near the ship and we hope to sail out in a couple of days. Since Mr Turner, unhappily, is no longer aboard, can you supply another Chief Deck Officer by helicopter from Mombasa?"

"By Hell, your Company's got a bloody cheek. The answer is NO, not now, nor ever again."

"OK Captain, I can't really say I blame you. So it looks as if we'll not be working together again, pity in a way since you always say directly what you think – must be your Geordie up-bringing. A hell of a sight better than your Human Resources Superintendent anyway."

'Nobody likes that bugger,' Tom thought to himself, referring to the HR man, 'certainly not the sea staff, nobody much here in Head Office either. I wonder who appointed him and why?'

To mark the end of a perfect week, his phone rang. It was the border police, saying a plane had arrived from Paris with two Bangladeshis without papers. They'd been told by the French authorities that the Company was responsible for them. They obviously won't be allowed to stay in the UK, so how soon can they expect the Company to finance their repatriation and where to exactly?

For Christ's Sake; the *Aylesbury* is getting almost as bad a reputation as the *West Wycombe*. Unwillingly, Tom felt a stab of sympathy for the two Bangladeshis. They had walked from their country; hundreds of miles across Northern India, without papers, to arrive at Karachi. And then, for God's Sake, stowing away on a British ship that was not even going to Britain. How unfortunate can you get!

Tom looked up the distance by Wikipedia, 1,470 miles or 2,366 Km. Having no real choice, Tom sent a junior Superintendent to Heathrow to deal with the matter. He told Tom later, the two men had been handcuffed as far as the airport in Paris, then put on a plane with a guard and handcuffed again in London. All of which would have to be paid for.

* * * * *

Tom had always visited the bookshops that proliferated in Karachi, books by his favourite authors and ones he'd heard about but not read. They were usually cheaply printed, often with the print not quite in line with the page, so that the few last words on some of the pages had to guessed at. He was always ready for a good curry dinner there.

Not far from the tanker berth, there was a hotel where he and Doreen, when she used to sail with him, had sometimes enjoyed an excellent meal there. A talented pianist, judging their ages, had always played a variety of music from that era. They ate in the garden where there was a magnificent Bougainvillea tree showing three different coloured flower-like leaves from the same tree.

Apart from the port, Tom liked Karachi with its bazaars, its restaurants, bookshops, camels grazing beside the roads and the friendliness of the people he'd met there. Even the hustle and bustle and the dusty roads. He and Doreen had loved visiting the bazaars; handling and buying jade as well

as soft calf-skin leather jackets. Doreen had even bought a fox fur coat which she didn't dare wear now.

Chapter 14 – London - July 15th

The next indication of Jim Turner's possible whereabouts came quickly and, strangely enough at a meeting sponsored by the Honourable Company of Master Mariners on *HQS Wellington*. She is a famous old sailing ship moored at the Embankment, fitted out as a comfortable venue for meetings. Tom had been invited in his professional capacity, since the subject under discussion involved the relatively new system for charts called ECDIS. Other aspects of shipping, including Charter Parties and Bills of Lading were also on the Agenda.

Over an aperitif following the meeting, a Superintendent from another Company mentioned that his son, a junior Royal Naval Officer, had just completed a tour of duty on a frigate operating with the Atalanta Force. Their Helicopter Pilot claimed he'd seen an uncharted island off the coast of Puntland to the North of Eyl. More than that, the Island had also enclosed an unknown bay.

If true this would be an astonishing, if not a major discovery. The Warship had recalled the helicopter at that point, having received orders to proceed immediately to the coast of Kerala in southern India.

Since it was about Somalia and the fight against piracy, Tom took Captain Barnes, the other Superintendent aside and mentioned his interest in the subject and the reason why. By then it was close to six pm, the meeting had finished and Tom was invited home to meet the son. After braving the London homeward bound traffic, they came to a nice detached house overlooking Clapham Common.

Over a couple of Gin and Tonics and a Pink Gin, his son said there was considerable doubt about the sighting. Most of the Officers in the wardroom thought the pilot must have confused it with another partial island further north. A known island but with two causeways joining it to the mainland. Since his ship was under way to the other side of the Indian Ocean, no further helicopter flight could be organised to verify the claim.

Tom, however, was reasonably certain a fully trained naval helicopter pilot wouldn't make a mistake on that scale. He was mildly astonished that the sighting had not been reported to the Admiralty.

"Incidentally," the Naval Officer remarked, "I don't remember any British ships being taken by the pirates, on which ship did your Officer sail and on what date?"

"The *Dawn Splendour* on April fifth this year. She's a Liberian tanker and Turner had been loaned out to the Liberian Company for a three month commission." Tom said, looking around the comfortable sitting room. The comfortable leather armchairs gave the room an atmosphere of a wealthy London club.

By this time they were on Christian name terms, the other superintendent was named Eric and his son Maurice. The latter said:

"Oh yes, I remember hearing something about that ship and that one of her Officers had been abducted. We didn't know he was British though. I'm sure we were never told that, or else we would have been more concerned. I seem to remember a French Helicopter being involved and was nearly shot down; so we all assumed the missing man was French."

"Well, thanks for the information, I've noted it. Please be discreet about the abduction, for the sake of his poor wife." Tom said. "Do you remember on what date the Pilot thought he saw the island?" Tom enquired, Maurice frowned in his effort to remember, finally saying:

“Vaguely, there was a lot happening that day; we’d just received orders to proceed at full speed to a position off Kerala in Southern India. Say about six weeks ago.”

They passed a pleasant evening discussing relations between the Royal and Merchant Navies over dinner, to which Eric’s wife had cordially invited him. If she was bored, she certainly didn’t show it. A pleasant evening all round, the type of evening Tom badly misses since Doreen had left and he’d quitted the North-east coast. It was the kind of evening where the talk was all male, but with an appreciative woman listening and occasionally making shrewd comments.

If the sighting turned out to be true, then Tom supposed a report would go to the Admiralty later; probably no action would be taken until the situation in Somalia improved. He idly wondered if this improbable island could have any bearing on Jim’s whereabouts.

He didn’t think so, but added it to the list anyway. He could always use it as a persuader, should it become necessary to convince top Management. Discussing it further with Maurice, Tom began to think along similar lines to the Warship’s Officers, doubting its existence.

He knew there were no islands at all charted on that coast apart from the one to the North, which was called Zaafan; not really an island though, being connected to the mainland by two causeways. Also a couple of other known islands between Socotra and Cape Gardafui.

It was close on midnight before Tom left the house at Clapham Common to face the long drive through London to his flat at Harrow-on-the-Hill, lucky not to have been breathalysed.

Chapter 15 – St. Marylebone – July 17th

The calls from Angela had gradually petered out, not stopped but no longer weekly. As soon as that thought had entered his head, Angela did phone and they had their usual chat. She mentioned she was coming to London the following Friday, 17th July, on a job for her fashion magazine. Tom invited her out for lunch, but she said she would be lunching with the rep she was meeting.

“OK, what about dinner then? I’ll make sure we finish eating in time for you to catch the last train home from Liverpool Street station.” He’d asked her, hopefully.

“I’m not sure Tom,” she’d replied doubtfully, “I don’t fancy catching the last train back to Chelmsford so late at night, then groping round the station car park to find my car. Wait a minute though... yes here we are, my old roommate at University lives at Cricklewood, near Golders’s Green. I’ll give her a ring and ask if she’s got a spare bed for Friday night.”

She rang back an hour later and said there’d be no problem staying the night with Julie, her girlfriend; also that she’d be pleased to have dinner with him on Friday evening. This put Tom in a bit of a quandary, should he tell her of his findings concerning Jim or not? He didn’t want to give the girl false hope, only to be dashed later on.

On the other hand, she seemed to be a pretty strong woman, the type who would resent having any information, not exactly hidden from her, but withheld. He decided to wait and see how things would turn out on Friday.

The day came quickly enough and they had a dinner in a French restaurant not far from Marylebone station that he’d often used. She looked smart and business like, wearing a well-cut black suit over a white blouse. Simple and attractive. ‘It’s not surprising really,’ Tom reflected, ‘since she came to London on business.’ The restaurant was nearly full, they had an aperitif at the bar before being shown to their table; a Cinzano Bianco for her, a Gin and Tonic for

him. Once seated and the wine ordered, she opened the conversation:

“Julie’s given me a key, so there’s no rush to finish quickly. I’ll get a taxi to her place from here. I’ll not be eating much, since I had a good lunch not that long ago.”

The waiter came with the menus. Tom knew what he wanted, a dish he had every time he ate there; *Coq au Vin*. Angela scanned the menu and then gave a little yip of pleasure. When the waiter came back to take their orders, she pointed to a dish called ‘*Soupe de Poisson*’ and asked how good it was. The waiter became excited and burst into rapid French.

To Tom’s and probably the waiter’s surprise, she replied in the same language. After exchanging a few more sentences in French, she turned to Tom and said she hoped it was as good as the waiter had said. Apparently it was the first time she’d seen this particular dish on any menu outside Provence in Southern France.

“You remember my uncle who was staying with us when you, Jack Knowles and his wife all came to see me? You know, soon after Jim was kidnapped. He’s the same as you, a Sea Captain and ended up a Superintendent in Kuwait, but is now retired and living in Southern France.” Angela said, sipping a glass of red wine that Tom had ordered.

She went on to say that she’d been going down to see him at La Ciotat in France since she was a child and had persuaded Jim to take part of their honeymoon there. Uncle Bob’s French wife, who they both called ‘Tatie’, was a good cook and they both enjoyed eating the local Provençal dishes. *Aioli*, *Bouillabaisse*, *Pieds et Paquets* from Marseille, *Soupe de Poisson*, *Soupe de Pistou* and *Cassoulet* from the Langue d’Oc region.

On winter holidays there, she’d enjoyed the Alpine cheese dishes such as *Tartiflette* or a dish called *Raclette* where melted cheese was poured over a variety of hams, *saucissons*, gherkins, potatoes and onions. The town was

lovely for kids, with a warm sea in summer and a three hour drive to the nearest ski resort in winter. She could ski well and William was a natural too, Laura enjoyed sledging down mountains.

Tom remembered the man well and wondered again whether they had been right not to show Angela the clipping from the *Le Monde* newspaper. The photograph was shocking and Tom hoped she would never see it. After that they talked of things generally; she seemed to be well read and up to date on what was going on in the world. They talked briefly about politics; her job; the weather; the MPs expenses scandal and Tony Blair's chances of being the first President of Europe. Even their culinary likes and dislikes were debated.

By this time they'd finished the *entrées*, the table was wiped clean and the main course arrived. Having thought the *Soupe de Poisson* would only be a bowl of soup, Tom had been wondering why she'd ordered nothing else; probably because she'd already eaten a big lunch earlier that day.

He was surprised when a tureen arrived at the table, as well as some toasted slices of *baguette* and a small jar of something she said was called *rouille*. She put three or four pieces of toasted *baguette* into a soup plate; wiped them with a piece of what he realised was garlic; covered them with *rouille* and grated cheese and then ladled thick brown soup from the tureen over the whole lot.

She persuaded Tom to try a spoonful, it was a strange taste, fishy with a tang to it that she said came from the *rouille*. By then, the bread had disintegrated into a soggy mess. It wasn't bad though, not bad at all. She helped herself twice more from the tureen, each time adding more bread smothered in *rouille*.

"I don't think I'm being unduly pessimistic," Angela said later, replete. "But I don't honestly think Jim is alive after all these months. If they'd taken him off the ship to

persuade the owners to pay the ransom quicker, then they would have exhibited him by now. We would have known he was still alive.

"It's been three months now, why do you think they killed him?" Tom asked her.

"I don't know, but what's the alternative? Look Tom, if they took him ashore as a hostage, then they surely would have said so, one way or another. Oh hell, I don't know, there seems to be no sense taking him ashore and then saying nothing to the Press or anyone else, as terrorists usually do. The whole thing just doesn't add up." She said, toying with her spoon.

"Yes I agree, but maybe there's another reason that *does* make more sense." Tom said. "He could possibly be there alive and forced to work for them. Forced labour, if you like."

"Doing what, for God's Sake, what kind of work could Jim do in Somalia? Secretly too?"

Taking a deep breath, Tom decided to tell her about his findings or suspicions:

"Look, Angela, there has been some strange things coming out of Somalia, which makes me think Jim may possibly still be alive." He stated, his eyes on her face.

She sat up, jogging the table with her knees, a dollop of soup splashed on to the table top. The soup spoon started trembling in her hand.

"Have you been keeping something from me, Tom?" Angela asked sharply, an edge to her voice.

"No, there's nothing at all certain, it's all guesswork and pretty far-fetched at that. I was waiting until for something more definite before telling you." He countered.

"Well you'd better tell me now instead of burbling on. Come on let's have it." She demanded shortly.

Startled by the expression she'd used as well as her directness; he continued:

“OK, First of all, about a month ago, one of the Supers in the office was dining with a friend from *Brice and Somerville*, a well-known firm that sells charts and navigation equipment, including echo-sounders. He mentioned that they had received some odd requests for information from Somalia. I contacted the firm, who told me information regarding charts and publications *had* been requested, but with nothing ordered from them. The Emails came from the Somali Marine Agency and were signed SOLIMAR. Does that name say anything to you Angela? ‘S, O, L, I, M, A, R’. An old email address, perhaps?”

“No, but don’t you think you should have asked me at the time if I knew that particular address?” Angela demanded, less sharply now, but wanting an immediate answer.

“I asked Jack Knowles to try all the combinations of those letters to see if any were known to him. After all, he knows both of you well and it seemed to be too much ‘up in the air’ to possibly distress you for nothing.” He said, slightly puzzled by her reaction.

“Yes, I see. Jack would probably have known something like that, I take it he didn’t come up with anything, not that there’s anything to come up with in those letters. Go on then, was there something else?” Her tone had softened a bit now.

“Wait a minute! I phoned various contacts myself, at the Baltic Exchange; Lloyds List; the Nautical Institute and other places, asking them for their advice. The Baltic, Lloyds and other institutions thought the email address was phony since none of them could find any reference at all to this Agency.”

“Do you really think it was Jim who sent that message? How could he create a phony Agency? Were there any more messages?” She asked, her eyes wide with hope.

“Yes, I asked around, targeting similar Companies to do with shipping. One of them said an Email had arrived from

the same source, asking questions about Way Points on one of their GPS instruments.” He added, finishing his glass of wine.

“Do you really think those two items are connected and have anything to do with Jim?” She asked doubtfully. “Does Internet exist in Somalia? Would Jim be allowed to use it?”

“I honestly don’t know. Probably in Mogadishu and almost certainly in Somaliland. Elsewhere I don’t know.” Tom said.

“In that case, Jim could be in a city like Mogadishu or in Somaliland.” She exclaimed. “Anyway, carry on please.”

“OK. A couple of weeks later,” Tom continued, pouring out some wine, “Another one of our Superintendents was in Rotterdam arranging some engine repairs for our LPG carrier, the *Two Chalfonts*. In his hotel near Europoort, there was the usual mix of Superintendents and senior Officers waiting for ships. You know the hotel; you’ve been there yourself, waiting for Jim’s ship to arrive a couple of times?”

“Yes I know it, the one with all the Company flags on the wall behind the bar, the names and photos of various ships too. Fascinating place, good food too.” She smiled at the memory.

“That’s the one. Anyway, while having a drink in the bar, he’d overheard one of them saying that a chart had been stolen off his ship, while she was waiting at Eyl for the ransom to be paid. The ship was the *Brave Spirit* registered in Malta; the chart was one covering the Gulf of Aden and part of the Somali coast. It must have been one of the Somali pirates who had stolen it, although they denied it.” Tom said, pouring out more wine.

“Do you think that’s relevant?” Angela asked doubtfully, frowning. She put her spoon back tidily into the soup bowl.

By this time they had finished their main course and were waiting for the dessert to arrive. She had ordered *Tarte*

aux Pommes, which turned out to be an apple tart. Tom thought cheese and biscuits, coffee and a liqueur would be nice to follow up with. She smiled and said:

“This is a fine restaurant, Tom, very French, in fact I think the waiter has a Marseille accent. The people from that city are well known for exaggerating, but he certainly didn’t exaggerate over the soup. Sorry Tom, please continue with what you were saying just now.”

“OK. I wondered if your husband could be behind all this, maybe it’s his only way of alerting us, although that’s a bit far-fetched. Then it occurred to me that the pirates could be using Jim for something, and that something must be to do with ships, or else why kidnap him? In other words, they could be using him for forced labour.” He said, pausing to catch his breath, then continued;

“Think about it Angela. The Solimar email address was asking information from *Brice and Somerville* about charts and publications. Then someone, possibly one of the pirates steals a working chart from a ship at anchor there, detailing part of the Somali coast. The dates of the first Email from Somalia as well as the stolen chart coincide, or very nearly.”

“Yes alright, I’m thinking about it. That’s really three coincidences, are they just coincidences and nothing else?” Angela asked, still a bit doubtful.

“Let’s suppose for a minute that Jim *is* behind all this, not orchestrating it certainly, but being forced to do something technical there. There’s something else too, although I can’t see any relevance at all at the moment.”

He paused, uncertain whether or not to bring up the subject of the island, which may or may not have been verified. Finishing his glass of red wine, he sat back and referred to his notes:

“What other thing, Tom?” Angela asked, her tone softening.

“At a meeting the other day on the ‘*Wellington*’, I got talking to a Superintendent in another Company whose son is an RN Officer, just returned from a British Warship patrolling the Indian Ocean. He said their Helicopter Pilot claimed to have seen an uncharted island on the coast of Somalia during one of his patrols. There was a kind of bay or lake behind the island with a couple of fishing boats. Nobody in the wardroom really believed him, most of them thought it was another island up near Cape Gardafui. I’m sure it has nothing at all to do with our problem though. I’m inclined to forget all about it, since it would mean that the Admiralty charts covering the coast of Somalia are wrong.”

“Yes I see” Angela said, putting her hand briefly on his arm. “You’ve been doing an awful lot of work on this, haven’t you Tom? Do you think these three, and I mean three, things are connected? Doesn’t it mean that the pirates have been a bit careless, to sort of let this information pass out of their hands?” She said.

She’d been surprised to feel his muscle flex when she’d put her hand briefly on his sleeve. Uh oh... she thought, why the hell did I do that? Her mother’s words came back into her mind and she quickly took her hand away.

“Look Angela, don’t forget I’m actively thinking about things with a very receptive mind. The pirates probably don’t realise how small a world it is in shipping, especially here in London. The major British Shipping Companies have their Head Offices here. Also the Chamber of Shipping; Lloyds of London shipping insurance; various P&I. Clubs; Trinity House as well as the Baltic Exchange. The institutes are also here, the Nautical Institute; the Institute of Marine Engineers, Scientists and Technologists; The Royal Institute of Naval Architects; The Royal Institute of Navigation; the Honourable Company of Master Mariners; Nautilus UK too, the Officers’ Trade Union. These establishments are mostly centred in the City or...”

“Good grief!” Angela exclaimed, interrupting, “I never realised London was so involved with shipping. But surely they don’t gossip to each other, do they?”

“... Or not too far away from Central London,” he continued, pouring out more wine. “Outside of London there’s Lloyds List at Colchester; the Royal Navy at Northwood as well as here at the Admiralty; the Maritime & Coastguard Agency or MCA at Southampton. Not to mention allied Companies such as Ship agencies, technical manufacturers and suchlike. Retail firms like B&S too. It’s a concentration and information is always being exchanged, or gossiping if you prefer to use that term. It only takes an ear to listen out on a particular subject, as it were, to hear something that seems relevant. Two relevancies can equal a maybe, three a possibility and four a possible certainty.” Tom

stated, sitting back in his chair.

“A possible certainty?” She exclaimed. “Isn’t there a grammatical expression for two words like that? One used as an adjective the other a noun, both words having contrary meanings. It’s a... oh damn, I can’t think of it now, although it’s on the tip of my tongue.” She nearly put the trip of her tongue as an emphasis, but thought better of it. She quashed her mother’s advice about mildly tempting Tom.

“An oxymoron, although I had no intention of using one.” Tom said proudly, showing off.

“Thanks. Well in that case, using the scale you’ve just established, we’re only as far as the ‘possibility’ stage at present.” She said, smiling at him.

Seeing the bottle of wine was empty he ordered some brandy for himself and a Cointreau for her. The fact struck him that he hadn’t had such an enjoyable evening out like this for years. Angela looked at him, took a deep breath and said:

“Thank you very much Tom, for all you have done to find Jim, I’m sure nobody else could do more – or would even try to. Most men would leave it to the authorities to find out these things. I’m very grateful indeed Tom. There, having said that; is there anything we can do with these facts or suspicions? Can’t we use them to persuade some action to be taken from the Authorities or somebody?”

She looked at him, her eyebrows raised. Tom hesitated, only too aware of the paucity of information he’d gleaned: “I was wondering the same thing. Who though? My top management? Well maybe, at least for a start. If I can persuade those buggers, I can persuade anybody! Then what? To ask help from the Government I suppose; After all, a British subject has been kidnapped, even though he was working on a foreign ship at the time. Against that, he’s only one man among hundreds of other seamen stuck on their ships off Somalia.” He answered, toying with his wineglass.

“Oh hell Tom, don’t go all defeatist on me, now that you’ve gone and told me all that.” She said, pouting and finishing her Cointreau. She put the glass down on the table.

“OK. Jim’s case is different, but in the eyes of the Authorities? I don’t think they will send in the SAS, or rather the SBS just for Jim, although you never know. Don’t forget there has been no ransom demand for him.” Tom replied, in a ‘That’s that’ kind of tone.

“There’s one very powerful force you’ve overlooked Tom. The Press. If nothing is done by the authorities, then we can give the whole story to the newspapers. Just imagine it Tom, a wailing wife; two heart-broken children; a kidnapped husband, a family friend who has done a lot of investigative work but nobody listens. It’s a dream of a story for them.” Angela said.

“Oh that’s great, that is. I’ve been using all my persuasion to keep the Press away from you and now you

want to go and involve them. Don't you see, if the Press gets hold of it now, after more than three months, what effect that would have on Jim's captors? They are bound to get wind of it, since they must have contacts here in Britain. Maybe we *should* have used the Press at the start, but not at this point. Look it's getting late, will your friend be waiting up to see you?" He asked her, unwilling to bring the evening to a close.

"Julie? No she won't. I told her I'd probably be late and we'd have a long chat in the morning and lunch together, then I'll catch an afternoon train home. Before I go, what do

you think we should do about Jim and your suspicions?" Angela asked.

"Nothing at present, I'm afraid. In any case the Chairman has got all this information anyway. I've kept him informed each time something new comes in. The old fraud's getting right bloody sick of me!" Tom said smiling at her.

She laughed and finished her coffee, picked up her handbag and offered to pay half. She agreed with Tom that it was all too iffy to go right up to the top, as it were. They'd wait and see if anything else came in. Tom, for some inexplicable reason, felt sure something else would soon crop up, so long as he kept his ears open.

The waiter approached with the bill and Tom took his Visa card from his wallet, adding ten per cent in cash. While tapping out his code, the waiter took the opportunity to speak to Angela in French.

"No question of you paying half." Tom said, after the waiter had left, "I have thoroughly enjoyed your company; any time you come up to London, please let me know and we'll do it again." He said hopefully, not looking at her directly.

"Hey, steady on Tom. I'm a married woman, married to one of your officers too. I've enjoyed it as well, especially

the Fish Soup that was just right for me, taking into account the lunch I had as well. I think it's time to go now. Thanks for the lovely meal and again, for all you've done to find Jim." Her tone was lightly dismissive. A put-down.

"OK, I'll take you to Cricklewood in a taxi and keep it on to Harrow where I live."

It was close on midnight when they left the restaurant. It was raining; the night muggy and warm. A couple of young louts were making a racket further along the street, occasionally pestering passers-by. A taxi approached and they got in and sat down. At Cricklewood, she briefly kissed Tom on the cheek; got out and ran into a large house, probably divided into flats.

Back home at Harrow-on-the-Hill, Tom sat down on his comfortable armchair and thought back to the dinner. He'd thoroughly enjoyed the evening, she had been good company and it'd been months since he'd had dinner with an attractive woman. He hoped she would keep phoning as she had been doing over the weeks since her husband's abduction. He helped himself to a large Scotch then thought about going to bed.

He woke up; cold and uncomfortable, still in his old armchair around five in the morning, weary and bleary, with a vile taste in his mouth. He had a shower and went to bed, hoping not to be called in the morning; so he could have a Saturday lay-in.

* * * * *

Once settled for the night in Julie's flat at Cricklewood, Angela reckoned her trip to London had certainly produced some startling results. Tom seemed to think he's found indications that Jim may still be alive, but it all seemed rather far-fetched to her. She'd already given up hope for Jim, but now he's gone and cast doubts in her head.

The evening had shown her a different side to Tom since he'd so obviously enjoyed having dinner with her. He'd been talkative, amusing and even a bit flirtatious. She'd half expected him to make a grab for her in the taxi, but he'd held back. What would she have done if he had? Shown shocked surprise? Slapped his face?

At the age of thirty-six, she was probably at the height of her sexual appeal. With her husband presumed dead, she'd already accepted a 'one-off' with Jack. Pleasant as that had been, she had no desire to take him away from Sonia. However, if he finds himself in London again without Sonia and at a loose end, then she saw no reason not to have him again. Assuming, of course that he'd still want her!

Chapter 16 – London – July 28th

It was now nearly two weeks since Tom had dropped Angela off at her friend's flat in Cricklewood. He'd kept the taxi to his home in North West London, a flat halfway up the Hill at Harrow. A pleasant area, a kind of isolated village close to the famous Harrow school. Not always convenient though. The nearest tube station was South Harrow where he parked the Company car during the week; thus avoiding the Inner London Highway Robbery. Weekends, he often drove out into the country, especially along the Thames Valley; also using the car for visiting ships in Britain and occasionally on the Continent.

Tom had thoroughly enjoyed the pleasant evening he'd spent with Angela. She had proved to be an agreeable companion and he wouldn't mind seeing more of her. He was starting to realise how lonely his life-style had become. Perhaps she would agree to an occasional Sunday drive in the country, with lunch at that nice riverside pub at Marlow?

Looking at the calendar, Tom realised Turner had been missing for a hundred and seven days now. Although he had very little to go on, just a couple of email messages and a chart stolen by the pirates; plus a doubtful sighting of an Island with a bay behind it. Tom felt certain the man was still alive. Back at work and thinking about this mysterious Island, Tom got the chart out again and looked at the coastline, trying to spot anything resembling an island.

There was Zafaan, very nearly an island up near Cape Gardafui; its two causeways joining the island to the shore *did* form a kind of lagoon. Not at all like the helicopter Pilot had apparently described it, although the confusion could have been the result of a quick overflight. Those two causeways may even be covered at high tide like St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall.

Albert, a colleague came over and joined him looking at the chart; Tom explained what he'd learnt from the Royal Navy, which left Albert absolutely astounded. When Albert is absolutely astounded, which is often; everybody in the Office knows about it, sits up and waits.

"A new island with a bay behind it? Come off it, Tom. It's 2009 now and islands can't just suddenly appear without being noticed." Albert said loudly, in his usual Yorkshire accent.

"I agree it certainly looks like pilot error" Tom said, almost convinced.

"Let's have a look at the Pilot Book for the area, then." Albert boomed. "Sometimes they print pictures of prominent points of land. In any case the coastline will be thoroughly described, section by section."

"Why on earth hadn't I thought of that?" Tom said to himself. After all, he was supposed to be the Senior Superintendent! Somehow, Albert usually caught him out, one way or another. Pilot Books or Sailing Directions are often called, are a thoroughly good read, containing far more information than the name suggests.

At sea, he used to write to a school, describing the countries and ports visited, with much of his information coming from Pilot Books. Especially the older ones before their New Editions limited the texts more to navigation only. Corrections are made when needed, New Editions published when large changes occur, usually after three years. He strolled over to the bookcase, searched for and eventually found the correct Pilot Book.

Reading about the coastline from Eyl to Cape Gardafui, Tom noticed what seemed to be a cliff, some thirty miles North of Eyl. It seemed different to the surrounding coastal plain. At the end of that chapter, a hand drawn picture showed a high cliff, a couple of miles long with low lying coastal land either side.

"Maybe the helicopter pilot thought that cliff was an island," Tom said, "But it doesn't explain the sea or bay area behind the cliff does it?" Another colleague wandered over and joined them.

"To turn that cliff into an island," Albert shouted thoughtfully, "would need one powerful earthquake. Do we know if one that size has occurred in Somalia? It would certainly have been known about; seismic stations would have picked it up and found the site by using three point strangulation. Oops I mean Triangulation" Albert said and boomed with laughter.

When Albert laughed, it was the *Haw-Haw* type of laughter; and, as usually happened, everyone working in the main office looked up startled; grinned and looked back down at their work again. Tom and Ken, the colleague who'd joined them winced and politely smiled.

"In that case, other countries would have sent help; planes would have flown over taking pictures and films. A new island and area of sea would certainly have been noted with both the chart and the Pilot Book corrected. Still; it would have to have been something catastrophic wouldn't

it? A real upheaval, assuming the pilot really saw an unknown island nobody is aware of.” Tom said pointing to the tiny area on the chart taken up by the cliff.

“Let’s face it; the whole thing seems highly improbable. The chopper pilot must be wrong.” Ken said, measuring the cliff as best he could with the dividers.

“Could it be natural erosion over the years, the low-lying land either side of the cliff gradually eroding, then filling the area behind it as a kind of saltwater bay?” Tom said thoughtfully.

“Unnoticed by the rest of the world?” Was the scornful bellow he received from Albert.

“I wonder how much damage the Tsunami did to this part of the coast. When was it now? Around Christmas 2004, I think.” Ken reflected.

“Surely it wouldn’t have done that much damage by the time it reached Africa, several thousand miles away? Of course it wouldn’t. No, it was a mistaken sighting.” Albert said, in a ‘that’s that’ kind of voice, before walking back to his desk. Ken followed him.

Not completely satisfied Tom consulted Wikipedia again, and found that North East Africa, mainly Somalia, had indeed suffered severe coastal devastation from the Indian Ocean Tsunami. He had another look at the chart, but could see no way a Tsunami could have caused an island to appear. It could have swept over the low-lying coastline each side of the cliff and formed a lake, which supposed the land behind the cliff was below sea level. A feeling of sheer loneliness overcame him and he phoned Angela at her office.

“When are you coming up to London again, Angela? Tom asked her, hopefully. “I’ve nothing really new to tell you, but... you remember that third thing we talked about last time? The Naval Officer stating a helicopter pilot seeing an uncharted island?”

“Yes, I remember. What about it? You seemed ready to dismiss it then, has something changed your mind?” Angela asked, not really surprised at the phone call.

“Well, again it’s one of those ‘maybe,’ ‘may not be’ or ‘probably not’ kind of things, if you if you see what I mean. I’d like to talk to you about it. Are you coming up to London again soon?” Tom asked her.

“I don’t know, there’s nothing planned. Can’t you tell me over the phone?” She replied doubtfully;

“Yes, I suppose so, but I would rather talk to you about it and get your opinion. Look; I usually have a drive out into the country most weekends when I’m free. If I come down your way either this coming Saturday or Sunday, would that suit you? We could have another meal out together. I need to talk with you about this new island and how it might involve your husband.” Tom said, wondering what the hell he was playing at. Angela glanced up at the ceiling and stifled a sigh.

“Today’s what? Tuesday the Twenty-eighth, that means next weekend is the first and second of August. Sorry, it’ll have to be the weekend after. This one’s already taken up. Mum and I’ll be taking the kids out for at least one of those days. So I’m afraid it will have to be the following weekend. But don’t forget I’ve got two children you know; I can’t keep on getting Mum to look after them. She’s had them a lot lately and she’s getting on a bit now. They are quite a handful when they are together with her, and it tires her. So, if that’s OK with you, you choose which day.” Angela said, wondering why he couldn’t discuss it over the phone.

“Let’s make it Sunday then, the August Ninth,” Tom said. “I’ll be with you about eleven and I’ll take you all out for lunch. OK?”

“Right, we’ll think about that when you arrive, must go now, there’s another call coming.”

* * * * *

Tom eventually stopped wandering around his office in a happy daze, sat down at his desk and began to work. *What's this then?* A complaint from the pilotage authorities at Rotterdam? They alleged that the **High Wycombe** had entered the port flying the Dutch courtesy ensign upside down. It's like the French Tricolour flag, except with Red, White and Blue coloured sections are horizontal instead of vertical, with the red stripe on top. Tom put a call through to the ship:

"Hey Mike, have you been having problems with the Rotterdam pilots? They are accusing you of flying the Dutch ensign upside down."

"No trouble Tom, it was the harbour pilot; he thought I had a crew of twenty instead of five. I could see my three men on the Fo'c's'le Head putting out the headlines and springs, also trying to let go of the tug at the same time. Every time he thought they were slow to carry out his wishes, he would slap his hand on his forehead and say "*Mamma mia*". I got sick of it and asked him if he enjoyed life in Holland more than in his native Italy."

"I take it the man *was* Dutch?" Tom asked laughing, remembering his own frequent visits there.

"Of course he was, he came back the next day and told me about the flag being upside down, he'd only noticed it when he passed by on another ship. Said he was going to report it to someone. It was a case of too many ships needing too few tugs."

"The usual thing." Tom said. "They were needed for another ship, I suppose."

Tom faxed an apology to the Rotterdam Pilot Association, mentioning that their Captain had been surprised to find an Italian Pilot at the port. Let them sort that one out!

Chapter 17 – Chelmsford – July 30th

On Thursday morning July thirtieth, Angela was at work, her mother at home looking after the kids, now broken up for their school summer holiday. Suddenly she remembered Captain Murchison's phone call last Monday; when he'd wanted to visit her and tell her more about that island. Or was it just an excuse to see her again? Having put him off until Sunday week; she realised that she couldn't refuse him altogether; after all he *is* Jim's Boss and the Company *is* still paying her, so it's a bit like a Royal Command.

Why not get the visit over and done with and let him come this Sunday instead? She could ask him about his recent trip to the Far East. It had sounded like a dream; but these things are for men only; except that she'd been to Paris a couple of times for her work. She decided to call him now about the change of Sundays.

Just as she was about to dial his number, her cell phone rang. To her surprise, it was Jack Knowles on the line. She'd heard nothing after that afternoon in bed together, just over a month previously.

"Look Angela, I'm going to be at Romford with my folks this weekend. Can I take you out to lunch on one of those days?"

"Lunch with you *and* Sonia?" She replied, surprised to hear from him again.

"No, Sonia's still in Italy, just lunch with me, OK?" Jack said, uncertain of her reaction.

"Well, why not?" She asked herself, but decided not to make things too easy for Jack. She smiled, surprised at how pleased she was at the invitation.

“I’ll have lunch with you Jack, but only that. Nothing else. What are you doing in Romford anyway? Your folks OK?” She asked him teasingly.

Jack told her about the two week course his Company had

asked him to take at Southampton, also that he’d be joining the *Chesham* on the Monday after the second week. He said he’d probably spend the weekend break at Romford with his parents; no question of going to Italy and back just for two days.

“So I’d like to take you to lunch on the Saturday or Sunday” He’d said, “or both.” He added hopefully.

“OK I’ll have lunch with you, just lunch, if mum will come and look after the kids. Although it’s a bit much to ask really, since she’s got them all week. Have you forgotten it’s now the school holidays?” She said, playing with a pencil on her desk.

“Christ! I’d completely overlooked that. OK then which day please, Saturday or Sunday?”

Jack went on to tell her that he was coming up to London on Friday evening until the Sunday evening, which made her sit up and think. Why not ask Mum to take the children to her sister in West Hampstead for the weekend? No, No, that’s out! She couldn’t ask her that, she’s getting on a bit now and a weekend will be too much for the Poor Old Girl. At that moment her fixed phone rang. Telling Jack to hang on, she answered it and heard her mother’s excited voice.

“Hullo love, how are you? Wendy has just renewed that invitation to see her and her family in Canada, the children too. But it’s got to be now since they are booked for a holiday themselves in Hawaii on the fourteenth. I don’t suppose you’d want to come along as well, would you?”

Angela hastily told Jack on her mobile that she’d phone him back in a few minutes and then picked up the other phone again. She knew about Wendy’s offer, it had been in

the air for days, but no date had been decided. Wendy had apparently taken things into her own hands on a 'now or never' basis. Which meant she would be free for the whole weekend with no children.

"No, Sorry but no, I can't. I'm still working until the second week of August. How long will you be in Canada and

when are you thinking of going?" She asked her mother.

"It's Thursday now, love. There's an Air Canada flight on Saturday, the first of August, or a BA flight the following Wednesday. I've tentatively booked both and must call them back within half an hour. The kids are so excited they are jumping up and down. Will Saturday be too soon to arrange things for the children? Wendy wants us to stay for ten days, so that will have to be from Saturday to Tuesday or Wednesday the eleventh or twelfth of August" her mother explained.

"Saturday? That's only two days away! You've all got biometric passports, but what about visas?"

"I've phoned the consulate, we don't need them since we've got the short-stay paperwork accepted. I'll take the kids into Ipswich tomorrow so we can buy presents for their cousins in Toronto. They've both promised to be good. Please say yes for the sake of the children. For me also. The ones in Canada are also my Grandchildren." Mrs Patterson pleaded.

"What time is your flight on Saturday? Are you sure about the visas, Mum?" Angela asked.

"I just told you I phoned them today, and the short stay paperwork for Canada was done and agreed when we first thought of going a few days ago, Can we make the Saturday flight then?" Reluctantly Angela said yes, and asked again what time the flight was.

"Ten-fifteen from Heathrow with a stopover at Shannon; do you think it's possible from here, what with having to be

at the airport some two hours before boarding time.” Her mother asked anxiously.

“Well OK then, Mum. Book the Saturday flight. I’ll run you up to Heathrow; otherwise it’s a hell of a journey from here by train and tube, especially with the luggage and two small children. You can sleep with us on the Friday night.”

“Thanks love, this means leaving Chelmsford at about half past five or six on Saturday. That OK with you? We’ll be going for ten days, back on the Tuesday eleventh.” Her mother sounded excited and Angela could hear the children cheering in the background.

That fixed, they said good-bye and she then spoke to William and Laura, who were, as her Mum had said, beside themselves with excitement. Putting the phone down, she took a deep breath; steadied herself and phoned Jack.

“Sorry Jack that was Mum on the phone. Right now, you were asking me about lunch this weekend weren’t you? Just lunch that is, with no afternoon sex like last time, is that correct?” She asked Jack, sounding demure.

“Yes, lunch either Saturday or Sunday.” He said and sighed theatrically, “Make it Saturday then as Mum and Dad will be away that afternoon and evening. Look, I’m making no promises about what’ll happen afterwards.”

“What makes you think I’m the type of woman who’s ready to leap into bed after a free lunch? I’ll be pleased to have lunch with you but that’s all.” She exclaimed, pleasantly exhilarated at the thought of a whole weekend to herself and to do exactly as she pleased.

“Well OK then. I’m still inviting you to lunch and will do my best to get you to bed afterwards.” Jack said forlornly. She smiled and decided to let him off the hook.

“What about lunch both Saturday *and* Sunday?” Angela said, smiling calmly. “We can have dinner too while we’re about it, can’t we?”

“Sorry Angela, I’m not with you, at least I don’t think so.” Jack replied, she could imagine the bewildered look on his face.

“Look Jack, I’ll be in London on Saturday about midday, after seeing Mum and the kids off to Canada. OK? We can have lunch together then dinner as well. Then what about a nice Sunday morning breakfast in bed followed by Sunday lunch then dinner? What we do in between meals is up to you, play cards if you like. I strongly suggest you book a hotel right now and call me back. Unless, of course, you’d prefer to go to Romford for the weekend?” Angela said and put the phone down.

He phoned back five minutes later, having booked a hotel at Bayswater. She could have invited him back to her place for the weekend but she’d wanted the comfort of a hotel, with all meals cooked for her and without children

More importantly, she didn’t want to use the home Jim and she had created for a, let’s face it – a dirty weekend with Jack. She’d already had him once there at the house, which was enough. If he was willing to pay for a hotel, OK - but never again in her home.

She then told him about her Mother taking the children to Toronto for ten days.

“Just one thing Jack, what have you told Sonia about us?” Angela inquired sweetly.

“Nothing. She thinks I’m on the *Chesham* and have already sailed. I’ll make an excuse for my parents but that’ll be OK. Now that I’ve booked the hotel in London, you’re not going to change your mind I hope.” He said alarmed

“You’re a sneaky bastard aren’t you Jack? You organised some of this beforehand didn’t you? Just in case I was willing and able to join you. When are you joining the *Chesham*?” Having said that, she wondered if both weekends were feasible.

“On the Monday after the course finishes. You’ve gone and taken me completely by surprise, I’d only anticipated lunch and maybe an afternoon like we had before. Don’t you dare change your mind now!” Jack said, but they both knew she wasn’t going to do that.

They chatted for a while after this; Angela deliberately made her voice sexy and suggested various things they could do together, waiting for him to make the obvious calculation. Suddenly he understood and said breathlessly:

“Look Angela, I’ve been counting on my fingers and it seems to me that you’re going to be free the following weekend as well, the eighth and ninth. Since I’ll be catching the Hook of Holland ferry on Monday the Tenth, how about both weekends?” There, he’d said it!

“Bravo Jack!” Angela cried “It took you long enough. Anyway, we’ll see how this coming weekend works out and decide then. You know, you’re a real bastard to Sonia aren’t you? No, don’t answer that and don’t worry, I’ll be there on Saturday as soon as the flight leaves. I only hope the hotel has some good parking space.”

“It’s a pity the old ‘Merchant Navy Hotel’ at Lancaster Gate was sold off.” Tom said. “I was there a couple of times and it would have been perfect for us.”

“I know the place you mean, with all those photos of ships and things to do with the sea, Jim and I spent a night there once, a few years ago. OK then, make sure you are there waiting for me on Saturday, even if you have to catch a very early coach. What name have you used? Mr and Mrs Smith?” She asked, laughing.

He told her he’d booked the hotel in his own name and that she was Mrs Knowles for that weekend. They talked for a while then broke the connection.

She was calm, pleased at the thought of a weekend free of the children and the house. What about Sonia then? Jack appears to have lied to her and deliberately not told her about the course. She thinks he’s on the Chesham and has

already sailed. Hopefully, she'll never find out. She had no intention of taking Jack away from Sonia permanently.

She thought about the men in her life. There was Jim, of course, probably dead; surely he couldn't be alive after all this time, despite Tom's findings. He'd been a good husband and she'd been faithful to him throughout their marriage. There'd been opportunities of course; even her bloody boss had tried it on once, when she was just a secretary at the magazine.

She thought she'd lose her job after contemptuously turning him down, but it was him that got pushed out in the end. The fool shouldn't have tried, working for a magazine aimed at women, staffed mostly by women.

Now what about Jack? She'd pretty well put Jack out of her mind since that unexpected afternoon when he'd arrived at her door, which she'd thought would probably turn out to be a one-off.

'After all,' Angela thought. 'He had a superb looking and

obviously sexy wife in Italy; so why should he come back to me?' She had a fair idea about the reason, of course. He was thirty-nine and Sonia at twenty-four was too young for him. Evenings in bars and cafés, laughing and chatting to youngsters of her age was OK at first, but must pall after a time. Sonia probably made it up to him in bed.

He was unable to communicate with her parents at all, who were only a few years older than him but couldn't speak a word of English. So, why not go back to his first love then - who'd conveniently lost her husband? A mature older woman, then back to his young wife.

Did she mind being the mature older woman? She asked herself. No, not really. *Although she'd half-kill anybody who dared to call her that!!*

Jack's an ugly bugger in a way, nicely ugly though. Medium sized, stocky with powerful shoulders, hair an indeterminate brownish colour. Eyes what? Yes brown as

well. A determined face, the face of a man who knows what he wants and where he's going. Would she marry him if Sonia leaves him? She couldn't answer that.

Now Tom, what about him? Well what about him? He's nice to chat to on the phone but that's all. She was going to change the rendezvous to this Sunday, well that's out now, next weekend too probably, the eighth and ninth. So she was going to have to put Tom off for that weekend as well and tell him to wait for the following one, sometime in the middle of August. Oh well, she'd make the call next week after this weekend's finished.

* * * * *

Their first weekend passed pleasantly, they didn't spend the whole weekend in bed. Since they had to leave the hotel by midday Sunday and it was a nice day they'd decided to leave at nine that morning. They drove along the Thames Valley through Windsor, then Maidenhead, Marlow, Henley and Abingdon as far as Oxford and back.

They had an early lunch at Marlow and at Henley Jack, showing off, hired a rowing boat for an hour, aiming to reach an island he could see and have a bit of a cuddle there. He was not as proficient with the oars as he thought and landed a dollop of river water on her dress when he caught a crab. Something Angela never allowed him to forget on either of those weekends.

Late Sunday evening, she drove him back to Victoria bus station to catch the coach to Southampton then returned to Chelmsford.

On the Wednesday morning following that weekend, Jack phoned her at the office, saying one of the lecturers was ill and that he, Jack, would be free that afternoon.

"How about you taking the afternoon off work and driving down to Warsash? One of the guys here has lent me the keys of his sailing boat; feel like a nice bit of nookie afloat in a boat?" He'd asked her.

Her first instinct was to say no. It was a long, sometimes difficult drive from Chelmsford to Southampton. About 205 miles. Looking at her Road Map, she reckoned she'd have to use either the M25 North or the M25 South. South would take her through the Dartford Tunnel so she chose the northern route. From Brentwood to Woking on the M25, then to Southampton via Farnborough and Basingstoke. From Southampton, she'd have to find her way to Warsash. It would probably take three hours or so.

About to refuse, she looked at her office clock; it was still only ten-thirty. Say a three hour drive to arrive about one thirty in the afternoon. If she stopped somewhere for a bite to eat, then say Two in the afternoon. Have a good afternoon romp on the boat and drive back about ten pm. Did she need to do all that just for the sake of a good romp? The two words WHY NOT in capital letters flooded into her mind. The memory of that Saturday night at Bayswater was still fresh in her mind and frankly, she wanted more! She had no children to think about, was up to date in her work, so why not take the rest of the day off.

"I seem to remember the last time we were on a boat together and getting thoroughly soaked; I'll come down if you promise not to drown me." She agreed, laughing.

Angela phoned her secretary, told her she was going to the sea-side for the day and drove down, arriving there about two fifteen. The boat was about thirty foot long, pleasantly appointed inside with a bunk berth that just managed to hold the two of them comfortably. It was lovely; the boat was rocking gently from the wash of ships going up to the docks at Southampton. They even went out on deck for an hour and sun-bathed, both nude in the late afternoon sun. She would have liked to have gone for a sail, but the boat did not belong to Jack.

They had dinner in a quaint old pub overlooking Southampton water and at ten pm she drove back to Chelmsford arriving at one in the morning and wearily

dragged herself to work at nine that same morning. She remembered Captain Tom Murchison was supposed to be arriving on Sunday 9th, so she quickly phoned put him off until the 16th; he'd sounded very disappointed and even a bit annoyed.

Angela wondered what was happening to her; a three hour drive each way just for a bit of sex and a good meal afterwards! OK, she'd enjoyed both and had obviously wanted more than the Saturday afternoon and night at Bayswater had provided, or else she would never have agreed. Nearly all of that Sunday having been spent driving along the Thames Valley.

She'd better get a good night's sleep this coming night, she

told herself. The following evening, Friday, she was meeting Jack at a good hotel she knew in Ipswich for Friday, Saturday *and* Sunday nights. This time she'd offer to pay half. She was looking forward to the weekend, but afterwards

She must make a decision.

* * * * *

During the second weekend, they drove round Suffolk, visited Blakeney wharf and saw the sites where Constable had painted. Sunday afternoon, on a stretch of river, Jack had hired a boat again and they rowed downriver until they saw what had once been an ancient watermill. He'd noticed a gaping hole in the wooden wall of the mill where it entered the water.

Telling Angela to keep her head down, he'd skilfully guided the boat through the hole into the mill. It was quite dark inside, with only a faint light coming from the entrance. The light dimmed occasionally as other boats idled past. The atmosphere was spooky and quickly charged.

Putting her feet under the thwart, Angela was able to lie back on the bottom boards. Regarding the shadowy figure of Jack, she'd laughed and held out her arms. He'd joined her there and they started kissing. The kisses grew more and more passionate and Jack had soon exposed her breasts. Looking up, past Jack's face she'd suddenly saw another face looking down at them and screamed.

A section of floor boards from the floor above was missing and the face of an elderly man wearing a cloth cap was looking down at them. His face was deeply lined; his eyes alight with malice as he spoke in a broad country accent:

"This is Private Property you know, but carry on please, it was starting to get interesting!"

Jack swore and pushed the boat out into the stream while she hastily buttoned up her blouse. They were blinded by the strong sunlight and went crashing into another boat. They made a few jokes about the Old Man but it had cast a shadow over them. The whole stupid incident in the old watermill had alarmed her.

After all, she's thirty six years old, Jack two years older and they'd been playing around like a couple of teenagers. Jack didn't seem concerned and was joking about 'The Old Goat in the Watermill'. About how they should have continued and given him the thrill of his life. She didn't find it at all funny and said so. Gloomily they returned the boat, paid for the hour and drove back to the hotel.

In bed that night, Angela had eventually succumbed to Jack's pleading and let him make love to her. She knew it was over between Jack and her. On the Monday, Angela drove him to Parkeston Quay at Harwich and waved him off on the ferry for the Hook of Holland. She was determined to finish with him. On neither weekend had they spoken about their future nor about Sonia.

She decided to write a proper letter to him, telling him it was all over between them. Something a bit more official,

in a way, than Email, Twitter or whatever. If she wrote today, he should receive it at his next port.

Jim was dead, Jack finished with so what about Captain Murchison – as her own dear mother had suggested! He was far too sober to go messing about in old watermills. Or even, come to that, to suggest a weekend with her a hotel. If anything ever happened between them, it would be because she'd pushed it. Not like Jack.

She laughed at the absurdity of the thought. Or was it so absurd? After all, he was unmarried, there'd be no complications like poor little Sonia to feel guilty about. Her mum was all for it. 'No Thanks Mum!' she thought No harm though, in keeping her options open!!

Chapter 18 – Chelmsford – August 10th to

16th

It was now the first day of her Summer Holidays and she'd just seen Jack off on the ferry to join his ship at Rotterdam. Tomorrow, she'd be waiting at Heathrow for her mother and children arriving back from Canada. It'd be lovely to see them again and she was sure the kids would have acquired Canadian accents.

Oh Hell! She'd just remembered Tom Murchison is coming on Sunday with new information regarding Jim and his possible whereabouts in Somalia. Since he was Jim's boss, it had been like a Royal Command in a way. Even though she'd put him off on the previous weekends, he'd still persisted. What on earth could he tell her that he couldn't say over the phone or by Internet? What has this new island got to do with Jim anyway?

OK, she'd enjoyed having dinner with him in the French restaurant the previous month and had appreciated his help over Jim's abduction. He always seems to welcome her

phone calls, now at longer and longer intervals, but surely he doesn't think they meant anything more than friendly conversations. If he wants to see me for reasons other than Jim's abduction, then she'd have to put him off gently. After all, he is Jim's boss, Jack's as well come to that!

The flight from Toronto was on time with two happy excited kids and her equally loquacious mother all talking at the same time. Jet lag soon took over though as she drove through London. By Chelmsford all three were fast asleep.

Tom arrived on the Sunday right to the minute, with a nice bunch of flowers. This was something that used to annoy her about Jim, his obsessive punctuality. She was sick of arriving on time at dinner parties and finding themselves alone with the husband while the wife was still cooking the dinner. Once her hostess had even been in the shower. She'd hated arriving at parties on the dot when all the other invitees were at least half an hour late.

Thanking Tom, Angela filled a vase from the kitchen tap and put the flowers in; a nice bunch of mixed summer blossoms, although she would have preferred a potted plant. She wore a powder blue summer dress with the hem just above her knees and a fairly modest neckline. Both children were wearing 'I Love Toronto' tee-shirts.

"There's been a slight change of plan since I phoned you last." Angela said, "William has been invited to a circus at Southend by the mother of one of his school friends. There's a group of them going and it seemed a shame for William to miss out. Laura and another little girl are having a 'sleepover' at the other mother's house. She'll be leaving about two with her toothbrush and nightie."

"I hope they enjoy themselves." Tom said. "I propose taking all three of you out to lunch, a restaurant if there's time or a pub lunch if not."

"Sorry Tom, William's got to go before One and Laura soon after at Two. I'll make some lunch here; salad OK for

you since it's nice and warm? How about a drink now? I've got Gin and Tonic, Whisky or Cinzano Bianco."

"Gin and Tonic please, but only the one since I'll be driving and it's a long weary route from here to Harrow. Pity I have to pass through the whole of London, in fact it might have been easier to come by train." He said, sitting down in a nice comfortable chair.

"You could use the M25 I think, but that would probably be just as bad." Angela said, referring to the circular ring road round London. Why don't you take your jacket off, it's hot.

They chatted generally for a bit after that until noon when she got up to prepare lunch. She asked Tom to keep the children amused. He ended up playing a game with William on Internet, while Laura played with some dominoes, sometimes interrupting their game to William's increasing fury.

After lunch, a car outside hooted and William left. Soon after that Cynthia, Angela's friend, arrived with her daughter and led two highly excited little girls away for their first 'Sleepover'. After washing up, Tom and Angela settled down in comfortably in armchairs.

"Right Tom, what have you got to tell me regarding Jim? Something about the island I think you said?" Angela asked, opening the subject. She sat back and waited for him to reply.

Tom struggled up from the depths of the armchair, unrolled an Admiralty Chart he'd brought with him and spread it out on the dining table. He used teacups as weights to stop it from rolling up again. It was BA chart 4071 showing the whole northern part of the Indian Ocean. With his finger he traced the whole Somali coastline from Kismayu to Cape Guardafui.

"As you can see, there are no islands with bays behind them until we reach here." He said indicating a small island

close to Cape Gardafui. "From Mogadishu, until that point, the whole coast is smooth. OK,"

"OK." She affirmed, wondering what it was all about. Tom rolled that chart up and unrolled another chart he'd brought with him. BA Chart 2970, the *Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden*.

"This is a larger scale chart of the area where I think your husband could be. He was abducted from his ship at Eyl. The warship claims to have found an Island with a bay behind it about here." He said, pointing to an area some thirty-five miles north of Eyl. "At that point, there is a small straight line, unfortunately too small to measure against the Latitude scale." He pointed to it and continued.

"With some colleagues, I was intrigued by this and we looked up the Pilot Book or Sailing Directions." With that he delved into a brief case he'd brought with him and pulled out a tattered dog-eared copy of the relevant Sailing Directions. Opening it at a page with its corner already turned down, he said:

"That small straight line is really a cliff, with low-lying land to the north and south of it. Also to the west or inshore side. This cliff could have been the Island the helicopter pilot thought he saw." Tom said firmly.

"But how could he possibly mistake it for an Island, with a kind of bay behind it?" She cried, unbelievably. "It would be impossible to mistake that cliff for an Island?"

"Perhaps because it really *is* an island and there really *is* a kind of bay behind it. Maybe it really does exist. If so, then I'd bet my bottom dollar that is where your husband could be." Tom replied. "The whole coastline from Mogadishu, up to the island of Zaafan is just one long uninterrupted coastline. Eyl, where some of the hijacked ships are being held, is just an anchorage." He paused, watching the expression on her face, then said:

“If this island really does exist with a stretch of sea behind it, as the Helicopter Pilot claims; unknown to the rest of the world; then I would be prepared to bet this is where your husband has been abducted to.”

“But surely it would have been found by now? Ships or planes would have noticed it long ago.” She exclaimed.

“It could have always been there, but I think it is recent. An earthquake could have caused it, for instance. Or something on that scale.”

“An earthquake? One sufficiently large to have caused this without anybody noticing? I don’t think it exists at all.” Angela concluded with finality.

She rose from the table and started collecting up the teacups, which caused the chart to roll up again and roll off the table on to the floor. Tom was annoyed at his theory being so lightly dismissed.

“Don’t you *want* it to exist? Don’t you *want* to consider the possibility that your husband is still alive and being forced to work there?” Tom said imprudently, his annoyance showing. “Don’t you *want* to consider other possibilities?”

She was livid; her face became white with fury. He was her husband’s boss but how *dare* he talk to her like that! She banged the cup she was holding into its saucer, nearly breaking it. She only just stopped herself from slapping his face.

“OK Tom. All I want is my husband home unharmed. The British Government could and should be doing everything to find out where he is and to rescue him. The bits and pieces you have strung together are not at all convincing and as for that secret island!!! I think you are wasting your time as well as mine.” She said, almost spitting with anger.

Tom was shocked by her reaction. He'd thought he'd achieved something definite and was annoyed when his theories were discounted as an unconvincing waste of time. More so, because he was doing this on top of his normal daily work, as a self-imposed chore. He considered walking out of the house, but decided to apologise before leaving.

"I'm sorry to have upset you, really sorry. I'd better be off now." He said sadly, stooping down to pick the rolled up chart off the floor.

He was angry but was reluctant to have a row with her. What Tom didn't know, was that his questions had stung her badly; it was less than a week since she'd been at Harwich seeing Jack off after spending two enjoyable weekends with a man who was somebody else's husband. Tom seemed so sure Jim was still alive; which, if true, meant that she would have to consider herself an adulteress.

"I'm sorry too Tom," she said, calming down. "Please sit down while I go and make a pot of tea. Or would you prefer a drink?" She said, controlling her quick burst of temper and smiling at him.

"I was only trying to help you and give you some hope." Tom said plaintively, starting to put a rubber band round the chart.

"Yes I know. Please sit down, I won't be a minute." She said, getting up and going into the kitchen. Returning with the tea tray, she smiled at Tom and said:

"Look Tom, I'm sorry I blew up. Let's go back to where you think the island could be. Also why you think Jim could be hiding out there."

Tom hesitated, the abrupt way she'd dismissed his theory had dismayed him. Alarmed, she saw his annoyance, remembered that he was her husband's boss and hastily decided to placate him.

“Please Tom, please stay and tell me what you were going to tell me before all this started. I promise to take your findings seriously.” She insisted, smiling.

She put her hand on his arm, relieved to feel the muscle in his arm flex involuntarily. She crossed her legs and saw his eyes flicker down, then quickly up again.

“OK then.” He said, relenting. “For a start, I still can’t believe a fully trained naval helicopter pilot could make so basic an error. He was looking for Pirate’s nests, I agree, but I think the island he discovered actually does exist.” Tom stated gruffly, wary of her temper.

“Your faith in helicopter pilots is touching, Tom. We’ll just have to wait and see, won’t we?” She said brightly, uncrossing her legs and taking her hand away.

Looking everywhere except at her legs and still feeling the warmth of her hand on his arm, he continued:

“A couple of colleagues and I examined the chart carefully, reading the relevant section of the Pilot Book for East Africa. It’s all conjecture of course, but I think I have an inkling of how the island came to be formed.”

“How Tom? How can an island be formed, hiding a bay? Has the area never been surveyed? I’m really sorry, but it sounds rather like Science Fiction to me.” She said.

“Maybe it has always been there, with the entrances not visible from the sea, only by air. That is one possibility. That cliff I told you about is about two and three quarter miles long, sheer with low lying coastal land, all three sides of it - as I mentioned before. We discussed an earthquake being the cause, but it seemed unlikely. Do you remember that Tsunami that happened a few years ago?”

“The Tsunami that washed all those Swedish tourists away? Yes of course I remember it, on Boxing Day wasn’t it? Anyway, what about it?” She asked.

“I think the land behind this cliff could have been below sea level. We thought the Tsunami would not have been

high enough to reach the top of the cliff, being too high and sheer; but it would certainly have been high enough to flood over the low lying coast either side. When the wave receded, it may have left a salt water lake behind. Maybe the pilot saw that”

“I don’t know what to say, Tom. It all seems so very far-fetched and full of ifs and buts. As you say, it could explain the bay as being a lake full of salty water, but doesn’t explain the island itself, does it? Or what it has got to do with Jim, or where he could be hidden? I seem to remember you saying the pilot saw a couple of fishing boats there with some men

fishing.” Angela said, trying to let him down lightly.

“Yes I think he did but maybe he got confused. What were the fishing boats doing there? Fishing in seawater or fresh water from a lake?” Tom said, realising he hadn’t convinced her.

“Sorry Tom! It sounds like a good theory, but there are far too many of those ‘don’t knows’. First of all, did the Tsunami really do all that much damage to Somalia? The news seemed mainly about Thailand and the tourists. Sumatra as well, and something about India and Sri Lanka, but nothing much about Africa. Secondly, you assume the area behind the cliff really is below sea level. Thirdly, why doesn’t the water evaporate or sink back into the sand?” Angela asked. She was beginning to wonder when he was going to leave. William would be home soon, full of excitement.

“According to Wikipedia, the tsunami badly hit the Somali coast as well. Another theory we discussed is erosion over the years, the sea eating away the two low bits of littoral either side; with seawater seeping in to fill the area behind the island?”

“Sounds more probable than a Tsunami.” she said, hoping she’d smoothed things out between them.

“I did warn you it was all a bit ‘up in the air’ as it were. If or when the island is confirmed, then my reasoning could be right. This is the reason I wanted to talk to you about it instead of over the phone.” Tom said; although not sure himself if the island really did exist.

“Well, it’s not enough to go to the Government with, is it?

What do we have to show them? A couple of emails from Somalia; a chart missing from an anchored ship, plus what a helicopter pilot thought might be an island. Are you really prepared to go to your Chairman with that, asking for Government intervention?” Angela questioned him.

“No, at least not yet but I’ll continue keeping my eyes open. My office staff seems to think I’m losing my marbles over this and so, apparently, do you! Anyway, thanks for the lunch and at least for listening to me. I’ll be off now on the long trek back to Harrow. Maybe I’ll try the M25.”

“Oh Tom! Don’t go off all disappointed because of my doubts. What you say does make some sense, assuming the Island and lake do exist. If they are verified, at least by another ‘copter flight, then I’ll be on your side. OK?”

Taking a Road Map out of a drawer, she opened it out on the table and found the relevant page. Leaning over the table she continued:

“Look Tom. When you get to Brentwood on your way home, why not take the M25 as far as Chorley Wood, then the A404 to Harrow. Or you could go the long way round via Hertford, but I wouldn’t advise it if you don’t know the route. Anyway please keep in touch. I’m sorry for my burst of temper and hope we are still friends” She traced the route with her finger and smiled at him.

By this time, it was getting on for five o’clock, Tom reluctantly grabbed his attaché case and took the long drive back to Harrow, stopping at a McDonalds for meal. She

was in his thoughts all the way home, so much so, he nearly missed the A404 turn off to Harrow.

Chapter 19 – London – August 17th

Tom Murchison's phone rang; it was the Merchant Navy Officers Union enquiring about an accident on one of the Company's ships. Not the *West Wycombe* this time, thankfully; perhaps the three men he'd put back on that ship had succeeded in stopping the bad luck! This was an accident during lifeboat drill on the LPG Carrier, the *High Wycombe*. A winch handle had spun off and hit an officer in the face, breaking his jaw.

Since compensation would obviously be demanded, Tom made some notes reflecting his views of the accident. Enclosing them with copies of the deck and engine logs, as well as the Official Log Book entries; he passed them on to the Company's legal department. Finally, he advised the Human Resources Department to send a replacement Officer to the ship.

Lifeboat accidents are unfortunately quite common, often due to lack of maintenance or bad handling. He also sent a fax to the fleet describing the incident and advising ways to stop further accidents with lifeboats.

Tom thought privately that Lifeboat Davits were fine for lowering lifeboats into the sea in an Emergency but not up to the job of safely recovering them – or even exercising them at weekly drills. It has been stated that Lifeboats, over the years, have killed more seafarers than they have saved. Tom hoped the *West Wycombe's* bad luck had not been transferred to the *High Wycombe*.

Thinking about the Union, Tom picked up a copy of the 'Telegraph' news-sheet, published by them. This is a good informative piece of journalism he receives monthly; keeping an eye on developments, as well as other Companies forthcoming pay demands. Nautilus UK recently joined up with a similar Dutch Officer's Union. The UK branch also includes ex-Officers working ashore in industries and firms allied to shipping. Tom had been a member during his career at sea; glad to have had them behind him, and still receives the 'Telegraph'.

Reading through the 'Letters to the Editor' section, an amusing letter caught his attention. The author jokingly described a theft when his ship had been anchored off Eyl; an attempt had been made to steal a complete Seafarers Library. The Second Mate had seen a Pirate taking the distinctive orange coloured box down to a launch alongside. The joke being that the box was empty, the books having previously been taken out and put into a bookcase.

Tom remembered these libraries, sent out to ships by the Marine Society, now called '*The Marine Society and Sea Cadets*'; the boxes contain at least fifty hard backed books as well as several soft backed ones. They can be exchanged through the ship's agents at various ports and is a worthwhile service.

Turning back to the International section, Tom was astonished to see what could possibly be another pointer to Jim's whereabouts. A small paragraph referred to a Swedish ship complaining about looting in general and the loss of a pair of good binoculars at the same anchorage. Both items were categorised as looting but Tom was not so sure.

They could have been stolen to order, as the chart from the *Brave Spirit* could have been. Looking at the dates, he noticed the theft of the binoculars happened the same day the chart had been stolen; the Seafarers Library box having been stolen a fair while later.

These two items, together with the odd emails received by *Brice and Somerville* as well as the GPS Company, convinced Tom to try and get his Chairman to act. First of all he'd better tell Angela about the latest coincidences. Thinking about her, Tom was glad he had persisted in going to Chelmsford that Sunday and talking his theory over with her, despite her attempts to put him off. He'd been annoyed at the time, but was now willing to overlook them as well as her spat of temper. She was often in his thoughts, despite his attempts to block them.

He phoned Angela to say he was coming and caught the next train from Liverpool Street for the forty-five minute journey to Chelmsford, where she met him at the station. The house was noisy with her children both wearing '*Toronto, star of Canada*' Tee-shirts and a couple of their friends. Her mother was there trying, but not always succeeding, to control the unruly bunch. Before starting to discuss the latest developments with Angela, Tom told the children a joke he'd heard lately and considered apt.

"What did the Lone Ranger say to Tonto before crossing the border?" He'd asked the assembled children and adults. None of them knew.

"The Lone Ranger said '*On to Toronto pronto Tonto!*'" He said laughing, stressing all the *ontos* "Go on admit it; you all thought I meant the Mexican border didn't you?"

They all politely laughed, except young Laura who kept telling him it was Toronto she'd been to, not Mexico. After that Angela and Tom found a slightly quieter corner to discuss the new items over a cup of tea. He opened the newssheet and pointed out the two that he'd ringed; explaining their possible relevance.

"I want to try going to the authorities now, with all the information backed up by charts and copies of the email messages from *Brice and Somerville*. Why sit on it all?" Tom said, firmly, replacing his empty teacup on the tray.

“Yes Tom, I’m inclined to agree with you this time. Jim as you must know, having sailed with him, is an avid reader. As you say, the theft of a box full of books in English could possibly have been for him. He’ll go frantic if he’s alive and finds out they’ve only stolen the box! By the way, have you heard anything from the Royal Navy yet? You know? About the helicopter finding that uncharted island?” She enquired, wondering how long it had taken him to pluck up the courage to come and see her to discuss things.

She yelled at the children to keep quiet, her mother said she was doing her best, if Angela didn’t like it, she could do the other thing.

Tom wondered what ‘the other thing’ could be in this case. He was content though, basking in the family atmosphere. He could see, despite Jim Turner’s absence, there was a good relationship between adults and children in the house.

“No. Quite frankly I’ve finished that line of thought,” Tom said, raising his voice, “The Navy have said nothing, nor is there anything in the newspapers or on TV. To tell the truth, until these latest things came up about the binoculars and library, I was considering dropping the whole thing. It was only the thought of you that made me carry on.”

She smiled her thanks and poured another cup of tea for him, adding just one lump of sugar; not the two lumps he’d asked for, also adding milk that he didn’t want. But he drank it anyway! Looking at Tom over the rim of her tea cup, she said thoughtfully:

“Right then Tom, who do we see in authority about all this? Don’t look at me like that, I’m coming with you. I’m on holiday now and Mum can come and stay here and look after the children. God alone knows, she’s had plenty of practice lately. Don’t you dare say No!”

She was glaring at him as she said that last sentence, ready to fight.

“Of course you can come with me, if that’s OK with your Mother.” He said. “To start with, I’ll have to get the OK from my Chairman; he’s in a better position than I am for dealing with the Government, probably the office of the Foreign Secretary. I’m glad you’re coming along as well; a good looking wife always helps. Maybe you can shed a few tears!”

“Oh come off it Tom! I’m sure a determined woman will cut more ice than one weeping. Look at the mother of that poor little Madeline who was kidnapped in Portugal two years ago. I hope to be as strong as she is, at least outwardly.”

She argued.

Agitated, Angela dropped the biscuit she was holding. As she bent down to pick it up, she heard Tom chanting:

“And One; And Two; And Three; And Four; And..., it’s OK you’re safe now.”

The room had gone quiet; they were all looking at him, astonished. Tom having caught them by surprise.

“What’s all this *and one and two* business Tom, why am I safe?” Angela asked.

“Have you never heard of the *Five Second Rule*, Angela? If you drop something edible on the floor and pick it up in less than five seconds, it’s said to be safe to eat. Before all the little bacteria and other nasty things recover from the shock and become active.”

“There are certainly no bacteria or other nasty things on *this* carpet, young man!” Mrs Patterson said severely, hiding a smile. “I cleaned it myself this morning.”

Tom was mortified, he’d gone and put his foot right in it again – a habit of his; he’d intended to amuse Angela and the kids, but now he’d gone and offended her mother! Red-faced he mumbled his apologies and said he certainly didn’t mean to say the carpet was dirty. By this time Angela was laughing at his discomfiture.

“Why did you say *And One, And Two* like that, why not just say one, two, three?” She asked, thoroughly enjoying his embarrassment. Tom mumbled an answer.

“It’s an accurate way to count seconds. We use it at sea when counting the time between flashes for light houses and buoys. I use it for thunderstorms as well”

“For thunderstorms?” She queried. Doing her best to keep a straight face.

“Yes, I count the time in seconds between the lightening flash and the clap of thunder, then divide by two, this tells me how far off it is in miles. You know! The speed of light being more or less twice the speed of sound.” Tom concluded. They were all staring at him.

“Well yes.” Angela said. “It’s rather nice to know these things. I just can’t wait ‘till the next thunderstorm comes. Pity there are no lighthouses in Chelmsford to practice on. I think we’d better get back to what we were discussing before.”

“It works!” William suddenly shouted. “I’ve been counting the seconds with that clock. There you are. Look - *and one and two and...*”

“Ok you can stop now; I think we’ve all got the idea.” Angela said, to general laughter.

“Right then,” Tom continued. “Can you manage to be at the Office by ten tomorrow morning? No, we’d better make it Wednesday morning to give me more chance to get everything together. If that’s OK with you, I’ll arrange a meeting with the Chairman for Wednesday morning.”

Angela agreed, her Mother agreed to come and look after the children; at the same time making sure the carpets were five seconds clean, in case fumbling fingers dropped other edible things on the floor. Tom winced. Looking at Angela, Mrs Patterson said:

“Make sure you come back early enough to get William ready for the cub show. He’d be terribly upset if you miss it, since he’s got a major role in it.”

William, behind her back nodded and made a face at Tom. Laura was still looking at the clock, using her fingers to count the seconds – noiselessly mouthing the words.

That settled, Tom said good-bye, shook hands with her mother and kissed the children who were starting to call him Uncle Tom. Angela drove him to the station and raised her face to accept and return the airy kiss on both cheeks that had developed between them. He returned to London, cleared his desk and then went home hoping to get an early night.

* * * * *

Tuesday morning Tom reviewed the items he had gathered, wrote notes explaining the ones not immediately obvious and photo-copied everything, which he sorted into two files. That done, he arranged a meeting with the Chairman for the following morning, without mentioning the presence of Mrs Turner. The Chairman was reluctant at first, saying he was busy preparing notes for the next board meeting, but eventually agreed.

Upon Entering the Chairman's Office soon after ten on Wednesday morning, Tom introduced Angela to Mr Harding, who was surprised that Tom hadn't forewarned him. She was attractively dressed in a knee-length black skirt and a simple white blouse. To Tom's eyes, she looked exactly right.

"Mr Chairman, may I present Mrs Turner, the wife of Chief Officer Turner who was abducted on April 12th. I have involved her in every step of my attempt to find out what has happened to her husband. As you are aware, I believe that Turner is still alive and being forced to work in Somalia. She was not always in agreement with my theories, but is now convinced." Tom announced, not at all sure she really *was* convinced.

"Good Morning, Mrs Turner, what a pleasant surprise. Please accept my personal condolences, as well as those on

behalf of the Company for what has happened to your husband. Please sit down.” The chairman said, surprised and not over pleased.

They shook hands, and Tom then presented all his findings to the chairman, bit by bit, with the relevant dates, stating:

“As we all know, a Company Chief Officer was forcibly abducted from the *Dawn Splendour* on April 12th this year. No reason was ever given, nor has there been a separate ransom demand for him. He appears to have disappeared into thin air.”

“Just over two weeks later, on April 28th, chart BA 2970, the *Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden* was stolen from the Maltese flagged ship *Brave Spirit*. This was obviously taken by the pirates although they strenuously denied this. Superintendent Jones picked up this bit of information at Europoort, which I confirmed with the Owners of the ship. The stolen chart was not the one in use at the time. It was in the chart drawer, underneath the one in use, almost as if they were searching for that particular chart.”

“Six weeks later, June 3rd, another Superintendent, Mr W. Stent, had dinner with a friend who now works for *Brice and Somerville*. His friend stated odd emails had been received from an agency in Somalia, which calls itself “The ‘*Somali Marine Agency*”

“This I confirmed with B & S the following day. Neither they nor my several contacts have found any evidence that this Agency actually exists. The email address seems odd for an agency, more like an individual address, rather than an organisation. These are copies of the emails. You will notice that the last one from Somalia is nonsense.”

“Due to the correspondence with *Brice and Somerville*, I rang up other firms with maritime connections and found one that sold GPS systems. They had also had received an

odd email from the same source in Somalia and were equally mystified.”

“On July 15th, during a meeting organised by the Honourable Company of Master Mariners, a Superintendent from Bibby’s mentioned that his son had just returned from a warship patrolling the Indian Ocean. Apparently their helicopter pilot reckoned he’d found an uncharted island, with some kind of bay between it and the mainland; also uncharted. It was generally thought that the pilot confused the sighting with another island further north. This has not been confirmed to my knowledge. It could be relevant, since the sea or bay behind the island is the most likely place where Mr Turner could be working.”

“Two days ago on Monday August 17th, having received a call from the Officers’ Union referring to an accident on one of our ships, I decided to read their News-sheet, ‘The Telegraph’. There I found a report from a Swedish ship, stating that a pair of binoculars had been stolen while waiting for the ransom to be paid. Stolen apparently by the hijackers the same day as the chart went missing from the *Brave Spirit*. This was denied by the pirates at the time.

In the same edition I found a ‘*Letter to the Editor*’ referring to a stolen Seafarers Library, also while anchored off Eyl. Mr Turner reads a lot, as Mrs Turner here can verify and the stolen case of books could well have been for him. The binoculars as well.” Tom said, pausing for breath.

The Chairman looked up at that. He’d been informed by Tom of each item as they occurred, but had not taken them seriously. He’d kept quiet during the time Tom was outlining his case, as it were. This, in itself was pretty unusual for him.

“The specific dates and times are all there, Mr Chairman. As you can see, each incident means nothing taken by itself, but put together they could indicate something strange going on in Somalia. In my view, Chief Officer Turner could well be forcibly involved with

whatever is happening there. He was taken off his ship by force; none of the pirate gangs have ever claimed responsibility, nor has a ransom been demanded for him.” Tom concluded, a bit out of breath.

“Exactly what do the two of you think I can do?” Mr Harding asked. “I can see the points you have presented *may* indicate something bizarre happening in Somalia. However jumping to the conclusion that Mrs Turner’s husband is involved against his will, is a quantum leap.”

“We want to go to the authorities, the Foreign Office or some other Ministry, maybe as far as the Prime Minister himself and find out what steps should be taken to prove all this and, if possible to release Mr Turner. There are too many coincidences, all pointing to him being behind it all. I personally think the British Government *should* become involved; in view of what *could* be happening there. They *should* be concerned what Turner is being forced to do. Look Mr Harding, if I’m right, then it could be a far more serious problem involving security and God knows what else.”

“We have already been to the authorities when he was first kidnapped, with no results. It was the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, wasn’t it?” Mr Harding protested.

“Yes, I know we did Mr Chairman, but we didn’t have all the bits of information I’ve picked up since then.” Tom said, pressing home his point.

“Information? Or just a group of unrelated incidents? Anyway, why are you involved, Captain Murchison? I would have expected the Human Resources Manager to have followed this up, rather than you. You have your own work to do.” Mr Harding said.

“I am involved because no-one else seemed bothered to try and find out. Also because I sent him there, instead of the Officer chosen by the Personnel Department whose leave was just finishing.” Tom stated.

“Well, why did you do that? Did you consider the chosen Officer was not good enough for the job? In that case, why was he promoted?” Mr Harding asked.

“I did it because I knew Turner well and thought he was the best man for the job, having often sailed together. I also knew he was short of money after buying a new house. I deeply regret my interference and have apologised to the Personnel Superintendent. Also to Mrs Turner here. Those are my reasons for getting involved.” Tom stated, aware his reasons were not all that good.

Angela looked up at Tom in surprise, she had no idea that Jim had spoken to him about their finances, nor was she pleased about it. He hadn’t apologised to her either.

“You have caused this mess, Captain, acting against Company policy. Now you want me to pick up the pieces and put things right. Just what do you think I can do?”

The Chairman was frowning and obviously annoyed at being driven into a corner by his Chief Marine Superintendent.

“Yes Mr Chairman, I admit I was in the wrong and I must apologise to you as well. However, the point is, if things had gone ahead as they should have done, then *another* Company Chief Officer could well be in the same situation that Turner is in now. In which case, either myself or the Personnel Superintendent would be sitting here with the same demand.” Tom persisted, his body tensed.

By now, Tom was determined to go to the top himself, bypassing his Chairman if necessary. He started to gather up his papers, intending to leave the office with Angela when Mr Harding spoke:

“Right then, Captain Murchison, give me a day or two to find out who to contact. Good job the Press don’t know about this.” Mr Harding said, looking worried and wringing his hands.

“The fact that a British Chief Officer was involved was never mentioned at the time. After all, it was a French Navy

helicopter that witnessed the abduction. Neither they nor the Liberian Company stated his nationality. We discussed all this at the time, didn't we? Shall we both come back here in a day or so?" Tom asked, keeping up the pressure.

Mr Harding thought a bit, asked his secretary to look up the telephone number of the Foreign and Commonwealth office on her computer. He then dialled the number on his cell phone. After telling them what he'd learnt from Tom, he asked for a rendezvous. Putting the phone down, he rang another number and started to repeat it all again.

He soon stopped and passed the phone to Tom, who explained their concern over Mr Turner and what could be happening in Somalia then passed the phone back to the Chairman. To their surprise, an appointment was made for Friday, in just two days' time. Mr Harding, still listening on the phone, looked up at Tom and asked if he had copies of all the Emails received from *Brice and Somerville* and the other firm, as well the relevant Telegraph Newssheet.

"Yes, Mr Chairman, I've got all the originals in my office." Tom stated, feeling he was getting somewhere at last.

The Chairman repeated Tom's words into the phone, listened

and then nodded and put the phone down.

"Please go down and bring the file containing the originals up to this office. At the same time ask one of your junior Superintendents to come up as well."

Mystified, Tom complied and gave the file and newssheet to the Chairman, who put them into a large Kraft envelope and sealed it. He then handed the envelope to the junior Superintendent, saying:

"Right Mr Stephens, take this file directly to the Ministry of Defence; tell the Security men you are to give this file to a Mr Dudley personally – with the seal still intact. To no one else, not even the Security guard there, OK?" With that he turned to Tom and Angela, saying:

“Both you and Mrs Turner arrange to be here in this office by ten Friday morning. You can go now, but do not tell anybody what has transpired in this office. On your way down, ask the Human Resources Superintendent to come up. I have a few questions to put to him about this business and why he let you overrule him. Also I think we should stop loaning our Officers out to other Companies. I’ll see you both on Friday 21st then. Goodbye and keep your eyes open for more strange things coming out of Somalia.”

Angela and Tom left the Chairman’s office, alerted the Human Resources Manager about his coming Interview with the Chairman and then went to a local coffee bar. They sat down to a much needed cup of coffee and sausage sandwiches. Tom had offered her a proper lunch but she settled for the sandwiches. The coffee was far better than the stuff the office machine pours out and the place was brightly lit and colourful.

“Well you have certainly stirred up a real hornet’s nest haven’t you Tom? I wonder why the Ministry of Defence are involved. Do they think Somalia is going to attack Britain with my husband in the front line leading the charge? What on earth have you gone and started?” Angela asked, blowing delicately on the coffee to cool it down.

She was on the point of getting a pack of cigarettes out of her handbag, when she made a face and put them back, remembering the recent non-smoking rules in public places.

“God knows what I’ve started.” Tom said, equally astonished. “Whatever it is, it seems to be serious though. I feel sure Ministries don’t schedule immediate meetings unless something is going on.”

“Well there’s no point in guessing now is there?” Angela said. “Another thing; the Chairman certainly seemed upset about you overruling the Personnel man. You think your job is safe?”

“Why aye, my job will be OK. I might get a *Letter of Reprimand* and be warned not to let it happen again but I don’t think so. By the way, I didn’t know you smoked.”

She pointed her cup of coffee at him; her elbows on the table and said thoughtfully:

“I only started smoking again after Jim was kidnapped and I’ll stop the day he comes back. Be careful with him Tom, the Chairman I mean. I saw the look in his eyes when you were explaining why you overruled the Human Resources man. It sounded as if you’d favoured one Officer at the expense of another one. He gave me a quick glance too, as if wondering what kind of relationship we have with each other...”

“Relationship?” Tom cried, rather too loudly. “There wasn’t one! I certainly have never considered one, what put that stupid idea into his head?” He was indignant.

A couple of heads at other tables turned in their direction. Tom was lying; occasional thoughts of just such a relationship *had* come into his mind, but he would never dare tell her that. Angela smiled and said:

“Hey, not so loud Tom, everybody’s looking at us. You must admit though, what you said about you and Jim sailing together previously and knowing about the new house costs didn’t sound very convincing. Oh dear, that’s not the word I want. It was convincing inasmuch as you believed it, but to him it must have sounded odd, as if you were doing a kind of favour to one of your officers, at the expense of another Officer. Incidentally what *did* Jim tell you about our money worries?”

“Not much at all. In fact you have let slip far more than he ever did when we’ve been talking together over the phone all this time. I know what you mean though, even to my ears, the reason I replaced the other officer with your husband *did* sound a bit strange. I only hope he doesn’t get the impression I interfered and arranged things so we could have an affair.”

“An affair with Jim’s Boss? Come off it! Look, I’ve got to get home now to get William prepared for his part in the Cub’s show.” She said, laughing.

Before she could get up from her seat, Tom’s Cell Phone rang. It was his office.

“**Chesham**? What’s that? She’s alongside now at the Lay-by berth? Lay-by berth where? OK Thameshaven. OK, I’m coming back to the office now and I’ll give Captain Knowles a ring” He said. He turned to Angela and said:

“Sorry Angela, I’ve got to go now, apparently the **Chesham’s** on a lay-by berth near Thameshaven, waiting for her cargo to be ready.” Tom said, “Jack Knowles wants to leave the ship for a day or two while waiting. Since there is a makee-learnie Captain aboard, I’ll let him go. Right then, I’d better be getting back. See you Friday morning at the office then.”

His mind was on the ship, thereby missing her look of consternation. Angela quickly kissed him on the cheek and left the bar, stunned. As she knew he would, Jack phoned her later and cheerfully suggested a meeting followed by a night in a hotel. She brusquely refused since it was William’s Cub show that evening and she had too much on her mind anyway.

She regretted her affair with Jack although the two weekends had been pleasant and something she’d needed. Not specifically for the sex, but the chance to get away from her routine at home and at work. A chance to be looked after; meals provided and no children to bother about. Oh, the sex had been OK, at least until that bit of groping in the old watermill! Shuddering she remembered the Old Man’s evil face peering down at them! However, enough was enough!

Jack tried hard to persuade her over the phone; she was adamant in her refusal but was unable to explain why. She could almost feel his anger seeping through the phone but she persisted. He evidently hadn’t received her letter yet!

When Tom had come to her home the previous Sunday and posed those three questions, she'd been ashamed and badly shaken.

She was now partly convinced that Jim *was* still alive and would eventually be home. If that was the case, then she'd wait for him, however long it'd take. If Jim never came home, she knew she'd eventually take another husband, but not Jack. She smiled, remembering the indignant way Tom had denied a relationship between them. He'd been far too indignant! He was obviously attracted to her.

Why, oh why, had Jim agreed to go to that ship and create all this mess?

Chapter 20 – Ministry of Defence – August

19th

Angela arrived at Head Office on the Friday morning; looking beautiful and if anything slightly flushed and breathless. She was dressed differently this time, in a smart blue business suit and a white blouse, her legs bare. She and Tom were both ready to confront the Chairman, although nothing new concerning Jim had come in since the previous Wednesday.

Listening to the radio earlier that morning, Tom heard that a tanker had been hijacked over a thousand miles from the Somali coast. This meant two things, either the pirates were becoming desperate due to Warships in the Gulf of Aden, or they were showing the world just how well organised they are.

He called the Chairman on the internal phone and was told to go up to his office, where they were asked to sit down and wait. A few minutes later another man entered the room. They were introduced to a Mr Dudley from the

Ministry of Defence who, once the greetings and hand shakings were over, opened the meeting. He was carrying Tom's file, but didn't open it.

"I have already expressed my views to Mr Harding," he said, indicating the Chairman, "and will repeat them to you both. Tell me why, for God's Sake, were we not informed about a British Merchant Naval Officer being abducted in Somalia? We could have made enquiries some four months ago, maybe even secured his release through the government of Somaliland. I consider you have all been very remiss."

He was a dapper little man in his fifties, smartly suited as a London business man, wearing a tie whose colours were probably those of a good public school. He looked like a man who knew his own mind and didn't suffer fools gladly. Dapper and little he might be, but he had a definite air of authority about him.

"I'm sorry Mr Dudley," Angela spoke before Tom had a chance to reply, "Captain Murchison here was keeping it quiet, so as not to warn the Press. He thought the paparazzi would make my life a misery through that awful time after my husband's abduction." Angela said quickly.

"Mr Dudley," Tom chipped in quickly, aware that she was answering the wrong question. "I went to the Foreign Office myself on behalf of Mrs Turner, soon after the kidnapping. I was told the Government would never entertain ransom demands, even for British nationals. I got the impression that it was up to the Liberian Government to take action, since he was an Officer on one of their ships."

"Presumably when you contacted the junior staff there, you did not have all the information you have produced now. They would have assumed the abduction was part of the ransom demand. An added pressure on the Shipping Company. It now appears to be something totally separate from the original hijacking. Was the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office informed that a separate ransom demand was never received for Mr Turner?"

"Er... no, not by me." Tom mumbled, a bit put out; sitting down again

"Did the Liberian Company receive any demand for Mr Turner in addition to the original ransom demand?" Mr Dudley asked quietly.

"Not to my knowledge." Tom replied. "I don't think so, since they would have passed it on to us."

The Chairman told Mr Dudley that he also had contacted the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and was more or less told the same thing. Although they *had* tried to contact Somalia and Puntland but had found nobody in authority able to talk to them; Somaliland had stated categorically Turner was not in their country. He also admitted failing to inform the FCO that no ransom demand had been received for Turner. Mr Dudley looked distinctly peeved, which was not a good sign.

"It would have been a lot better, Captain, if you and Mr Harding had acted together; instead of individually, neither of you subsequently following it up. We might have been able to use other means of gathering information. Be that as it may, we now have to consider exactly what is happening in Somalia or Puntland; whether Mr Turner is involved, assuming he is still alive. We have to consider whether this concerns a new aspect of piracy or worse."

The chairman was concerned the Company could face a possible scandal if Turner was involved in a situation further enhancing piracy. He addressed Tom directly:

"You, Captain Murchison, you have caused this mess in the first place by sending Mr Turner to a Flag of Convenience ship, the ownership of which is hidden behind proxies. In addition, you have wasted Company time by chasing a lot of vague items you call clues. This was not your business; you should have turned the whole thing over

to the Human Resources Superintendent. He could have used his own staff."

'Jesus wept' Tom thought, but didn't say. 'The crafty old bugger's trying to lay the blame on me! The Human Resources Super could never have got this far.' Angela stiffened; stood up and blurted out angrily:

"That's not fair!" She stated furiously. "You are both criticising the only man who has at least done *something*. He told me that he *has* consulted you, Mr Chairman, at every step, every new piece of information he found or suspected. You obviously refused to believe him, so did I at first. You should also know, Mr Harding, that both my husband *and* Captain Knowles, along with most of the sea staff, have no time for the Human Resources Superintendent. They think he is null and not up to the job." Wow, thought Tom, good for her! Mr Harding looked taken aback.

Angela was shaking with anger after her outburst. Before anyone could react, she continued:

"Captain Murchison has had the guts to do something and the ability to carry on, in spite of a complete lack of belief. Both from you, Mr Harding and even from me."

The Chairman and Mr Dudley were both shocked at her outburst and Tom wondered how it would affect his position in the Company. The Chairman spoke first, coldly.

"I think, Ms Turner, you had better wait outside until we have finished our discussion."

"No! Don't go. Please remain here, Mrs Turner, but moderate your indignation." Mr Dudley said firmly.

Tom thought she would refuse point blank, which would not have helped matters at all, so he jumped in and said, soothingly:

"Thanks Angela, but I don't need you to defend me; I'm well used to defending myself. This is by no means the first time I've had a head-on clash with authority; and probably

not the last. Please sit down again.” He turned to Mr Harding and said. “Hidden behind proxies? It doesn’t seem to have stopped the pirates’ representative finding out who to send the ransom demand to, does it?” His question hung in the air.

Mr Harding still annoyed, regarded his Chief Marine Superintendent closely, shocked by his use of Mrs Turner’s Christian name. Tom needed Angela’s support and was not going to offend her in any way. She sat down reluctantly, giving them all, except Tom, a nasty look. He then decided against being cowed, neither by the Ministry man nor by his own Chairman. Nor by Angela either, but didn’t think he’d be over-successful there. He continued:

“You’ll have to forgive that outburst, Mr Dudley and you too Mr Chairman. Just remember it is *her* husband we are discussing, whether he is alive or dead.”

They both muttered their apologies and the atmosphere calmed down, with Mr Dudley still firmly in control. Smoothing his neatly cut dark hair, he motioned Tom to continue:

“First of all, I’m a bit bewildered. Why is the Ministry of Defence involved? Both myself and Mr Harding thought the Foreign & Commonwealth Office would be appropriate.” This was something that had been puzzling Tom. Mr Dudley explained

“In this case we are dealing with a *‘failed state’* which comes under our aegis. Somalia has been considered the worst failed state for many years now and is partitioned into three separate parts. Somaliland, which is completely independent and does have a government and the usual administrations. The rest of Somalia is fractioned into Somalia itself, Puntland and a Disputed Region. These failed states could pose terrorism threats to the United Kingdom.” He paused to get his breath, then continued:

“Somalia, as you are probably aware, is at present fighting an Islamist group in the south of the country, rumoured to have connections with Al Qaeda. Access to Weapons of Mass Destruction cannot therefore be ruled out, with terrorists using these failed states as a base. Apart from Somaliland, there is no police force to worry them, nor any overall authority.”

“Yes, I see. They also occupy the port of Kismayu which, in my opinion, should be blockaded.” Tom said, frowning. It was a point that had frequently been on his mind.

“My opinion also, Captain Murchison, but we’d need UN authority to do that, which we don’t have at present.” Mr Dudley agreed.

“Look Mr Dudley,” Tom said, forcefully. “I have done my best to find out what has happened to Mr Turner and have, I think, achieved a fair bit, mainly through *my* connections, nobody else’s. The Personnel Superintendent wouldn’t have known where to start, however, I won’t say any more on that particular subject. As for the rest, I saw it as my duty and I’d do it again in similar circumstances. Now, please tell me what we can do now.” Tom said firmly.

He felt that he’d cleared the air between him and Mr Dudley. The latter revised his first impressions and began to acknowledge their ability to work together and find a solution. In short, they began to respect each other.

“Both of you are right about the Government not paying out ransoms. However, there *is* no ransom demand for Mr Turner. At this stage we must now consider what is going on in Puntland? Whether Turner is working for them under menace or not? There are several questions to be answered. For a start, is this newly discovered island part of the Piracy operation? Is Turner working there? Is he still alive? Is Al Shabab involved? As I mentioned before, we know they have links with Al Qaeda.” Mr Dudley paused, then went on to say:

“Finally we must consider whether Mr Turner is being forced to work for them, or if he has *agreed* to work there for a great deal of money.”

Both Tom and Angela were shocked; that thought had not occurred to either of them.

“Mr Turner, if he is still alive, must be under menace,” Tom said finally. “Normally, I would expect him to refuse sabotage attempts. If Al Qaeda is involved, then I don't know if he, or anyone else for that matter, *could* resist. As for working for money, it would have to amount to a small fortune to tempt Mr Turner away from a good job and a promising career here. I certainly don't believe there is any truth in that statement.”

“Of course it's not true!” Angela said shakily. “I'm still not sure he's alive. After the kidnapping, I had horrible nightmares about my husband being tortured. Thankfully these suddenly stopped a few weeks ago, which made me think he'd been killed under torture.” Mr Dudley sighed and turned to her, saying:

“Mrs Turner, please realise what I'm going to say now is something which *must* be said at this point. The only way I can imagine your husband being dead is by being accidentally killed, or as you say, accidentally tortured to death. I honestly don't think either case is correct.”

Shuddering, Angela's hand flew to her mouth and her eyes filled with tears. The whole conversation so far reminded her of those first awful days of utter grief. Tom was horrified at that speech and was sorry he had agreed to bring her to the Office with him. Mr Dudley called a pause, asking the Chairman for some coffee.

The chairman rang for his secretary, who brought in a solid silver tray, the sugar bowl and milk jug also in silver. The cups and saucers were made from bone china, all bearing the Company's House Flag. She poured out a cup for all four of them, two sugars for Tom, none for the others. No milk for Tom but the others had some. Angela

gradually recovered her poise, gratefully sipping her coffee. The Chairman's office was old-fashioned, the walls consisting of dark walnut, pictures of past Chairmen hung on the walls.

"Mrs Turner, your husband has been abducted, not kidnapped." Mr Dudley said.

"What's the difference?" Angela snapped, replacing her teacup into its saucer with a bang. Mr Harding winced.

"Had your husband been kidnapped, you or the Company would have received a ransom demand. You would know by now that your husband was alive and possibly being tortured. He would probably have been shown on television with hooded terrorists holding guns at his head, pleading for his life. Since your husband seems to have been abducted, then either he has been killed, which is improbable; or forced to do some kind of work for whichever of those failed states he is in. Both Captain Murchison and I think he is being forced to work." Mr Dudley said.

"You are saying that my husband is probably alive and working there against his will. What's going to happen when the job or whatever is finished? Will they just thank him and let him go or kill him to keep his mouth shut? What job could he do for Al Qaeda anyway?" She was almost in tears.

"I don't think you can assume that, Mrs Turner, nor do I think Al Qaeda is involved - yet. As far as we can tell, the Al Shabaab organisation who claim to have links with them, are too busy trying to capture Mogadishu. They are at a standstill now. Al Qaeda or another terrorist organisation is very likely waiting to see the outcome of that. We need to know more about their ultimate aims."

"Another thing. If my husband is being forced to work on something against this country, will he be charged with a criminal offence, like treason?" Angela asked. "Even

though he only agreed to save his life?" She had risen to her feet but sat down again.

"Probably not." Mr Dudley said, his manner brooking no further questions from her. He then turned to Tom and the Chairman, saying:

"If we assume that Turner has something to do with this new island, then we can demand assistance from the Royal Navy. The Captain of HMS *Loch Kelliesport* is eager to explore the area. It was *his* helicopter pilot who noted the existence of the island." He stated.

"New Island? So the island really does exist and the Bay Area behind it as well?" Tom asked, astonished. "I wonder why the Newspapers haven't got hold of it then. It would make an excellent news item."

"Yes they exist alright, but it is being kept secret for the time being. The British warship, HMS *Loch Kelliesport* only returned to the site three days ago, after being diverted to the other side of the Indian Ocean. She sent her helicopter out at dawn on the nineteenth to prove its existence one way or another. As it turns out, the helicopter pilot's claim was valid." Mr Dudley paused to adjust his tie then carried on:

"There were no signs of life, either on the ground or in the nearby village at that time; probably too early. To avoid confusion, we will refer to that stretch of water hidden behind the Island as the 'Lagoon' in future. The island will be referred to as the Island with a capital I"

"Kept secret!" Tom said loudly "You must have read from my file that a colleague from another Company told the meeting I was attending about this new Island. His son was a Junior Officer on that ship. I've even told colleagues here in this office although none of them believe it either."

"It was only verified three days ago; the same day your Chairman phoned me with your deductions about Mr Turner. The reason we're all meeting today is due to your observations coinciding with the discovery of the Island.

The coincidence is rather disturbing, not to say alarming. We have decided to keep quiet about the Island for now, until we know more about what's happening there. There'll be no more random helicopter overflights, since we don't want to reveal that the lagoon is no longer a secret. We need to find out what it is going to be used for. Either connected to Piracy, or for other forms of sabotage. Or; as I mentioned before, for use by terrorists." Mr Dudley said, looking concerned.

"Then you really consider Turner's abduction to be connected with this Island, or rather to the stretch of hidden sea behind it?" Tom asked, putting his empty coffee cup down.

"It is an obvious possibility, considering your findings. There has been no ransom demand for Mr Turner; no organisation has displayed him as a hostage; nor has there been any video of him pleading for his life." Mr Dudley said. He too, replaced his coffee cup in its saucer.

"You are ruling out the possibility of him being killed then?" The Chairman asked.

"Yes, I agree with Captain Murchison in considering it unlikely under the circumstances, there being no reason for it. His abductors would almost certainly have made it public had they killed him. Therefore he is probably working for them since all other possibilities have been ruled out." Mr Dudley stated, straightening his tie.

Angela shivered, her whole body rigid with tension. They all seemed to think her husband was still alive and working; but for how long? Would they kill him when the job was finished?

"You've been thinking on those lines all along haven't you?" She asked Tom, her voice shaking.

"Yes I have. He must be working for them under menace, either do it or be killed, in which case they are unlikely to torture him." Tom answered her. He turned to Mr Dudley. "I

also think the Island, or rather the lagoon behind it is probably where Mr Turner is working; since it must be to do with ships or something nautical. The coastline is straight from Mogadishu to a known semi-island further north. Unless there are other hidden places, then he is, in my opinion, most likely to be there.”

“I agree with you, Captain Murchison. The first overflight by helicopter noted two boats there, heading towards what looks like a creek. Unfortunately, no photographs of the boats or their occupants were taken. The pilot was concentrating on the sea area, the fishing stakes and the possible Island; as well as Pirates’ nests. I intend to contact the Admiralty and order the *Loch Kelliesport* to carry out just one more helicopter overflight of the area, asking them to take plenty of photographs, including the boats and any persons seen, either on the land or on the water.”

“You’re taking this very seriously then?” Tom remarked to Mr Dudley. “I would have thought this island and stretch of sea would have been spotted long before now by helicopter overflights. Why hasn’t it?”

“The site is between the towns of Eyl and Bandarbeyla, both of which are active pirate towns. There has been little need up to now to overfly the vast area in between. It’s a bit of a mystery though. Was the island there when the Italians administered the country? I’m still waiting for an answer to that question.” Mr Dudley replied seriously.

“It must have been; islands don’t just form with nobody noticing.” Was Tom’s contribution.

“For the moment, I am taking it seriously. If you pick up any other information, then let me know right away at this number.” Mr Dudley said.

Writing the number down in his notebook, he tore out the page and gave it to Tom, then turned to the chairman, saying:

“Mr Harding, is it your intention to let Captain Murchison carry on searching for more bits of information. Up to now, he has used his experience to solve a few of the questions. I would appreciate it if he worked full time, at least for a while.”

“He’s got his own work to do; can’t you use your own MoD staff?” Mr Harding replied indignantly. Mr Dudley shook his head definitely and pointed to Tom.

“Too busy defending the country are they?” The chairman remarked sarcastically, then turned to Tom. “Very well then, you can do it full time Captain, but please keep an eye on things. Hand over the day to day running of the Department to another Superintendent for the time being.”

In a way, this was good news. Up to the present; Tom had been gathering these facts mainly by phone calls and accidental bits of information. Now he could get out of the office and visit various sites personally, which may well prove to be more productive.

“Mr Dudley,” Tom then said, “surely you haven’t come from the Ministry at a moment’s notice, as it were, just to save Jim Turner. After all, he’s only one man among some, what, six hundred Merchant seafarers being held hostage? What do *you* think the Somalis are up to? Why abduct a serving seafarer? What, in your opinion, is he being forced to do? Assuming he’s still alive.”

Mr Dudley hesitated for a fraction of a second, probably the result of a lifetime of secrecy.

“We don’t really know, there are many options. The worst being is to convert a hi-jacked ship ready to detonate in a busy industrial port, like Southampton or Liverpool. Or even to blow the bottom out of a ship and sink her in the main channel. That’s not likely though, since there are too many warships out there, nor do they have the infrastructure to accomplish this, but the Al Shabab/Al Qaeda element disturbs me. Otherwise, the Island site with

its hidden bay could be used for continued piracy. A refuge for the pirate boats for example. Or to disguise armed pirate boats as boats

quietly fishing. A hidden arms cache even or diesel fuel dump for refuelling Mother Boats. As far as we know, they think the area is secret.”

They discussed that for a while, as well as nominating another Superintendent to run the day to day affairs of his department. By this time, all the anger between them had evaporated and the decision made to work together. Tom gathered his job was safe. At least the existence of the Island and Bay were real and the island could only have been that cliff he’d seen in the Pilot Book.

“One last thing;” Mr Dudley said, getting a form out of his briefcase. “This island and bay is to remain a secret under the Official Secrets Act. Please read and sign this form.”

“Mr Dudley!” Tom cried, astonished. “As I mentioned before, I already knew about the possibility of an Island there and I’ve already told some of my staff.”

“Well, at least, only you three here in this room know the Island and Bay really do exist. For the few persons who have heard about the new Island, it will remain just a rumour and soon be forgotten. Please keep it that way and sign this Official Secrets Act document on the dotted line. This forbids you to mention the island exists. What we have discussed in this room is also confidential under the same Act.” Mr Dudley stated solemnly.

* * * * *

The meeting adjourned soon after that, Tom and Angela left while the Chairman and Mr Dudley were taking a whisky bottle and glasses out a drawer. Once in Tom’s office Angela, who was close to tears, regretted her speech in his defence:

“Oh Tom, I’m sorry to have said all those things and I hope I haven’t compromised your job. I hope too that I haven’t destroyed Jim’s chances if he really is alive. It made me so mad though when both the Ministry Man and your own Chairman were so horrible to you; like I was that time you came to my house.”

“No, that’s OK; a Warship is involved now, presumably to keep a discreet eye on and around the new Island. That’s all they really can do at present. Now that I’ve been told to carry on trying to find Jim’s whereabouts full time, I’ll be able to spend more time out of the office actively looking for coincidences; instead of just waiting passively for them to come to me. Despite their attitude, they’ve gone as far as we can reasonably expect.”

He paused and looked at Angela whose face was still white and thought about what she’d been forced to hear that day. About her husband probably still alive but possibly working in a foreign country against his will. Probably not tortured, but this was by no means certain. He was apparently working in a hostile climate with no guarantee of release afterwards. Neither had Mr Dudley given a positive assurance concerning her husband’s possible treason charges.

“Look Angela,” Tom continued. “Forget what Mr Dudley said about your husband being put to death by torture. For myself, I am absolutely certain he is alive and will come home. If we accept that there’s no reason to take him ashore to kill him, then there’s equally no reason to take him ashore to torture him.”

“Thanks Tom; thank you for saying that and obviously believing it.” She said, breaking down into tears, sobbing on Tom’s shoulder and soaking his lapel with them.

Tom held her close to him and let her cry, breathing in the clean scent of her hair. It was lunch time when she’d recovered sufficiently and repaired her make-up, so Tom

took her to his favourite pub for a Pub Lunch. A couple of other Superintendents were there and joined them, anxious to know the latest news of Turner. The whole thing turned into a sort of private party, aided by the presence of a pretty woman. She left after half an hour, taking the Central Line from Bond Street to Liverpool Street station and then home. Her mother was curious to know the outcome.

“It was awful! I lost my temper when the Chairman started blaming Tom Murchison. The Ministry of Defence man even thought, Jim might be working for money there.”

Chapter 21 – Indian Ocean - August 20th

Commander Donaldson, RN, Captain of the Frigate HMS *Loch Kelliesport* read the message from the Admiralty for the third time. His orders were to photograph the hidden bay discreetly by helicopter, but showing no particular interest in the Island. All persons on the beach; or on the bay area between the Island and the shore; or in the nearby village to be photographed.

The helicopter had already overflown the area at dawn five days previously and verified that the island and lagoon did exist. No persons were visible at the time, but there were more fishing stakes visible than the previous overflight in July. A report had been sent to the Admiralty with the relevant photographs. The helicopter pilot been quietly triumphant at the result, the atmosphere of disbelief in the wardroom turning into a grudging acceptance of the fact.

The Captain realised the Island and Lagoon were more than just a problem for the Hydrographic department. The orders he'd just received stressed an urgent need for a further overflight. More photographs were needed, especially it seemed, for persons at the site. Although how

the flight of a Helicopter could be considered discreet was a mystery to the Commander Donaldson.

Still orders were orders, and at 0800 the following day, the helicopter lifted off from the deck of the ***Loch Kelliesport***, roamed the area from south to north in a haphazard way, taking photographs of everything in its path. As if the flight seemed to be concentrating on finding Pirates' Nests. Two hours later, the helicopter returned to the Warship, having successfully completed the mission.

Commander Donaldson was shocked on seeing the contents of some photographs. The Zodiac style boat did not appear to be a fishing boat at all. Nor did the other boat tied

up alongside a small jetty at the mouth of the creek. The latter

was a work boat normally used in ports and harbours.

There were four men in the Zodiac, three of whom were obviously Somalis but the fourth man appeared to be an Arab. He was dressed as a workman, sporting a full black beard and a Kheffiyah style Arab headdress. The helicopter pilot had managed to get a photo of the Arab before he'd had time to pull part of the Kheffiyah over his face.

"You reported two fishing boats on your previous overflights" Commander Donaldson said to the pilot. "But this boat is not a fishing boat, nor is it fishing. There are no nets or lines streamed and one of the crew is an Arab. This should have been reported to me after the overflight on July 18th. The other boat, tied up at what appears to be a creek, seems to be an ordinary work boat often used in ports."

"I'm sorry sir, you were all busy getting underway for the Kerala coast and called me back to the ship. I didn't even have time to take photos. I wasn't concentrating on the boats, thinking I'd discovered a brand new Island. An Island that nobody believed, not even you sir! The boats and their crew slipped my mind." The pilot said defensively.

The Captain summoned his Senior Officers, showed them copies of the relevant photos and asked their opinions. One of the photos showed the whole lagoon and its surrounding area. In this photo, four women were at the site; not on the beach, but further inland holding two stakes upright; two women were holding the stakes, while the other two were waving at the men in the Zodiac.

Further examination and comparison with the photos taken on July 18th and five days previously, showed the fishing stakes in the lagoon were concentrated closer to the island.

“There is something strange about those two stakes held by two of the women.” A Senior Lieutenant observed, holding a plastic ruler in his hand. “If you draw a line between the two stakes and continue it out into the lagoon, it’ll arrive at the boat. All three on the same bearing as it were.” Commander Donaldson immediately saw the relevance of this remark.

“Yes you’re right. In that case they could be Leading Marks, the inshore stake being higher than the other one. Which could mean the Zodiac is sounding the lagoon, with one of the crew watching the stakes to keep the boat on a straight course. They have probably been sounding the lagoon all the time; while we’ve been thinking of them only as fishing boats.” The Captain remarked.

“Those other stakes near the Island, the ones actually *in* the lagoon.” Another Officer cried. “Could they be delimiting an area? Say an area of deeper or shallower water?”

They pondered this but came to no conclusion, not having enough facts to go on. It could be a potential anchorage area, but only for small craft, perhaps a sheltered area not directly in the path of the prevailing monsoons.

Commander Donaldson was worried. The pilot had made a bad mistake, which would certainly reflect on his ship.

Chapter 22 – Ministry of Defence - August 21st

The chairman phoned early Friday morning saying that both Tom *and* Angela were urgently needed at Head Office that morning, if at all possible. Tom phoned her, while pouring himself a cup of coffee:

“Good morning Angela; Tom here, sorry to disturb you so early but the Chairman wants us both in his office this morning. Can do? It sounded rather like an order!”

“Good Grief, he could have given me a bit of notice, Oh hell, there’s no-one to look after the kids, Mum’s not here, she’s staying with my sister in West Hampstead for the weekend. Can I bring the children with me? Will your secretary look after them? No, wait a minute, let me think. Hang on and I’ll ask Cynthia on my portable if she could help out. Thankfully I’m on holiday now.” She replied, reaching for the cell phone on the bedside table.

Five minutes later, Angela came back on the line, saying cheerfully: “Yes that’s alright. She’s going to take them to Colchester Zoo with her own little girl. Let’s see now. It’s just after eight, by the time I get myself and the children out of bed and Cynthia arrives, I’ll be able to catch the Nine Forty Five train, arriving at Liverpool Street by half past ten. I’ll get a taxi straight to your office. Let’s say eleven o’ clock is about the earliest I can manage. Is that OK?” Angela asked breathlessly.

“You mean you’re still in bed?” Tom said, looking at his watch. “Yes I think that’ll be OK. If not, I’ll call you back. By the way, try not to get yourself almost thrown out of the office again, like last time. The poor old Chairman didn’t know what had hit him when you went for his jugular. Incidentally I’ll make sure you are reimbursed for the fare”

“OK Tom, yes I’ll come quietly and remain as dumb as all good women should. It would have helped if I’d been a blonde. Of course I’m still in bed, it’s just gone eight and I’m

now on holiday. Why do you ask?” She countered.

Tom finished his breakfast, had a quick shower and dressed, got into his car and started up. Seeing it was still early; he decided to take the car into London and pay the exorbitant fees the nearest car park charged. He was getting sick of the South Harrow/Green Park journey anyway. He chose his favourite route, up what used to be the Western Avenue, past White City stadium, through Shepherd’s Bush then along the Embankment.

At eleven prompt, Tom and Angela entered the Chairman’s Office, where both he and Mr Dudley and another, more Junior Civil Servant, were waiting. They smiled, stood up and shook hands. The extra man was briefly introduced as Mr Wells. Coffee was ordered and then they all got down to business. Mr Dudley opened the proceedings:

“I am glad you are here, Mrs Turner, because we need to show you a photograph. We are considering the probability that your husband is alive. This is due to what Captain Murchison has been able to dig up, as well as some information from HMS *Loch Kelliesport*.”

Angela jumped to her feet, scarcely able to believe what she was hearing. She swayed and Tom put his arm round her to stop her falling, making her sit down again. Mr Dudley continued:

“The *Loch Kelliesport*’s helicopter has overflowed the site again as part of the normal routine inspection for Pirates’ nests. That uncharted island and lagoon are definitely there. Oh sorry Mrs Turner, you will want to know about your husband first.”

“Yes please, please tell me all you can.” She said, faintly, her head starting to swim.

“Right then. The first over flight of the helicopter was some five weeks ago. The pilot reported to the Captain that four locals were fishing in the hidden lagoon, the report going to the Authorities but no photographs taken. The Admiralty ordered another overflight yesterday with instructions to photograph *all* persons either ashore or afloat with a special camera. This photo showed three Somali men and one man dressed as an Arab, wearing an Arab head dress and western working clothes...”

“For God’s Sake, What’s all this about Arabs? Please tell me about my husband? Where is he? What is he doing? When is he coming home?” Angela cried impatiently.

Mr Dudley took a sip from a glass of water and continued patiently:

“Yesterday when he overflew the lagoon again, the man dressed as an Arab looked up briefly, then quickly down again, but the pilot managed to get a full face view of him. Have a good look at this blown up photograph. Could this possibly be your husband?”

Hands trembling, she took the photo, gave a gasp and then studied it again carefully.

“Yes that’s Jim; at least I’m pretty sure it is; it certainly looks like him. His stance, the way he holds himself, it’s Jim all right. But what’s he doing there with a beard, dressed like that and fishing with a couple of Somalis? Has he left me? Is this a new life for him? Oh Hell, I don’t know what to say. I can see enough of his face to positively identify him, but what on earth is he doing there, fishing in Somalia?” Her voice was shaking, tears not far off.

She handed the photo to Tom who, mentally ignoring the beard felt sure it was Turner. He was dressed in an old shirt and trousers, with an Arab red and white chequered head dress. Judging by his appearance, he seemed to be one of the boat crew.

Tom had mixed feelings on seeing the photograph, pleased his instinct had been right and Turner was alive, but

sorry he was going to miss the friendship he and Angela had formed over the months. Tom concentrated on the rest of the meeting, feeling despondent. Mr Dudley seemed relieved that it was Jim Turner and not an Arab, having been afraid that Al Shabaab was involved.

“Are you sure Mrs Turner, that it really is your husband, in spite of the beard?” Mr Dudley asked.

“Yes I’m sure. You see those two white streaks one each side of his chin? He came home with a beard once before and those same white streaks were there then, until I persuaded him to shave it off. Anyway, what’s he doing there, fishing in a boat with three Blacks?”

“We don’t know what he is doing there Mrs Turner, but we are pretty certain he is not fishing.” Mr Dudley said, then turned and addressed them all. “From previous photos, we’d assumed those stakes you can see were fishing stakes. But if you look closely at the photo, they seem to form a sort of pattern. A pattern that suggests deeper water in part of the lagoon, probably connecting with the channel leading out into the Indian Ocean. It could define an anchorage area, but for what purpose? We don’t even know how deep it is...”

“An anchorage,” Angela interrupted. “But what for and why? How is my husband involved?”

“We can only suppose your husband has been forced to work in Puntland. Dressed like that, he seems to be part of the boat crew; but why abduct him to work as a labourer, when there is obviously plenty of native labour available? I believe he is being forced to *survey* this anchorage, if that’s indeed what it is. He would have the knowhow necessary to carry out this work. Why he agreed to do it and what the anchorage is for, we do not know.” Mr Dudley argued.

Are you suggesting that my husband is a traitor by working for a foreign Government?”

Angela was standing up again, shocked and angry at the thought. Tom went across to her and briefly put his hand on

her shoulder to persuade her to sit down again. She shook it off, but sat down. Mr Dudley took a list from his pocket and faced Angela.

“Mrs Turner. Has your husband ever expressed a wish to go and work in Somalia – or Puntland? Has he ever mentioned an affinity with the country or a desire to go there

to help them? Has he ever *been* there? Does he know any Arabs or other Muslims personally?” Mr Dudley questioned, reading from a list held in his hand.

“Affinity with Somalia? Wanting to work there?” Angela sounded incredulous. “He might have been there a couple of times on his ship but I’m not sure, Captain Murchison would know that better than me. As for knowing Arabs personally, he was loaned to a Kuwaiti ship once where nearly all the Officers were Arabs. What exactly are you accusing him of?”

Angela was again on her feet, angry and disbelieving. Tom, looking at her, realised he was going to miss her when all this had been sorted out and her husband back home.

“I’m accusing him of nothing; I’m trying to eliminate your husband from a joint operation with a criminal gang, or even terrorist network there.” Mr Dudley said, frowning.

“You can’t be serious!” Tom intervened angrily. “What joint operation? It was I who sent him on the ***Dawn Splendour***, from which ship he got kidnapped, sorry abducted, a week after she was hijacked.” Mr Dudley then turned towards Tom:

“As I understand it, Captain Murchison, ***you*** over-ruled the Human Resources Superintendent in order to place Mr Turner on that ship. Why did you do that?”

“I can’t believe what I’m hearing! Do you honestly think I over-ruled the man so that I could send Turner to some miserable failure of a country? To do what? Try to Sabotage a ship to blow up the Houses of Parliament?” Tom said;

beginning to stutter. Mr Dudley turned towards Angela Turner again and said:

“We cannot rule out the possibility that your husband is carrying out this survey for money. I understand you have bought a new expensive house lately. In which case he could be working for Somalia illegally to pay off your debts. Do you know anything about this? Are you and your husband working together? Or both of you working with Captain Murchison here?” Mr Dudley’s voice was menacing.

They were all, apart from Mr Harding, on their feet now, the atmosphere electric with tension. Tom noticed that Mr Wells had taken up a position behind his back. Angela was stunned by the accusation; one hand covering her mouth, staring with horror at Mr Dudley. The latter turned towards Tom saying:

“It could also be possible that *you* acted with Mr Turner. You have the power to appoint your Officers to any of your Company or even other Company’s ships on occasions. You also have the means and ability to choose a ship with a destination that could put her into the path of pirates. Or even to make a direct rendezvous with a pirate boat. Do *you* have any Arab acquaintances? Do *you* feel the need of an extra income? Are you and Mr Turner working together? Is Mrs Turner involved as well?”

Mr Wells was surreptitiously edging closer to Tom, ready for trouble.

“This is totally unbelievable. Well the answer is No to all those questions; and I can safely say No as far as Mr Turner is concerned. Please tell your Mr Wells to stay away from my back before I turn round and belt him one.” Tom said angrily, his right fist already clenched.

“You wouldn’t stand a chance!” Mr Dudley said. “Why did you choose to send Mr Turner there, in the place of another Officer who’d already been chosen?”

Tom hesitated, not wanting to answer this question, at least not the whole truth.

“I sent him there instead of the Officer chosen by Personnel because I considered him the best man for the job.” He said, angry at the suggestion.

“But that’s not the only reason is it? You told me the other day you’d sent him instead of the man chosen by Personnel, because you knew Mr and Mrs Turner had bought a new expensive house.” Mr Harding interrupted, pointing an accusing finger at Tom.

Upon hearing this, Angela flushed a bright red and stared at Tom accusingly, shocked by the Chairman’s speech. Mr Dudley sat up with a jerk, they were all looking at Tom who tried to retrieve some of his lost ground.

“That’s correct. I knew he was short of cash due to that, so I gave him a chance to recuperate and get back on his feet again.” Tom said desperately.

He knew it sounded awful put like that. As if he’d the used new house as an excuse to send Turner away so he could play around with the man’s wife. Like King David sending Uriah to war so he could make out with Bathsheba. Angela looked at him furiously, on the point of saying something when Mr Dudley spoke again:

“OK; we have examined both your bank accounts to see if either of you have received any extra monies. Frankly, I don’t believe for one minute that either you or Mrs Turner *are* involved, but I had to ask these questions to gauge your reactions. I take it that you have *not* been communicating with any Terrorist or Pirate teams. OK Mr Wells, you can return to the office now.” Mr Dudley concluded, carefully watching their expressions. He then spoke again.

“As I say, your bank accounts are OK; but this doesn’t rule out money paid directly into an account in Switzerland or the Cayman Islands or some other safe haven – without touching the UK. *Are you and Mrs Turner lovers?*”

It was Tom's turn to turn red while Angela choked back a laugh. Mr Dudley had deliberately lulled them into thinking that they were off the hook, then shocked them by mentioning offshore bank accounts. Tom exploded, his whole body rigid with anger, his face scarlet. Angela was calmer and suppressed a nervous giggle. Mr Wells was still behind Tom's back, not having budged. Mr Harding was now certain his senior Superintendent was having an affair with the wife of one his Officers.

"OK Captain Murchison, you can calm down now. I had to make sure in my own mind that neither of you had anything to do with Mr Turner's apparent abduction." Mr Dudley concluded.

"We're not lovers, that's a disgusting thing to say, or even to think." Tom yelled. Angela looked at him and was unable to stifle a giggle. All four men looked at her in surprise. Mr Wells left soon after that.

"If that was some sort of test, I assume we passed it OK then" Tom said drily, after the Junior MoD man had left and closed the office door. "In your opinion, is there going to be a ship sailing from there with a bomb in it, powerful enough to flatten New York? I'm perfectly sure that Turner would never agree to that, even if menaced."

"Of course he wouldn't, he'd rather die first." Angela said heatedly. "Anyway he loves New York."

The absurdity of that remark eased the tension in the room, causing a ripple of relieved laughter.

"I agree with Mrs Turner. We know Turner was forcibly taken off his ship last April; a French helicopter witnessed the abduction and photographed the boat leaving the ship with Turner in it. A Somali man was holding a gun at his head, with three others firing their guns up into the air." Tom said.

"Photographed? Jim? What Photo? You're saying there's a photo of my husband actually being abducted? Why

wasn't I bloody shown it?" Her voice was nearly a scream; the tension was back.

'Oh Lord!' Tom thought, 'I'm in trouble with Angela again.' He had completely forgotten she didn't know about the photo, since he, Captain Carter and Jack Knowles had deliberately not shown it to her.

"I'm sorry Angela; I deliberately didn't show it to you, it would have been far too upsetting for you at the time. Now that we know he's alive, I'll show it to you later. In future years, you can show it to your Grandchildren, telling them what a hero your Jim once was." Tom said, hoping to stave off the inevitable problems he could see looming. Mr Dudley was looking grim and visibly upset.

"Captain Murchison, Mr Harding. What photo are you talking about?"

Tom told him it was a clipping from a French newspaper,

rather than just a photo. Mr Dudley looked astounded; rose to his feet; fists clenched on the desk in front of him; his air of authority beyond question, saying:

"You are telling me that a photograph exists, showing Mr

Turner being taken ashore? With four armed Somalis? Please explain why we, in the Ministry of Defence, have not seen this photo or clipping, or even known of its existence? *I want that clipping right away. Now!!!*"

Tom hurried down to his office, called Jane in and they both searched around looking for it. He was profoundly relieved when Jane found it tucked away under some papers in a drawer. Returning, he offered it to Mr Dudley, who angrily snatched it.

"You Mr Harding should have come straight to us with this clipping and whatever information Captain Murchison had gathered. Don't either of you realise that we could have used this photograph; duplicating it to all the International Navies who are doing their best to protect Merchant

seafarers? These men could have been properly identified by now. Maybe even Mr Turner's hiding place could have been found a lot earlier. What's more, you didn't even include it in the file you gave me last week!"

Tom felt obliged to answer that criticism and decided his best defence was to attack:

"Look Mr Dudley, I accept your criticism, but would like to point out a few facts. First of all, the abduction happened on a Liberian ship with a thoroughly mixed crew. Secondly, why didn't the French Navy who took the photo, why didn't *they* duplicate it round the various fleets? Thirdly, I didn't obtain the information you mentioned all at once. It was often weeks between the various bits and pieces coming my way. I only carried on because it seemed logical that Turner *hadn't* been killed. OK, once I was convinced, I had to convince others, like you, Mr Harding, you took a whole lot of convincing. Frankly, I gave the photo no further thought, once I'd identified Turner."

"I too saw the clipping and identified him as one of my Officers." The Chairman stated. "I also did not give the photo another thought. Therefore I am equally guilty. It's true I took a lot of convincing before I acted and contacted your Ministry,"

"Another thing. Why didn't the Captain of that Warship report the presence of an Arab in the boat after the *first* over flight? He too was remiss, as you put it." Tom said angrily, still defending himself.

"That is not your problem, Captain Murchison; we were not in the picture at that stage, mainly because you'd kept hold of that clipping, which should have been brought to our attention immediately." Mr Dudley stated, his tone abrupt, his attitude menacing.

"But surely, *someone* on the Warship should have at least *questioned* the presence of an Arab being there after the

first flight. You should have known about it *weeks* ago.” Tom countered, glaring at Mr Dudley and his own Chairman.

He was angry, feeling that he’d taken too much blame right from the start. Blamed for sending Turner there in the first place; then being accused for neglecting his work in his search for him; suffering the ridicule of booming Albert in the office and now for this goddamned photo. Angela was obviously blaming him too!

“Where did you get the clipping from Tom? I don’t remember if you told me at the time or not.” Mr Harding asked, intervening to calm the situation down a bit.

Tom sighed, realising he was going to be in further trouble with Angela by answering that question; he was evidently going to be hung for both a sheep *and* a lamb!

“It was faxed to me from France by Mrs Turner’s uncle who lives there.” Tom said hesitantly, not daring to look at her. Angela gasped, astonished – unable to believe what she was hearing. Rising to her feet, she looked at Tom as if he’d just landed from the moon. He tried to outstare her but failed dismally.

“Uncle Bob! Uncle Bob from La Ciotat? Why didn’t he tell me? He’s my uncle for Christ’s Sake! I don’t think he’s even told my mother. I’ll never forgive him for not telling me straight away. Just wait ‘till I see him again. You must have been out of your mind not to have shown it to me.” She was almost screaming.

The final sentence was addressed to Tom, who felt himself shrinking and looked round for a handy escape route.

“The photo appeared in a French newspaper,” Tom finally replied, “*La Provence*, I think. Your Uncle recognised your husband and phoned me; then faxed the cutting and sent a copy of the paper by post afterwards. We both decided not to show you the photo; it was far too disturbing. Jack Knowles and his wife also agreed, we all

thought it would have been far too distressing at the time.” Tom said, not looking forward to the aftermath of all this.

“You mean to say Jack and Sonia knew about the photo as well? Probably half the office staff too and nobody thought to tell me, his wife! I just can’t believe all this. I can’t believe you and Uncle Bob took it upon yourselves to keep this from me. Don’t ever try keeping things from me ever again.” Her last sentence was almost a scream, her fists clenched. Tom tried to calm her down by stating:

“Sorry Angela. Your uncle agreed and I asked Jack and Sonia to keep quiet about it.”

“Another thing, you were all at my house, weren’t you? You, Uncle Bob, Jack and Sonia too; that time you took us all out to dinner. All of you knew but nobody dared tell me!” She cried, tears streaming down her face.

“We didn’t know your uncle was going to be there,” Tom said faintly. “It was a shock when you introduced him.”

“But surely you must have shown that clipping to someone in the Ministry when you went there first, just after the kidnapping?” Angela questioned Tom angrily “Did you or didn’t you?”

Her face was white, all her colour had faded. It was now time for Tom’s third confession on this appalling day.

“Well... I meant to. To tell you the truth, I thought I would translate the text first and then take it to the Ministry.” He said, knowing what was coming next, but unable to avoid it.

“Well, why didn’t you? I’m positive we never saw it, The FCO would have passed it on to us.” Mr Dudley said, grimly.

Tom sighed again, ready to duck if they started throwing things at him.

“Because I was having enormous difficulty translating it and was unable to find my French/English Dictionary; then

something else came up and I forgot all about it.” Tom confessed sheepishly.

Having been forced to admit it, he felt thoroughly ashamed of himself. Mr Dudley raised his eyes to the ceiling in exasperation and handed the cutting to Angela. She nearly fainted with shock when she saw it. Jim sprawled out in the bottom of the boat; his face distorted with fear; his hands roughly tied and a snarling Somali holding a gun to his temple. Three other pirates pointing their guns up into the air, presumably aiming at the helicopter. Mr Dudley continued speaking.

“You, Captain Murchison, have done an excellent job piecing all these bits of information together; but both you and the Chairman here, have been very remiss by withholding that clipping. And also Captain; you have even stopped the photograph from being reproduced. I cannot promise that you will not both be charged for withholding vital information regarding the war against Piracy. Maybe the Official Secrets Act applies in this case. Anyway, that will be up to the Crown Prosecution Service.”

“I will take full responsibility for the negligence,” the Chairman spoke up, “Captain Murchison did show me the photo, I knew of its existence and will take any blame on behalf of this Company and its employees. Nor did I think to translate the text.”

‘Good on him!’ Tom thought, but he was far more scared of Angela’s reaction to all this. She was white faced, shocked at the barbarity the photo showed and still obviously very angry. Her tears had dried up leaving faint mascara streaks on her face. She was sitting down by then, her fingers drumming on the desk in front of her.

“Right, I’ll be getting back to the Ministry again for further talks with the Navy about the situation. Whether to land an attack force will be a difficult decision to make. I’ll also get in touch with my French counterpart and see where that photograph came from.”

“Oh no,” Angela screamed, “an attack force? *Do you want to kill my husband by doing that?*”

“Look here Mrs Turner. We must consider what the Somalis are aiming to do with that hidden stretch of water or lagoon. First of all, I do not think for a minute that your husband is a traitor, or that they are going to load a bomb in a ship with enough power to flatten New York, or anywhere else for that matter. Do you realise how large that bomb would have to be, to be effective, even if it is nuclear...” Mr Dudley, in his turn was trying to calm Angela down.

“I have no idea at all. I can’t imagine my husband agreeing to work for sabotage in any form.”

Mr Dudley winced at her interruption, remembering her furious outburst at the meeting in this room earlier that week. He seemed to be about to rebuke her but wisely refrained. Tom courageously cut in saying:

“OK Angela, please calm down, nobody is calling your husband a traitor.”

She looked at Tom as if he’d crawled out of a small hole in the wall. My God, he thought, she looked even lovelier when she was angry. A glorious Amazon. Or a righteous Diana, the huntress.

“As I was saying” continued Mr Dudley, grimly. “There is no way they could load a bomb like that in the lagoon, without heavy cranes and a definite infrastructure. I doubt whether there is a floating crane in the whole of Somalia, which could be towed up there without being seen by the various navies. Your husband has obviously been forced to carry out this job under threat and probably still is under threat. Maybe the *Stockholm Syndrome* applies to this situation.”

“The ‘*Stockholm Syndrome*’?” Angela cried. “Are you serious? Isn’t that where the hostages become sympathetic with the aims of their kidnappers? But surely that’s a far different hostage situation. Bank robberies and that kind of thing, where they want helicopters to make a getaway.”

Angela said, looking round fiercely for someone to dare contradict her. Mr Dudley and Tom wisely remained silent;

Mr Harding then stepped in again to calm the situation down and stated:

“Also for Political hostages. Anyway, Mrs Turner, a bomb is not likely, not one with sufficient power to harm cities. They could be using the lagoon as a Piracy stronghold or even for an arms cache though. Or even a port of refuge.”

“So you no longer think he’s working for them voluntarily then?” Tom asked Mr Dudley.

“Probably not; not after seeing that clipping. It would take a superb actor to have looked and acted as terrified as he seemed to be then. Maybe at a later stage but not at the start.”

The situation had developed into one where Tom and Mr Dudley were trying to appease or to placate Angela, who was still in a blazing temper. They were figuratively tiptoeing round her, wary of her ability to attack. Mr Harding was observing Tom carefully, certain now that a scandal was developing between his Chief Deck Superintendent and the wife of the abducted officer.

It appeared so, from the way he was looking at her and jumping in with both feet when she was asked a question, calling her by name and even touching her shoulder on occasions. Surely the man was not considering jumping into the void left by her husband’s disappearance! Or had he already done so?

Mr Dudley had raised a good point about the *Stockholm Syndrome* though. Tom remembered reading, many years ago, about a case in America where the daughter of a rich important man was kidnapped by a gang for political or terrorist reasons. She was photographed some months later during a bank raid handling a gun; having apparently joined the gang willingly during her abduction.

Tom wondered if Mr Dudley was right about the size of the bomb needed to do a lot of collateral damage. Maybe he was just saying that to keep Angela quiet. They then discussed what could be happening there in that part of Somalia.

If it wasn't a bomb, which couldn't be ruled out, despite what Mr Dudley had told Angela, then what was it? Could a ship be used to transport some kind of Nerve Gas and release it in a port when the wind was blowing in the right direction? Or, more prosaically, could it be a secret Port of Refuge for an advanced type of Pirate Boats.

"Perhaps the pirates will use the deep area to bring in a hi-jacked ship, one with a valuable cargo, for instance, or to ground a ship in shallow water that's on the point of sinking?"

The meeting was turning into a guessing game until Mr Dudley asserted his authority and brought the meeting to order. He did, however make one further suggestion himself:

"There is one other possibility; maybe they could use this lagoon to secretly arm a pirated ship as a sort of "Q" ship to use against other merchant ships. We and the Germans used to do this during the war. Or it could even be something far simpler, like a water barge depot with a barge there to supply fresh water to the ships anchored out there." Mr Dudley said thoughtfully. "In any case, there's no point in guessing until we can find out more."

"Christ, I hope not!" said Tom. "Not "Q" ships, they'd be far worse than the present Piracy. How long is the Navy ship staying there?"

"She's already gone. She left the area two days ago is now on her way to the Northern part of the Indian Ocean to take up station there. I had wanted to keep her handy, but there's no justification to keep her hanging around the Island. She's got a job to do."

The meeting ended at that point and Mr Dudley left. The Chairman spoke grimly: addressing Tom and Mrs Turner.

“What a mess this has turned out to be. Oh I know it is partly my fault and my responsibility. Why did you carry on unravelling the mystery? It was not your job, although I can see no-one else could have followed it up so assiduously. You can go now Mrs Turner, thank you for coming to the office. Captain Murchison, please stay a minute?”

“You know where my office is, Angela. Please wait for me there. I’ll not be long” Tom said. He was red-faced and furious as he left the Chairman’s Office. Reaching his own office, he found Angela there, looking at the fleet photographs along one of the walls; the only wall not made of glass. By now, she had recovered and calmed down, her bad temper soon over.

* * * * *

“What’s the matter Tom, you look absolutely furious?” She asked, smiling.

Without answering, Tom took her along to their own little coffee bar. There, she ordered sandwiches and coffee for them. He looked at his watch and was astonished to note that the meeting had lasted most of the afternoon. Regarding Tom calmly, Angela said:

“What’s the matter Tom? What did the Chairman say that has made you so mad?”

Tom smouldered for a minute, wondering whether to tell her or not. She sat there and waited for Tom to speak, smiling and stirring her coffee.

“The obnoxious Bastard mentioned that when all this is over, there’s bound to be an Enquiry of some sort and the Press would probably be involved too. He hoped we weren’t having an affair that could be exposed by the Press.

“But surely he had no right to say things like that, even if he *is* your Chairman! You’re not sixteen years old!” She said indignantly, then smiled. “I can see his point though. I suppose you have been sort of hovering over me like a Mother Hen, trying to protect me when I had no need of protection.”

“He mentioned the time when you said to me; *‘Don’t you ever try keeping things from me ever again.’* He seemed to think that implied intimacy. I denied it of course.”

“Did I say that? Using the word ‘ever’ twice in the same sentence? What on earth made him think I was trying to seduce you?” She asked, trying hard not to laugh.

“No, He didn’t say that, nor did he give the impression that you were in any way involved. In fact I think he was more or less trying to protect *you* from *my* evil intentions. As if I was taking advantage of a woman whose husband’s been abducted.”

“Well it’s a good job he didn’t hear what you said this morning when you phoned me, asking if I was still in bed! That would certainly have convinced him what a wicked man you are. What was going through your mind? No, don’t answer that; just tell me if your Chairman’s guess has any basis in fact.” She asked, stealing one of his sausage sandwiches.

“Don’t worry about that, just look forward to Jim’s return home. It’s been one hell of a day for you, what with seeing that damned photo and all the rest.” Tom said sympathetically, wondering how to answer her question.

“Talking about that photo or clipping, you should have shown it to me, I could have easily translated it. Never mind,

just answer my question, does your Chairman’s observation have any basis in fact? Are you falling in love with me?” She

demanded, her eyes steady on his.

“Well I wasn’t, not until the Chairman suggested it.”

Tom

said, then amended “No, of course I’m not, Mr Harding shouldn’t make foolish statements like that.”

“But you did ask if I was in bed this morning, didn’t you? Well why? What did your imagination conjure up?” She said, mischievously. “Me in bed with my pyjamas on. In that case, you should have asked if I was in the bath.”

But Tom couldn’t answer, having been reduced to an embarrassed wreck. It was exactly what he had imagined that morning. Fortunately his imagination hadn’t yet gone as far as thinking of her in the bath. Now he could think of nothing else!

* * * * *

She left then, without waiting for an answer, stifling her laughter. Now she must start thinking seriously about Jim still being alive. What would happen when the job was finished? Would he be let go to find his own way back to Britain? Or would he be killed then? How long would they keep him there? Why couldn’t the Navy go in and fetch him out? Surely they’ve got the men and equipment to do just that?

What about her sleeping with Jack? Two weekends plus a bit more. Should she consider herself an adulteress? After all she’d thought she was a widow. There’s no denying that the weekends had been good – apart from that stupid business in the old watermill. She’d written him a letter and had even posted it. Why? To salve her conscience? If he suddenly made himself available now, she’d have him like a shot!

What about Tom then? She liked him, he’d been a good friend to her since Jim had been abducted. She knew he wanted to make love to her. Had he taken the initiative in the taxi after the dinner at Marylebone, would she have said

no and slapped his face? Or even the afternoon he'd been at her house and the children away? To make up for her loss of temper?

By this time she was at Liverpool Street station waiting for the train to Chelmsford. She hesitated. If she contacted him now and suggested a drink together? No. No way! The barrier opened and she boarded the train and was soon hurtling through East London.

Her mind turned to Jim again. He was obviously in good health. She wondered if he was sleeping nights with an African woman. Would he say no! Probably not. If it turned out that he was, then it could excuse her and Jack.

Her mother again questioned her as soon as she was in her front door.

"Oh Mum, it was terrible. The Ministry man accused Tom and me of collusion. He said that Jim could be working for money to pay off this house. Then he asked if Tom and I were lovers. Jim *is* alive, the Navy took a photo of him sitting in a boat dressed as an Arab with three Somalis. Please don't mention that to anybody, I shouldn't have told you after signing the Official Secrets Act.

"So Jim's still alive then. You'd better not tell him about your affair with Jack." Her mother said.

"The affair *you* pushed me into? There were four native women on the shore waving at the boat and laughing. I wouldn't mind betting Jim is having it off with one of them. If that's so, then we're quits." She said, looked at her mother and giggled. "Talking about that, Captain Tom Murchison asked me when he phoned this morning if I was still in bed."

"Did he now? I wonder what was going through his head at that moment." Her mother asked.

"I told him he should have imagined me in the bath. He went bright red. I left then."

"Then you'd better have him before Jim comes home!" was her mother's final word.

Chapter 23 - Somali Patrol – August 22nd

Back at the MoD that same evening, Mr Dudley gave the clipping to a junior, telling him to fax it to the EUNAVFOR Atalanta fleet; also to the NATO CTF 150 fleet for onward transmission to their warships, even though he knew it would be too late to do any good.

He then phoned his opposite number in Paris, demanding why a copy of the original photograph was sent *only* to the ***La Provence*** newspaper? Also where was the original and why was it not sent out to the both fleets? M. Lefebre said he'd look into the affair and call back. While waiting for an answer, he sat down at his computer and put the whole thing down on a USB key.

As expected, the French Defence Minister stated that their Navy had not sent a copy of the photograph to ***La Provence***. The newspaper assumed it had come from the Defence Ministry; although they did wonder why no other papers had received a copy. Then who had sent it?

Mr Dudley then explained the background; who the kidnapped man was and what they thought might be happening in Somalia. Why had the copy been sent only to one newspaper and then not promulgated to the fleets? Was ***La Provence*** protecting its sources?

“Perhaps a Junior Officer on board could have got hold of the photo, copied it and sent it for a cash payment.” Mr Dudley argued and then demanded. “Why was the photo not distributed to the EU and NATO fleets?”

The ugly suspicion was beginning to emerge that the original Photograph had been tucked away in a drawer somewhere and forgotten. It was only an old Liberian tanker after all, so who cared? The photograph taken by the helicopter was definitely received by the French Frigate operating it. From the Frigate, it was sent on to the Government department in Paris handling the EUNAVFOR

affairs; where, for all intents and purposes, it stopped. The newspaper stated they had paid no cash for it; the photo had just arrived one day, out of the blue.

It was only by sheer luck that Angela's Uncle Bob had bought a copy of the paper; recognised Jim Turner and phoned Tom Murchison. Not so lucky though, with Tom sitting on it for over five months so as not to upset Angela. Having clean forgotten about it, he had, all on his own, stopped it from being promulgated.

The following morning, Saturday, August 22nd, Mr Dudley arranged a Conference call between The British Admiralty, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and his own department at the MoD, relating what he'd found out so far. They discussed what could be was happening in the Puntland part of Somalia and what could be done about it. A landing force from a Warship was out of the question; however they decided to infiltrate a spy there on a low-key mission; the main object being to contact Turner and find out exactly what was going on. Although...

...The suspicion that Turner was working voluntarily for Puntland and would receive a fortune in US dollars could not be ruled out, in which case the spy's life could be in danger.

Mr Dudley was reasonably certain this was not the case, having noted the shocked expressions on Captain Murchison's and Mrs Turner's faces when he's stated this as a possibility. He decided it was worth the risk. Having made the decision, Mr Dudley began to make things happen.

Since the ***Loch Kelliesport*** was already steaming to the Northern part of the Indian Ocean, They arranged for her to divert to Khor Fakkan in the Gulf of Oman. At the same time, a semi-trained Somali national was chosen to go to the area and contact Turner. He was thoroughly briefed over the weekend and given Identity Papers of a Merchant seaman. He was told to fly to Dubai where he would be met

and transported overland to Khor Fakkan. From there he would go by a normal Agency launch out to the Anchorage area to join a Merchant ship at anchor there, thence being transferred to a nearby warship.

It would have been quicker and easier to have used another warship and collected the infiltrator directly from The Seychelles, but they couldn't rule out the presence of spies there. Khor Fakkan was thought safer and the ***Loch Kelliesport*** was not far away.

Upon arrival at Khor Fakkan anchorage, HMS ***Loch Kelliesport*** was told to anchor on the offshore side of a British ULCC and wait for a passenger to board. Having made the pick-up, the warship was told to return to a position twelve nautical miles off the newly found Island and await orders.

* * * * *

Commander Donaldson knew the anchorage well. The port of Khor Fakkan is in the Sharjah Emirate on the Gulf of Oman coast. The town is approximately thirty miles south of the Quoin Islands, the Point of Entry to the Persian Gulf. At dinner that evening the Commander Donaldson explained the reason for the change of orders, at least as far as he'd been told himself, then added:

"It will be good to see Khor Fakkan again. I was there as a junior officer during the Iran/Iraq war, escorting convoys up to Dubai and back. Some of the ships under escort were Kuwaiti tankers that had changed flags, due to Iranian attacks. The US Navy was there too, escorting American ships. A lot of those were also reflagged Kuwaiti tankers sailing under the Stars and Stripes. Khor Fakkan anchorage was where the two convoys gathered, just outside the Arabian Gulf in the Gulf of Oman."

“Why were the Kuwaiti ships so favoured, Sir?” One of the Junior Officers asked. “As far as I can recall, they were

not involved in that war.”

“They were involved all right, although not technically at war. The Iranians found that Kuwait was actively helping Iraq; importing war material into their port of Shuwaikh and then transporting it overland to Iraq. Several Kuwaiti ships were attacked, mostly their tankers, one of them being on fire for twenty-one hours. It became known as the ‘*Tanker War*’, although still part of the Iran/Iraq war.”

A further buzz of conversation went round the table. A Junior Officer on her first deep sea voyage asked the Captain who had put the fire out? Or was the ship lost?

“They did, the crew themselves with the help of several salvage tugs. Anyway, Kuwait asked for protection from America and Russia, the then Superpowers. The Americans took eleven tankers and re-flagged them, I think and Britain three. Ronald Reagan was President then; it was he who authorised taking those ships over, before the Russians could step in and become an unwelcome presence in the Gulf. It was still the old Soviet Union then.”

The Captain looked round the table, remembering that time in 1988 and continued; “In fact, I met the Captain of the Kuwaiti tanker on fire later, after that war had finished. We were still patrolling the Arabian Gulf and used to exchange Officers with British flag merchant ships when we saw them, usually by helicopter.

I was one of the Junior Officers selected to go aboard the ‘*Tonbridge*’ for a couple of hours while some of their Officers were lifted aboard our frigate. The ship was now British flag but run from Kuwait, being one of the reflagged tankers taken over by the British Government.”

“The same thing happened to me,” A senior Engineering Officer joined the conversation, “I was on the old *Alacrity*

during that same war as a Junior Officer and was one of the Officers lifted aboard the *Chilham Castle*. An interesting experience, although she was only 30,000 tonnes, small by today's tanker standards."

"The same Company, I believe; had a blue funnel didn't she?" Commander Donaldson asked. "While on board the *Tonbridge*, I got talking to their Captain. He was English as were most of the other senior Officers or Indian. We were discussing the recent Iran/Iraq war from our respective viewpoints, the Royal and Merchant Navies. He told me he'd been attacked twice when two of his previous ships, not the *Tonbridge*, were still under Kuwaiti colours."

"The same ship that was on fire for twenty-one hours, sir?" The same Junior Officer asked.

"Yes her and her sister ship. On the first occasion, a missile was fired from a helicopter that destroyed the port Bridge Wing; the lifeboat immediately underneath it and peppered parts of the accommodation with shrapnel. They were anchored off Qatar on Christmas Day, waiting for nightfall to sail out of the Gulf. It was, or so I was told, a 'Maverick' missile. No casualties though."

"Aye, an Engineer Officer on the *Chilham Castle* told me their ships sailed only at night then, anchoring at dawn in the territorial waters of a friendly Nation." The Engineer added.

"Yes that's right; the *Kazimah* was anchored seven miles off Qatar, well within their waters and on Christmas Day too. The second attack was on the sister ship; a speed boat fired seven Rocket Propelled Grenades at her, five of which hit the ship. The last grenade penetrated a cargo tank full of Naphtha resulting in a fire lasting twenty one hours. The ship's crew fought the fire for six hours before several salvage tugs arrived and eventually put the fire out, after a further fifteen hours." He paused then and sipped some coffee.

“That must have been shortly before the Iranians started mining the gulf. The Officers on the *Chilham Castle* told me that all their ships then had to reverse the procedure and sail only in daylight hours, keeping a sharp lookout for mines.” The senior Engineer Officer contributed.

“Yes that’s right. It was also before we and the Americans started the convoys. After that, plus a couple more bad war experiences, including, as you say, stopping overnight for mines; his Company gave him and a couple of others like him a job at Khor Fakkan as Offshore Pilot/Loading Masters. Their job was to moor two giant tankers together.”

The Captain paused to drink some coffee and then resumed:

“The cargo, usually Crude Oil, would then be transferred from the shuttle tanker that had come down under convoy from Kuwait, into another tanker. The latter tanker taking the cargo on to its destination. I remembered then, hearing his voice over the VHF at Khor Fakkan when we were forming our convoys for Dubai. Apparently he lived in Southern France at a small shipyard town close to Marseille with his French wife. Probably still does, although he must be well into his seventies by now.” Commander Donaldson said, amazed at his feat of memory.

“I was still at Dartmouth then, but I remember hearing about a reflagged Kuwaiti tanker being mined sir. Did that happen on one of your convoys?” Another Engineer Officer asked.

“No, that happened on one of the American Convoys. An Ultra Large Crude oil Carrier or ULCC renamed the *Bridgeton*, hit a mine and her forepart was damaged, but no casualties. The American Convoy Commander put the ship at the head of the convoy. She was what, some 410,000 tonnes deadweight, damaged by the mine but still able to carry on. It was a wise decision; she was in ballast with plenty of empty tankage area. If she struck another mine

forward, it would probably still have been absorbed with no loss of life. A Warship, smaller tanker or dry cargo ship would be far more vulnerable. She became known as the 'Largest Minesweeper ever built.'"

"Where *were* the mine-sweepers, sir?" Another Junior Officer asked.

"At first there were none in the area, until India lent us a couple. In fact, another Captain in that same Kuwaiti Company was given command of their two tugs, supplied with paravane gear and told to sweep mines ahead of the convoys." Captain Donaldson replied.

"Did they have any luck, sir?" The same Junior Officer asked.

"Not as far as I remember. In fact I think they were extremely lucky not to get blown up themselves!"

"She would have had an American crew then, I suppose. the *Bridgeton*, I mean?"

"The Captain and Radio Officer only from the American Merchant Marine and two US Naval Officers for communications within the convoy. The other Officers were mostly British, Arab or Indian and the crew Filipino."

* * * * *

The *Loch Kelliesport* arrived at Khor Fakkan anchorage; after anchoring on the offshore side of the ULCC, a boat came alongside and a young Somali man climbed aboard with a battered suitcase. He was met at the gangway and escorted to the Captain's cabin and welcomed aboard.

"Good Afternoon Captain," he said in unaccented English. "I am your guest for a while; here are my credentials and a letter from Mr Dudley in the MoD. As far as the authorities ashore here are concerned, I am a seaman joining the tanker between you and the shore. I have an authentic Seaman's Discharge Book and Passport. Since I

had to pass as a seaman through the various airport controls, I was unable to carry the equipment I need.”

“Yes I have received a communication from the Admiralty telling me to supply you with certain items and also weapons from our armoury.” Commander Donaldson agreed.

“Good. I am, or rather was a Somali citizen with the usual

papers and speak the local dialect of the Puntland area we are going to. As you see, I look half-starved and must stay that way until I have finished the job. I’ll tell you my plans when we approach the Somali coast.”

Upon saying this he took a hand-rolled Biddy out of his pocket, lit it and dropped the spent match on the deck. With an effort; Commander Donaldson bit back an angry remark. The warship hove up her anchor and sailed back to Puntland where she would be seen as part of the European Union Naval forces protecting Merchant ships. During the Passage, Abdul the Infiltrator asked Commander Donaldson to arrive twelve miles offshore, abeam of a position five miles south of the new island site at 0230 the following day Wednesday, 26th August.

“I’ll be using that large rigid Zodiac type boat that can withstand monsoon conditions.” Abdul said.

“Be a bit uncomfortable though, good job the worst of the monsoon is over. The boat has an engine which can be muted

and still maintain speed. What do you propose doing?”

“Yes, I was told about the engine. I plan to use the boat up to a point half a mile from the beach, then to proceed in with the engine muted. Give me two sailors to handle the oars if necessary and a mechanic for the engine. As soon as the Zodiac is back on board your ship, carry on as instructed.”

“I’ll send a Junior Officer as well on the boat, for training. When do we pick you up again?” Commander Donaldson replied.

“To pick me up again,” Abdul continued, “On Tuesday 8th September, send your Zodiac back to exactly the same place and time, the engine as before. If I am not there after fifteen minutes, then leave and come back on the 15th. After that, don’t bother any more, either I won’t be coming back at all, or I’ll have found another means to leave.”

“Yes, I’ve got all that. Will you be bringing Mr Turner back with you? I gather from my last conversation with the Admiralty that the Arab man we photographed was in fact him, in which case, maybe no Arabs are involved at all.”

“Everything depends now on what I find out from Turner. This is really only a scouting penetration, just a minor operation. Since he’s been there since early April and is still alive; then he is probably not in any real danger.” Abdul said, lighting another Biddy. “I have no intention of bringing him out at this time. That will be decided in London depending on what I find out.”

Commander Donaldson was irritated by the smoke from the biddy, but refrained from making a comment, saying:

“OK. I’ll be resuming anti-pirate patrols, although remaining within easy reach of this area after landing you ashore. I’ll give you a portable VHF that looks like an ordinary smartphone. There is only the one channel. If you have any information you want to send urgently to London, just say one word ‘**Samson**’. Then I’ll send the boat to the same place at the same time, the morning following your call. Otherwise we’ll stick to the arrangements for the eighth and fifteenth. Is that OK?” Commander Donaldson demanded, wondering if the smoke from the biddy would set off a Smoke Detector alarm.

Everything went to plan the following night and the spy was landed ashore.

Chapter 24 – Puntland – August 26th

Having been successfully landed ashore, Abdul hid behind a sand dune until daylight; alternatively dozing and waking up to have a cautious look round. In appearance, he looked and was dressed as a poverty stricken man of thirty wandering around, looking for a job. He was reasonably tall; lean but obviously tough with a rugged face. Reaching for his sack, he buried the equipment that would have given him away, and then wandered into the nearby small village to ask some casual questions.

By ten that same day, he gathered that some activity had been noticed in the lagoon but nobody knew exactly what was going on. Security Guards were prowling around there, questioning and turning people away who were trying to reach a nearby village to the North; making them detour round a large house. A couple of boats were fishing in the lagoon every day, probably keeping the village fed.

Satisfied, he moved on to the lagoon area, where he was stopped by an armed Security Guard. Abdul told the guard that he was going home to his village further north, several kilometres along the coast. He said he'd run out of cash and was hoping to find some relatives there. Since he was tired and didn't want to make a large detour round the big house, could he please cut directly across? The guard shrugged his shoulders, spoke into his walkie-talkie and agreed.

Cutting across the space in front of the lagoon he was stopped by another guard with a dog, escorted into the house and interviewed by a Somali man who seemed to have the area under his control. After being searched, he was asked to explain his presence there. 'Walking home to his village not far from Ras Yaafun' was the explanation Abdul gave. There was nothing on him liable to give him

away, just a few shillings in cash and some tattered identity papers, as well as a few ragged clothes in his battered suitcase. Abdul was told

to explain his presence there:

“I came south some weeks ago hoping for work or even to join the Pirates, but nobody was willing to recruit me. I ran out of cash and am now returning home. Have you any work, any kind of work I can do for you? If not, I’ll continue north.”

He went on to list his competences and the kind of work he had previously done. The interrogator had been joined by two other, younger, but equally hard men. The two guards were summoned and told to see him off the property and to never let him back.

“Continue on your way north, I do not want to see you in this vicinity again. *Ever!*” He was told contemptuously.

Abdul deliberately looked disconcerted by the man’s abrupt tone. That, as well as Security Patrols with a dog, warned him it was not going to be all that easy to see Turner and talk to him.

The MoD in London seemed to have under-estimated the efficiency of the operation he was meant to observe. This meant that he was going to have to hide out and watch for any easing of Security. But where? There were some small stunted trees, some bushes and scrub scattered over the landscape, plenty of boulders and rocks as well.

Between the village he could see to the North and the large House, there was a hill overlooking the whole area. The climb looked far from easy, but not *too* difficult. There were some bushes and boulders at the summit; maybe just sufficient to use as a cover. If unfrequented, it would probably be ideal, he would return tomorrow and decide then.

He bypassed a village just to the North of the lagoon, feeling it was too close to the large house and word of his

presence there could soon filter back. He'd already made one mistake in trying to cross the area after being warned by the men in the first village that morning. Now his face was known, it would cause suspicion if he was seen in the area again. There was another village some ten kilometres further North where he might be better off. The only snag being the long walk each time he wanted to approach the site, over ten kilometres each way. A bicycle would come in handy.

He thumbed a lift to the further village, contacted a group of young men and asked where he could stay for the night, several nights in fact. He had just sufficient cash on him to find accommodation with the family of one of the youngsters. He also found an old man who loaned Abdul an old but usable bicycle. Next day he left his lodging about six am, covered the ten kilometres on his wobbly wheels, bypassing the large house and the nearby village.

He continued cycling the eight kilometres South to where the boat had dropped him. There, he dug up his cache, a pair of good binoculars; some night sight glasses; a powerful camera; a prismatic compass; a revolver and other items including a lot more cash, both in local shillings and US Dollars; all of which provided by the ***Loch Kelliesport***. It was risky carrying all this in his battered suitcase, but it should be safe enough if he avoided the big house.

Cycling back to the lagoon area, he hid the bike some 200 metres away from the hill he'd picked as his observation post. Since it was now Ramadan, he waited until early afternoon before climbing the hill; most of the villagers probably sleeping until sunset. Re-arranging a couple of boulders, Abdul constructed a fair hide-out where he could see both the house and lagoon.

After carefully scouting the whole area, he buried his cache and turned his attention to the two boats. One looked like a Zodiac and was still working in the lagoon. The other,

a workboat, was berthed in the creek. In the zodiac, he picked out Turner by his Arab style headdress as well as the three Somalis working with him, one of whom obviously fishing.

Hearing some distant shouting, he noticed three or four women on the shore holding two stakes upright. Just after two thirty in the afternoon, the boat headed for the shore and tied up in the creek; which he remembered noting on the map provided for him by the MoD. The man dressed as an Arab, went up to the large house while the three Somalis and four women walked to the village two Kilometres away.

Abdul waited until it was dark, watching the two guards who seemed slack and lazy, probably posing no great problem for him. The dog though, a Rottweiler, could well be a problem, although the guard kept it on a lead all the time, or in a fenced-in dog pen. Abdul hoped the dog would never have the run of the place. It would soon sense him; as could the village dogs. He had a silenced revolver he could use, also some poisoned meat.

Seeing no further activity, Abdul decided to wait until well after dark; then climb down the hill and return the next day. He was about to quit the hideout when he heard voices and laughter on the hill side below him. He froze, hoping his boulder rearrangement would not cause investigation. A group of village men and youths carrying various tools passed by on a level below his hide-out heading for the creek. They were chatting together and occasionally laughing.

Through his night glasses, he saw a large truck with a crane drive out from behind the house towards the creek bank. Both the truck and what seemed to be a working gang arrived there at the same time. The area was illuminated by a weak lantern and the truck's headlights.

Two other men joined them from the house and one of them started giving orders. Through his night glasses,

Abdul recognised them as the men who'd ordered him off the property the previous day. Some of the village gang got into the back of the truck; the rest of them jumped into the creek and started lifting a cylindrical black object out of the water. Even through his night glasses, Abdul had difficulty identifying the object.

One end of the object was just clear of the water when the lorry revved up and parked beside the creek; its stabilisers lowered on to some flat rocks placed there by the gang. Abdul felt a surge of excitement when the crane was raised from its stowed position, extended and swung out over the creek. A wire sling dangling from the crane hook was attached to the object being lifted out of the water. The crane slowly took the weight, the lorry shuddering on its stabilisers.

When a couple of metres were clear of the water, Abdul saw the object was black, cylindrical and glistening with moisture.

Shocked and excited, he realised he was looking at a torpedo being lifted out of the creek; the wire sling having been attached to what appeared to be the propeller housing. Another torpedo was being lifted down from the truck.

At that point he was interrupted by a dog barking close to his ear. Unnoticed, a village dog had climbed the hill and was snarling, its hackles raised, ready to attack. Abdul quickly shot it with his silenced revolver and evacuated the hilltop, taking the corpse of the dog with him. Reaching his bike safely, he attached the dog's body to the crossbar and cycled back to the village he staying at, plus a few kilometres to the north. There he hid the body of the dog in some scrub off the road. Arriving back at his lodging, he switched on the special smart phone Commander Donaldson had given and said the one word '**Samson**'.

At 0330 the following morning, Abdul was on the beach waiting when he heard the faint mutter of the muted engine.

The Loch Kelliesport's zodiac slowly appeared out of the darkness. Handing his hand-written report to the Officer-in-Charge, he then disappeared back over the sand dunes to where he'd hidden his bicycle. What to do now? He asked himself. Had his hide-out been discovered? He remembered some of the working gang raising their heads when the dog barked, but had there been an investigation?

He decided to would continue with what he was being paid for and try to approach Turner and find out exactly what was going on.

* * * * *

Unsurprisingly, the encrypted message from the *Loch Kelliesport* caused a sensation in London or at any rate to those few who were entitled to read it. Mr Dudley immediately asked the Chairman to summon Captain Murchison to the Company Head Office at 1000 the following morning. The invitation obviously concealed an order, the kind of invitation that had to be obeyed, apart from the illness or death of the recipient.

Tom was not invited to bring Angela with him this time. An Admiral from the Royal Navy attended the meeting as well as a senior executive from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Mr Dudley opened the meeting, saying to the assembled company:

“Good Morning to you all. I have received a message from HMS *Loch Kelliesport*, stating that the infiltrator we sent in has observed a torpedo being lifted out of the creek. He also saw another one being lifted out of a lorry.”

A moment of shock stunned everybody in the room, followed by a pregnant silence as they absorbed Mr Dudley's words. Soon afterwards, they all started talking at once until he restored order. He then spread out a map of the area, made by a skilled cartographer working from

photos. Pointing out the creek area. Mr Dudley continued speaking:

“Let us see what we have got so far. An Island sheltering a lagoon, hitherto unknown to the rest of the world. From photographs we know, or think we know, Turner and three Somalis are sounding the lagoon. Two stakes are being held by women in a line that suggests they are leading marks. Other stakes in the lagoon seem to mark out an area which may be deeper water, but we cannot be sure of that. Since it seems to be taking a long time to sound the lagoon, then there is probably no modern equipment. That’s all we know so far” Mr Dudley concluded.

“Let’s look at it another way.” The Admiral said with a frown. “Can’t we figure out what they are doing and why, based on those facts?”

“We can try! Our agent has not yet been able to speak to Mr Turner. Captain Murchison, do you think it possible for a submarine to enter the lagoon from the Indian Ocean through the southern channel?” Mr Dudley said, pointing to the map.

“Why ask me?” Tom answered, indicating the Admiral. “You’ve got a Navy man here who must know submarines better than I do. My opinion is that the submarine could possibly use this channel but probably not submerged. For Christ’s Sake, we know neither the depth of the anchorage nor the channel yet.” The Admiral concurred.

“This is what we have asked the infiltrator to find out from Turner. But for now, let’s discuss these torpedoes.” That point was dropped, and a discussion followed.

Which countries in the area possess submarines? Somalia obviously had none and out of the near-by Countries, only Pakistan, Iran, Oman, the Emirates and India were known to have some. Yemen probably not, although Djibouti may have a French submarine based there. Kenya, no-one was quite sure about but Mozambique and Tanzania none.

They were all mystified. How did the torpedo get *into* the creek? Why were they lifting it out now? Were they going to equip submarines with torpedoes? Where did they get the torpedoes from? Surely the subs would be carrying their *own* torpedoes anyway. Abdul claimed there were more torpedoes in the lorry. Was the Al Qaeda/Al Shabab link involved?

Nothing made sense! Many possible scenarios were explored. It was known that Pakistani territory bordering Afghanistan have links with the Taliban. They were assumed to be tribesman with no connections with the Pakistan Navy. Was the Pakistan Navy involved? This seemed highly improbable since elements of their Navy were actually working with the NATO force here in the Indian Ocean. Iran?

Would Iran want an unknown lagoon as a secret submarine base?

President Ahmadinejad had often threatened the West to close the Gulf. If this happened, the American Navy would probably blockade the Iranian Navy in at Bandar Abbas. They would have to patrol the rest of Iran's Coast in the Persian Gulf; also in the Gulf of Oman and then East to the Pakistani border. It was an enormous coastline.

If two Iranian submarines, for instance, managed to get clear of the Arabian/Persian Gulf and into the lagoon before all this happened; then they could attack the American Warships from the rear as it were. Or even target normal tankers. Anything is possible in that turbulent nation. This was thought to be thoroughly far-fetched, although no other scenario fitted quite as neatly as that.

Mr Dudley finally brought the meeting to a close, stating that the agent was still there and would soon be able to talk to Turner. Meanwhile the ***Loch Kelliesport*** would remain within helicopter distance of the area. Before going back to his office, Tom had to sign the Official Secrets Act again.

* * * * *

To find out why torpedoes were being lifted out of a small creek in Puntland, we will have to go back in time to April 2009 and follow Jim's story from there.

Book Three Events in Somalia/Puntland

Chapter 25 – in Somalia – April 21st

Two days after his outburst in the hut, Jim was escorted to the big house where three men were sitting down waiting for him. He forced himself to stop trembling, his fists clenched and his whole body rigid with tension. The men all wore western clothes, their faces unsmiling and grim.

"Please sit down," said one of the men, pointing to a rattan chair. "Tell me what an English officer is doing on a Liberian ship. Have you been dismissed from English ships or are you just an adventurer?"

Jim looked up, startled, shocked even. The question was totally unexpected, so was the politeness. He had expected what...? Brutality certainly; violence; a beating to soften him up; threats to him and possibly his family but certainly not politeness. Jim took his time answering the question, realising his whole future could depend upon the correct answer.

"There are quite a few English officers sailing on Flag of Convenience ships. Not so very long ago many British Companies were folding up, or else being bought out by non-shipping consortiums. In my case, I was on *loan* to the ship for a three month voyage, then back to the British Company that employs me."

“Is your British Company involved with tankers?” one of the other men asked.

“Yes, we have three, plus some container ships, RoRos and Bulk carriers. Also two liquefied gas carriers.” Jim replied, more mystified than ever.

“Good, are you qualified for all those vessels?” The same man asked, leaning forward in his chair.

Jim could make neither head nor tail of these questions; were they offering him a job or something? This was in complete contrast to the violence when they took him off the ship. The last thing he’d been expecting was a Question and Answer forum! Looking around, he noted with surprise the lack of guns or balaclavered armed guards in this, not unpleasant, room. Encouraged a little, he decided it was time to ask a few questions himself.

“Yes I’m qualified for all those ships. Please tell me why I’m here and why you took me off my ship? When can I go back on board the *Dawn Splendour*? I’ve answered your questions, now please answer mine. More importantly, will you reassure my wife I’m still alive.”

“Your questions will be answered later, when we have decided what to do with you. And that, Mr Turner, depends how you answer *our* questions. Shall we carry on or do you want to go back to the hut for another few days?”

“Yes I’ll answer your questions, so long as they don’t involve terrorism or how to sabotage ships to blow up in New York or somewhere.” Jim answered briefly.

He had hesitated whether to say this or not, but said it anyway and felt a renewed moment of panic, scared he may have hastened his own death. Wiping sweat from his brow; he felt his stomach churning and wondered if he was going to have diarrhoea right there in the room.

“We are not pirates; neither are we saboteurs, nor terrorists. We have no intention of using ships to blow up New York or anywhere else. We want to use ships or a ship,

but I'll explain later when we have decided whether we can trust you or not."

He spoke good English, seemed well educated and completely in control. Although Black, their features seemed to have an Arabian quality. Intelligent but ruthless, was Jim's initial summing up. The next question was also unexpected.

"Mr Turner, do you know anything about Somalia, the people living here, our religion or religions?" Jim thought for a bit and then said hesitantly:

"I know very little about Somalia, except that France, UK and Italy colonised it until soon after the war."

He went on to tell them about the Somali crew he'd sailed with on the *Amersham*. How two of them had joined initially and then called all their mates sailing out of British ports, after the UK crew had left." He stopped, thought for a bit, then resumed

"We ended up with a full Somali crew. Good workers too, no problems with drink or drugs. On another occasion," he suddenly remembered, "there was a very large Dhow on fire off the South coast of Oman during the Southwest Monsoon. We stopped and searched on a dark windy night and picked up some survivors the following morning. I was in charge of the lifeboat, pulling them out of the sea. They were all Somalis with a Pakistani Captain. I've been to Mogadishu and Kismayu a few years ago, Bossasso once as well. That's about all I know of Somalia and its nationals. I know there is fighting in the South of the country, from Mogadishu down to Kismayu and the border with Kenya."

"Well, that's certainly more than we expected. In that case you know that we're mostly Moslems in this country, Sunni Moslems, although there are still one or two Catholic

families who were baptised when the Italians were here. Do you have any prejudice against Moslems?" Jim was asked.

'Careful now' Jim said to himself, thankful he was able to quote his previous experience on the Kuwaiti ship.

"No, not at all. The Somali crew I mentioned were all Muslims, since they were strict about not eating pork. I sailed on loan to a Kuwaiti ship about four years ago, where the majority of Officers were Moslem. They were mostly Egyptian, Syrian or Pakistani, even some Palestinians too. In fact there are two Syrians on the *Dawn Splendour* right now. I got on well with them, although we seldom ever discussed religion." Jim replied.

He very nearly said he wasn't against Catholics either, but stopped himself in time. This was neither the time nor place for levity. Certainly not for over-confidence.

"Right, the Crew List on your ship stated your nationality but not your religion. Are you Jewish or do your sympathies lie with Israel?

"I'm a Christian. I was born and baptised as a Protestant in the Church of England. My sympathies do not lie with Israel, nor with Palestine." Jim said. "On British ships there is no column for stating ones religion. Nor on our passports."

There followed a few more questions, some about religion and others about his work experience. All of which he was able to answer adequately.

"One last question, are you willing to work for Puntland?" The leader suddenly demanded. Without thinking, Jim answered:

"Huh! Work for Puntland? Doing what? Why me? All I want is to get back to my ship and back to England as soon as possible. If you are not going to kill me, then please let me go home." Jim said incautiously, feeling he was now on safe ground.

His captors looked at each other, shrugged, shook their heads and stood up. Two of them left the room leaving Jim and one of the men there. He was frightened again, wondering if he'd made a terrible mistake. Another armed guard was summoned and the three Somalis spoke together in their language, indicating Jim. Then the second guard nodded and cocked his gun. Terrified, certain they were taking him outside to shoot him, Jim felt his legs almost give way under him. Tightening the muscles of his buttocks, he hoped to stop his imminent diarrhoea. He dimly heard the man talking to him.

"Right Mr Turner, that last answer was disappointing. Just remember that you are our prisoner and we have absolute power in this area. Remember too, that nobody knows where you are, no-one can help you, nor can you escape. You are to return to the hut while we decide what to do with you. During that time, think seriously about working here."

Jim felt weak with relief, his legs trembling and sweat covering his whole body. He was taken back to the hut and locked in, reaching his squatting toilet just in time to avoid soiling himself. Once again he considered trying to escape, but where to? His captors were right; he'd stand out like a sore thumb with the local population and would certainly not get far. What did they mean about working for Puntland? Where was he anyway? Was he in Somalia or Puntland? The names seemed interchangeable.

He reckoned he is as brave or as cowardly as the next man but hoped he would be able to resist converting ships to act as suicide bomb ships. He had no idea how to go about doing this anyway!

There was nothing he could do except wait for the three men to decide his fate. That last speech his captors made had chilled him. He realised that he'd fallen prey to their initial politeness and was even beginning to think his situation was not quite as bad as he'd first feared. Once

again he was frightened; others were considering his future in terms of life or death. He hated being so helpless and locked up once again!

‘Why the hell didn’t I say yes to working for their country?’ He murmured to himself.

* * * * *

Back in the villa, all three men had returned to the room and were discussing the answers Jim had given; they debated whether to continue using him for their project, or to kidnap another Officer from a ship at anchor. That led to the question of what to do with Turner, the one they had already kidnapped. If they killed him, it would be contrary to the reputation the Pirates had until then for not harming ship's crews. If they kept him and forced him to work for them, they would need his cooperation as well as his expertise. A regime of constant fear and punishments would result in an inferior job.

“Why did you choose a white officer for the job?” One of the younger men asked. “Surely a black would have been better. A white man is really going to stand out in this community.”

“Naturally I would have preferred a Black, but there are none out there according to my contacts, nor can I afford to wait any longer. In any case, I intend disguising him as an Arab working man. After all, Arabs have always traded here from Egypt and Arabia, back to the time when this area was the original Land of Punt.”

“Surely there are some Indian Senior Officers out there who could do the job and not be so immediately obvious? Well I hope our villagers don’t object, especially those who will be working with him, they will think we’ve gone back to the colonial era. White Italian overseer and black workmen!”

“They’ll do what I tell them to do.” The Head man retorted, pacing the room and considering the alternatives. Whether to keep Turner, forcing him to work for them or to kidnap another ship’s Officer, a Black Officer when one becomes available.

But how soon would that be? If they agreed to kidnap another Officer from a ship, then they would have to dispose of the one they have already got. He stopped beside the once valuable walnut desk and picked up the list of ships currently at anchor off Eyl. The younger man spoke again:

“If we do decide to kidnap another one, don’t ask those four stupid fools to carry out the operation. They did badly last time when the helicopter overflowed them. They were told to have the captive covered by a tarpaulin from the start.”

“I agree” answered the leader, sitting down on a comfortable maroon coloured chair. “But don’t forget they had only just left the ship, and probably had no time to use it. The question is, did the helicopter have time or the means to take a photograph of the hostage and boat crew? The ship is Liberian but the hostage certainly isn’t. *We* know the man is English but I doubt the helicopter crew realised his nationality; none of the Pilot’s questions to the ship were answered.”

“I still think they should have obeyed our orders and got him under the tarpaulin right away, like a boat delivering stores. But no, the fools even tried to shoot the helicopter down! Why did they not do the job at night? That was never explained.”

“Well there is nothing much we can do about it now.” The leader said, yawning. “We discussed all this nine days ago when he was taken off his ship, so there’s no point in going over it all again. We’ll just have to abduct another one from a ship at Eyl.”

“What are we going to do with our prisoner then if we don't kill him? Pity the world knows he is somewhere in Somalia or Puntland. Why not force him to go ahead with our plans? If not, what? Put him in a boat with some food and water and then push him out to sea? Being a sailor, he should survive.”

This speech came from the third man, who rose from his chair and strolled over to the open window. He seemed less forceful than the previous speakers. Rolling a cigarette, he said:

“I think we should go ahead with our plans and use him. There is far too much at stake and we have been compromised by the helicopter anyway. The sooner we get started the better. As far as the Englishman is concerned, the best thing we can do is to frighten him badly, very badly.” The younger man said, lighting his cigarette with an expensive lighter.

“What do you suggest?” Said the leader, putting the list of hijacked ships down. “He has been afraid all the time, he still is. The boat crew said he was shaking with fear when they left the ship.”

“You should have seen him earlier this afternoon when the guard started messing around with his gun.” The other, more forceful younger man stated, laughing at the memory. “How can we make him more afraid than he is now?” the apparent leader asked. “The death threat is still there.”

The language they were speaking was Somali, interspersed with English, which they could all speak fluently.

“Yes, but that's a long term fear. As you say, it has not gone away but he is used to living with it by now. What we need is a real short term, paralysing fear, which when stopped *will* go away *and which could be repeated at any time it becomes necessary.*”

“Um.... Yes I see, so again, what do you suggest?” queried the leader, “I am against physical torture as being

unproductive and rarely necessary, especially if we want his full cooperation later. Badly frightened yes, but not tortured.” He stood up, crossed over the room and joined the other man.

“I have an idea about that. I was talking to one of his guards who told me there was a big commotion in the hut one afternoon. Some yelling and banging that sounded like his tin plate hitting something. The guard looked in through the window; saw him beating his plate at a small harmless spider that was easily avoiding it. Our prisoner seemed really afraid of this little spider. He doesn't like cockroaches either, but spiders really seemed to bother him.”

“As you know; most Westerners do not like spiders or other insects”. The leader said.

“I was curious about this and wondered if this knowledge could help us. So I experimented by putting other, slightly larger spiders into the hut. I watched him through the window and noted his reactions. He was terrified and I'm reasonably certain he suffers from Arachnophobia. I remember reading that persons suffering from this disease tend to exaggerate the size of the spiders. I suggest our men capture some big hairy Tarantulas and put them in the hut with him late one afternoon, not long before nightfall. We all know these spiders are big ugly brutes but relatively harmless, but he may not know that.” He replied.

“Spiders?” Jeered the other slightly older man. “Tarantulas? Do you really think a couple of spiders will terrify him so much that he will just agree to do what we want?”

“Yes, I'm sure of it, judging by his reactions to small spiders.” Came the rejoinder.

“Are you sure you are not just giving him a couple of furry footballs to kick around?”

“Those furry footballs, as you call them, will terrify him, I'm sure he will be screaming to be released and will do what we want; without a scratch on him.”

“If he is as scared as that, he might have a heart attack and be useless to us.” The elder of the two said.

“Well, it might work,” said the leader, cutting in to the argument. “Send one of the men to collect three or four tarantulas. The hairier and bigger the better. Make sure that they are not Mygales though, their poison is fatal. If that does not work, we can try some snakes.”

Jim Turner did, in fact, suffer from Arachnophobia although it had never been diagnosed. He’d managed to control himself against the small harmless spiders that are plentiful in England, but anything larger, uglier or hairy terrified him. Even the thought of them made him feel sick. Consequently he’d never confessed his fear to anyone, including his parents.

Chapter 26 – Captive in Puntland – April 26th

Five days had passed since Jim had been returned to the hut, frightened for his life. Since he was still alive and being fed twice daily, he realised his abductors had not yet finished with him. Nothing seemed to have changed, neither the behaviour of his guards nor the quality of his food.

‘For Christ’s Sake’ he thought, ‘why in hell didn’t I agree to work for them?’ But, then again, what did they want him to do in Somalia, or rather Puntland? The whole interview had been bizarre. What could he, a sailor, do for that country apart from sailing one of their ships? Always supposing they have any! What were they going to do with him now? After nervously walking up and down the limited space in the hut, he felt tired, laid down on the bed and dozed off. He’d been a captive for a total of eleven days by then.

The door opening and shutting disturbed his sleep; then an odd scurrying sound woke him, a sound he'd not heard before. Looking round to identify it, he saw two giant spiders roaming around the floor of the hut. Great big horrible hairy brutes, evil looking things, the epitome of all his worst nightmares. A third spider was climbing up the wall towards the bed. Terrified, he jumped to his feet, still on the bed, looking around wildly for a weapon.

His plate and mug on the table seemed to be the only things he could defend himself with. Attempting to make a dash for them, he saw yet another spider appear, clambering over the table top; attracted by the leftovers from Jim's midday meal. He hurriedly jumped back on to the bed again, half out of his mind with sheer terror.

Remembering his shoes under the bed, he grabbed them as weapons and managed to knock the spider climbing the wall down to the floor. The other two were charging in his direction, their eyes almost hypnotising him. Standing on the bed with a shoe in each hand, shaking with fright and horror; he desperately fought those three tarantulas and killed one of them, which made a nasty splodge on the mattress. The other two retired for a bit, joining the one that had climbed down from the table.

It looked as if they were consulting together, planning a new attack. Then, attracted by a couple of cockroaches in a corner of the hut, they ignored Jim. Watching, scared almost out of his wits, he was repulsed when he saw how fast the spiders moved to catch the cockroaches. They even seemed to be trying a pincer movement.

The guard, realising the menace was not going as planned, opened the door and saw Jim standing on the bed, being ignored by the spiders. He emptied a bucket containing two more, causing Jim to vomit with fear and disgust. After watching and sometimes fighting them for a good half hour, although it seemed a lot longer, he noticed the light fading. It would soon be dark and the only

illumination he had after ten at night was the quarter moon. The lights were always turned off at that time and there were no torch or candles, nor any other means of lighting the hut.

‘It will be dark soon?’ He thought, trying to resist a further surge of panic, ‘how can I fight them if I can't see them? I can't stay up all night standing on the bed, just waiting for one of them to bite me. Even if I manage to kill these monsters, they'll put more in later. They obviously intend letting the spiders kill me.’

He was far too terrified to realise one simple fact; if the Somalis wanted to kill him, they would have done so, without taking the trouble to use spiders. Nobody could have stopped them.

He heard a hissing noise but couldn't place it at first. Then he saw an even worse horror. Immediately behind him, a snake was slithering through the open window, winding itself round the bars. Yelling with increased fear, he jumped down off the bed to avoid the snake, a move that attracted the spiders to him. Almost out of his mind with terror, he ran to the door, shouting for help; banging a tattoo on the door with his shoes.

Looking down, he saw one of the spiders close to his bare foot, the others fast approaching. Almost vomiting again, he ran back to the bed, jumping over two spiders. By then, the snake had wriggled clear of the window bars and was now on the bed. Jim had nowhere else to go; except to climb up on the rickety table which swayed under his weight, threatening to collapse under him.

The guard opened the door, looked in and laughed, yelling at Jim to keep quiet. Kneeling on the wobbly table top and pointing to the spiders and snake, he shouted an appeal to the man for help. The guard shrugged, repeated his warning and left the hut, locking the door.

Completely terrified, more so than he'd ever been in his life before, Jim shouted that he was willing to work for

Puntland, pleading with the guard to take these spiders away. Two minutes later the guard opened the door and used a broom to sweep the spiders out of the hut, ignored the snake and beckoned Jim to follow him. Putting his shoes on; he was horrified to see that one was blood-stained from the spider he'd killed.

Jim was no coward, as brave as the next man in normal circumstances. Once he'd separated two drunken sailors fighting with fire axes, stopping them. He'd had confrontations with crew, also with Superior Officers when he thought they were wrong. The Somalis seemed to have found his major fear with no trouble. He was terrified of spiders and, to a certain extent, crabs. Poisonous snakes, he had never really considered before; he could now safely add them to his list of horrors.

Jim was taken to the same room in which he was interviewed before and left alone. Sitting down on an uncomfortable rattan chair, he forced himself to calm down; his heart thumping at double its normal speed. It took him twenty minutes even to stop shuddering. The room was not air-conditioned but a large fan fixed to the ceiling kept the air moving. The evening was cool; the windows all open to catch the faint breeze, with gauze inserts to stop insects flying in. A further half hour passed before he stopped sweating. He could have welcomed a cigarette but had stopped smoking a few years previously.

Although untouched by the spiders, Jim felt, and looked, as if he'd been given a beating; the type of beating that leaves no visible marks, except for the vomit staining his uniform shirt front. Self-confidence having been knocked out of him, he was ready to do anything his captors wanted. As soon as he was calm again, the same three men entered the room.

The one Jim thought to be the Leader was dressed in a dark western style suit with a striped shirt but no tie on. The other two in some kind of colourful robes. They sat down in

comfortable chairs; staring at their defeated prisoner. The silence grew prolonged and Jim started sweating again, his fear mounting. He clenched his fists, hoping to stop his incipient trembling, determined not to be the first one to speak.

“Right, Mr Turner,” the apparent leader finally said ominously. “Are you going to work for us or not? If not, we will put you back in the hut again and forget about you. In a few days we will bury your half-eaten body and abduct someone else. If you do agree to work, then never forget that the hut is always there; spiders and snakes are easily obtainable.”

Jim stared at the three men with a mixture of hatred and relief. Relief that he was clear of the spiders and hatred having been forced to endure them. Hatred too, for the men who had thought up such a diabolical nightmare. Self-hatred because he knew that he was going to give in and do exactly what they wanted. Thinking back to his first interview, he realised that the tone of the leader had changed, being much harder now; lacking politeness.

“OK, but how did you know I'm scared of spiders?” Jim asked. His question was ignored. The three men were all staring at him, their eyes hard and their faces grim.

“I’m asking you just one more time,” the senior man said, holding up one finger. “Are you willing to work for us here in Puntland? Before you answer, remember that any attempt to escape or any bad mistake you make; or a refusal to work for us will put you right back in the hut again, left to be poisoned and then eaten alive. Right then, yes or no?”

Jim gave an involuntary shudder. Despite the coolness, the room seemed suddenly hotter and stuffier. Plucking up the last of his courage, he asked:

“What do you want me to do for you then? If it's for sabotage or using a ship to blow up in a port like New York or somewhere, then I've got to refuse.”

He was shaking with fear as he said this, terrified to be sent back to the spiders, but ready to back down if they insisted. His three captors started laughing. Jim looked up, shocked by the unpleasant brittle laughter. Terrified again, he braced himself for further unpleasantness. The apparent leader looked at Jim with disdain and repeated:

"I told you before; we are not Pirates, although we do fund some of them at times. Neither are we saboteurs nor terrorists. We have no intention of blowing up New York or anywhere else."

"What do you want me to do then?" Jim asked, it was almost a whisper.

"We want you to build a Deep Water port." The senior man calmly announced.

"You want me to do *what!*!" Exclaimed Jim loudly, sitting bolt upright with a jerk and wondering if he was going mad. The chief captor relaxed and said in a more reasonable tone!

"Well, not a port exactly. You cannot see it now because it is dark, but there is an uninhabited island quite close to the coast. The stretch of sea between that island and the mainland appears to be shallow. Two elderly fishermen convinced me a year ago that somewhere in that stretch of sea, or lagoon, there is an area of deep water; with a channel leading out to the Indian Ocean. We want you to find this deep water and channel, mark them with a line of buoys or stakes so that medium sized or small tanker ships can anchor there."

Jim sat back in his chair, nearly causing it to fall over backwards. The Chief spoke very good English, although it was a bit stilted; as if he'd learnt it from a governess.

"But why me? Why do you want to do that? You've got some near decent ports in the country anyway. I've been to Mogadishu and Kismayu myself a few years ago. Bossasso as well."

“An Islamist sect controls Kismayu and most of Mogadishu. We will tell why later, but for the moment just do as we say. We will provide a boat with a couple of helpers and a secretary to keep a file on your progress.”

“OK.” Jim said, assuming the secretary would be male, placed there to spy on him. “But why go to all the fuss and bother taking me off my ship to do a job you seem well equipped to do for yourselves? Are those two elderly fisherman still around?”

“They are both dead. There are plenty of people in this country who could do the job, some of them probably better than you. But we need to keep the whole project a secret. You will be working strictly for us and *only* for us, with armed guards to stop you escaping. If necessary you will be locked up at night. You will be fed enough to keep you alive, but not paid. We will use your knowledge of charts and depth limitations, as well as tides and tidal flows. What effect monsoons have on the tides? What size tanker could anchor in the Deep water, using the southern channel from the Indian Ocean? Would that tanker be able to negotiate the channel?”

Jim was relieved they were not going to kill him, not yet anyway. It still seemed bizarre.

“This seems to be more of a job for the Port Captain from Bossasso or Mogadishu, he’d obviously be far better than acquainted with local conditions than I am. Or a team of professionals with the right equipment. They will have a lot more expertise than I’ve got, and be able to complete the job in far less time.” Jim said.

He was casting around for one last try, attempting to find ways to refuse without being returned to the spiders. With a frown, the leader lit a cigarette and said bitterly.

“What team of professionals is going to come to this country to work? There is no real police force here, nor any law? We would need a private army to protect them

adequately. Here we live in an under-populated area, all of which is fully under my control.”

“You mean you’re a War Lord?” Jim asked, amazed. His sun-tanned face paled with shock.

“Yes, I suppose you could call me that. I would rather be known as the Head Man of my clan, or even the Clan Chief. In any case the whole area, about one hundred and seventy-five kilometres along the coast and the same inland, is under my *direct* control including many villages. My influence, however, is far greater than that, since the whole area forms part of that same tribal group of clans.” The man paused, as if in order to collect his thoughts, then continued.”

“The work you will be doing is a secret operation, for the benefit of myself, my family *and* my clan. We have no intention of advertising our plans until the job is finished - a ‘*Fait Accompli*’ if you like. Just remember, you are our prisoner and you will stay here working until the job is completed to my satisfaction.” The older man elaborated.

“Where will I be living?” Jim asked. “Locked up in the hut with no lights after dark?”

“We’ll be watching you closely all the time, we could easily do this work ourselves but we have other, more important things to do at the moment, which is why we abducted you. As for your living quarters, you can have a room here in this house. Right, it is getting late now.”

Having said that, the man who appeared to be in charge

went to the door and called out. Moments later, a woman arrived, dressed in traditional costume with only her face and hands uncovered.

“Follow this woman who will show you where to sleep as well as the usual facilities. I imagine you would like a shower

after being so long in the hut? We will discuss the project in the morning.” The boss man said ominously.

The other men stood up as well and left the room; the woman looked at Jim with hostility and told to him in perfect English:

“The electricity here comes from a generator and is stopped at ten each night until seven the next morning. The generator provides power for the fresh water pump in a deep well. When the electricity is off, there is no more potable fresh water, which includes the toilets. Follow me and I’ll show you your room and the room where you will find food at certain times of the day; also our rather primitive washing and toilet facilities. Give me that shirt you are wearing and I’ll get it washed.”

Jim could only see part of the woman’s face, which was downcast. Her body was hidden beneath a billowing colourful robe with a form of scarf or *Hijab* hiding her hair. She showed him the toilets and shower arrangements, then took him to a room, and left him there, taking his shirt with her. Jim showered, went to his bed and fell into an exhausted sleep.

He woke early the following morning and thought about all he’d learnt the previous day. There were three men, the senior one being a War Lord. They needed his expertise although there must be men in the country with far better expertise than his. Secrecy was obviously involved. Surely he would stand out in this community, being the only white man – they should have picked a Nigerian or Kenyan Officer or similar.

Jim got out of bed and looked around him. He was in a normal room, by no means a prison cell. He had a single bed, a settee, an obviously old easy chair and a table but no bathroom or toilet. The walls were bare, plastered and painted a faded yellow.

A very basic room, not altogether different in a way, to his cabin on the *Dawn Splendour*. A large window led out to a balcony, overlooking the sea and what appeared to be an island. The floor was clean with scuffed large square

tiles. It was barely daylight but the house seemed to have come to life. He put his pants and shorts on and went to the door, which was locked, but opened later by the same three men.

“Come along Mr Turner, you can start working for us now.” The apparent leader said. “After a quick meal, we will go to the top of the nearest hill, where you can see the island and sea area in between. This should give you some idea of what is involved. Then I suggest you have a good look round, see what facilities we have here, then make a list of what you think you will need. We will give you a boat with a small crew, who will obey your orders. They will also be your guards while working in the boat or anywhere outside the house. There is a room here in the house you can use as an Operations Room, equipped with a computer and a secretary to keep your observations cross-filed.”

‘A computer,’ Jim thought hopefully, ‘but it can’t have internet. Surely they’re not that stupid.’

“One other thing,” the head man continued, his eyes hard. “We do not want you outside the house, or working on the boat, dressed in your white uniform; which will be far too visible to overflying helicopters. We will give you the clothes a normal Arab workman wears.”

One of the other men produced the clothes and Jim got changed. There was an old shabby pair of denim trousers with a piece of rope for a belt and an equally shabby long sleeved check shirt. Also a red and white chequered *kheffiyah* for his head, the end of which could be wrapped round his face leaving his eyes free. A long white robe, a pair of sandals and some working boots completed the outfit. After changing into these unfamiliar clothes, he wondered if he would ever get used to wearing them. Although not yet nine in the morning, he felt the need for a strong drink. The long white robe was for use in the house but not on the boat.

All four of them started climbing the hill. It was a hot windless day and Jim was soon soaked with sweat. From the hilltop, he saw the area properly for the first time. The island was bare, high with an almost sheer cliff down to the sea. Either side of the island, there was an opening out into the Indian Ocean, the one to the North was small, the southern one looked large enough to take a small ship, depending on the depth of the passage. It would be a tricky manoeuvre to undertake though. The sea in between the island and mainland shore seemed calm with no visible rocks.

“By Christ!” Jim exclaimed, astonished. “You mean, you want all this sounded? What kind of equipment have you got? Is there an echo-sounder in the boat? It’ll take many weeks, even months to sound it all by hand. What are you going to use for buoys?”

“Those are all *your* problems; we need the anchorage to be open by the next change of monsoons. Always remember,” the Chief continued ominously. “You will be watched all the time; we have plenty of out of work people in the nearby village to do this. If an aircraft or helicopter does fly over, especially a military one, then cover your face with the end of the Kheffiyah. Do not look up or make any moves to attract its attention. If you do, then it is back to the spiders. We will let them kill you this time and abduct another Officer.”

Jim shuddered, wondering if he would ever get used to these death threats. He would try to ignore them.

“Change of monsoons? But that’s now! The Southwest monsoon will be starting in six weeks or so. You want all this sounded by then?” Jim exclaimed incredulously.

“I mean the next change of monsoons” The Chief man repeated, sounding irritated.

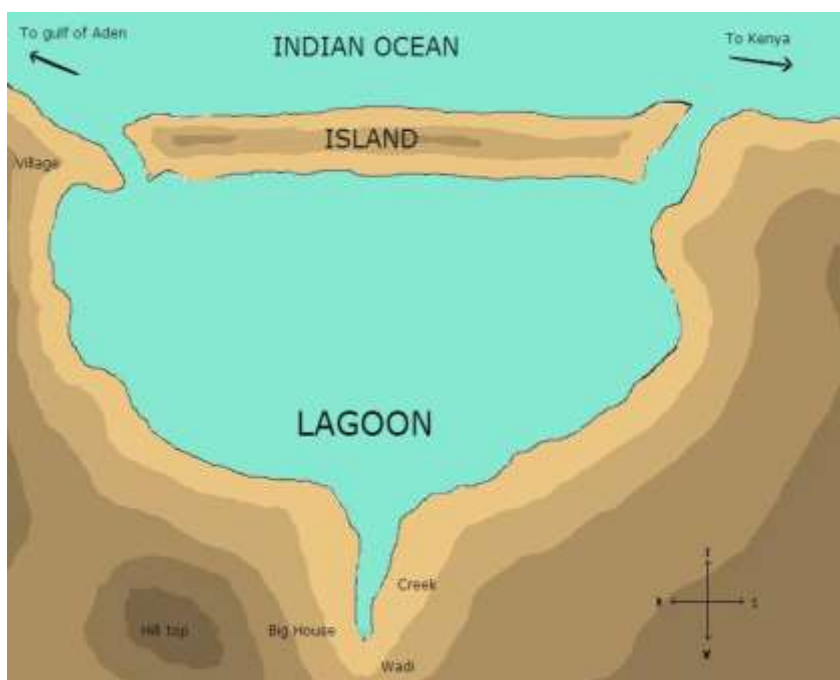
“The next change of monsoons? The calm period between the Southwest and Northeast monsoons? You’re talking about when... October or maybe even November? *That’s*

bloody months away!” Jim exclaimed, shocked and bewildered.

The thought of sitting down in a boat day after day for months and physically sounding the whole area was unimaginable. His hands started shaking.

“That is when this lagoon must, and I emphasise the word *must*, be ready for tanker ships to anchor here. Then you can train two or three men to take them in and out of the lagoon.” The elder man said firmly.

The following is a rough map of the lagoon and the immediate surrounding area:



(A rough map – not to scale. The island is three and quarter miles long. The distance between the village to the North and the Big House – about two Kilometres.)

“You mean you want me to pilot the ship as well and then train others to pilot them. I’ll be here for ever. Christ, I’ve

got a wife and family in England; what are you going to do about them? Will you be paying me? Can you tell her where I am?" Jim asked alarmed, His questions were ignored.

Jim was shocked, both at the scale of the job and the amount of time it would take. At least nine months to a year. Would they let him go then anyway? Or just quietly kill him after he'd completed the job? On top of that, there was something else puzzling him

"I've sailed along this coast many times and don't remember any of this? Has it never been charted? I remember an island a lot further north, but it seems to have two causeways connecting it to the mainland." He asked.

"No, it is not Zaaan" Replied the senior man. "From the sea it is impossible to tell it is an island, the lagoon is completely obscured from the Indian Ocean. Somehow the original cartographers must have missed it and nobody has bothered since. Don't forget that this was once Italian territory. Incidentally you can call me Hassan, it's not my full name, but it will do. What do I call you? Mr Turner seems a bit too formal for a relationship that may go on for several weeks or even months."

All three men smoked heavily; at least cigarettes seemed available in this country, but Jim had stopped smoking years before.

"Jim, I suppose." He replied despondently, "What about my wife and family? Is there any way I can let her know I'm still alive? She'll be deeply worried by now; I'm also badly worried for her and my children." His question was again ignored.

"If you do not work as I want, then you are aware of the alternative. When the spiders kill you, we can easily pick up someone else from another anchored ship. Just take a look round this afternoon and see what equipment we have got" He said, looking at his wristwatch and frowning.

The three men left and went back to the house. A shaken Jim wandered down the hill and went for a walk on the

beach along the shore line. Scared and thoroughly depressed, he felt self-conscious in his new clothes and wondered what on earth his wife would think if she could see him. This immediately brought back all the misery, the worrying situation she and the children were facing.

Jim was appalled, both at the scale of the job and the time it would take, even if there's some basic equipment available. He was not quite so afraid now; the immediate death threat seemed to have disappeared for the time being. It was replaced by visions of solitary boredom and sheer, probably unpleasant work with an antagonistic work force. Had things gone as planned, he would have been home with his wife and family by now, but that was before the hi-jacking and subsequent abduction.

'They are going to take weeks out of my life' he thought bitterly, 'No, not weeks - months.'

A thought occurred to him; was he any better off? Or worse off? Had he not been abducted, he would still have spent several months on the ship waiting for the ransom to be paid; but at least he'd be in his own element and not anticipating unpleasantness and a likely death. Suddenly a lump formed in his throat and tears flooded his eyes. He sat down on a nearby rock and cried as he hadn't cried since he was a child.

He wept out of fear, but also for the coming months of loneliness in a hostile country. Relief for having escaped death, at least for several months was also part of that torrent of tears. He re-lived that terrible time in the hut, attacked by spiders and a snake. He cried too for his wife and children, visualising what they must be going through. Their torment was even worse than his, he knew he was still alive, but they probably didn't.

"At least," he spoke out loud afterwards, "I am still alive and not tortured. At least not yet!"

Ashamed that he, as a grown man, had given way to tears; he got up, rinsed his face with seawater in his cupped hands

and decided to make a start. He wondered what the anchorage was going to be used for. Probably for extended Piracy Operations or something worse, like fitting out a tanker to explode in a busy port? Hassan had definitely ruled that out, but was he to be believed? Should he have agreed to work on this project through fear of the spiders? Would he be betraying his country, or even making things a whole lot worse for brother seafarers? Should he continue?

He shuddered as he envisaged the other alternative. He knew then, that he was going to continue and do the job as outlined by Hassan until he found the first evidence of deep water. Then he must decide what to do. Either declare it and carry on with the job until he'd found all of the deep water and channel?

Or to fudge the results and not to admit finding *any* deep water. At least not until it was obvious the proposed anchorage area would be non-existent or too small for anchoring a Tanker. In which case he would have to find a way to fool his boat crew, which was improbable.

Ironically, had Hassan or somebody else in authority offered him the job legitimately, with sufficient pay, proper equipment and suitable conditions for his wife and children, he may well have accepted. It could be very interesting in the right circumstances and with the right equipment.

* * * * *

Well, if he was going to do the job, he may as well set about it properly and start thinking of what he'd be needing. Going back into the house, he looked for the Operations Room, wondering if the promised secretary was there. Being a Muslim country, he felt sure the secretary would be male; there to make sure Jim did the job properly and to report to - what's his name? Oh yes Hassan.

Upon entering the room, he was surprised to see an attractive young Indian woman wearing a sari sitting at a desk and using a Desk Top computer. She was the first to break the silence:

“Good morning, Mr Turner, I am your secretary and have plenty of office experience. Please call me Sophia. As you

see, my family was originally from India, Goa to be exact.”

She seemed friendly, probably in her early twenties. Both hands were placed together in front of her mouth in a prayer position while speaking; her head slightly bowed. Her eyes looking up at him were almost black, her skin the colour of dark honey.

Her long black hair was partly covered by what appeared to be a silk scarf. Too surprised to reply for several seconds, Jim’s immediately thought was that being Goanese, she probably had some Portuguese blood in her veins.

He was not accustomed to secretaries. On his ships, he’d always composed, typed and filed letters himself; thinking of the days he’d been told about, when Pursers and Chief Stewards were available on board to do all the paperwork. Smiling slightly under his scrutiny, she looked up, waiting for him to speak, her eyes taking in his strange appearance. A thoroughly English type face but unshaved, dressed in shabby clothes, with a *Kheffiyah* on his head. She suppressed an impulse to giggle, but was unable to hide the amused look in her eyes. Finding his tongue, he said:

“Good morning Sophia, pleased to meet you. You'd better call me Jim. I expect you know why I am here and the job I'm supposed to do. Let's start by making a preliminary list of items I'm going to need.”

“Yes, I know all the circumstances and what’s to be done. Go ahead and tell me what you want as soon as you're ready, then I'll arrange it with Hassan. But before we start, will you

please take that ugly thing off your head.” She said, having a job not to laugh.

Surprised he did so. She smiled showing white even teeth and her eyes seemed to soften. There was no Betel Juice staining the inside of her mouth red. They chatted for a while, and then Jim got down to business:

“For a start, I'll need a proper chart. As far as I can recall the chart we were using before my abduction was the '*Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden*'. A British Admiralty chart, number B.A. 2970 or 2971.”

“*Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden*” she repeated slowly, writing it down. “This will be a nautical chart used by ships, won't it?”

“Yes, that's right, I'm pretty sure it's number 2970. Then we had to go on to another chart, I've forgotten its number but it's from *Cadala to Ras Yaafun* or something like that. I'll also need the '*Tide Tables for the Indian Ocean*'; the title

may include the South China Sea, although I'm not sure. Also

The three '*Africa Pilot*' books, usually referred to as '*Sailing Directions*'”

He sat down behind the other computer in the room and thought for a bit, trying to make sense of all he'd learnt that day. Thinking how to start this project, Jim asked her how long she thought it would take to order all this from London and have it sent out to Somalia. At least a couple of weeks he guessed - even if it was possible.

“That's no problem; Hassan has said you'd get all you need in a couple of days. I suppose you prefer English publications rather than Italian, French or German?” She replied.

“Yes, British ones would be preferable, published by the Admiralty Hydrographic Office. But surely it's going to

take quite a while for them to arrive from London? Oh aye, I'm going to need a hand held Prismatic Compass as well."

"Please don't worry about it," she said, jotting down his request in a notebook. "There are plenty of ships out there at anchor waiting for their ransoms to be paid. Hassan's men will probably take whatever you need from one or another of those ships, which will be put down to looting. I doubt that anyone will connect these thefts to your disappearance, even if they are connected at all."

"You mean they're going to steal these items from ships offshore, at anchor off Eyl? As far as I can remember, there are no British ships hijacked, or at least, not yet." Jim said.

"Probably you're right, anyway that's up to Hassan and the others. My job is to pass what you need on to them. Maybe Indian or Pakistani ships still use English books and charts."

Jim acknowledged she was right. The Kuwaiti ship he'd been loaned to, as well as the *Dawn Splendour* had both carried British publications and charts. Both ships also received Admiralty Notices to Mariners with corrections for them. Jim remembered having to show the Second Mate on the *Dawn Splendour* how to do them.

"Yes you're right. That's all I can think of for the immediate future. Incidentally, I'm surprised you speak such excellent English?" He asked her, his admiration evident.

"I speak Somali too. Also Konkani the language of Goa and some Hindustani. When I was a girl, I was sent to an English school in Nairobi and stayed until I was fifteen. When home from school, I lived in Somaliland, which used to be British Somaliland before independence and we nearly always spoke English at home. There were many Indian and Goanese families there, like in most of ex-British Africa. I am here for the same reason as you"

"What, kidnapped, like me?" Jim queried, somewhat astounded.

“No, not exactly kidnapped. Oh I'll explain it all later, it's quite a story. You'll need to know more about the area, its past and present history. Here, let me arrange those items you need.”

Realising the enormous complications of the job, he went back outside and had another look at the lagoon and island. There were not only the soundings to consider, but currents as well. Did the monsoons make all that much difference? This was now the slack period between monsoons. Let's see, it's the last week in April now. By the middle of May or early June, the South West monsoon should be starting. Some of that current must come through the lagoon, he reckoned, but would the tide overcome this or not? Or was the current totally dependent upon the monsoon wind? He should know the answer to that but didn't.

He knew the Southwest Monsoon blew in a North-easterly direction along the Somali Indian Ocean coast, but what effect did the Northeast Monsoon have? It blew South-westerly along that same coast, but with less force. Again he had no idea how it affected the tides. Naturally, during his voyages on various ships, he's been exposed to both these monsoons in the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea.

He knew the theory of monsoons, they were a major factor in his sea-going career and he'd learnt the basics at college. The Southwest monsoon was caused by India and the rest of Asia heating up during the hot summer months causing the hot air to rise. The sea remained cool and retained its cooler air, which replaces the hot rising air.

The opposite was true for the Northeast Winter monsoon. Just like land and sea breezes at the seaside, but with considerably more force.

Suddenly another thought occurred to him. If the British Admiralty didn't know the island he was looking at sheltered a hidden lagoon, then it wouldn't be charted on *any* chart at all. After all, nobody knew of its existence. It

was this that had been bothering him, ever since the job had been outlined to him. The soundings he'd been told to take would have to be plotted, but on what?

From the sea, the island must seem to form a continuous, uninterrupted coastline. How on earth could the lagoon have been missed all these years, especially by the major seafaring nations? OK, everyone knows Somalia is a poor failed country, with no real Government. The Al Shabab Islamist group is fighting in the South, between Mogadishu and the Kenyan border. That, however, does not explain why the island is not shown on *any* chart and the lagoon was not known about.

In the ninth year of the twenty-first century, an island exists with a stretch of sea behind it, known only to a few locals. Incredible if true!

Incredibly it *did* seem to be true! He'd have to chart the lagoon himself, but how? How, with no theodolite, could he measure the part of the island facing him, using only the very limited equipment here? If he had a sextant, he could measure the horizontal angle between the two extremities of the island - but then what? How could he turn that angle into miles? Or even Kilometres?

If he knew the height of the island, he could take a vertical sextant angle and calculate the distance off by Trigonometry. This would give him an approximate width of the lagoon. Accurately? Probably not.

He must think this out properly; no way could he sound the lagoon without putting the results on some kind of chart. A few years previously, his Company had run out of ships to place him on and no other Company needed an Officer on loan. He'd spent a couple of months at a College in London, studying the Part 'A' syllabus for the Extra Master's Certificate, at his own expense. He'd never sat the exam though, since he was called back to sea too early.

The time spent studying did, however, give him some knowledge of Oceanography and Hydrography, having

actually constructed a chart showing a mythical coast. Far more difficult than it seemed, having to correlate the latitude scale with distance. Also he'd used a mapping pen and Indian ink, having difficulty to stop it splashing over the whole damn chart. For the first time in his life, he'd had to buy blotting paper!

At least it was a start, if he could only remember how he'd

done it. Pity he hadn't brought his notebooks with him. Maybe he could ask Hassan to ask Angela for them and at the same time be discreet about his whereabouts. He dismissed that thought as highly improbable.

Three men approached him and told him they were his boat crew, introducing themselves as Yusuf, Abdullah and Ahmed. All three seemed to be in their thirties. They seemed to speak reasonable English; two of them were dressed in old shirts and trousers, like Jim's; the third man was also wearing a working shirt and a type of sarong from his waist down to his feet; his head covered with a rag. Jim learnt later that the sarong could be hitched up to leave his lower legs free.

Just below the house, they showed him a creek with two boats moored there. A half decked Work Boat with an inboard diesel motor; also a large Zodiac style hard rubber boat with an outboard engine. One of the Somalis was looking at Jim strangely and seemed puzzled. Looking closely at the man, Jim was puzzled too, he seemed vaguely familiar. He took off his kheffiyah and they both realised the answer at the same time.

"Hey Yusuf, weren't you one of the deck sailors on the '*Amersham*' a few years back?" Jim asked, surprised.

"That's right, Mister Mate. Two of us joined her at the Isle of Grain; we did a short trip to load somewhere and then back to Thames Haven. All the English lads walked off."

“Yes, I remember now. You and the other sailor sent word round the various Pools in all the UK ports, recruiting more of your countrymen. The Old Man agreed and you went ahead and called them down and we sailed out again with a full Somali crew. All good sailors, they were too.” Jim said, totally astonished at the coincidence.

“What I best remember about that ship are the 'Blind Dogs'!” Yusuf said, grinning.

Jim, despite his situation, couldn't help smiling at the memory. Often on ships, they were asked to donate money on a one-off basis to various charities, usually the RNLI lifeboat service. On one occasion the appeal was for '**Guide Dogs for the Blind**', which, in conversation the Officers referred to as the '*Blind Dogs Charity*'. Or even just '*Blind Dogs*'. The Captain and Chief Engineer signed the list for £15 each, he and the Second Engineer for £10, and so on down the line. Not a single Somali had signed the sheet, not even for a penny. Intrigued, Jim had asked the bosun why. He'd replied:

“No sir, we are very sorry for dogs that are blind, but we don't want to give them our money!”

Sobering, Jim inspected the work boat and asked if there was an Echo sounder on board, worked off the 12 Volt battery. There was, but apparently it hadn't worked for years. They showed him a hand Sounding line. Just a length of knotted Marline, one end attached to a large bolt, acting as a weight. They were obviously going to have to make up a proper sounding line from rope about the same diameter as a signal halyard, marked either in fathoms or metres.

The three Somalis were waiting, so Jim gave them the job of making a suitable one. He asked them to use a metal base for a weight, making sure to include it in the total measurement. Instead of using fathoms, feet and inches, he decided to use the Metric System. Far easier to use. They would secure or even staple a piece of red cloth at each metre, and yellow cloth for each half metre.

He asked Abdullah to find some tallow or fat which they could smear on the piece of weighted metal. Gravel, sand or mud could stick to this when the weight hit bottom, showing the texture of the sea bed when hauled up. 'Candle wax should do', Jim said.

"When did you leave Britain" he asked Yusuf. He was curious about the man; nor could he get over the fact that they'd sailed together in happier circumstances.

"About eighteen months ago, my visa had expired and the British Government didn't want to renew it. I tried staying there without papers but was caught and sent back here. I protested but no good. I'm waiting to have enough money to

get back there illegally."

Jim went back up the hill again for another look at the whole area, sat down on a convenient rock and thought things over. He'd been told to find out if the lagoon is deep enough for a medium size Tanker. She could only use the Southern Channel but for what purpose. If not for sabotage, and Hassan had seemed most definite about that, then what for?

What's the definition of a medium size Tanker anyway? Say 62,000 tonnes deadweight? Far too big for here. No way

could he visualise a Tanker that size sitting in the lagoon, even if the deep water does exist. Right, let's come down a bit. Jim roughly remembered the dimensions of the last Company tanker he'd sailed on before joining the Liberian ship.

The *Chesham*, about 35,000 tonnes deadweight. Some 180 metres overall length and a 32 metre beam. Loaded draft? Maybe just under 10 metres. In which case the depth of the deep water part of the lagoon must be at least 12 or 13 metres minimum at low water; as well as the channel leading out into the Indian Ocean. This would have to be his Chart Datum. Looking at the area of the lagoon before

him, he realised just how long it would take to sound it all properly, using only a hand held sounding line.

While sitting on the rock, he took a good look around him. Facing him was the Island and Lagoon. Looking north, he could see a small village with a mosque, mainly a collection of stone buildings, some with walls enclosing a plot of land. Others were a bit tumble-down. A few wooden shacks as well and what looked like the ruins of an old church. Looking inland he saw the Big House, also the hut where he'd spent the last three weeks.

The house was interesting, solid but built on stilts, probably built in the colonial period with a veranda on each of the four sides. One storey only, but large with plenty of rooms, a flat roof with a rain catchment area on top. Not that there was much rain in these parts.

The land was quite bare, some small trees struggling for survival, but plenty of scrub and some half-hearted bushes. The dominating colour was a yellowish/red, ochre like, desert coloured earth, with plenty of rocks. The trees and bushes were a light shade of green, as if the normal green colour had been leached out of them by the tropical sun.

Jim wondered how the locals scratched a living and then saw one or two herds of goats with men looking after them; also a few camels grazing. There was at least one well he knew about, with a seemingly endless supply of drinking water. It had been sunny every day he'd been here so far, he wondered if the coming South-West monsoon would cause a dense cloud cover, as it did in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman. Well, he'd soon find that out!

He reached the house, where he hoped to find a three course dinner, with aperitifs and wine waiting for him. Freshly caught fish with some pasta, a kind of chapatti like pancake, some vegetables and a glass of tea was all he got. It was welcome though, since his normally excellent appetite was slowly coming back.

By now, Jim had realised the layout of the Big House. There was in a large central room that was comfortably furnished, partly as a lounge and partly for dining. All the bedrooms, kitchen, toilets, and other rooms opened into this large room as well as having external doors leading out to the verandas. The accommodation was far from being uncomfortable, clean but somewhat run down. It could all do with a lick of fresh paint.

Before sleeping, Jim thought about what he'd learnt so far. He'd met six men and two women, one of the latter being Goanese – which seemed an oddity in itself. Three of the men were obviously of a higher social standing than the three men who were to be his crew. It had come as a relief when he and Yusuf had recognised each other, Jim remembered the man well and his abilities as an AB. He hoped the other two would be just as efficient. They had both remained silent during his conversation with Yusuf.

What about the two women then? The black woman who had shown him the toilets had kept her head down while speaking to Jim, but he had the impression she was good-looking. The Goanese woman was attractive, but what an earth was a Goanese woman doing here in an all-black community? He'd received an immediate impression that she was friendly. Was she married to one of the three men who'd interviewed him? No – not likely.

* * * * *

Sophia, at the same time, was thinking about Jim; he was not at all what she was expecting. What was she expecting anyway? A ferocious stout man about sixty, with clenched fists, a beetling brow and cropped grey hair? A bit like one of her school masters at Nairobi. She'd been relieved when he entered her office. About forty, quite good-looking and with an air of authority.

She smiled as she remembered the look on his face when he walked into the office and saw her. The look of amazement had soon turned into a look of relief; then, as expected, into a look of appreciation of her as an attractive woman.

Chapter 27 – Anchorage off Eyl – April 28th

The Maltese ship *Brave Spirit* was one of the latest to be captured by pirates. She was anchored off Eyl with a mixed nationality crew, most of them from the Antwerp International Pool. The Captain was English, the Chief Mate Bulgarian, the other Deck and Engineer Officers were Polish, Ukrainian and two Egyptians. Bored, Captain Saunders was checking charts against the Notices to Mariners, verifying they'd been corrected up to date. A boring job at the best of times, but crucial for the safety of the ship.

He decided to check the current chart, then all the charts to be used up to the next port. He assumed his orders would still be the same as they had been before his ship was hijacked. He was sorry not to be on a modern ship with Electronic charts linked to either the Gyro Compass, radar or Satellite Navigation systems; thereby cutting out the tedium of correcting charts by hand. He opened the chart drawer, checked the chart in use, B.A. No. 2969 ***Cadala to Raas Yaafun.***

The next chart to be checked was the ***Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden***, B.A. Chart No. 2970. Unable to find it, neither in the current chart drawer, nor in the drawer containing cancelled charts, he looked in the appropriate chart folio but it wasn't there either. Calling out to the Officer on anchor watch, he asked him where it was. The Egyptian Third Mate said he hadn't seen it recently.

“It should be in the top drawer. That's where I last saw it.”

“When was that then, when you saw it last?” queried the Captain.

“Two or three days ago, it had tea stains on it, that's why I put them all in the drawer to keep them clean.”

“Well good for you, but it's not there now.” Captain Saunders complained.

With that, he went down to the Officers' deck to ask them where the chart was. Maybe one of them had taken it down to his cabin to study it, although he couldn't begin to think why! Nobody had seen it. He was perturbed because it was the chart he wanted to use soon after they got under way again. They had been bound for the Suez Canal, then Alexandria.

He asked the Somali Chief Pirate if they'd taken it. He said no and shrugged dismissively. The chart was never found. In fact one of the Somalis *had* taken it one night when nobody was around and slipped it down to a boat waiting alongside.

Another chart went missing from a Panamanian ship using British Admiralty charts. They were equipped with the new ECDIS Electronic chart system, with their paper charts being used only as backups if the electronics failed. The loss of paper chart B.A. No. 2969 was not missed for some time.

The *Indian Ocean and South China Sea Tide Tables* was stolen from an Indian ship, unnoticed until several weeks later, well after the ship had been released. They were then in Liverpool undergoing one of the perpetual surveys, the missing book being noted as a default. A new one had to be bought and nobody bothered to inquire why the original book was missing.

A fourth ship, registered at Bandar Abbas, lost one of its Pilot Books, *Africa Pilot Volume 1*, which again was not noticed until several weeks later. Volumes two and three

had also been stolen from two other ships. Hassan had ordered all three volumes to be stolen, so that the one referring to East Africa was bound to be included.

A pair of binoculars was stolen from a Swedish ship, missed by the next watch-keeper, but the mystery never solved.

Chapter 28 – Planning the Job – April 30th

The following morning, Jim woke early from a troubled sleep, he'd been dreaming about his wife and it took a few seconds to realise the grave situation he was in. It was now eighteen days since he'd been abducted from the ship. It was shortly after sunrise; a new tropical day had started with little wind and likely heat up pretty soon.

Jim heard the key turn in the lock and Hassan, with his two followers entered and asked Jim what plans he had for that day. Hassan then unlocked the outside door and they sat down on the veranda. A local woman appeared with tea and some chapatti like bread.

"I'm still thinking it out," Jim answered, dipping his chapatti in the tea like a croissant. "Since no-one seems to know the lagoon exists, the area has never been charted. The charts on board the *Dawn Splendour* showed neither the island nor the lagoon. Do you know if there is a local chart or map I could use?"

"Not as far as I am aware." Hassan said, looking at his two consorts for confirmation.

"In that case, I've got to make up my own chart; from the island to the shore here; also from the point below that village to the southern shore." Jim said pointing to each location. "To do this properly, or even adequately, I need a GPS system, a hand held one for use either in the work boat or the Zodiac."

“Would the GPS in my car be of any use?” Hassan said frowning. “But don’t damage the car taking it out.”

“Hm. I don’t know” said Jim. “A GPS like that only shows you the way to go along previously mapped roads. I need one that can give a Latitude and Longitude read out to the nearest minute of arc. I don’t know if the GPS you’ve got in your car can be adapted for that.”

Later, Jim discovered his ideas on GPS systems were not altogether accurate.

“Why are you bothering with all this? Why can’t you go ahead and find the Deep water and the channel and mark them with stakes? Then you can take the ship in to anchor in the deep water, without needing a chart.”

“So you really do want me to act as the pilot as well?” Jim said, his heart sinking. “I can’t imagine any Captain taking his ship into *any* anchorage just by following a few stakes stuck in the mud; even with an experienced pilot on board. He’ll need to study the chart beforehand and even then he’d probably refuse.”

“He is not going to have a choice. Armed men will be aboard the ship, the Captain will do as he is told or suffer the consequences. You as well!” Hassan said harshly.

Jim felt it was time he made a definite point. He’d been kidnapped to do the job; his life had been threatened, not only once but several time. He’d been humiliated and his spirit broken by the spiders; on top of that, he was being forced to work here for months with an uncertain future. He might as well go for broke and try to regain some of his former courage. *Now!* Seizing the opportunity, he said to Hassan:

“There is no way I can do the pilotage without a chart. Nor will I be able to persuade, or even force *any* Captain to take his ship into an uncharted anchorage, even if it is properly buoyed. I’ll need a chart to plot the soundings, also to plot the position of the buoys or stakes. The only way to this quickly and accurately is by using a hand-held

GPS system, with Latitude and Longitude read-outs.” Jim said firmly. “I can’t possibly sound the lagoon until the chart is completed.”

“The secretary will record all the soundings in the computer, which should be sufficient.” Hassan said, looking ready for trouble.

“Record what? Without a GPS she can only record the depths but not their positions? If a storm comes and sweeps the stakes or buoys away, or even a strong monsoon; we could never replace them accurately without reference to a chart. All Sophia can record are the soundings and how many stakes or buoys we’ve used, but not their location.” Jim stated firmly, finishing his second chapatti and drinking his glass of tea.

He’d noticed one of the men with Hassan looked thoughtful and had even nodded a couple of times. Seizing the opportunity Jim attempted to drive his point home.

“Another thing Hassan, do you want to use the anchorage on a permanent basis? Even if it’s only a ‘one off’ job, we’ve still got to have a reliable chart to plot the soundings on. If, as I say, the buoys or stakes get swept away, they can easily be replaced by referring to their charted position.”

Jim saw that one of the men clearly understood his point and started to argue with Hassan in their language. Jim interrupted and said:

“Look Hassan, you know computers as well as I do, we might be halfway through the job and the computer packs up. Or the secretary presses the wrong click and we’d lose a month’s work, just like that. A proper chart is permanent and that’s what is needed for the job, both for a ‘one-off’ and multiple usage. I’ll use the computer but *only* as a back-up. I’ll also make a list of the buoys and stakes in a notebook as well, in case the computer does pack up.”

“How long will it take to chart the lagoon? I want the whole job finished before the calm period between the

South West and North East monsoons. Around October or possibly November.” Hassan eventually asked.

“I don’t know, never done it before. No longer than a week I’d say, after the GPS unit comes.” Jim replied, stifling a sigh of relief. He felt better about things, having made a point and won it. He paused, then went on to say:

“Look Hassan, this is what I propose to do. My first line of soundings will be from a point on the beach here to the north end of the island, on as straight a line as possible. The soundings will be at, say, five metre intervals along that line. The next line will be five metres to the south of that first line, and so on until we reach the southernmost tip of the Island. This is the only way I can see to do the job with any certainty of finding and delimiting the area of deep water.”

“Right then, I’ll get one for you, probably from Djibouti or Aden. If you cooperate fully, you will be treated fairly as a kind of 'Working Consultant' under guard, and let go after completion of the project. I expect your Company will eventually sort out your salary because we will feed you but not pay you.” Hassan said.

“One of the things I need to know is whether the ships will be in ballast or fully loaded. As far as I know, there's no Crude Oil in the country, so I suppose the tanker will be carrying something else.” Jim said.

“We plan to use more than one tanker. We will tell you more later on when we see how well you’re working for us. Just remember those spiders; they still exist!”

“In that case, you will certainly need a chart. When the hand held GPS comes I’ll be able to start work. I’ll also need some Indian ink and a mapping pen. When will the Tide Tables, Pilot Books and charts be coming? Especially the Tide Tables?” Jim asked.

“Tomorrow; I think”. Hassan said, turning to go with his two companions.

Looking over the balcony rail Jim saw a scorpion scurrying out from the space beneath the house towards a rock. He shuddered; aware he was only wearing sandals with no socks. Would socks be sufficient to protect his feet though? Jim decided to try his luck again:

“Right then Hassan. I've also been thinking about the area of the lagoon and the very limited means I've got to measure the depths. Only a hand held sounding line, which means the job's going to take for ever. The work boat's got a 12 Volt battery to start the engine, so I suggest you buy an echo sounder able to be fitted into that boat, as well as an additional marine battery.” Jim said hopefully. “The one already on the boat doesn't work and there are no spare parts for it anyway.”

“Give the details to Sophia and I'll decide yes or no.” Hassan said, irritated and impatient.

“The one in my cousin's sailing boat is a 'Navman' set, which includes a speed log as well as a depth sounder. This would be invaluable. However, you're going to have to buy it rather than steal it, because we'll need the instructions to know how to fit it.” Jim stated, realising he'd already won a small battle and could be on his way to win another one.

The three men left. When Jim had mentioned Crude oil, he'd noticed one of the men give Hassan an involuntary glance, which was ignored. Was there any Crude Oil in the country? He hadn't heard of any, but then again, he knew pitifully little about Somalia; even less about Puntland. All the same, Hassan had definitely stipulated a tanker to enter the lagoon. If, as he says, terrorism can be ruled out and oil exists here then... No, he quickly dismissed that line of thought.

Even if oil does exist here, how would they load it on to the tanker? Assuming there really is deep water in the lagoon; they would have to build an infrastructure for loading or discharging tankers. This would have to include investments like Chicksans; pipelines, even a jetty.

Did they have the means of getting the oil out of the earth? No, he thought, to load Crude Oil or even its products is far too far-fetched. What else would a tanker come here for? What else could it take away, if not oil? What else in fact can a tanker carry? The answer came like a flash. Water of course, Fresh Water.

He'd heard on the BBC World News before his ship was captured, that this whole region was in a severe drought. Maybe they were considering loading a tanker full of fresh water for *discharge* here. When on holiday the previous year in Southern France, Jim had heard that tankers were being loaded with Fresh Water at Marseille for discharge at the port

of Barcelona. Therefore this could be a possibility. But why go to all this trouble to use the lagoon?

Why not use a normal tanker port with reception facilities that can be converted to receive water? Surely it would be seen as a good humanitarian thing to do, neither secret nor illegal. In the lagoon, a whole infrastructure would have to be built; Chicksans; underwater pipelines to reception tanks; Tanker Lorries to distribute the water. Probably cheaper anyway to build a desalination plant like they have in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

'So', Jim reckoned, 'probably not fresh water either.' Another possibility was Palm Oil for export. Or even Coconut Oil. Both those needed a lot of heating so probably not. He went down to the boat again where Yusuf was working on the new sounding line. Jim had a look at what he'd done. From somewhere he'd found a half metre length of steel tube to use as a weight, bored a hole in one end for the rope, then started attaching the red and yellow pieces of rag to indicate the depths. Ahmed and Abdullah were preparing the boats and testing the engines.

* * * * *

Jim had risen through the ranks in Bucks County Steamship Company, starting in General Cargo and RoRo ships. He'd started as a Cadet on the old *Beaconsfield*, sharing a cabin with Jack Knowles, the other Apprentice. Tom Murchison at that time had been the Chief Mate, shortly before he'd got his command. She was an old ship, but what a wonderful run it had been, long before America made shore leave in ports pretty well non-existent. He then did a spell in Container ships and Ore carriers, before joining the Company's fleet of Tankers and LPG Carriers.

He'd heard, just before joining the *Dawn Splendour* that the Company was becoming too diversified and would soon be concentrating on Tankers, slowly selling off the other ships. Twice, he'd been loaned out to other Companies with different flags, first on the Kuwaiti cargo ship and finally the Liberian tanker. On the Kuwaiti ship, Jim had undergone his first experience of Piracy; while enroute to from the straits of Singapore to Balikpapan in the Indonesian part of Borneo.

Having just cleared the Singapore Straits, three pirates had climbed up over the stern rails from a pursuing speedboat in the ship's wake. The Captain had been woken up with a parang at his throat. They'd captured Jim as he was passing by on his way to the bridge for the Four to Eight morning watch. The pirates had forced him to open the ship's safe, also with a parang at his throat. Several thousand US dollars had been taken, plus some articles of value lying around the cabin.

The three pirates had tied both the Captain and Jim up, gagged them and left the ship the same way they'd come, over the stern and down into their speedboat. The Second Mate, on the Midnight to Four watch, had sent the Lookout down to find Jim when he hadn't turn up for his watch at Four. Jim and the Captain were eventually released.

Jim had blamed the ship's agent at Singapore for this. He'd contacted the ship by VHF before their arrival; stating

the ship would receive 9,000 US dollars in cash, some stores and mail from a boat while passing off Singapore later that day. The pirates may well have overheard this message, identified the ship and followed her. The \$9,000 had been for Crew overtime, food and drink purchases later in the voyage. There was absolutely no need for the agent to have mentioned the cash over the VHF.

Jim then remembered his first voyage as Chief Mate, some ten years before, after being promoted up from Second Mate on the same ship. She was the old *West Wycombe* and he came pretty close to being killed down a tank. An extremely light cargo had been loaded in Venezuela for discharge at Aruba the following day. At that pleasant little Dutch controlled Caribbean island, they'd discharged the cargo with great difficulty, since its Specific Gravity was less than half that of water. After discharge, the ship had to clean tanks while alongside and hand dry them; ready to back load a cargo of Aviation Spirit, for discharge at Portland Maine.

He had a good British crew then, willing to work hard and seldom adrift in port. The tanks had been fully inerted with scrubbed funnel gas during the discharge; then cleaned with jets of sea water from the Butterworth hoses, while still inerted. After that, they'd been gas freed; using air driven fans to push fresh air through tubes into the tank bottoms; the cargo and inert gasses being forced out through the tank coamings and other deck openings.

As far as his instruments were concerned, one tank was gas free, so he'd sent two sailors down to mop the tank hand dry. Water in AvGas, it was thought then, could bring a plane down out of the sky. He'd left a lookout at the tank top to watch the two men.

Jim and the rest of the crew were preparing the next tank, when the sailor watching the two men down the previous tank started shouting. Ragged tuneless singing coming from the tank, a sign that the two men down there

were being gassed. Like a fool, Jim had gone down without donning a self-contained compressed air set.

He'd got one sailor to the ladder; luckily the man was still sufficiently aware to climb up. The other AB had collapsed. The crew on deck had sent down a safety stretcher; into which he'd strapped the unconscious man. Jim had then signalled the crew to heave away. The last thing he remembered seeing down the tank, was the stretcher being hauled up, swinging gently from side to side. After that...Nothing!

When Jim had recovered consciousness, he was on deck standing up by the tank coaming, with the Captain asking what was going on. Ignoring the Captain, he'd asked the deck crew who had saved his life. It was the ship's Pumpman who had gone down the tank, also without a Breathing Apparatus. He'd got hold of Jim; led him to the vertical ladder and physically pushed him up; fresher air nearer the top had revived him sufficiently to climb the rest of the ladder unaided. The Pumpman, nearly dead himself, had just managed to get out before collapsing.

Jim had risked his life and was nearly killed rescuing the two sailors; the Pumpman had risked his own life to save Jim.

The Captain broke out a bottle of rum and all hands had a good tot. Everybody was over-excited, happily recounting who'd done what and congratulating each other over the four men's narrow escape. However, the job still had to be done, the tanks still had to be water washed and hand dried. Men still had to risk going down the tanks. They'd been a lot more careful this time about gas freeing and checking with the hand held Gas and Oxygen meters; even taking them down the tanks

After completion of the job, Captain Murchison then Master of the ***West Wycombe*** before coming ashore as a Superintendent had very nearly sacked Jim. Instead he gave him a right royal bollocking. Mainly about risking his own

life and that of the Pumpman by going down the tank without donning a Breathing Apparatus; which basically meant four men could have risked dying instead of two, had the worst happened.

That had been some ten years previously, and it was shocking to read that men are *still* dying down tanks and other enclosed spaces. Either from cargo or inert gas. Or in empty enclosed tanks where the air has been depleted in Oxygen. Breathable air contains 21% Oxygen. Rust forming in these tanks often depletes the oxygen to an unsafe level.

Chapter 29 – Sophia’s Story – May 1st

The following morning, having been freed from his locked room, Jim decided to make an inventory of the tools available; counting the nuts and bolts, screws, nails, and suchlike, deciding which were serviceable. He’d then be able to decide what equipment he’d need to order from Hassan, his friendly neighbourly Ship Chandler! He’d been Nineteen days captive, which included twelve days locked in the hut. It was nearly a month since the ship had been hijacked.

“When you start a job,” an old Bosun had told him years ago on his first trip. “Always think what you’re going to need, think the job through in your head. Then go and find all the correct size screwdrivers, spanners or whatever. Also take five per cent more nails and screws than you’ll need. Saves a lot of time running around once you’ve started the job, especially in heavy weather or working up the mast. The more time spent in proper preparation, the better the job done.”

Jim had always remembered that advice and it usually worked. Pity his wife wasn't at all convinced, Angela's attitude being a definite '*Perfection without preparation*'. Quoting his old Bosun made no difference; it only annoyed her when she'd got excited about a job.

"Oh, don't fiddle around with that," she'd say, "Let's get on with it! Bugger your old Bosun".

Since many jobs needed to be done in the new house, the phrase 'Bugger your old Bosun' had become a kind of catch phrase. Until one day they'd received a summons to attend the school where William and now Laura were pupils. He'd been home at the time, so he and Angela had gone together to find what their son William had been up to. The Headmaster had greeted them and then called in a woman teacher. After shaking hands, she'd laughed and said.

"It is extremely disturbing for the class to hear the sweet dulcet tones of your daughter, telling me to 'bugger my old bosun.' I have neither the right equipment nor even the desire to do so. He's probably too old anyway! Please clean up Laura's language."

There was not a lot they could say in reply to that; but Jim of course had tried.

"Sorry about that," he'd said cheerily, "She didn't mean it literally you know; it's just a family joke. You see, when I first went to sea, this old Bosun..."

"Jim, will you shut up!" Angela had cried, appalled. "Of course she didn't mean it literally; she's only six years old."

She'd been livid, thoroughly embarrassed and ready to murder Jim. The headmaster hadn't improved matters either, by stating that he hoped other family jokes were in better taste. Waiting outside in the corridor for a file of schoolchildren to pass, they'd heard laughter coming from the Headmaster's study. Angela had flushed with shame and Jim prepared himself for an afternoon's misery. It was she

who had originally coined the phrase but the blame was going to be his alone.

Since the GPS hadn't yet arrived, Jim pushed those thoughts aside and decided to take a trip out in the Zodiac the following day to get a general idea of the lagoon. He may even be able to guess the location of the deep water. Logically it should be nearer the island than the mainland shore. Looking at the land either side of the island, Jim was puzzled and frowned. They seemed to be a different rock formation than the island itself.

The following day, all four got into the Zodiac with Yusuf at the helm. They went hurtling through the water and rounded the southern exit, out into the Indian Ocean. Jim asked Yusuf to take the boat offshore a mile or two and then stop. There, with the stolen binoculars he had a good look at the shore, verifying Hassan's opinion that the lagoon was hidden. The island appeared to be part of a continuous coastline. They revved up again and carefully returned via

the narrow Northern passage. Yusuf, Jim noted, had handled the boat well.

As soon as the equipment he'd demanded arrived, he could get down to the job. 'The quicker it's done,' he thought, 'the quicker I'll be home'. 'No I won't,' he remembered. He was stuck here until the Southwest monsoon stopped. The bloody thing hadn't even started yet.'

He wondered if he could steal the work boat late one afternoon and escape out to sea, under cover of darkness. Then what? If he found a ship sailing by and approached her, he might get himself shot as a pirate, especially if he was still wearing the Arab head dress. Maybe he'd get as far as Eyl and board one of the pirated ships, hoping the crew would shelter him.

Obviously he'd prefer a ship whose ransom was due to be paid quickly, but he couldn't row round all the ships asking stupid questions. Escape, either by land or by sea

seemed to centre on Eyl as the only spot close enough. Jim went back into the house, entered the Operations Room where Sophia was playing computer games, concentrating hard on the screen.

“Do you have internet on that computer?” Jim asked her, hopefully.

“No I haven’t! This isn’t London you know. Why don’t you take that silly *Kheffiyah* off your head while you’re indoors?” Sophia replied, smiling.

“OK.” Jim said removing it. “You don’t have a usable computer with Internet here then?”

“No I don’t.” She answered him brusquely “There is another room in the house which does have a computer that can receive Internet; but I’m not allowed to use it. Only Hassan, his sons and Samira have access, the room is kept locked all the time.”

Jim was surprised, he didn’t know that Somalia, despite its wars, was ahead of most neighbouring countries in the use of Internet.

“Is there nobody in the village with access to Internet?”

“No, Hassan forbids its use there. At the same time, he keeps them informed of events when they happen.” She replied, her hand reaching up to smooth her luxurious black hair.

Jim nodded and brushed his hand through his own hair, making it stand up on end, a habit that used to annoy Angela no end. Sophia, watching him, hid a smile. While feeling sorry for him in his predicament, she was glad he was here. Although tolerated by the Somali community, she was eager to get back to the kind of life she once knew.

“Who is this Samira then? A local woman?” Jim asked, wondering if she was another Indian, although he didn’t think Samira was an Indian name. Neither was Sophia, come to that.

“No, she’s much too important for that. You’ll be impressed by her. I can’t tell you any more, you’ll just have

to wait until you want to use the net. She uses the name Samira, but her full name is longer and more complicated than that. Hassan's name isn't his full name either."

"I hope Sophia's your proper name. Weren't you playing a computer game just now on the net?" Jim asked, hoping it would be in English, not one of the other languages she spoke.

"Yes, Samira downloaded a dozen games for me on this CD. I'd go mad here if I didn't have them."

"Good, do you have Bridge on that disc? Or Chess? Or even Backgammon?" He asked, a wild hope in these circumstances.

"Highbrow aren't you? I don't know, you'll have to have a look sometime. Anyway, I don't think you're going to have much time to play games anyway." Sophia remarked, smiling.

"Nor the inclination either, while I'm so badly worried about my wife and kids." Jim said bitterly.

The door opened and the Somali woman who had shown Jim his room and the toilets came in, wearing traditional dress with her hair covered. She was quite tall; stately; very black; regal and, in a word, superb. Her face looked almost sculptured. Possibly in her early thirties, she walked as if balancing a heavy earthenware water jug on her head, her bearing was so upright. Like Hassan, she gave the impression of power as well as a superior education, which he hadn't noticed before.

Jim had thought she was some kind of maid, but now doubted that she'd ever carried a water jug on her head in her life; she looked far too classy for that. Years ago he'd read in a book that Somali women were said to be the most striking in Africa. If they were all like Samira, then that could be very true. She was, to put it mildly, beautiful.

"Good Afternoon, my name is Samira. I am here to help you. Has Sophia explained about Internet? If you need to use it to query something in your work, then dictate your

message to me and I'll get it sent off. Remember it's for your work, but *only* for your work. Any questions, technical questions I mean, will be E-mailed by me, *only* by me, to whichever Company you choose to contact." Samira stated firmly.

"Stop gaping," murmured Sophia into Jim's ear, startling him.

"Incidentally," Samira continued, giving Sophia a sideways look, "any attempt by you to insert hidden messages into the emails will put you right back to the spiders."

With that she smiled and left the room. Jim shuddered at the memory.

"I said you'd be impressed, your mouth and eyes were wide open." said Sophia. "What was all that about spiders?"

She was sitting down at the computer, elegant in her sari. He told her what he'd been through after the first interview with Hassan, surprised that Sophia didn't know. In which case, she was probably not very high up in the hierarchy here,

or else she would have known. Added to that, neither she nor Samira had attended either of the meetings. Meanwhile she was going through the Computer Games.

"Yes to your question, we've got Chess, Mah-jong, card games generally, including Bridge and my favourite, Canasta." Sophia said, her face solemn,

"Exactly what is your position here Sophia? You said you haven't been abducted like me, but something similar." Jim said, curious about the woman.

She was a complete anomaly in this set-up, being an obvious Indian in an all-African operation; although no more an anomaly than he, himself was. Sophia, regarding him gravely, suddenly gave Jim a smile that took his breath away. Bewildered by the rapid change of expression, he stared at her, willing her to answer his question so he could

attempt to fathom out the relationships, or hierarchy. Finally she dropped her gaze, colouring slightly.

“What do you know about Somalia?” She asked, switching off the computer and putting the CD disc back in its jacket.

“Very little, I know it used to be divided into three different countries, French, British and Italian Somaliland but that was just after the war. There must have been some fighting between Britain and Italy then. I remember from school that Abyssinia and Eritrea were Italian. After the war, I suppose the country gained Independence and formed the State of Somalia. Wasn't there another war, Og... Or something like that, maybe with Ethiopia? I've been to Mogadishu and Kismayu on my ship a few years ago. Since then I've heard the country is in chaos with no proper government. I know there is still fighting between Somali forces and Islamists in the South.” Jim said, watching her mobile face as he spoke.

“Not bad at all. The war you mentioned was the Ogaden War, because Britain gave away the Ogaden district of Somaliland to Ethiopia before Independence in 1960. Somalia wanted it back and fought for it sometime in the late 70s. In 1991, President Barre was overthrown, and there were lots of civil wars in the country between different tribes. Ex-British Somaliland where I was living soon became independent of Somalia and renamed itself Somaliland. Just Somaliland, not British any more. A proper Government and police force exists in Somaliland. Are you with me so far?” She queried, brushing away some strands of jet black hair from her face.

“Yes Sophia, please carry on.” Jim said, unable to take his eyes away from her face.

“OK; in 1998, Puntland where we are now, declared a form of Independence from what was left of the original Somalia; but not full independence like Somaliland did. It is still part of Somalia but self-governing – at least partially.

There *is* a form of Government, but the War Lords are more powerful. American soldiers invaded Mogadishu about that time but didn't do any good and left."

"What about French Somaliland. Wasn't that ever part of Greater Somalia?" Jim interrupted.

"No, they had a referendum at the time and decided to stay with France. I think Djibouti is still French, or anyway under French influence. To go back to what I was saying before; Somaliland and Puntland had lots of border disputes and still do. Somaliland wanted to keep its original British border, whereas Puntland wanted the border moved further west. The tribe in the area in between the two proposed borders helped Puntland to break that area away from Somaliland and join it to Puntland." Sophia said, pausing to take a breath.

"So who won? Or are they still fighting over the border?" Jim asked her.

"Neither side won. The tribe that helped Puntland quarrelled with them later; so they went and formed a tiny, semi-independent state of their own, between Somaliland and Puntland. That area is sometimes called Maakhir, independent but not fully. Mostly it's only referred to as the '*Disputed Region*.'" She replied, her face becoming sad.

"So now there are four countries after independence where only one existed before? Somalia, Puntland, Somaliland and, what name did you say – Maakhir? None of them with a working government, infrastructure or an adequate police force. Is that right?" queried Jim.

"No, not quite, Somaliland does have a proper Government and all the services and is the only one really fully independent, although I don't think it has been recognised internationally yet."

"So where do you come into all this, why are you here and under what conditions?" Jim asked. She hesitated a little, wondering if she should continue.

“After leaving Goa, my family lived quietly in British Somaliland, once part of the British Indian Empire. My father owned a store and also ran an export agency. His two brothers, my uncles, ran a small business. They bought cattle from local farmers; shipped them across the Gulf to Aden where they were slaughtered and the meat sold to the ships calling at Steamer Point...”

“Just a sec.” Jim interrupted again. “What’s all this about the British *Indian* Empire? Surely it was all the same empire. Was it run from Delhi or something, instead of London?”

“I don’t know,” Sophia replied, reprovingly. “I wasn’t alive at the time, nor were you; at least I don’t think so. Daddy once told me the Indian rupee was the only currency then, converting to Shillings later. Are you going to keep on interrupting me?”

“No sorry, I just wanted to be sure of my facts. This is all strange to me you know, I’ve never really given Somalia a thought before. Anyway, please carry on.” Jim said, soothingly. He looked at her, smiled and sat down at the other computer in the room, which was not turned on, he started fiddling around with the switches but nothing happened.

“It’s not plugged in.” Sophia stated, annoyed. “Do you want me to carry on or not?”

“Sorry Sophia. Yes please go on.” Jim said, suppressing a smile. She looked at him hesitating whether to continue. Making up her mind, she said:

“OK. In those days, we Indians were an in-between society, needed by the British and tolerated by the Somalis. After independence in 1960, most Indians and Goanese left the country but my family stayed on. Indians were never kicked out; you know, like they were in Uganda.”

“Yes, I vaguely remember hearing about that, when I was a kid.” Jim said, before he could stop himself.

Sophia tried to look thunderous, but only succeeded in looking a bit vexed. Jim stifled a grin and thought that she was likeable, seemed intelligent and was downright attractive. He wondered again how she ever came to be working here for a War Lord.

“There you are! You’re *doing* it again!” She said, her voice starting to sound cross. “Anyway, after independence in 1960, my family was now living in Greater Somalia. It was OK at first, business carried on as normal, according to Daddy and life continued. I was born in 1982. In 1991, when I was nine years old, President Barre was overthrown and the whole country became just one huge civil war.” She stopped then and looked at Jim silently counting on his fingers.

‘1982, 1992, 2002; it’s now 2009 so she must be what? Ten, twenty, twenty-seven years old!’ She certainly looked younger. Sophia saw his fingers moving, grinned and said:

“Yes I’m twenty-seven as you have already worked out. If I was in my fifties, you would have had to use your toe as well.” She said giggling. “You’re what – forty?”

“Not far off. Anyway please carry on.” Jim replied, working out the difference in their ages.

“Ok then. Somaliland, where we lived, quickly broke away from Somalia and some of the English even came back to work. My family decided to stay on and the new country was established, a government was formed and all the services re-started? I don’t think Somaliland has yet been recognised internationally though.”

“So you were living with your family in Somaliland, which was virtually a new country?” Jim asked her.

“Yes at least at first. It was different to the rest of Somalia, where tribes were fighting for territory and no real Government existed. The Islamists came and most of Somalia came under Sharia law and things calmed down. Then Ethiopian troops came and chased them out. There is

still one Islamist group fighting in the South of the country; from Mogadishu to Kenya.” Sophia added.

“As Goanese, we were no longer safe.” She went on to say. “My family considered moving out of the country, but where to? Back to India? The family had not lived there for generations. Most Indians chose to go to Kenya. The only other alternative was Britain, we could all speak good English and Britain seemed to accept anybody who arrived there. Or even Portugal.”

“You’re right about Britain accepting anybody. Oops sorry!” Jim apologised, smiling.

“Anyway,” she continued, frowning impatiently, no longer smiling. “Things quietened down then. In 1997, I was just fifteen when the part of Eastern Somaliland where we were living, split away and joined Puntland. I had just come back from the school in Kenya when that happened. Soon after that, as I said before, the tribe broke with Puntland and formed what has now become ‘The Disputed Region’ between the two proposed borders.”

She paused; her eyes became bright with tears. On the point of sobbing, she carried on:

“We no longer lived in Somaliland, nor in Puntland, but in the new ‘Disputed Region.’ It was awful, during the fighting and looting in ‘98, my parents were killed when I was just sixteen. I was away that evening, at a meeting in the Indian Youth Centre. There were not all that many Indians left by then and Somali boys started invading the club, shouting insults at us. Arriving home at midnight, I saw the store windows smashed and the door swinging open. I went inside and found my parents with their throats cut, my mother obviously raped as well. There was no sign of my two brothers nor did I ever find out what happened to my Uncles and Aunties. I hope they managed get across to Aden, but I don’t think so.”

Jim was startled, ashamed of his previous flirtatiousness. He went across to her and put his arm across her shoulder; she shrugged it off and continued:

“My two brothers were gone, I think they were killed. The fighting, looting and raping were terrible, with gangs of violent men roaming around.”

“My God,” said Jim looking at her, still silently weeping. With a tremulous smile, she wiped away her tears. “How on earth did you survive?” He asked her, wondering if she’d been raped, but didn’t dare ask.

“Since I was by myself, my parents dead and the rest of the family missing, I returned to the Indian Youth Centre where I saw a young Somali student, a bit older than me at nineteen. He, Karim, offered to protect me for as long as I stayed with him. I was young at the time and strictly brought up, like most Indian girls then, but not foolish. I knew very well he’d been attracted to me physically for some time, but the Somali and Indian communities seldom mixed then. I had no choice but to say yes, but only on a long-term basis.” She looked at Jim as if to gauge his reaction. “Why am I telling you all this?”

“You don’t need to tell me more if you don’t want to.” Jim said, shocked at what she’d endured. She looked at Jim steadily and said:

“We managed to get back to Daddy’s store where we hid until all it was quiet again and some kind of order was restored. Luckily I’d found my passport and other papers the looters had missed. Also I found the cache of money my father had been saving over the years. Karim managed to get some Somali native clothes for me since I’m dark enough to pass as a Somali woman as long as I covered my hair and part of my face, stayed in the background and only spoke when spoken to. Like a good Somali wife!”

“Where did you go?” Jim asked; he’d been at sea long enough to know these things happened, but never thought he’d meet a victim.

“We wanted to go to Somaliland; it seemed to be the only stable part of the original Somalia. Karim thought he could get work there and I thought I might be able to integrate myself into the Indian Community; or what was left of it. But that border was closed indefinitely by then, which meant we had to retrace our steps, back across The Disputed Region again and then into Puntland. It was weeks before we found somewhere to live.”

Jim looked at her slight figure, marvelling at her apparent stamina to survive all this.

“How did you live? Were you able to get food and drink?” he demanded.

“Yes, we bought food with Daddy’s money, slept where we could, often in ditches or empty houses or wherever we could find shelter. We had an old wheel-barrow at one time we used to carry some food and spare clothes in. We spent a lot of the money as bribes to self-appointed officials and illegal check-points, then used the remainder to buy a share in a fishing boat. This enabled Karim to earn sufficient to keep us both in food and clothes.” She said, paused then carried on.

“By this time we were living together as a married couple, although I was really his mistress or concubine if you like, remaining veiled and dressed as a Somali woman. In fact I was accepted later as one of the very few whose mother was Indian and father Somali.”

Jim was amazed and appalled at the story and what she had lived through. At Sixteen years old, she had seen the bodies of her slaughtered parents. No sign of her Brothers or Uncles who she also presumed dead. Although young and strictly brought up, she had sufficient *nous* to negotiate an escape with this Karim. She was lucky she'd attracted him, otherwise what? Also lucky to have found the money her father had hidden. By now she was sobbing openly. Jim was

at a loss what to do, how to console her.

“My God, you were very lucky, extremely lucky. This Karim could have raped you and taken the money.” Jim said.

“Yes I suppose he could have done, but he didn’t. He told me that he’d wanted me for over a year, even though we were different religions. To survive, I had to dress and act like a Somali woman. As I mentioned before, I speak Somali fluently with a local accent.”

“So you landed up here?” queried Jim. He’d wondered at first if she was telling him the truth, but was now certain she was. A happy childhood, an appalling adolescence and now?

“No, we reached a village south of Eyl, it was there where I used Daddy’s money to buy shares in a fishing boat. Karim became a fisherman and eventually a pirate.

“*A pirate?*” Jim asked, shocked, thinking back to the pirates on the *Dawn Splendour*.

“Yes, but don’t forget this was several years ago, and piracy was only just starting. He was inept and nearly got killed boarding a ship. His uncle arranged a marriage for him, but Karim wanted me to stay with him.”

“Karim was living with you, but got married to somebody else.” Jim exclaimed, mystified.

“Yes, we’d been living together for three years by then. I was nineteen and Karim twenty-one. Hassan arranged a marriage with Samira, who you met about half an hour ago. I stayed on as a second wife, although we’d never married. I was given another house to live in. The fishing boat was more than half mine anyway, bought with the money my father had saved and hidden. We called it my dowry. Karim joined another Pirate gang and was killed only one year after his marriage. Hassan gave us both jobs here and protection, and here I am.” She concluded, leaving out the worst bits.

“Well, that’s quite a story.” Jim said, “Hassan knew Karim then?”

“Yes, Karim was Hassan’s nephew, treated like another son. Samira is another family member; a distant cousin I believe. Hassan arranged the marriage and Samira came down to where we lived and stayed with Karim. I was given a different house and stayed there as his mistress, but treated like a Second Wife. Everybody in the village knew I was a child of a mixed marriage by then and I was living in constant fear. Only the fear of Hassan’s anger kept me safe. Oh the villagers were OK, it was visiting officials and armed gangs that scared me.”

“Sounds terrible. Were you both happy with the arrangement? Was Karim happy as well?” Jim asked, totally bewildered by then.

“Why not? Karim had a beautiful Somali wife he could show off on special occasions, you’ve seen for yourself how she looks. He also came to my bed whenever he felt like it.”

As she said that, Sophia’s colour deepened and she looked embarrassed. Somehow Jim had the impression that Karim had spent a lot more time in Sophia’s bed than Samira’s.

“But you and Samira? Were you both happy with the arrangement as well? Wasn’t she jealous of you? How the devil did the three of you live together peacefully?”

“First of all, we didn’t live together, I lived in a separate house. Anyway as women we didn’t have a choice, Hassan and Karim decided it between them. I don’t think you understand our way of life. In the West; maybe marriages are made in heaven, but here they are usually arranged between families. Hassan wanted a Somali woman to be the mother of Karim’s children, rather than me. In the end neither of us conceived.”

“So Hassan brought you both back here then after Karim was killed?” Jim queried.

“Yes, she is now Hassan’s legal and financial advisor, I am the secretary and Jack of all Trades if you like. Karim was never really my Karim, we never got married. Although

Hassan arranged the marriage with Samira, Karim insisted that I was given the status of his Second wife. Although he loved me, we couldn't marry due to our different religions."

"I presume you are a Catholic then, coming from Goa, or maybe even...? Jim started saying.

"...Yes Catholic. In spite of that, Hassan still offered me protection after Karim was killed and brought us both back here. After all, as I said before, it was my money; the money Daddy had saved that was legally in the boat." She said, turning the computer on again. "So here I am now, twenty seven years old and a sort of widow. Samira is the legal widow!"

"All I can say is that Karim was lucky to have had two good looking women looking after his every need. If I had to make a choice, I'd take you instead of her." Jim said thoughtlessly.

"Well, you certainly haven't got the choice at all!" Sophia snapped indignantly, sitting up with a jerk. "Don't ever dream of her, me neither. I think you had better go to your own room now. Thanks for the company; I hope I haven't bored you." She frowned, looking furious.

Jim tried to apologise, said he didn't mean it that way, but only seemed to be digging himself deeper into the morass. 'After all' he told himself 'I was only trying to comfort her.' He then told her that he was happily married with two great children, which didn't noticeably comfort her at all. He left the Office then, not noticing the wicked, little; 'one-up' smile she allowed herself. She felt sure he would apologise next time they saw each other.

Jim went outside into the evening air, the heat of the day cooling off nicely. He was idly watching a helicopter out at sea, obviously hunting for pirates, when Hassan walked up to him and spoke:

"Do not put your faith in Naval Helicopters," he said to Jim harshly. "Do not look up at them or give them any signs at

all; should one come close. Use the end of your Kheffiyah to cover the lower part of your face”

“Well OK, but it's hard not to look up at a chopper when it passes over. It's instinctive really.”

“I've been thinking you'd look far more like an Arab workman if you continue to let your beard grow naturally. At least it is dark, nearly black.” Hassan continued. “Apart from those two white streaks on each side of your chin.”

“I did grow one once, a few years ago, but in this climate it'll be hot and irritating. Those white bits were there then as well.” Jim said, feeling his chin.

“Well, carry on with what you have already got. Let it come naturally, don't clip it at all. A big bushy beard is what is needed, not a silly, three day affair that most Westerners prefer.”

He left; Jim went back inside the house again for an early supper. Sophia came in and sat down beside him, cheerfully giving him a bright smile. She seemed to have forgotten her spat.

“Sorry I upset you this afternoon, I didn't mean to.” Jim said apologising.

Sophia accepted the apology with a smile, knowing she'd won the first round, ‘He's OK really’ she thought, ‘and he certainly likes looking at me. Perhaps one day, I'll tell him how many times I was raped and Karim beaten during that awful period. Or maybe not.’

“One thing surprises me, every woman I've seen here; also in Mogadishu and Kismayu some years ago, all wore local type traditional clothes like Samira this afternoon. Some colourful, others dark or even black. Always with their hair covered. Why do you dress like an Indian? Don't the Somalis mind?” Jim said looking at her colourful Sari.

“When I lived with my parents, we always wore Goanese style clothes, saris and suchlike and with the hair partly covered. After my parents were killed and I joined up with Karim, I wore local Somali clothes and partly covered

my face with a veil. When Hassan took me and Samira in to work for him, he told me he didn't mind if I wore traditional Indian clothes, or even jeans, as long as I kept my legs and arms covered."

"It seems to me Hassan seems pretty powerful round here," Jim said, toying with a piece of meat which he thought probably came from a goat.

"Yes he is, very powerful. He controls the whole area, including the nearby village. He is what you call a War Lord really; westernised too, having studied, lived and worked in both England and America. Samira too. Don't you like camel meat?" She asked with a smile.

Nearly choking, Jim looked at Sophia, expecting to see sadness in her eyes but could see none. Recalling their last conversation when she'd warned him off, stating that neither she herself, nor Samira were available; he found himself beginning to notice just how attractive she was.

Her face was dark, but her features not entirely Indian. Her long black hair was normally tied back in a Pony Tail or hung loosely to her shoulders. Her bright eyes were alive with intelligence, as well as a kind of private amusement. By no means glamorous in a Western way, she was certainly pretty - but more than just pretty though; more like attractive and even challenging, with very expressive eyes.

Quite small in height, about five foot three or four, but perfectly formed on a more miniature scale than Angela. The sari hid her body but left bare a fascinating couple of inches of taut brown skin, exposing her naval. She became aware of his gaze and smiled, her eyes downcast. Despite what she had been through, she still had an air of untouched innocence.

Samira, on the other hand, had a really beautiful face but Jim felt more attracted to Sophia. Suddenly he realised that he'd hardly ever spoken to an Indian woman before. Plenty

of Indian men though, most of them being his fellow Officers or crew members on several occasions.

Samira came into the room and spoke to Sophia rapidly in Somali. Sophia nodded and looked excited. After Samira had left, she turned to Jim and said that she'd be going away for two or three days to the capital, Gorawe, then to Berbera on special jobs for Hassan.

"If you need to use the computer at all, the password is my name, spelt with a 'ph.' and not an 'f'. Use it to list things you'll need, which I'll arrange with Hassan when I return."

She seemed breathless and was fidgeting. The meal finished they separated into their rooms.

* * * * *

Next morning, the house stirred early; he got up and went to the veranda door, which he was surprised to find unlocked. A military convoy had arrived and a high-ranking black Officer got out of a staff car and entered the house. While watching, he saw a veiled Somali woman get into the car and sit in the rear. Half an hour later the Officer came out of the house and, after shaking hands with Hassan, entered the car and the convoy drove off.

It seemed strange to Jim, the soldiers in the convoy were dressed in camouflaged overalls; but the officer wore a smart uniform, which seemed familiar to Jim. He realised it was styled on a British army tropical uniform, complete with swagger stick. 'Surely there are no British soldiers fighting here' he thought; 'or were they looking for him?'

Chapter 30 – The Island Mystery - May 4th

The two charts had arrived, complete with circular tea stains, also the Pilot books and Tide Tables. No hand held GPS yet but promised soon. The hand held prismatic compass, stolen from a captured fishing boat, stank of garlic. A pair of good binoculars, not requested by Jim but nevertheless useful added to the booty. They had plenty of paper, biros and pencils, but no mapping pens or Indian ink. Jim had now spent twenty-two days in captivity; and a month since the ship had been hi-jacked.

He spent the rest of that morning pencilling in a rough outline of the lagoon. He reckoned the best way to start things rolling, was to find just where the hell he was, his exact whereabouts. He asked Sophia, who had returned from Gorawe, to show him their location on the '*Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden*' chart. She'd hesitated, seemed a bit concerned; Jim looked at her, surprised.

"I'm not sure you should know that" she said, doubtfully, "I'll have to go and ask Samira."

Neither she nor Samira had seen a Navigation Chart before and were unable to accurately pin-point where they were. They started arguing about it in Somali, making him wonder if he really *was* in Northern Somalia, or Puntland. Jim intervened, asking Sophia:

"Can you find me a land map of the local area, please? If you can show me on that, maybe I can relate it to this chart." At least he hoped so.

"Why do you want to know where we are?" Samira asked Jim suspiciously, as Sophia went away to look for a map. "Not planning an escape I hope?"

"Where would I escape to? Look, Hassan doesn't know if there's a large scale map of the lagoon, but it must be shown on a normal land map, although it won't be large enough for my purpose." Jim said. Samira enquired why.

"Because I've got to make my own chart of the lagoon, large enough to mark in all the soundings correctly. If I can see the lagoon on a land map of the area, then I can use its

scale to measure the lagoon area and then expand it to the size I want. If the island is as rectangular as it looks, the seaward side should equal the side facing us – or thereabouts. The land map will confirm this.” He said.

“What will that give you?” She asked, as if wondering if he really *was* competent enough to carry out the work Hassan wanted.

“The length of the island facing us looks to be the approximate usable length of the lagoon from North to South. If I know exactly where we are on the map, it will give me a rough Latitude. By transferring this Latitude to the navigation chart, I may be able to spot something that could be the southern entrance to the lagoon. The island is pretty high and the land or coastal strip either side looks mainly low lying; at least, as far I can see from here. The scale is too small though, so I don’t think it’ll be shown.” Jim said, thinking it out as he went along.

Sophia came back then with a local map. Taking the map, Samira started to indicate something on it and then froze, frowning. Muttering to herself about '*lazy Italians*' and '*something wrong with this map*', she left the Ops Room. Sophia and Jim looked at each other, puzzled. Samira came back ten minutes later holding a second land map. Beckoning the other two over, she spread out both maps. One of them dating back to the Italian Colonial period, the other much later. Pointing to one of the maps, she said:

“I’m sure this is where we are, just on the Southern border of the *Kaarkaar* District; and there's the village and that building there,” she said pointing, “could be this house. But, where's the lagoon? It's not shown on either of these maps. There’s nothing there at all, just non-existent land. This is so absurd, there is no island shown either.”

The three of them looked at each other and then looked out of the window. The lagoon was still there, placid, waiting for the Southwest Monsoon to ruffle its surface. Jim

was shocked! His theory had gone up in smoke; there *was* no lagoon shown on the Land Maps for him to measure and expand. Nor did the Admiralty Chart show it. The two women were looking at him, as puzzled as he was.

“What on Earth am I going to do now?” He said out loud. Neither woman answered.

He looked for and found the Latitude on one of the maps and compared the coastline of the map to that of the chart. On the latter, a tiny straight section of coast attracted his attention, which could possibly be a cliff.

Turning back to the land maps he saw a rectangular block, whose contours were far higher than the coastal plain to the north or south; also far higher than the land on its inward facing side. In other words, a raised block of land with the sea on one side; a continuation of the low coastal plain to the North and South; with more low-lying land to the west.

Visualising the map contours and comparing them to the island he could see through the window, he began to recognise superficial similarities. Referring back to the chart, this rectangular block compared favourably to the straight section of coast; being roughly the same Latitude as shown on the map. The height of this rectangular block was given in metres above sea-level.

On the chart, Jim tried to measure the straight section of coast from the latitude scale, but it was far too small for accuracy. Too large a piece of land and sea had been included for small distances to be successfully measured this way. Having no large scale chart of the area, Jim decided to consult the Pilot Book.

Finding the appropriate page, he read a thorough description of the coast, noting the straight section at that latitude was described as an almost sheer cliff. There was a footnote at the bottom of the page, stating that a view of the cliff could be found at the end of that chapter. Flicking through the pages, he came to a drawing of the cliff as

viewed from a survey ship offshore, many years previously. (1927 was the date given in the pilot book).

This also gave him the length of the cliff – a fraction over two and three quarter nautical miles, plus its height in feet. Holding his breath, he measured the length of the rectangular block from the scale on the land map, converting the kilometres into miles, then to nautical miles. ***Bingo!*** – Exactly a fraction over two and three quarter nautical miles! It all tallied, the cliff shown on the chart *must* be the seaward side of the Island he could see through the window.

Converting feet into metres, the height of the cliff from the Pilot Book was equal to the height of the rectangular block on the map. He rechecked everything again from the start and arrived at the same conclusion. Relieved, he double-checked it again.

This cliff, viewed from the sea, was identical to the rectangular block on the map, which means that somehow, this rectangular block has now become the island. All the evidence points to this fact. But how did that happen?

Why was it not known about, neither on the chart nor the land maps? Hassan, summoned by Samira, came and studied the maps and chart. He'd already told Jim why he thought the chart hadn't shown the lagoon, but this didn't explain why the land maps had also missed it. Samira and Hassan left the Ops Room together, Jim and Sophia went down to have their evening meal.

Puzzled, Jim thought about the problem for the rest of that evening and well into the night before going to sleep. He saw no reason why that block had turned itself into an Island. The following morning, he woke up thinking he may have found a possible indication.

The only possibility making any kind of sense was that the lagoon did not exist when the area was surveyed, nor

did the island in its present state. The two maps and the chart could not all be wrong.

It was highly unlikely the lagoon had been deliberately concealed; since the land map publication dates covered a period from the Italian era, until just before president Barre was toppled. There had to be a reason, something must have happened between the date the area was last surveyed and the present time. To turn this block of land into an island and creating the lagoon; something massive, even catastrophic, must have happened. Possibly an enormous earthquake for instance.

After a breakfast consisting of a couple of chapatti like pancakes, some fruit and coffee, Jim went to the Ops Room where he found Sophia already there. Both Hassan and Samira arrived ten minutes later. After rechecking Jim's calculations, they discussed the mystery of the island and lagoon, but came to no conclusion.

Sometime between the last published dates of the maps and the present time, they thought an earthquake must have occurred. Neither Hassan nor the two women remembered one on a scale to turn the cliff into an Island. Besides which, an earthquake on that scale would have been known about, despite the chaotic state of the country since 1991.

Various seismic stations would have recorded and pinpointed it by triangulation, Relief Agencies and rescue teams would have arrived, not all of them invited; the area swarming with reporters. A major change in the land on this scale would never have gone unnoticed. Obviously it wasn't dug out by man either, in which case the lagoon would have been rectangular, not with the present indented shore line.

The others left; Jim gave up and went to join his gang getting the boats ready for charting the lagoon. Since the weather was calm, he considered taking the Zodiac for a run out to the island and back, even out into the Indian Ocean again. He explained why to his three buccaneers,

stating that two land maps and a Navigation Chart, showed neither the island nor the lagoon. Ahmed and Abdullah looked at each other, frowning. The latter said to Jim: "Two men from village always saying lagoon wasn't here before big wave come."

Abdullah went on to say that the two men been out at sea fishing and were the only persons not affected after a large Tidal Wave had destroyed their village. When they got back, the village was in ruins, its inhabitants either killed, missing or fled inshore to other villages. Most of the stone buildings had been badly damaged. Wooden shacks had completely disappeared, leaving no trace.

The two men had started rebuilding the village; others, like his three crew members, arrived at intervals and a new community developed. Hassan and his sons arrived and took control of the whole area. Nobody really believed the two old men when they spoke of the land before it had been drowned. Both had died a year or two after the *Tsunami*.

'Was this possible?' Jim thought. 'Could this be the answer? Could this possibly be the catastrophic event?' He remembered being shocked by the extent of the Indian Ocean *Tsunami* four or five years previously. It must have hit Somalia as well as other parts of East Africa; but probably far less reported upon than in other countries. There were few or no scenes of damage or reports of loss of human life.

If those two old men were telling the truth, this meant that a whole community was wiped out, with only a couple of survivors remembering how it had been before - both now dead. 'Let's think it through now' Jim told himself. He abandoned his project, told the three crew men to take the rest of the day off and went back to the Ops Room. There he re-examined the maps, chart and Pilot Book.

He imagined the wave pouring over the low-lying coast either side of the cliff, then sweeping over the land, probably continuing as far the Big House, if not further. The

receding waters could well have left the lagoon behind, in which case that area must have been below normal sea level. This however did not explain how the island was formed, did it?

Jim paused for a couple of minutes; wondering if he was on the right track, now that Abdullah had mentioned the *Tsunami*. He grabbed a towel and wiped the sweat from his brow, glanced at Sophia who was still examining the land maps. Sitting down, he tried to put the thoughts clamouring through his head into some sort of order.

The receding water, always far stronger than the incoming flow, could have crumbled or scoured the coastal plain away on each side of the cliff, thus forming the Island. It seemed a long shot, but was all he could come up with. While trying to think it through logically, Sophia started chatting to him. Annoyed Jim told her to keep quiet while he thought his theory through.

She looked astounded, smiled and raised an enquiring eyebrow; Jim muttered his apologies and had difficulty concentrating on his theory again.

First of all, it needed a catastrophic event. An earthquake on that scale was unlikely, due to the attention it would bring to the area. The *Tsunami*; on the other hand, affected several countries in the Indian Ocean, happened over Christmas and shook the world. Television and the newspapers reported the devastation in countries like Thailand, Sumatra itself, even India and Sri Lanka. East Africa, Jim remembered, was hardly mentioned at all.

Right then, assume that the island was not an island before the *Tsunami* struck. Neither of the maps nor the chart showed it. It was just a high cliff with normal low lying land either side; stretching North Easterly to Cape Gardafui and South Westerly to Kenya. Both maps and the chart showed this. The low-lying shoreline either side of the cliff was normal semi desert, sandy and rocky.

The cliff was high, rectangular and, in appearance; entirely different to the rest of the landscape. The lagoon did not exist, therefore the area directly behind the cliff must have been below sea level and dry; almost a crater it seemed, far different to the rest of the land.

To carry his assumptions further, Jim reckoned the crater could have been caused by a large asteroid many millions of years previously. The island itself, so different to the rest of the coast, may well have been part of that asteroid, far too large and dense to have broken up in the earth's atmosphere. His excitement was mounting; everything seemed to be falling into place.

Rechecking the land map, Jim noticed something that had escaped him before. The contours between the house and the island were negative; therefore the land was definitely below normal sea level. This could explain why both the chart and land maps had not shown the lagoon, since both had been published before the tsunami struck in December 2004.

He felt he was getting somewhere, but where?

Sophia, bored, started to play a noisy computer game. Jim was startled; felt like shaking her but didn't quite dare to. Instead he pulled the plug of the wall socket; annoyed, she started yelling at him until Samira came back in to retrieve a notebook and told her in English to be quiet. Sophia, attacked on both sides was incensed;

"I should have stayed in Gorawe where I was appreciated." She said sullenly.

"Enjoyed it there did you?" Samira asked. "No! Don't answer that." She said warningly, with a glance at Jim, before leaving the room.

Jim tentatively asked Sophia if she'd been here during the *Tsunami* and if the lagoon was already there before it struck? She was still sullen, offended, refusing to answer at first and then relented, not being the type of person to stay sullen for long.

“Oh yes, I remember it very well, nobody had ever seen anything like it before. It was awful.”

“Did it do much damage here? All the media reports were concerned about Thailand and Sumatra as well as the East Coasts of India and Sri Lanka. East Africa, especially Somalia was hardly mentioned at all in the Newspapers or TV reports.”

“I have never seen, or even imagined anything like it, coastal fishing villages were destroyed, almost all the fishing boats were wrecked, only those already at sea were saved. Fishermen, those that survived, lost everything. The poor people living in shacks were nearly all killed, their homes destroyed.” She paused, her eyes wide with remembered fear. Pulling herself together she continued:

“Samira and I were inside her stone house on the side of a hill when the Tidal Wave came; it was substantial enough to withstand the force of it. Karim was out at sea fishing in the boat we owned, so our boat was saved. The worst part was when the water went back into the sea, that's when most of the damage was done.”

“But didn't your stone house get flooded, through the windows and door?” Jim asked, puzzled.

“Yes, of course it did, but luckily we were in the back room with two stone walls between us and the wave. Anyway the wave was not fierce, like cyclone waves sometimes are. Oh dear, how can I describe it! There was no real force behind it, only a massive pressure, it was different when the water went back. Yes, water did come in, of course, but didn't fill the room up. We went upstairs and were there when the water came back out. It was terrifying to watch. We both thought the house would collapse and we were going to be killed.”

“But the lagoon?” Jim persisted, “do you know if it was here before the tsunami struck?”

“Yes I think it must have been. No, wait a minute, the tidal wave happened when?” She asked him.

“On Boxing Day, the twenty-sixth of December, two thousand and four.” He replied.

“That’s about five years ago. We weren’t living here then, we were in a village South of Eyl, so I don’t really know.”

Jim was using the metric system for the soundings, but was undecided whether to use Nautical Miles or Kilometres for mapping the lagoon. Eventually he decided to wait until the GPS instrument arrived and then use the units the machine used. All he could do in the meantime was to convert two and a half Nautical Miles into Kilometres, just just in case.

* * * * *

That same evening, he asked Sophia if Samira was the wife one of the two men who always accompanied Hassan. Sophia, her annoyance short-lived and forgotten, said:

“No, for a start, those two men you are talking about are Hassan’s sons, Malik and Kassim. Hassan is a lot older than he looks, must be about fifty. All three are married with families and are living in houses about five Kilometres from here. Samira, being a widow and childless, is not likely to be chosen for a Second wife. She is also a distant relative of Hassan.”

“Oh! Why not? She’s certainly good looking, brainy as well.” He said

“The very few men who take second wives usually choose much younger women. As you probably know, Muslim men can have up to four wives, but there are certain conditions attached. Extra wives should be provided with homes for themselves and their children. Only the rich can afford it.”

“I’ve been meaning to ask you, Sophia, do you know who that army Officer was, who came here the other day?

The day you went away somewhere. His uniform was like that of a British Officer, very smart he looked too.”

“You saw him? I thought you were locked up in your room.” She said, surprised.

“The inside door was locked, but the outside door leading out on to the veranda wasn’t locked. I just walked round the house. He replied.

He’s a Ugandan a General or Major-General; part of the African Union forces fighting against Al Shabab.

Chapter 31 – The Lagoon – May 6th to 8th

The hand held, battery operated GPS had arrived, presumably from a ship chandler since it looked brand new. Jim was glad of that, because the box contained a booklet with detailed instructions in English, French, Dutch, Greek, Russian, Arabic, and Japanese. He’d make a start the following day and map the whole lagoon – or so he hoped. Never having used a hand held GPS like this before, he wondered if it could measure distances from one position to another?

Sure, he could stand on a piece of land, with the water lapping round his ankles; read out the Latitude and Longitude; go to the next piece of land and take another read out. But then, how to measure the distance between the two? He could use the ABC tables in Nories Tables, if only he had a copy.

Reading the Instruction booklet, he found a section called ‘Way Points’. On his ship, he’d often used Way Points. At the start of the voyage the Captain, or Second Mate, would make a detailed Passage Plan. At each alter course position, he would read off the Latitude and Longitude and enter it into the ship’s Satellite Navigator as a Way Point. The machine would respond with the courses and distances to go in Nautical Miles between each one.

Always allowing for the presence of GIGO. (*Garbage in, Garbage out!*)

That was fine, but would this small hand-held GPS do the same? The handbook said yes but he decided to ask the question from the makers. He asked Samira to contact the manufacturer by Internet to verify that point. Having read the booklet, he knew the answer, but the more silly questions he asked to be sent to various firms in London; the sooner somebody might realise he was still alive. He hid the booklet in case they verified his need for the question.

Samira had already sent a message for him to *Brice and Somerville* asking a silly question about the ***Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden*** chart. The persons receiving these Email questions would think them odd or peculiar; although phrased as normal requests for information. However he must be careful not to do this too often.

Jim could now plot the outline of the whole lagoon! He hoped this would work, but was it really as simple as that? He would now have to keep his measurements in Nautical miles instead of Kilometres, although still keeping the soundings metric. All modern charts do this anyway, at least the British ones do; with the latitude scale being used to measure distances in nautical miles with the soundings plotted in metres. Fathoms have largely disappeared now, except on a few old charts still in use. Maybe American charts still used fathoms and feet but he wasn't sure.

The following morning he'd be up with birds and out on the lagoon to do some experimenting. 'Let's see now' he thought; 'the South West monsoon should be starting by the end of the month.' He reckoned the lagoon would be protected by the bulk of the Island, although a bit choppy with the wind whistling through the Southern Channel.

Next morning, Jim started surveying the lagoon. He'd previously determined that the main part of the island was pretty well a rectangle, therefore the seaward side

measurement taken from the Pilot Book, probably equalled the landward side. A fraction over two and three quarter nautical miles he had noted, which he was now going to check. Following the remembered instructions in the GPS manual, he found the button to obtain the Latitude and Longitude readout.

With his three man crew, he took the Zodiac to the end of the Northern-most part of the island, read out the Latitude and Longitude, copying them into a notebook. He did the same thing at the Southern point; then entered both positions into the GPS memory as Way Points. Hardly daring to breathe, he clicked the appropriate button and then watched the Course to steer and Distance in nautical miles materialise on the screen. 'Bingo' He told himself, 'it works!'

The distance was more than he'd estimated from the chart, the inland side of the Island being just over three nautical miles; it was probably not an exact rectangle anyway. This length could be used as the North/South length of the lagoon.

Afterwards, they took the Zodiac back to the mainland, chose a spot opposite the North end of the island and hammered a stake into the ground. They spent the rest of that day, going from point to point along the mainland shore, choosing and staking likely spots until he reached a position opposite the Southern end of the island.

Not as easy as it sounds, since they were making the stakes permanent, this involved not only digging the hole for the stake, but cementing them in as well. He realised this should have been done this a few days earlier while waiting for the GPS to arrive. Nobody mentioned his oversight though, but he must anticipate things more carefully in future. The spider threat was always there.

Taking the Latitude and Longitude of each stake, he noted them in his notebook, then entered all these positions into the memory as Way Points; noting the distances and

Courses to steer from stake to stake. These straight lines gave him the outline of the mainland shore.

It was then a simple job to obtain the distances and courses to steer from the Northern and Southern points of the island to the marked stakes opposite them; thereby covering the usable area of the lagoon. The actual shoreline of the Island and mainland could be roughly filled in afterwards.

He could now begin to make up his own chart. Making sure all the marker stakes were firmly cemented in, he said good bye to his three Jolly Jacks and returned to the Ops Room; disappointed when he found it empty. Sighing, he rubbed out the measured distance of two point seven-five nautical miles. Sophia came bouncing into the room, as excitable as she always seemed to be. This time, she was wearing a different type of sari, looking incredibly attractive. Seeing his appreciative look, she laughed and told him to take that damned kheffiyah off his head. By this time, he'd got quite used to wearing it, his white robe as well when not working in the boat.

Jim showed her his accomplishments with the GPS instrument, which made her go wide-eyed with admiration. Jim was momentarily transfixed by those eyes and felt his knees go all wobbly. Hiding a smile, she eagerly copied all the positions, courses to steer and distances into her computer. He now had the means to make a competent chart, but what next?

What scale was he going to use for the final version? Against what was he going to measure the Latitude and Longitude? He wanted to encompass the whole lagoon on a chart size piece of paper. To do this, he had previously taped sheets of A4 paper together and sellotaped them on to a cardboard base.

“Chart size pieces of paper!” He shouted out loud, making Sophia jump. ***“Sellotaping pieces of paper together to form a chart! I must be going bloody daft!”***

For Christ's Sake, why not use the back of a chart he'd been given? Yes, that's right, the back of the *Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden* chart. If he ever needed it again, he could just flip it back over. They turned the chart over so it was face down on the table; then they had to clean it up as far as possible, its back being rather grubby. Meanwhile Sophia was copying all the positions he'd obtained from his notebook into the computer.

On Mercator charts, there's an expanding scale of Latitude. One Degree of Latitude at the Equator equals Sixty Nautical Miles. Mercator projection charts show sections of a round earth projected on to a flat surface. The size of a degree of Latitude increases, the further North or South of the Equator being charted. There are always 60 minutes to a degree, each minute measuring one nautical mile, but *only at that particular Latitude*.

The lagoon being so small, he needn't bother with the expanding scale. But then, how to relate the Longitude scale to the Latitude? He could see no way to do this, apart from comparing the size of both on the face of the chart and then interpolating. Unsatisfactory really. He was again up against the sheer amount of the surface area the chart face actually covered. Another thought occurred to him. Why bother with Latitude and Longitude? He had the distances and Courses to steer for the entire lagoon in his notebook, thanks to the GPS. The Courses to steer were always measured from True North, 0° to 360°.

Choosing a position near the upper left hand corner of the chart, Jim made a mark to represent the most northern point of the island, then measured the *Course to steer* as an angle with a protractor and marked it. By joining these two marks, extending them and choosing a suitable scale; he measured the *Distance to go* with the dividers and arrived at the position of the first staked Way Point, which he plotted on the chart.

Using the same scale he plotted the courses and distances for all the Way Points until he ran out of chart. Obviously the scale he was using was too large to plot the whole lagoon. Therefore he would have to diminish the scale until the entire lagoon plus the Southern exit channel fitted the back of the chart.

Sophia had immediately understood his intentions and was helping Jim and even making pertinent suggestions. Despite her almost non-stop chatter and excitability, she seemed to have an acute intelligence. By then it was time to eat supper so Jim decided to leave things as they were for the night and make his chart the next morning. Sophia arrived at breakfast the following morning, still rubbing sleep out of her eyes. Jim asked her to contact his three man crew and tell them to take a couple of days off, or just tinker around with the two boats.

Then, both Sophia and he together, by trial and plenty of errors, laughing helplessly at times, managed to construct a fair copy of the whole lagoon on the back of the chart, using its whole area.

Once he'd tipped her chin up to give her a quick kiss of appreciation, but she'd pulled back. Perhaps it was as well she had, before it turned from avuncular into something better. They finished just as the lights went out at ten pm, and went off to their separate rooms. Jim slept badly, haunted by visions of Sophia interspersed with those of his wife.

The following morning at breakfast, a snag occurred to Jim. How can he plot the soundings if he chose to ignore the Latitude and Longitude scales? He could use the hand held compass with all its inaccuracies and take bearings of the fixed stakes; plotting the bearings as a cross on his home-made chart. This however would be pretty inaccurate.

He got up, leaving the remains of his breakfast on the table and went along to the Ops Room. Looking carefully at the chart and consulting his notebook; Jim realised that it

would be relatively simple to draw in both Latitude and Longitude scales. He had all the positions in his notebook, marked on the new chart as well.

The Latitude of the most Northerly position could be carefully marked on the side of the chart; using a set square or parallel rulers. The same with the most Southerly position. The difference of Latitude between the two positions in minutes of a degree could then be plotted on both the left hand and right hand sides of the chart, as well as fractions of those minutes.

As far as the Longitude scale was concerned, he could do the same thing with the most Easterly and Westerly Longitudes; plotting them on the top and bottom borders. It meant an extra day's work for both him and Sophia, which he was quite happy about. It would also give his three Watch Dogs another day off as well! Why not? Sophia and Jim worked for the rest of that day, the work was meticulous and needing constant checking.

* * * * *

Tired out, Jim went down to the beach and sat down. Relaxing there, the evening drawing to a close with the blue sea lapping at his feet; gave him the illusion that he was on holiday in Southern France. Only momentarily though. His Kheffiyah and beard quite spoilt that illusion! He started thinking about the frequent visits to Angela's Uncle, living in Southern France with his French wife.

Uncle Bob, as they both called him, had also been to sea as a Ship's Officer, then Captain, finally a Marine Superintendent. He was retired now, Seventy Five years old. No that's wrong, he'd be seventy-six now having had a birthday recently. Uncle Bob had joined Prince Line in 1951; which soon became Furness Withy, then absorbed

Royal Mail and Pacific Steam Navigation Company. Until the whole shebang folded up in 1971.

He'd left British shipping shortly afterwards, having found a job as Chief Officer in a newly formed Kuwait Tanker Company. He'd got his command in 1974, sailing giant tankers up to 410,000 tonnes deadweight.

Two ships under his command had been attacked in the Iran/Iraq 'Tanker' war, one by a missile fired from a helicopter. The sister ship was attacked from a speed boat, which fired seven rocket-propelled grenades. Five of them had hit the ship; the last one causing a fire in a tank full of naphtha. The fire lasting twenty-one hours.

The Kuwait Company then offered him a job as offshore Pilot and Loading Master at Khor Fakkan, just outside the Arabian Gulf. His job had been putting two giant tankers alongside each other and transferring their cargoes from one ship to another. He was then offered a job in Kuwait City, where he narrowly escaped being captured by the Iraqi army during the First Gulf War; when Iraq attacked and briefly occupied Kuwait. He ended up as a Superintendent, living in newly liberated Kuwait city.

On one occasion; in 1976, he'd been sent to the shipyard at La Ciotat, between Marseille and Toulon, by his Kuwaiti Company. His job then was to stand by the building of a 328,000 tonne VLCC (Very Large Crude oil Carrier). After spending seven months working there, he'd sailed out as Master of that ship, returning one year later to marry a secretary in the shipyard, making the town his home. Quite a varied life, all faithfully recounted to Jim over the years.

A year or two previously, he tried to persuade Uncle Bob to write his autobiography. To his surprise, the old fellow had done so and was currently having enormous difficulty finding someone to publish it.

* * * * *

Sophia was thinking about Jim, whose life depended upon a satisfactory conclusion to the job he was being forced to do. On the other hand, if all went well and the task completed on time, Hassan would probably let him go. Obviously he would eventually find his way back to England and she wanted to go there with him. Her ambition was to leave Africa and Jim provided the means to escape.

She knew Hassan expected her to sleep with Jim, so as to give him a more natural life, although he would never directly order her to. She felt herself to be under an immense obligation to Hassan, having saved her life after Karim had been killed. Sleeping with Jim would be no problem for her, she could take him tomorrow if she wanted to. However she'd let him sweat it out for a few more days.

'Let's see.' She told herself. 'It's now early May. That means all the rest of May, June, July, August, September and maybe part of October too; about five months in all.'

Chapter 32 – Sounding the Lagoon. – May 9th

Twenty-seven days after being kidnapped, Jim was now ready to start the next job, sounding the lagoon from North to South and from West to East. This also needed a fair bit of thinking about. He had a boat, two in fact and a crew, plus a home-made sounding rod, but the job would have to be done on a systematic basis. It would be pointless to go romping out into the lagoon and sounding just anywhere. Each sounding would have to be plotted on his home made chart. So what was the best way to do this?

He could take bearings of the Way Point stakes with the hand held prismatic compass. Probably not very accurate, unless he could fix the compass on to a steady platform. Or!! He could use the GPS with the new Latitude and Longitude scales along the borders of his chart. He could, of course, use both systems, hoping they would tally. He

sighed, apprehensive about the huge job ahead. What about the tides then? No point his finding the deep water, surveying it and then having the ship go aground at low tide.

That was what had been bothering him, something he hadn't thought out so far and something he should have realised - right from the start of this mad project. What was he going to measure the soundings he'd obtained against? What exactly was **Chart Datum** anyway? He then remembered it as being the LAT or Lowest Astronomical Tide.

Having no way to determine this, Jim reckoned he'd have to use the Low Water Spring Tides as a kind of Chart Datum. The thought struck him that he hadn't had any complicated problems like this to solve, since he'd sat for his Master's Certificate some twelve years previously.

Jim thought it a pity that hand held sounding machines with rolls of recording paper inside didn't exist. Or did they? Anything seemed possible nowadays. Why not ask Samira to get through to *Brice and Somerville* again and ask them if this was a possibility? He was pretty sure it wasn't, but hell she might as well do a bit of work and ask another silly question. He'd better stop after that, or he might be visiting the spiders again.

Despite this worry, he asked Samira to send the message anyway. After all, he thought, I've got to do *something* show I'm still alive. Sobering, he thought the messages he was asking Samira to send were a complete waste of time and could even result in his death.

Looking across the Ops Room, he saw Sophia sitting down quietly at the computer, concentrating on something she saw on the screen. Aware of his gaze, she looked up at him and smiled, her eyes soft and seemingly inviting. Almost overwhelmed, he started to cross the few paces separating them; she, in her turn, started to get up and then sat down again quickly and looked away, her smile fading.

Jim checked himself and turned back to his calculations. The episode distracted him and gave him great difficulty putting it out of his mind.

Both of them had approached each other, both had then stopped dead, both must have experienced an urge meet each other halfway; now Jim didn't know where to look or what to do next. He forced himself to think about the soundings again. Right, he would use the Low Water Spring Tides, but for what? He had no knowledge of the lagoon's underwater aspect. If deep water really did exist; would it be a gradual increase in depth, or a sudden drop from shallow to deep water? The latter would be preferable since it would make it easier to define where to place the stakes or buoys.

'Think Jim, for Christ's Sake think!' He told himself angrily. What could he use as a significant depth? His mind snapped back to his last ship, the *Chesham* with a loaded draft of just under ten metres, this being the largest size ship he could imagine sitting out there in the lagoon. At ten metres

even keel, he would then need a depth of twelve metres, both in the channel and in the proposed anchorage area.

Therefore, a ship the size of the 'Amersham' or 'Chesham' with a loaded draft of ten metres on an even keel, must have a twelve metre minimum depth at Low Water Springs, to ensure a minimum two metre Under Keel Clearance.

So, how was he going to work this then? Let's see, if he used Mogadishu as his base, being the largest and only port in the near vicinity, he could then read the daily times of high and low water as well as their heights above Chart Datum; gleaned from the stolen Tide Tables. Mogadishu though, was some distance away and the times would differ, high water there being either earlier or later than in the lagoon. He hadn't realised up to this point, just how very important the tides were to this particular job.

After studying the Tide Tables, he finally found an answer. He saw that High Water at Mogadishu was at 1415 that same afternoon. He had an early lunch then rounded up his gang of Helpful Harrys. They put three stakes in the boat with a large sledge-hammer, then took the boat a little way offshore and used the hand held sounding line for the first time. Just over two red bits of cloth! Two metres and a few centimetres.

They hammered a stake home into the seabed close to and touching the boat on each side. Another one at the bow, also touching the boat, then made a rope fast to that stake. Each time he moored the Zodiac between those three stakes he would always be in the same position. The first job each day, he would take a sounding in that spot, thereby keeping a daily record of the tide's rise and fall over the months to come.

But first he must establish the time difference between High Water at Mogadishu and High Water at the lagoon. It was then quarter to two, half an hour before HW at Mogadishu. He and his crew sat down and waited for the tide to rise up the stakes until it stopped flooding at 1450. High Water at the lagoon was therefore thirty-five minutes later than at Mogadishu. They waited then until the tide started ebbing, which gave him the time of Slack Water. He carefully noted these times, also the period of slack water; the depth obtained by the hand held sounding line and its Latitude and Longitude.

Back in the Ops Room, Sophia entered it all into the computer. He now knew roughly how long the tide remained high before starting to ebb - the Slack Water period, which would be useful when manoeuvring ships. The next step was to work out his Chart Datum.

To do this, he searched through the Tide Table columns at Mogadishu until he found the next Spring tides, the date and time the tide would be at its *highest* high water and *lowest* low water. The date was two days away. On that day

he moored the Zodiac to the three stakes and awaited high water. Again there was the thirty-five minute difference in time between the lagoon and Mogadishu. He recorded the time and sounding, waited until the tide started ebbing again then took the boat back to the beach.

That evening, he re-moored the Zodiac in the same position and took the Low Water sounding and time by torchlight. This gave him the Tidal Range at Spring tides, which later in the Ops Room he drew as a graph, with the height on one axis and time on the other. He thought the range would not alter appreciably whatever the depth of water sounded - either shallow or deep - if in fact the deep water did exist.

Another thought struck him. Was it the opposite, Neap Tides, he should be thinking about, not Spring Tides! The date and time the tide was at its *lowest* high water and *highest* low water. Springs or Neaps? Neaps or Springs? Hell, it's got to be Spring Tides, hasn't it? Yes that's right.

All soundings at Low Water Springs less than twelve metres, Jim would consider unsafe for that particular class

of ship. His Chart Datum in other words; all other tidal states would then be a bonus!

Spring tides occur at two week intervals, when the moon and sun are pulling in the same or surprisingly, opposite directions. Neap tides occur when the moon is at right angles to the sun relative to the earth – also at two week intervals. He'd once told Angela that, but she did not believe the sun also affected the tides. Probably still didn't believe him.

He saw Sophia watching him and was distracted by the woman. She smiled, looked away and starting using the computer. When a secretary had first been referred to by Hassan, Jim had been sure it would have been a local man and had been delighted as soon as he saw Sophia.

‘Oh Come on’ he said to himself, ‘let’s get back to the knotty problem of the tides again.’ Forcing his brain away from the girl, he made a note that twelve metres must be his Chart Datum at Low Water Springs. Twelve metres was how many feet? Approximately thirty-six assuming a metre is more or less a yard. *Goddam it*, he told himself, stop thinking about feet, it’s all metres now.

But the word feet remained in his mind and he found himself staring at Sophia’s bare feet, tucked under her chair; like the rest of her, they were small, neat and seemed incredibly sexy. She usually kicked her sandals off when sitting at the computer, so that her feet sometimes, her face and hands were all that Jim had ever seen of her body. Except when she wore that special Sari that exposed her naval, together with and an inch or two of bare skin on either side.

With her eyes glued to the computer, she yawned and slowly rubbed one foot against the calf of her other leg; which action raised the hem of her skirt slightly above its normal ankle length, then smiled, as if a pleasant thought had occurred to her. Jim started sweating, his mind a riot of mixed feelings, thinking that he was being unfairly tempted. Did she in fact realise what she was doing to him? Or was she just being friendly?

‘In Britain, women’s legs had been visible for nearly a hundred years’ he said to himself. Here in Somalia, he hadn’t

yet seen one single pair of legs. As far as the village woman and Samira were concerned, he wasn’t bothered. But he desperately wanted to see Sophia’s bare legs. Not to mention the rest of her hidden body.

Forcing himself to concentrate on the job, he made an effort to tear his mind away from her and concentrate on the tides. With a wrench, he flung his mind back to the job in hand. If he ever found the deep water, he would have to be

more careful and take more care with the exact positions, times and depths obtained.

Each evening in the Ops Room, he would check the time of High and Low waters at Mogadishu adding the Thirty Five minutes difference. Using the Tidal Range graph he'd made up, he could then compare the time scale on the graph with the height scale.

If he subtracted the height difference for a rising tide and added it for an ebbing tide, he should have an approximate true depth at that particular time. He hoped!

Or was it the other way round? Or not like that at all? Depths less than twelve metres, he would consider unsafe. This, he thought would do. He sat down, his head whirling. He was assuming the project would use a tanker with a maximum deadweight of 35,000 tonnes, or less, with a loaded draft less than 10 metres, on an even keel. If the deep water was shallower than his twelve metre limit, he would have to insist on a smaller ship, say 18,000 Tonnes or even a Coastal tanker.

He realised that there was no great tidal rise and fall at Mogadishu, about three metres at Springs. He hoped the two metre allowance would cover any 'Squat' problems they might encounter while manoeuvring.

A few days before, Jim and his piratical crew had tried sounding on a line from the mainland shore to the Northern point of the island. It had been a slow undertaking, attempting to keep the boat in as straight a line as possible; trying to estimate a five metre advance between soundings. They had great difficulty stopping the boat drifting when sounding. By the time they had finally accomplished that one line of soundings, they were all bad tempered and almost ready to fight. Jim was right theoretically, but the practical side had to be evaluated and, as far as he could see, made easier and quicker to do.

Now they would have to really get down to the practical side of the job and sound the depths on a systematic basis.

His plan was to start from the mainland shore and work across to the island's northern point, sounding at five metre intervals. Then move five metres to the South and do the same again. Each sounding would be recorded into his notebook, together with the times and the Latitude and Longitude read-outs. In the evening, the adjusted soundings would be recorded and plotted on the chart that Jim had made.

He asked Sophia to call his three crew members into the Ops Room for a meeting. He started by telling them that the one line of soundings they'd previously taken was a load of shit. He then asking for suggestions to improve his proposed methods. Yusuf, meanwhile, had been talking to Abdullah and Ahmed, advising them to calm down their frequent outbursts of temper.

He assured them that Jim had been and probably still was a good man to work with. Not to work for, but to work with! He'd reminded them that none of them, neither Jim, Sophia, Yusuf himself nor the two others had any choice. Hassan had spoken!

Slowly some suggestions were put forward. Why not use a splash of paint on the island cliff as a mark to steer the boat to, using the prismatic compass? Why not tie some rope round a rock and drag it through the water, using it to anchor the boat when doing the actual sounding; to stop her from drifting sideways? How to measure the five metres intervals between soundings still remained a problem. Jim reckoned the accuracy of that didn't matter too much in the shallow water; whatever the intervals turned out to be, the position would always be known and recorded.

"Why do we need to put *all* the shallow water soundings on the chart?" Sophia asked, "They will be in your notebook and recorded on the computer anyway. Why can't we just plot one or two on the chart for each line. When you reach deep water, we can put them all on the chart."

‘OK why not?’ Jim thought. It would be a waste of time plotting every single sounding on his home-made chart and mess it up with too much information. When or if they ever reached deep water, he would have to plot each sounding properly. In fact, he could use the back of the other Admiralty chart he had, to plot the deep water part separately on a larger scale chart. He would keep his notebooks safe in case the computer packed up. He congratulated Sophia on her suggestion. She blushed charmingly, her colour deepening.

Neither Hassan nor Sophia had mentioned anything about an Echo sounder that could fit into the work boat, connected to the 12 Volt battery. If it came in time, this could be used to skim over the lagoon at Low Water more or less verifying their hand soundings. As soon as the deep water and channel depths were found, he would have to reverse the procedure, using the Navman as a check.

On his cousin’s boat, the *Navman* echo-sounder gave continuous soundings up to a certain depth, but that was all. There were no rolls of paper inside for a permanent record. What they saw on the read-out was the actual sounding at that particular moment of time and tide. Always supposing Hassan could find a Navman or something similar.

The following morning Jim got his three crew men together in the Zodiac. Yusuf started the outboard and they sailed a little offshore and lowered the sounding line until it hit bottom. Between two and two and a half metres. He took cross bearings on the two island stakes and a third from the mainland side. He corrected these bearings for variation, which he found printed on the chart’s Compass Rose. Deviation didn’t worry him since the boat was largely wood and the Zodiac rubber.

That evening, Jim plotted the bearings obtained on his Chart and ended up with Cocked Hats, two lines crossing and the third or subsequent lines forming a small triangle. This was inevitable, seeing the amateurish way they had

plotted the lagoon and the hand held compass being just that – hand held! He plotted the GPS position as well, which only added to the confusion because it indicated a position outside the cocked hat. Jim decided to use only the GPS positions using the Latitude and Longitude scales he'd worked out.

He asked Hassan that evening if he was getting a *Navman* set and how soon would it arrive? To his surprise, Hassan hedged, saying the job was beginning to cost too much and why couldn't they make do with hand held sounding lines? For a giddy moment, Jim thought he was back in the Bucks County Steamship Head Office, listening to old Tom Murchison querying his latest Stores Request.

"Look," said Jim annoyed, "if you want this job done by October or November, then I'll need the Goddam thing. Otherwise we'll be looking at November 2010. I for one want to be home for Christmas!"

"It's May now; you should have started the job long before this." Hassan said belligerently.

"You took a long time getting the GPS so I could make the chart." Jim countered defensively.

"I think you are exaggerating, Jim. Tell Yusuf to take whatever men you need from the village to help. It is nearly mid-May now; I think you should easily be finished by October. If you are thinking of going slow then just remember the spiders, bigger and hairier ones exist."

Jim found the suggestions obtained during the meeting with Sophia and his crew useful, but there was still something missing. Using the prismatic compass in conjunction with the splash of paint on the cliff was fine but the tide could, and did push them off to one side or the other while moving five metres forward after each sounding. This meant using the helm and motor to get the boat back on line again. Wasted time!

He then remembered leading marks or lights he'd often seen when under pilotage on his ship. Gathering two more

stakes, the four of them dug a hole for each stake in a line, one above the other a fair distance apart on a bearing that coincided with the paint splash – all three being on the same line – as judged by the hand held compass.

He would then be able to steer directly for the marker on the island, using the prismatic compass, while one of the crew watched astern - warning Jim when the two leading marks started to separate laterally. This should keep the boat in an approximate straight line; except that the prismatic compass still smelt of garlic. The man watching the leading stakes at the stern could do some fishing as well.

Then, keeping to this line, he would sound at five metre intervals, recording the GPS position, time and depth obtained each time. Attaching a line to a rock, they dragged it along the sea bed; using it as an anchor when stopped. With practice, they found the five metre intervals could be judged. That took care of the soundings on a line from West to East at approximately five metre intervals, starting at the North end of the island.

For the next line of soundings, Jim measured five metres to the South and dabbed another splash of paint on the island cliff, also changing the leads ashore the required five metres. Then they started sounding this second line five metres south of the first line. And so on, until they would have reached the southernmost tip of the island. When they hit the deep water, if they ever did, then he would have to be more careful and use the system he had just conceived, using twelve metres as his Chart Datum depth.

After a couple more lines, they found it took far too much

time and trouble, uprooting the leading marker stakes each time and digging them in again five metres south. Jim finally decided to use two men from the village, telling them to stand still at the required spots holding the stakes still while the boat was sounding that line.

“No!” Yusuf said. “Why use men, they’ll want to be paid and there’ll be more arguments. We’ll use our wives for this. They will be far more careful than the men anyway.”

And so it happened, the three wives and another woman took it in turns to stand at the required spots holding the stakes upright, carefully moving the stakes a measured five metres to the south for each line of soundings. When not at school, their children came as well. Shy at first, they soon got used to Jim’s presence there and the whole thing turned hilarious. The women were attractive, dressed in brightly coloured *abayas*, their hair covered with long *hijabs* down to their shoulders.

The men in the boats and the women were shouting back and forth in their own language. Jim sometimes wondered if he was the butt, but played along, grateful for their presence. He enjoyed watching their graceful movements and gestures and occasionally took over as stern lookout for that purpose.

All the corrected shallow water soundings would be entered into the computer; plotting only the odd one or two on the working chart. Each evening he would correct each sounding, using the graph he’d worked out. Using a Spread Sheet, Sophia conceived a series of entries:”

Date	Time	Depth	Depth Adj	Lat	Long	Remarks	
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When or if they reached the deep water, she would have to use another, more complicated spread sheet, as well as another chart to plot only the deep part. He still had to decide what to do if they hit the deep water. With the three Somalis constantly in the boat with him, it would be impossible to fool them.

Jim had almost given up wondering what all this was for. To use a tanker for a suicide mission, blowing her up in

a busy port seemed far less likely now. They could easily use an anchored ship for that. His original feeling of guilt for agreeing to do the job, had largely been stifled; both by the presence of Sophia and Hassan's repeated statements that the result would not be used for sabotage.

However, he still had bad moments, feeling he was more or less a slave; although not physically tortured apart from the spiders. He felt that he'd given in too easily, but he was in no position to stop work or 'go slow' at this stage. Not with his three crew members constantly with him in the boat. Also what would happen when he completed the work?

Well, no point in dwelling on it. What about the knotty problem of the Tidal current, which must flow through the lagoon as well, according to which monsoon was blowing? He knew this current was reversible according to the monsoon season. What he'd always thought of as the Southwest Monsoon was really the Southeast monsoon north of here.

He remembered being on one of his Company tankers bound for Little Aden from Durban when the engine broke down – probably not far from where he was now. The current was strong, driven by the Southwest monsoon, pushing the ship towards Socotra at an astonishing rate of some forty-eight nautical miles a day. Two knots.

Captain Wilkinson had called a salvage tug from Aden; until they'd realised the current was following the lie of the coast Westerly round Cape Gardafui. The Southwest monsoon had turned itself into the Southeast Monsoon, pushing the ship to the Northwest. It then turned back into the Southwest monsoon heading back to the North East again in the Gulf of Aden, continuing in that direction until it hit India and Pakistan. Since the ship had seemed safe from the hazards of Socotra and its couple of islands, the tug was dismissed. The Engineers managed to get the engine going again, after a heroic effort.

* * * * *

Jim remembered Uncle Bob telling him about the early days of Satellite Navigation, how it had more or less eliminated the chore of taking sun and star sights daily. Uncle Bob mentioned a time when he was Chief Mate on a tanker enroute from Durban to Port Sudan. The ship was off the Horn of Africa, probably not far from Jim's present position in Latitude but over thirty miles off-shore.

Using his sextant, he'd taken the usual star sights that morning in that magic period, half an hour before dawn; a time when it was light enough to see the horizon and most of the major bright stars were still visible. At the same time a Cadet on his watch had plotted the position by the newly installed satellite system, accurately, the lad had claimed.

There was a serious discrepancy between the two positions. Uncle Bob knew his star sights were good to within a mile or less; after all, he's been working them out for years. The Satnav position *must* be right, since it came directly from God, so what was wrong then? The Cadet swore he'd made no mistake reading the position from the machine. The answer to that could only be – the chart itself was wrong! He never found out but the chart was replaced soon afterwards.

Jim loved looking at the stars on his night watches, using them to calculate compass errors. He could point out most of the major stars with their lovely names. *Betelgeuse*, *Bellatrix* and *Rigel* in the Orion constellation; *Sirius*, the Dog Star, the brightest star of all; *Antares*; *Spica*; *Vega*; *Altair* and *Aldebaran*, all of which Angela's Uncle Bob had used for his navigation sights over the years. Even *Dubhe*, the brightest star of the Great Bear constellation, the curvature of its tail pointing unerringly to the Pole Star. Polaris was seldom used for star sights, since it was not really bright enough. Visible, but not always in the time

before dawn or at dusk. It was not visible in the Southern Hemisphere anyway.

Then there were the Southern stars, notably the Southern Cross with *Rigel Kent*, the closest star to the earth. Jim eagerly searched for the Southern Cross low on the horizon each time he neared the Equator. Sometimes as far as ten degrees North latitude. They were easily identifiable, you only had to look at the Australian and New Zealand national flags.

‘About that time,’ Uncle Bob had told Jim, ‘there was a strong rumour going round that New Zealand was discovered to be fifteen miles further East or West from its charted position.’ Captain Cook had done his best but had apparently slipped up there. For generations, ship’s Navigating Officers had been subjected to criticism when their ETAs were wrong. Fifteen miles on a ship doing fifteen knots is a one hour error on the ETA. Far more if only doing ten knots. If indeed, it had been true – something he’d never found out.

Angela’s Uncle Bob had some fascinating tales of a bygone era, as far as shipping is concerned. In the days of hand steering, before automatic steering took over, his ship had signed on a complete crew from Sunderland. The whole ship had lived in delirious happiness or deep gloom every Saturday, according to whether the Sunderland football team won or lost. One day he was idly chatting to his AB on the wheel.

“When are we going to India?” The AB had asked Uncle Bob, who was Chief Officer then.

“I don’t know” Uncle Bob had replied, raising the binoculars to his eyes and scanning the horizon. Why do you want to know?”

“Oh I love going ashore there; I can never get off the ship fast enough.”

This was amazing. Ratings generally didn’t go much on

India or Pakistan. Not much to drink, little for them to do. Full of beggars and too bloody crowded. Certainly not one of their favourite ports.

“Especially Bombay.” The AB went on to say, licking his lips. “I like darting up behind cripples and knocking their fucking crutches out from under them so they fall down. Makes me laugh that does?”

Uncle Bob had laughed and thought no more about it until

one afternoon some two years later when he was walking up from the beach at South Shields. There in front of him, going the same way was a man on crutches. The conversation with the AB came back to him like a flash. He’d told Jim that he’d had an almost irresistible urge to dart up behind the bloke and knock *his* fucking crutches out from under him. The urge was so strong, that he’d had to cross the road, choking with laughter.

Chapter 33 – Sophia and Jim – June 10th

Jim finished work for the day, having completed another five lines of soundings. The work was going well. Using wives to hold the stakes in place as leading marks proved to be a boon. Although shy at first because of Jim; they had soon become used to him. Somali language slanging matches between the boat’s crew and their wives ashore became a familiar daily chorus. Jim wondered how many of these witticisms featured him, especially when they all roared with laughter. He was even starting to pick up odd words in their language. It was now two months since he’d been abducted off the Dawn Splendour

The women were attractive, although dressed in *abayas*, all with *hijabs* but not veiled. All three crew men took turns keeping the stern lookout, warning against any lateral separation between the stakes, thereby indicating the boat

was drifting off course. Jim took the stern position a couple of times and enjoyed watching the graceful poses of the women. So much so that he very nearly missed a lateral separation once.

Sometimes the children came as well; making a party of the whole operation. The affair had turned itself into a lark, but the work was going well. Another woman had joined the three wives permanently, taking her turn at the stakes; a woman who resembled Samira.

Entering the Ops room, as he now referred to it, Jim was disappointed not to find Sophia there. She entered the room half an hour later, looking more desirable each time he saw her. She really was a splendid mixture of Indian and Portuguese, excitable and given to non-stop chatter.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said cheerfully, closing the door behind her. “I hope you’ve entered all those soundings and positions into the computer correctly. Right, let’s have a look

at the chart and see what you’ve done, no sign of deep water

yet I suppose?” She had taken charge – as she often did.

Jim looked at her and she gave him a smile that took his breath away. His glance took in her honey-coloured face and shining black hair combed back into a ponytail. Her eyes were wide apart and very slightly slanted.

Tearing his eyes away from her, he completed calculating the adjusted soundings, which Sophia entered into the computer. Two soundings were plotted on to the chart by using the Latitude and longitude scales on the edges of the chart. Packing all their equipment away, they went down for the evening meal. Sadly he watched her disappear into her room.

The following day, Jim entered the Ops. Room in a foul temper after another hot fatiguing day on the lagoon, Sophia was already there, dressed in her best sari. She’d been in his thoughts all day and he’d slept badly the

previous night. Had he been unmarried and still living in his own country, he would have tried to seduce her long before; but dare not try here without risking a visit to the spiders. He would try to ignore the woman, only appreciating her secretarial skills. By this time, the sameness of every day was starting to bore him. He desperately needed a change of some sort.

“Another day’s soundings completed.” He almost snarled, sitting down at his desk.

Tossing his notebook on the table, he saw Sophia sitting at her usual place behind the computer. She smiled at him, a different smile that seemed to make her eyes look softer and more appealing. He turned away scowling, determined to follow his decision and missed seeing her amused look and raised eyebrows. Laughing, she told him to take the Kheffiyah off his head. Grumpily he did so.

‘OK then’ she said to herself; tonight’s the night.’ She made a phone call in the Somali Language. After correcting and plotting a couple of the day’s soundings on the chart, they entered the rest into the computer, put the chart away and had supper together as normal. Sophia was chattering almost non-stop during the meal and Jim slowly felt his previous bad temper ebbing away. To his surprise, she invited him to her room for a coffee, saying that Hassan had given them all the following day off to recuperate and reassess the situation. She also told him that ‘lights out’ that evening would be eleven pm instead of ten.

“A day off?” Jim exclaimed, almost choking on a mango. “What the devil am I going to do with a bloody day off? There’s nowhere to go; nothing to see or do; nothing left to read; not even any good telly.” He was scowling, his bad temper returning.

“I thought we could spend the day together, you know, talking about things unrelated to the lagoon and work. Get to know each other better” Sophia said, smiling. “Your crew boys need an occasional day off too. Anyway, come along

and have that coffee now. You can tell me all about England.”

Arriving at Sophia’s room, he found it attractively fitted out, far better equipped than his own room. She had a lounge and a small separate bedroom, sited on a corner of the big house. In the lounge there was a colourful sofa and a couple of easy chairs, plus a small kitchenette where she could make tea or coffee. There was no television, but she had a small library of books and a short-wave radio, tuned in to a music station.

It was a bright feminine, even cosy room with attractive curtains at the windows. The room was cool, due to a large overhead fan. With the connecting bedroom door and the windows of both rooms open, there was normally a current of air passing through. Especially during the Southwest monsoon, which had started some time previously?

Sophia made the coffee and they sat together on the sofa, drinking it. Finishing her coffee, she rose and walked to the window. Her sari consisted of a long colourful skirt, tucked in at her waist, leaving her naval and a couple of inches of brown skin exposed. Above that bare section of stomach, she wore a patterned blouse and a long orange coloured shawl, one end of which was slung over her left shoulder. A light scarf partly covered her hair. Jim loved seeing her dressed like that; she looked very attractive, also very Indian.

“Is that your best sari?” Jim asked her, joining her at the window. “I’ve seen you wearing that sari a few times since I was kidnapped. Do you only wear it on special occasions?”

“Yes. This one I do keep for special occasions. I normally wear it on Catholic holidays; such as Easter; Ascension; always on May the twenty-fifth, St Sophia being my name day...”

“Name day, don’t you mean your birthday?” Jim asked her, puzzled.

“No, my birthday is in March, before you came. I also celebrate my Name Day in May.”

“So you have two birthdays each year then?” He said, this was something he’d never heard of before.

“Yes, my birthday and my Name Day. Anyway, to continue what I was saying before, I always wear these clothes on certain days such as Pentecost in early June; Assumption in the middle of August; All Saints Day on the First of November and of course Christmas. Sometimes I wear it when I’m feeling sad to remind me of my family and the happy life we had together.” She paused, feeling sad. Then resumed.

“I’m so very glad you came here; it has been a lonely life here up to now. It’s good to have something definite to do, someone different to talk to, instead of just sitting around waiting... for what? Do you like it?” She asked demurely, looking down.

Her answer had been solemn and Jim was immediately conscious of her plight in this country. An Indian stranded in Africa fighting for survival.

“Your sari? Yes I do like it very much. You look a real picture wearing it. So you’re really a prisoner of Hassan as well; do you have the choice to leave if you want to?” He replied.

“Certainly. I’m not a slave, but I’ve had nowhere to go, and no money to go there anyway.”

Which wasn’t exactly true, she had nearly a thousand US

dollars safely hidden. Returning to the settee, she brushed past Jim, patting the place beside her. Jim went to join her, aching to take her in his arms. The golden brown portion of bare flesh fascinated him and he longed to touch it. He’d never really appreciated before just how alluring a Sari could be, never having previously given them a thought.

A delicate perfume invaded his senses causing his mind and body to react. She watched her effect on him out of the

corner of her eye, while chattering on about the day's work. For once she was pleased to see he was barely listening to her.

Suddenly she turned her head and looked directly into his eyes, their faces only inches apart, her eyes wide open, challenging him. It was like a charge of electricity and Jim was suddenly in a hell of a state, rock hard, more so than he could ever remember being in his life before.

Fully aware of this, she casually put one hand on his arm to stress a point; her other hand on his knee. Her face was solemn, attempting to convince him of the point she must have been elaborating; a point he was totally unable to concentrate on. Unable to hold out he kissed her, stopping her chatter. She swiftly ended the kiss by placing her hand on his chest and gently pushed him away. Standing up, she took his hand and led him into a small bedroom, pushing him down on the bed.

Looking down at him sprawled out on her bed, she saw a bearded, not bad looking, reasonably muscular man not yet forty and not yet gone to fat. He reached out his hand to pull her into bed, but she dodged out of the way, laughed and told him to wait. Upright, still dressed in her Sari, she seemed to have the moral superiority and felt able to keep the initiative in their love-making, at least for a time.

Slowly she took off her sari piece by piece, folded them up and put them away.

Long before she'd finished, she looked over her shoulder and saw Jim had wriggled out of his clothes and was more than ready. She turned and looked down at him, giggled, threw the petticoat on the floor and joined him on the bed, straddling him. She was talking and laughing, her arms and legs seemingly everywhere at once, but her body rhythm matching his. After the second, or perhaps the third time, they fell soundly asleep.

Jim woke up at his usual time in the morning and looked at her still sleeping beside him. She stirred, opened her eyes

and smiled, her hands delicately touching him, causing instant arousal. They made love again, and then again, with her chatting and occasionally laughing at times, her supple body squirming all over him.

"I'd better go back to my room," Jim said finally, his hand stroking her thigh. "Hassan and his sons will be coming soon. They'll be angry if I'm not there, especially if they find out I've been sleeping with you."

"No they won't, don't you remember, I told you they were giving us all the day off. I'll make us some tea and then we'll go along for some breakfast. Don't worry, by now everybody will know you've spent the night with me." She said, then hesitated, looked down and said shyly.

"Why don't you collect your things and come and live here with me? You know, almost like a married couple."

She was smiling demurely as she said this, her eyes modestly downcast. Not that was a lot to collect, a change of working clothes, his notebooks and a book of hers that he'd been reading. Oh yes, his Kheffiyah and Djeballah as well. After breakfast they started talking seriously. Jim asked her if there were any other Indian families in this part of Somalia.

"There must be some," she told him. "Not many though, most of them fled to Kenya after President Barre was deposed. If there are any left, they'd be in Somaliland. This part of Somalia never had the Indian populations of Kenya and other ex-British African colonies. Sometimes I feel that I'm the only one left."

The day continued like that. He asked himself if sex with Sophia was better than with Angela. With Angela a definite future could be thought about, they both had families, plenty of friends, many of whom were in the same financial circumstances. Parties; secluded dinners by candlelight; falling into bed tired out after a hectic day; they were events that couldn't possibly happen here.

With Sophia, there was no common background to fall back on; no mutual friends; no common courtship memories such as dining out in restaurants, going to the cinema or theatre together.

The sex was different in other ways too. Sophia had the ability to arouse him whenever she wanted to and seemed to enjoy it as much as he did, judging by her laughter. The act of making love seemed casual for her. They would be discussing something when, with a touch or even a certain look, she would casually arouse him; continuing to talk non-stop and sometimes even laughing during and after the act. 'Since I'm a captive here with a possible deadly future,' he rationalised. 'I might well lay back and enjoy it.'

On her part, she welcomed the continuous sex with the same man over several months and hoped Jim could summon enough clout to get her through the Heathrow controls. She'd already had enough men in her life and hoped Jim would prove to be permanent - at least until she was safely in England.

At present it was she who was in control of the situation, she who decided when to make love. This was OK with him, since the sex was good and happened very often.

* * * * *

The following day Jim went down to the boat to start work again and was surprised to see his three merry men beaming at him. As he drew near, they shook hands with him, clapped him on the back and congratulated him. The wives too, each of the women kissed Jim on both cheeks, laughing. The one who resembled Samira, the one he'd been mildly attracted to, even danced with him and soon the others joined in.

All eight of them; the three crew men and their wives, the spare woman and Jim, all pounding away with their

feet. It was a merry occasion; they were all laughing and joking in their language. Jim, mystified, asked Yusuf what all the celebration was about.

“Why? You and Sophia, of course. You be much happier now you are in her bed.”

“Yes, but how did you know, you haven’t been watching through the window, have you?”

“You crazy, man? We’re too busy making pleasure with our wives.” Yusuf replied.

Chapter 34 – Sophia’s Confession – June 30th

Jim and his crew were getting on nicely with the soundings, with the four women holding the leading stakes in position. The job was even becoming a bit boring, especially since he still didn’t know why they were doing this. His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by an argument his crew members seemed to be having.

“What’s happening? Haven’t you got the sounding rod up yet? What’s all the yelling about?” Jim demanded, taking his eyes off the women ashore. One of them was doing a complicated dance around the stake she was holding.

The piece of metal tubing used as a weight had broken off, leaving the sounding line useless. They couldn’t even determine the depth they’d obtained with it, since they didn’t know where the break had been. Less than two metres or more, nobody knew. ‘We should have made two sounding rods,’ thought Jim. His old Bosun would never have forgiven him for the oversight. Now we’ve gone and lost an afternoon’s work.

Lost an afternoon’s work? With a shock he realised he was becoming thoroughly involved in the job, wanting to see it completed successfully within the time limit. Why?

Was it pride in a job well done? After all, nobody was paying him – unless that was Sophia's role? Perhaps he should he feel guilty about carrying out this work, without knowing the end product?

They turned the boat round, chugged to the mainland shore, entered the creek and tied up. Jim directed his crew to make at least one new sounding line fifteen metres long. Nobody moved, Yusuf said something in their language and the three loafers and four women roared with laughter. Looking at Jim with a broad grin on his face, Yusuf said:

“Hey Boss. *We'll* make the new sounding line for you this afternoon; but I think somebody be waiting for you up at the

Big House. You have plenty of time before supper.”

“Time for what? Now we can't do any more soundings, I was going to take the opportunity to clean the sump and change the oil in the workboat.” Jim replied despondently.

This really set them off; they were falling about with laughter, slapping each other on the back and hugging their wives. Yusuf recovered sufficiently to gasp out:

“You now have a free afternoon, go and have a pleasant afternoon with Sophia, *we* will make a new sounding rod this afternoon and then *we* will go and have pleasant afternoons with *our* wives. Oil change tomorrow. OK boss?”

The three wives and Aliyah laughed and started pulling their men towards the village. Jim hesitated and walked up to the big house, thinking about his relationship with Sophia. They had been sleeping together for nearly three weeks now. After a frenzied start, time had reduced their love-making until after lights out and some mornings, never in the afternoons. It was still good, although more and more casual on her part.

They'd stopped altogether for the last two or three days for her period and he was now ready to resume. She never denied him and mostly initiated it; but the casualness

disturbed him. He wondered whether Karim had been the only man in her life before he'd arrived.

Entering the Ops Room, he found Sophia there smiling a welcome, as if she'd been waiting for him. She was dressed only in a tee-shirt that stopped short at mid-thigh, the rest of her legs bare. She looked up at him smiling, her eyes wide with mischief, her whole stance a sensual invitation, waiting for him. Jim stopped short, overcome by a sudden rush of love for her. She raised her eyebrows, questioning and at the same time challenging him.

"We've gone and broken the sounding line," He told her hoarsely, his throat dry. He wanted to make love to her as he'd never wanted anything before. As he lunged towards her she put her hands on his chest, pushed him off and held him away at arm's length. Looking deep into his eyes, she demanded to know if he loved her.

"Yes! Yes! Of course I love you!" Jim shouted, overcome with sexual desire. She laughed and said:

"Sshh! Don't shout, the whole household will hear you. Now look at me in the eyes and say it again because I'm not sure that I believe you, I think it's only sex you want."

"No it isn't. I love you and I want to take you to England and live with you there;" He cried, slightly less loudly.

"I'd love that, but what about the immigration controls there?" She asked, one hand starting to unbutton his shirt.

He shivered as her hand touched his chest, then started to play with the next button; her eyes still holding his.

"Don't worry about that!" He said quietly. "I'll tell them that you're going to be my wife. I'll divorce Angela as soon as I set foot in Britain."

Satisfied, she closed the gap between them, laughing as he picked her up and carried her light weight into the bedroom. There was no question of his previous diffidence; for the first time, he was fully in control of the situation,

This time she cried out, instead of talking or laughing. When they'd finished, both of them were covered in sweat. Sophia looked up at him and said:

"My God, you raped me Jim, didn't you? Several times you said you love me. Is it still true?"

"Yes it's true, but I didn't rape you though; I made love to you like a man making love to a woman he loves." Jim explained.

"Yes Jim, it's what I've been waiting for." She said, looking up at him, grinning "But you did rape me didn't you?"

"Waiting for?" Jim queried, pushing up with his hands and looking down into her eyes.

"Yes, waiting for. Up to now, it's been me initiating things. I know you have been enjoying it, and have sometimes even started it. But you've never made love like that before. Don't you see, this time it was you who took me, even raped me, instead of me arousing you." She said, smiling.

"But you did arouse me, just by standing there in your tee-shirt with your legs bare."

"I didn't intend to, I was just starting to get dressed when you walked in." She lied. "This time Jim, you made me feel like a woman that *you* really wanted to make love to, instead of just someone you enjoyed being tempted by."

"I see what you mean though. I suppose it was because I thought Hassan had *told* you to sleep with me." Jim said, acknowledging the truth in her statement.

"Jim, nobody told me. Maybe Hassan would have liked me to in order to keep you happy, but the decision was mine alone. Now, tell me, did you mean it when you said you loved me. Can you repeat it now? Go on, say it, tell me once again."

“Certainly I can. I love you Sophia, I want you to come to England with me and live with me there. And you?” He questioned, astonished by what he’d said and realising it was true. He did love her.

“Right Jim, come along and let’s have a shower together” She invited him, her eyes dancing. “I’ll tell you afterwards.”

Refreshed and back in bed, she decided to tell Jim more about herself. She was concerned that Jim picking up more and more of the Somali common language from his crew and their wives. It was only a question of time before one of them let something slip about her past activities for Hassan. There were no secrets in the small community between the Big House and nearby village.

“Right Jim, you had better know more about me and exactly what I do here. Since I am the only one who has lived in Somaliland and have a current passport for that country; I go there on jobs for Hassan occasionally. I have a feeling he is going to ask me to go there again soon.” She said.

“But what do you do when you’re there?” Jim asked, stroking her legs.

“Usually it is to get things for him that we can’t get here. Your GPS System for example. A European man brought it into Hargeisa, I paid him for it and arranged to bring it here, bribing the customs as well.” She stated.

“Can’t the Europeans bring it here themselves?” Jim asked. “How long does each trip take?”

“Not long, never more than a week, usually much shorter. It’s too dangerous for Europeans here or any white faces. It’s much safer for them in Somaliland.”

“Don’t the men want you to sleep with them?” He demanded, rather than asked.

“Oh yes, most of them ask me to. Especially if they find out I’m Goanese. One or two try but I’m pretty good at

dodging and defending myself.” She said, “Although I must admit that I did sleep with one. That was long before you came here. I certainly won’t do it again. Not now. Now we love each other.”

“Are these things legal?” He asked. She laughed at him, her white teeth flashing.

“Oh Jim, this is Africa? Some of them are, others not. It makes no difference either way. If they are illegal, I pay more money as bribes.”

“Are you sure these affairs are not dangerous for you?” Jim asked, suddenly concerned for her safety.

“Why did you take the afternoon off?” She demanded, adroitly changing the subject.

“As I told you, the sounding line broke and there was nothing else we could do. In the light of what’s happened between us this afternoon, then I’m bloody glad it did break.”

“Yes Jim, so am I. That’s why I asked Yusuf to cut it when you weren’t looking.” She said demurely, looking down at her bare legs.

His eyes followed her glance; those seldom seen legs fascinated him. His hand was already stroking her thigh when he realised what she’d said. Astonished he pushed himself up with both hands again and looked down at her.

“You mean *you* asked Yusuf to cut it? I thought it was odd, the line breaking like that; it was a new rope and seemed strong enough to last for ever. But it’s only a small boat; I would have seen him cutting it.” Jim exclaimed.

“You had your eyes on Aliyah didn’t you? She put on a special performance for you.”

“You mean that you organised the whole thing from start to finish?” He said, bewildered.

“Yes Jim. I needed to see your reaction *and* I wanted an afternoon making love with you.”

“So I passed the test, did I?” He said, grinning. “Thanks for the unexpected afternoon pleasure.”

“It was no test.” She said, laughing. “Well, maybe it was in a way; I needed you to make love to me like you did, without me having to arouse you all the time. Anyway you passed on both counts.”

“So you asked Aliyah to create a diversion. Who is she? Is she married?”

“Her husband was killed the same time as Karim. She’s a Christian, Catholic like me, belonging to one of the very few

African families who didn’t convert to the Moslem religion.”

“Well.” Said Jim; one hand stroking her legs again. “It’s been quite some afternoon.”

“Yes it has hasn’t it? Today’s the first time we’ve made love at this time of the day. Pity I can’t keep asking Yusuf to cut the line. You’ll just have to wait for Ramadan in August.” She said and looked down. “Hey Jim, it’s been twice already and now it’s looks as if you want to make love again!” Jim was already turning to her.

* * * * *

What she had no intention of telling Jim was that she was part of the bargain. It was true, her job for Hassan was to liaise with these men, bribe any Customs Officials if necessary, and generally smooth the way. Some of the deals were legal, others not; one or two even criminal. Hassan had never asked her to sleep with the men. That had been her own decision after the disastrous initial job.

She had a Somaliland passport, spoke English fluently as well as the local Somali language. The men she liaised with were normally rich, powerful men in their late fifties or early sixties who had fought their way up from nothing.

Tough men who'd fought hard during their lives and were accustomed to paying for their pleasures.

She felt under a real obligation to Hassan. He'd saved her

life by rescuing her at the same time as Samira after Karim had been killed. He hadn't needed to, he could have left her there in the village to fend for herself. Had she been abandoned in that small fishing village south of Eyl, she felt sure she would be dead by now. She had no family nor any man willing to accept her. In this country she would always be a pariah.

After Karim had been killed, Hassan has taken both Samira and her to the lagoon. Samira had been Karim's legal wife, Sophia the preferred woman. Since she had a valid Somaliland passport and spoke English fluently, Hassan had asked her help by liaising with men, mostly East Europeans, who could supply items unobtainable in Puntland.

She would take sufficient take sufficient cash with her for bribing Customs and other officials. Dressed as a Somali woman, she was unlikely to be searched. Her handbag maybe, but never a body search.

She had difficulty with the first man Hassan has asked her complete the bargain with. He was willing to complete the deal but had also wanted her. She'd refused and had very nearly lost the deal. It had been concluded eventually with a slight loss to Hassan. She was ashamed and swore to herself that it would never happen again.

The second man she was doing a deal with had raped her one night, after bribing the hotel receptionist for the key to her room. The rape hadn't bothered her, she'd lived through a few of them when she was sixteen, during those terrible days when the Disputed Region had broken away from Somaliland. She'd fought him for a while then succumbed. She'd even had a job to stop herself participating.

When she'd approached the reception desk the following morning, he'd been there and took her to one side. He'd pleaded with her not to report the rape to the authorities, nor complain to the hotel. He'd given her \$100 to keep her mouth shut. She'd hesitated, glaring at him until he produced another \$50 bill. The hotel receptionist, her eyes down, had offered her 100 shillings, which she'd refused. The deal she'd been sent there for was profitable for Hassan.

After that there was no stopping her. After completing the negotiations, she would take off her Hijab, smooth back her long black hair and offer herself to the man she'd been sent to for \$150. They normally paid willingly. She now had nearly \$1000 saved. Although most of the men were old enough to be her Grandfather, they'd usually managed at least twice with her during the night. She generally liked the men and was happy to please them. Happy also, to bargain with them for Hassan and to obtain US Dollars for herself.

She thought back to the two Arms Deals she'd already carried out with the Ugandan Major-General. At forty-five, he was younger than the others. A giant of a man; tall, broad-shouldered, a powerful rip-roaring man but surprisingly gentle with her.

She was aware that another Arms Deal was on the cards, a big one. No way did she want to miss out on that, Jim or no Jim. She'd already had the General twice and was looking forward to a few more days with him. She was sure the General would insist that she'd be part of the deal.

Her thoughts slid back to Jim, still lying on top of her gently stroking her legs. Hopefully he'd never find out. Well, if he did, she'd have enough time to get him back to his present state. He was a lot younger but with no money. She'd stay with him until they reached England and she was through the controls; then she'd see. He'd stated that

he'd divorce his wife and marry her. If he changed his mind on arrival there and chose to stay with his wife, then she hoped to have sufficient money saved to last a couple of months in Britain until she found someone else.

With that thought, she lightly scratched his back until he was ready again. Although she didn't consider herself a prostitute, she'd realised this was the only way she could make money. If she got to England with Jim, then she'd have enough to live on there, until she either married Jim or someone else. Twice Jim had become ill, both times Sophia had nursed him back to health again, without him losing more than two days' work.

Chapter 35 – The Deep Found - July 18th

Nearly one month later, Jim and his crew were in the Zodiac finishing yet another line of soundings. 'Bloody Hell,' Jim thought to himself, 'we'll be wearing the sounding rod out soon. Mine too, if Sophia doesn't stop exciting me so much.' Sometimes he felt really shagged out in the mornings, to use an expression he hadn't heard since he was a boy. 'Stop thinking about her and concentrate' he told himself severely. They were over halfway to the island when Ahmed, who was taking the soundings suddenly shouted:

"Hey!" He yelled. "Its deep here, deeper than usual". Thoughts of Sophia fled from Jim's mind as he realised they had probably found the deep water.

"Go on, keep paying the line out until you touch bottom, we've got plenty of rope here. Have any of you lot been counting the bits of red cloth as it goes out?" Jim asked, sure the answer was no. None of them had, Jim neither.

They hadn't really expected to find deep water and were all thinking of it as some kind of myth, or at least a Fisherman's tall tale. Jim meanwhile double checked their position by GPS and also took cross bearings on the now familiar stakes used as way points, anticipating the usual cocked hat.

Bang went his chances of keeping the find to himself and saying the old fishermen were mistaken. It was never a practical idea anyway, which he'd realised as soon as the job had started. Was this really the deep water or just an isolated hole? Assuming it was the former, he christened it the *Barrow Deep* for future reference, the first name that came into his head.

Could it be the channel leading out to the Indian Ocean to the North, instead of the South as expected? No, not possible, they had been sounding in lines from West to East, starting from the North and would have found it long before. Now they would have to plot it very carefully, if tankers were going to anchor here safely. Perhaps even make up a new chart, just for the *Barrow Deep* alone.

Jim sounded it again, carefully counting out loud the yellow and red markers on the line and ended up with a total of ten reds, eleven yellows plus a measured two centimetres. Ten metres fifty-two centimetres. 10.52m. Jim decided to continue the line until they reached the island; still using approximately five metres as the distance between soundings.

10.41m, 11.33m, 12.07m 12.66m 13.71m 6.33m, 3.55m, the shallow water continuing to the island. Right then, this meant the width was approximately 5 x 5 metre intervals, roughly 25 metres wide. Nowhere near wide enough for a tanker and certainly not enough to turn her round. Only the depths between the third and fifth soundings were more than twelve metres, which reduced the available width to fifteen metres.

That is, if he used the two metre Under Keel Clearance he'd decided upon. He'd have to wait until this evening when he would adjust the soundings, using the graph he'd made to see which depths were actually more than twelve metres at Low Water Springs.

Suddenly Jim was faced with a mutiny. His three desperadoes had become more and more excited on finding the deep water and wanted to go ashore and celebrate. They had already shouted the news to their wives, who immediately abandoned the leading line stakes and rushed to the shore. Jim turned the boat round and headed back to the creek.

The four women didn't wait, they splashed into the lagoon and waded out to the zodiac fully clothed and tried to clamber aboard. They failed, the zodiac capsized, spilling all four men out of the boat into the water. Jim just managed to throw the GPS Position Finder to Sophia who'd come to see what all the excitement was about. This turned out to be the only thing saved from that morning's work.

Aliyah, the fourth woman helping with the stakes chose Jim when the Zodiac capsized, pulling him down into the water, half drowning him. Sophia laughed and helped to restore order. After the men and their wives had gone, they managed to salvage some of the morning's work. However they still had to redo that first line of soundings that same afternoon, if the outboard motor had dried out. By this time they were all calling the deep water, simply the *Deep*.

The next line of soundings gave the *Deep* an increased width from East to West of 36 metres. Two more stakes were hammered in to the nearby shallows. The third line of soundings gave a 42 metre width. 'Getting better,' Jim thought, 'but not enough to turn the ship round.'

He had to visualise, not only a ship arriving and anchoring in the Deep, but how to get her out again. This could prove insoluble; unless the width of the deep water

widened out considerably so that the ship could turn round within the space available, ready to sail out bow first.

To go any distance stern first, without the use of tugs in a narrow twisting channel would be a daunting manoeuvre. Even if the ship had bow or even stern thrusters, to pass stern-first through that Southern Channel could prove impossible.

Ships are unpredictable when moving astern for extended periods. Transverse Thrust from the propeller going astern, or even the lack of it, could wreck the best laid plans of Captains and Pilots. A ship with a single right-handed propeller going astern usually pulls the head round to starboard overriding any angle the rudder might be put at. Specially built ships *could* navigate astern, but tankers were not generally built for that purpose. Tankers with twin screws and the appropriate thrusters could possibly manage the southern channel, but they are few and far between.

The astern movement was used mostly for stopping the ship when approaching a Pilot Station or an anchorage, when the speed had already been reduced. Or for the occasional Emergency Stop at sea, due to heavy traffic; even then it was very rarely used. When deep sea the steering wheel was nearly always used to avoid other ships.

The astern movement was also used when docking and manoeuvring in port, nearly always with tugs in attendance. In some instances, use could be made of the ship's transverse thrust when mooring; or when carrying out a ship to ship transfer.

Before finishing work for the day, they heard the distinctive sound of a helicopter, coming their way. Jim looked up for a moment and then saw the three Somalis frowning at him. He wrapped the end of the Kheffiyah round his face, just having time to see the British markings. When Jim got back ashore, he asked Sophia to tell Hassan they'd found deep water. She came back and told Jim that Hassan would see him and both women in ten minutes.

“Very good” said Hassan, who was accompanied by his two sons. “How long do you think it will take to complete the work?”

“I don’t know” Jim said warily, “we’re now beginning the most difficult part. For a start, I want to know what you mean by a medium sized tanker, which we generally think of being about 60,000 tonnes deadweight. However a ship that size would be impossible here. Mind you, we don’t know the size of the *Deep* yet.”

“What size would you consider safe, Jim, at least at this point?”

“No more than 35,000 tonnes deadweight. 18,000 would be ideal since she’s got to be capable of being turned round in the *Deep*, I don’t suppose you’ll employ tugs?”

Jim went on to explain the need to turn the ship round. A point Hassan hadn’t considered – or may not have been aware of. Once again he wondered if Jim was fooling him.

“Right, for the moment, let us say 35.000 tonnes for now.

Does 35,000 tonnes deadweight mean the ship can carry 35,000 tonnes of cargo?” Hassan queried.

“What cargo? Unless you tell me some details I can’t give you an answer.”

“Crude oil. Just think of Crude oil in a tanker that size. I will tell you more later.”

“Look Hassan, the fuel oil and diesel bunkers aboard for the voyage, fresh water and a figure for the stores must be deducted from that figure. Also the Specific Gravity has to be taken into account. With a very light cargo having a low SG; the ship may be cubically full but nowhere near her deadweight tonnage or Plimsoll line marks. Crude however is usually about 0.9 or more compared to water.”

“So what quantity of Crude Oil do you think the ship can carry in normal circumstances?” Hassan insisted.

“This depends how much Fuel and diesel she already has on board when you hijack her. Also on the Specific Gravity and the temperature of the Crude you intend to load. If you hijack a ship going to the Persian Gulf, for instance, with enough bunkers to get there plus five days reserve, then you might be able to load about 32,000 metric tonnes. Are you going to load a cargo of Crude here?” Jim stated, folding his arms.

“I’ll tell you soon; anyway work on that figure for the moment.”

“OK, but make it soon. I’ll need to know the cargo, its Specific Gravity and temperature. Also if you intend loading her here or discharging a cargo of crude here. In either case how? All you’ve got is an anchorage that may or may not be adequate. OK, I roughly know the dimensions of a ship that size; but I’ll ask Samira to check them later on Internet.”

“I’ll assume a figure of 32,000 metric tonnes for the moment. I’ll tell you more of my plans later.” Hassan said.

“I’m going to have to know very soon what you hope to load in these tankers. Or if you are going to load at all. If not, will you discharge a fully loaded tanker here? Then what do you plan doing with a tanker when one comes? At present I’m working in ignorance. I don’t even know how you propose loading or even discharging the stuff.” Jim said but was once again ignored.

Hassan then raised the subject of the helicopter that had overflowed the area that day. Jim was annoyed at Hassan’s evasion and was about to protest when he saw Malik staring at him balefully. Hassan continued:

“Yusuf said that you only glanced up when it passed over then covered your face and acted naturally. That’s good. One thing puzzles me though Jim, why did it come? Have there been hidden messages in the emails you have been asking Samira to send? She is sure that is not the case,

we have both had a good look through them and they seem to be OK. I have decided to wait and see if the helicopter comes back for another look. If it does, then I will be more suspicious.” Hassan was looking grim and ready for trouble.

“Why should you be suspicious as far as the helicopter is concerned, Hassan? He was obviously looking for pirates’ hide-outs. They and other Navy helicopters are probably searching the whole coast from Eyl up to Cape Gardafui. Look Hassan, I’ve been here over three and a half months, why do you think they are they looking for me now? They should have done that long ago. They probably all think I’m long since dead by now anyway.”

“But why did the British warship bother to send a helicopter over here if it was not looking for you, Jim? Don’t they have enough to do catching our fishermen and arresting them as them as pirates?” Hassan asked, pointing at Jim.

“As I say, it’s got to be part of an on-going patrol. What has the pilot seen anyway? Just a house and two boats, one on the lagoon peacefully fishing? In fact Abdullah *was* fishing at the time. One thing was strange though; the chopper seemed to spend more time examining the Island, than looking at us. He briefly went to the House here and the village then back out to sea.” Jim replied, fiddling with the rope used as a belt.

“He saw you though, obviously white. Hopefully they’ll Think you’re a bearded Arab workman.” Hassan declared.

“I hid my face too. Much more to the point,” Jim continued thoughtfully. “Did the pilot realise that he’s seen an uncharted island? Has he been able to compare what he saw on the ground with the chart? If he went back to his ship and told his Captain he’d found a new island, then the helicopter will almost certainly come back to take some photos. They will also wonder why an Arab is fishing in a boat.”

“We cannot start laying pipelines if there’s a British Navy helicopter flying around. OK Jim, tell me what you think the worst scenario could be.” Hassan said, looking worried.

“Pipelines,” Exclaimed Jim. “What pipelines? What are they for?”

“Never mind that for now. Right I repeat, tell me the worst scenario concerning the Island and lagoon, as far as we are concerned.” Hassan demanded.

Jim struggled to put his thoughts in order, got up and walked round the room.

“OK then. Let’s presume that the pilot reported to his Captain that he thinks he’s found an uncharted island and a stretch of uncharted sea. In that case, the helicopter will certainly come back for another look and take photos. Maybe with his Captain as passenger; in fact I’m surprised they haven’t already done so. If I’m correct in the assumption that the island and lagoon were both created by the Tsunami in 2004, then I wonder why it hasn’t been spotted before. Why hasn’t one of the satellites taken a picture when it passed over? There are plenty of them, roaming around up there in space.” Jim said, wiping away sweat.

“Probably the Americans and others are not bothered to investigate this part of Puntland and it wasn’t considered worthwhile wasting photos on, then sending them back to earth. Go on Jim; continue your line of thought.” Hassan replied, starting to be convinced. “Or the person scanning might have seen it and not realised it was different.” He added thoughtfully.

“Look Hassan, this could be very serious for your plans. If the Captain thinks there is an uncharted island and stretch of sea here, then as I said before, he will investigate and warn the British Admiralty. They, in their turn, could well ask the Americans to investigate by satellite, taking pictures each time one passes over. They might already be doing

this, but at present there's no harm done, since all they can see is a house and a couple of boats. Sometime in the future, when things have settled down here, the chart will have to be updated professionally." Jim stated, hoping he'd convinced the man.

"OK thanks Jim that is the worst scenario; now tell me what you think yourself."

"The most likely case is that the pilot was concentrating on his job looking for Pirates Nests, and did not realise that what he saw was different to the chart. In which case, he would just file a normal patrol report." Jim said, but not really believing it. He continued:

"Maybe the pilot saw the lagoon but did not realise the island is an island, thinking it was still connected to the shore. Therefore the stretch of sea we call the lagoon was to him only an inland lake, and as such may not be shown on the small scale chart. He probably wouldn't have included it in his report to the Captain either" Jim said, ignoring Malik's glare.

"There is another possibility," continued Jim, turning the chart over. "You see this island up here, not far from Cape Gardafui? Zaaan it's called. It is an island almost, with two bits of land or causeways connecting it to the mainland. The French would call it a *Presque'Ile*. The chopper pilot may have thought he saw that and wouldn't have reported it." Jim paused, out of breath after delivering his masterful summing up. He didn't really believe any of these scenarios, a professional pilot would surely notice the difference. Pouring out a glass of water from a jug on a nearby table; he looked around the familiar room.

"Anyway, Hassan, if the helicopter does come back, don't blame me for alerting them – I didn't! You ought to be far more worried about their reaction to an Arab working here."

Jim hoped he'd convinced him, because he knew he wasn't entirely blameless. The last email he'd asked Samira

to send to *Brice and Somerville* was more or less a joke. He'd asked if hand-held, battery operated Echo-sounding machines were available, with rolls of recording paper inside. He knew, or at least was pretty sure nothing like that existed, although sonars might.

Thank God, they had had sent back a straight answer and not tried to be funny, or continue the joke. He had asked other questions in a couple of other emails that the receivers might consider odd. In any case he didn't think those silly emails would be picked up by anyone in London.

Remembering that Hassan had mentioned something about laying pipelines, Jim asked again what he meant but was again ignored.

"Just one other thing Jim; you should keep your men more in order, we lost a complete morning's work yesterday. Keep them under control"

"Hassan, they are my guards as well as working with me, you said so yourself. So I don't stop them. They have been working well up to now and there's no way I'm going to upset them because of a small celebration. I suggest you don't upset them either." Jim said stoutly.

He had always believed in looking after his crew and protecting them when necessary.

Chapter 36 - Bossasso - 20th to 28th July

The summons Sophia had been waiting for came on Sunday, the twentieth of July, when Jim was working in the boat with the others. Hassan wanted to see her alone and she had a pretty good idea why. Another arms deal had been concluded and Hassan needed her help with the theft of Arms and Ammunition. She was to bribe certain parties and liaise with the Ugandan Major-General, who was masterminding the deal.

She knew the man, she'd already liaised with him twice on previous, but minor Arms Deals. The first time before Jim's arrival, the second soon after that. Both times she'd allowed him to make love with her. Allowed him? She couldn't have stopped him, nor had she wanted to. He was young for a Major-General, about forty-five and a giant of a man. Always cheerful, he'd treated her well and was generous. She liked him and was looking forward to the days ahead.

She had a Somaliland passport and was fluent in the local dialect, having been raised in that country. She was also adept at getting things done, above all in handling bribes to port officials and Customs personnel. Skilled at bargaining, she was able to save Hassan a great deal of money over the years

This was a big Arms Deal Hassan was negotiating, which would probably last as long as a week or more. If the Ugandan General insisted taking her to bed again; then that was OK – more than OK since it usually resulted in a substantial monetary gift. Hassan had never asked her to provide sex to the men she liaised with. If he knew she was prostituting herself, he never said so. Nor did he ever treat her badly or demand a share. For the most part, these liaisons usually went smoothly, all three making their own profit.

She hoped Jim would never find out; nobody would tell him outright, but one of his crew might let something slip, forgetting Jim was slowly picking up their language. 'Oh well,' she thought. 'I should be able to deal with that easily enough if it happens.'

As usual Kassim flew her to the Somaliland border where Hassan kept an air strip. He then accompanied her as far as the border post on foot, where she crossed over into what used to be British Somaliland; the country of her birth. She was dressed as a Somali woman. Once over the border,

she caught a rickety old bus to Berbera, the bus carrying more goats, hens and sheep than people.

At Berbera, after a long shocking uncomfortable journey, she booked into one of the very few hotels there, found out which room the General was in and went up. The door was not locked and she sat down in a chair and waited, anticipating a pleasant week. So far all had gone to plan. She changed into a tee-shirt and jeans.

Ngaya, the Ugandan General came in shortly after, pleased to note Hassan had kept his word and Sophia was there waiting for him. They discussed the situation for a while, Hassan had already mentioned some details but she needed to know more.

An old clapped out Merchant Ship was due to arrive at Berbera the following day, with a cargo of Arms and Ammunition, loaded at Chongjin in North Korea. She would spend a day discharging a portion of her cargo at Berbera to the Somaliland Police Force. A platoon of Ugandan troops under a Junior Officer had been requested and was there to provide extra security. The General had decided come to Berbera to discuss final plans with Sophia.

The ship would then sail to Bossasso, the main port of Puntland to discharge the rest of her cargo to the AMISON forces. Several platoons of mainly Ugandan soldiers were there with Army trucks, which would take the weaponry south to a base outside Mogadishu. Each truck would have two drivers, plus two armed guards. Each convoy of three trucks would be protected by an armoured car.

Hassan and the General had organised part of that shipment to be diverted and loaded during the night into three decrepit old lorries. They would be driven down to the lagoon area by Yusuf, Ahmed and one other man; the weapons hidden under sacks of rice. Nobody would bother with three ramshackle old lorries apparently full of rice - slowly chugging their way south.

Sophia's task was to purchase the sacks of rice; bribe port officials and customs; and generally to make sure what was stolen compared to a list Hassan had given her. The ship's Captain, an American with dubious qualifications had already been bribed, but Sophia carried more money in case he threatened to blow the whole operation.

While they were discussing this, Sophia saw Ngaya, the Ugandan General was becoming more and more restless. Crossing and uncrossing his legs, occasionally getting up and wandering around the room, his eyes roamed over her body. She looked up at him, a large powerful man, One metre eighty in height; broad shouldered and yet gentle. A giant of a man. Smiling, she put her papers away and waited.

With a sudden roar of laughter, he picked her up and carried her into the adjoining bedroom. They spent the rest of that afternoon and night in bed. Ngaya was insatiable and she'd enjoyed every minute on the grounds that '*a change is as good as a rest.*' A saying she'd learnt at the English school at Nairobi. Over the next few days she forgot about Jim waiting for her at the lagoon.

Next morning, a Ugandan sergeant drove her as far as the border where Kassim was waiting. He flew her to Bossasso, where Ngaya was waiting for her, having been flown there directly by a military helicopter. The ship meanwhile had completed discharging the shipment of arms at Berbera and arrived at Bossasso that same afternoon – but would not start discharging until the following morning. While the General was planning things with his men, she went aboard the ship dressed as a Somali woman to meet the Captain. He was about fifty-five, going bald, but not bad looking for his age. She paid him the rest of the substantial bribe and told him her plans. She would be aboard with Yusuf and Ahmed for three nights to oversee the theft of Arms and make sure the right quantity and grades were taken according to her list.

That agreed, she looked at her watch, decided quickly then took off her hijab. Shaking her glorious long black hair free, she smiled at him and raised an enquiring eyebrow. He was amazed, having thought she was a local Somali woman.

“If you want me.” She told him. “Give me back \$150 of the money I’ve just given you and I’ll stay with you until 1700 this evening. You’ll be my first American.”

This was soon agreed and she told herself that she was now *‘making hay while the sun shines.’* – To use another phrase she’d learnt at The English school in Nairobi. With the money safely hidden, she left the ship then and went back to the hotel where the General was waiting for her.

That evening, Ngaya told her that he was returning to Kampala after this job had finished and would probably not be returning to Somalia. He wanted to know why Hassan wanted so much contraband arms and ammunition.

“As a protection against other War Lords.” She’d replied, snuggling up to him, sad to learn he was leaving. She then went on to tell him of Hassan’s plans to hijack a tanker, fill her with Crude Oil and sail her to the nearest port.

“Is his son Malik involved in these mad plans” The General asked. “I’m asking this because I’ve seen him on a couple of occasions at Gorawe talking to men dressed as Arabs. Once I saw him at Hargeisa, talking to Iranians.”

She was alarmed and wondered if she ought to pass this information on to Hassan. He’d never believe her though, so she thought she’d better keep quiet about it.

The theft of Arms and Ammunition over three nights was

successful. She’d been on board each night with Yusuf. The ship’s crew, also heavily bribed, discharged the selected items into the three decrepit lorries under her supervision. The lorries were then taken by Yusuf and Ahmed to a store

where they loaded sufficient sacks of rice to cover the Arms and driven south to the lagoon area.

Knowing she would never have another opportunity like this, she then spent a profitable hour in the Captain's bed before going back to the hotel, where she woke Ngaya up. During the days, she slept until Ngaya came back for lunch.

On the final day, Kassim arrived to fly her back to the lagoon. She dallied for a while, getting her notes up to date and counting the money she'd earned from Ngaya and the Captain. Almost \$1500. Shortly before midnight; she jumped straight into bed with Jim, waking him up.

Before going to Berbera, Jim had made her swear that she wouldn't make love to any other man while she was away. Well, she justified herself silently. 'I wasn't making love, only giving sex for money.' Prostitution maybe – although she considered herself to be a high-class Call Girl. Another term she'd learnt at that school in Nairobi. In any case she'd thoroughly enjoyed the General, nor was the ship's Captain too bad.

She knew that she must now concentrate completely on Jim. The General was soon going back to Uganda and none of the other men she'd slept with mattered as much as Jim – the only man who could possibly get her to England.

hapter 37 – Samira – July 26th

Three days after Sophia had gone to Berbera, thoughts of Angela were making a comeback. Not that Jim was forgetting Sophia at all, no way could he put her out of his head just like that, but Angela was increasingly there. He knew he should feel guilty about his affair with Sophia. What was going to happen though, when the job was finished? Would he be killed then? Or let go to find his way back to Britain? Or even offered a permanent job here? On the assumption that he could be killed, he might as well

carry on with Sophia as long as possible. The least he could do would be to do his best to get through the immigration controls.

Angela must be going through all kinds of hell now, especially if his salary had been frozen at source. She might even have sold the new house at Chelmsford, moving back to her Mother's place at Romford. As a Mother-in-Law, she wasn't too bad. They'd lived with her at the start of their marriage; she didn't interfere, even when William came along. At least, not much.

Unbidden, despite his depressing thoughts, he smiled at the memory of his Mother-in-Law complaining about Television weather forecasts. He'd told her she should listen to the BBC Shipping Forecasts, broadcast at various times during the day on Radio 4. Told her she'd get a far more accurate picture. The Old Girl had done so but still complained!

"You sailors!" She'd said. "You're only interested in fog, poor visibility, wind directions, state of the sea and things like that. What I want to know is, if it's going to be sunny or not, or if it's going to rain. I'm not interested in Barometric tendencies; winds backing or veering; state of the sea and swell. Or even what's happening in places like Fair Isle, Dogger or Fastnet, wherever they may be."

More thoughts of Angela surged through his brain; memories of good times together; coming home whacked out after visiting Regent's Park zoo with the kids, putting them to bed, then both falling fast asleep watching their favourite Television programme.

'I'm a rotten bastard,' Jim thought. 'Pissing around here in the lagoon, sleeping with Sophia every night while Angela must be going out of her mind, especially if my salary has been stopped. I hope Tom Murchison or her Uncle Bob is helping her.'

Coming back to the present, what was he going to do with Sophia if he was released? He had promised to take

her to England with him when all this was finished; and do his best to get her accepted by the Immigration Authorities. He'd even promised to divorce Angela and marry Sophia, which was something that really needed thinking about. Would she make a good wife? In bed yes, Angela too, come to that. He was doubtful about going that far. No way could he imagine Sophia in England married to him.

"Hullo Jim, you look very sad and thoughtful. Anything the matter?" It was Samira, who seemed concerned, having just appeared on the adjoining balcony.

He answered in monosyllables barely trusting himself to speak. His throat ached through suppressing his tears. He looked at Samira, as beautiful as ever, far more so than Sophia in fact – but lacking her vivacity. She was standing still, smiling, the monsoon wind fluttering her robes, only her face and hands visible.

"I think I can guess the thoughts running through your head now," Samira continued. "You have enjoyed yourself very much with Sophia and now she has gone away for a few days. You are now remembering your wife and children back home in England, thinking you have betrayed them. You are confused; you love your wife and also half in love with Sophia as well."

"More than half, I should have refused her right from the start." Jim said miserably. "When is she coming back here?"

"She'll be back in a few days." She replied. Looking at him, she saw that he was really miserable and probably not a little suspicious. Also she was concerned about the way Jim was working since Sophia had left.

"What exactly is she doing anyway? She said it was something about an Arms Deal." He demanded.

"Yes that's correct. She's liaising an Arms Deal with a Ugandan Major-General." Samira confirmed.

She went on to state what Sophia had already told Jim, listing some of the liaisons that Sophia had overseen. She looked at him and said quietly:

“Jim, she is not the kind of woman you should fall in love with; nor are you the man. What will happen when the job’s finished? Will you stay here with her? Can she go back to England with you? You have a wife and children and she’s thirteen years younger than you.”

“That’s assuming Hassan will let me go back! I had planned to take her to England and help her through the Immigration procedures.”

“Yes, she told me that, she also said you are basically a good man and seemed really concerned for her. What would she do in England though? She’s trained for nothing that would be of any value on the job market. And you? You would not be in a position to protect or look after her, would you? What with you having a wife and children, as well as a job that takes you away from home.” She said, turning half round to face him.

“I told her I’d get divorced and marry her. Surely what’s she doing now in Berbera and Bossasso means that she’s a good business woman?” Jim objected. “Maybe she could get a job like that.” Jim said. Samira hastily stopped herself from laughing.

“Like what? Dealing in illegal Arms? Most of the deals she’s carried out for Hassan have been illegal; some even criminal.” Samira countered.

“I’m worried about her being up there by herself, doing a job that should be done by a man – not by a woman. She told me that she even had to sleep with one of the men once.”

“Look Jim, she’s a strong woman, oh I don’t mean physically but mentally. OK it happened once and she certainly won’t let it happen again. Don’t worry about it.” She replied.

“But I can’t help worrying. She’s not safe where she is, without any protection from Hassan. I keep thinking of her up there by herself. Vulnerable; maybe even raped.”

Samira was worried, not about Sophia, but about Jim. He wasn’t working at all well now, not since Sophia had gone. He seemed to have lost his previous momentum for the work, which was becoming noticeable. Malik had started making remarks about it. Hassan had said nothing so far, but soon would. She decided to take things in hand before Jim did a trip back to the spiders again.

“Look Jim it’s after three now and hardly worth working until dark. Why don’t you walk with me to the village? You haven’t been out of the grounds since you arrived, have you? I’ve sent your crew home anyway.” Samira said, descending the balcony steps.

Jim wavered and then followed her, wanting to question her further about Sophia, but refrained. Samira knew full well what Sophia was doing up north and with whom. If Jim wanted to take that bundle of pure sex to the UK with him, he’d end up with a hell of a life – one way or another!

* * * * *

Despite that, they had an agreeable stroll in spite of the heat and humidity. The village was a mixture of cement covered stone houses, some fenced in; wooden houses; unfenced shacks and a mosque. A small but flourishing market sold local produce and fruit, especially mangoes. He noted one or two items that had obviously been looted off an anchored ship at Eyl. Samira bought a couple of items then led him round a corner, where he saw the remains of a church. It was obviously abandoned and part ruined, left over from the Italian period. It was a brick structure, ransacked repeatedly, but strong enough to withstand the Tsunami.

They sat down on a seat against the old church wall, out of the sun, talking together. Jim looked at her face and wondered about her. She was, how could he put it? Beautiful but unapproachable. Obviously highly intelligent, far more so than the work she was doing for Hassan. She was an enigma here in this part of Africa. She should at least be in Mogadishu, or Nairobi – or even Durban. Since they were sitting against the wall of an old church, he asked her if there were any Christians left in Puntland.

“Yes, there are about two hundred Christians, mostly Indian families still living here or in Somalia, according to Wikipedia. After President Barre was deposed there were many anti-Christian riots with churches being ransacked. The Catholic Cathedral at Mogadishu was completely destroyed. You can see for yourself how badly damaged this old church is. Nearly all the Christians fled the country or converted to Islam.”

“I presume you are a Moslem then.” Jim asked her, although he already knew the answer.

“Yes, my family was baptised by the Italian Catholic Church before the Second World War but converted after the Country gained Independence from Italy.” She answered brusquely.

“You speak good English, I would imagine you’ve lived and studied there. Don’t you feel like going back there to live; away from this sad country?” Jim asked, changing the subject.

“No.” She’d replied. “This is my country and I want to use my education and experience to help when things improve. We’re at the bottom now, conditions could hardly get worse but the country can’t stay like this; the only way is to go is up and I want to be here to help when it does.”

“Where were you educated?” Jim asked. A dog started to bark in the distance, then suddenly stopped.

“Cambridge, then the London School of Economics, also a year in the United States getting an MBA there. I’m sure I could help this country when it sorts itself out.”

They were interrupted then by the arrival of Yusuf and Ahmed with their wives, the two men having just returned from driving lorries down from Bossasso. More people joined and a party was beginning to form, with plenty of talk and laughter. Once again, Jim was struck by the grace of the women despite the hard lives they were leading in this failed country. They went back to Ahmed’s house, the chatter and laughter getting more and more raucous. Since they were speaking in the Common Somali language, Jim understood only some of their talk but laughed along with them.

Looking at Samira, Yusuf produced a jug of what was obviously home brewed beer. She smiled and nodded. Children were outside playing football, providing a lively background to an increasingly happy party. There were occasional thumps as a miskicked ball hit the outside walls of the room they were in. Each time the ball hit a wall, they all cheered and shouted ‘*Goal*’ in English. Looking at Jim, they chanted the names of the football teams, *Manchester United! Arsenal! Chelsea! Liverpool!*

“*Wolverhampton Wanderers*” Jim shouted back. “*Queens Park Rangers*” He was becoming happy with the unaccustomed beer, which flowed freely.

Jim was drinking his share of beer as well as Yusuf and one other man. The rest including Samira abstained, but the party remained happy. Another jug followed the first one. Jim was getting merry, it was the first drop of alcohol since he’d been abducted, over three months previously.

Another woman came in and he recognised Aliyah, the woman who’d pulled him down into the sea and damn near drowned him. After an hour, the beer was taking effect and his three warriors urged him and Aliyah to dance. Jim

hesitated but she laughed, grabbed hold of him and started to dance with him. Suddenly, much to his surprise and cheers from the assembled crowd, she pulled his head down and thoroughly kissed him; then leant back from the waist laughing.

The crowd cheered and shouted their approval, pointing to a low couch in the corner of the room. Aliyah laughed and raised her eyebrows in a question. Jim; by then in a state to agree to anything, pointed to the ceiling and pantomimed walking upstairs with his fingers. The crowd roared with laughter, there *was* no upstairs. There was only the three rooms on the same level. Samira came and pulled him away from Aliyah, dragged him to the door, then turned and apologised, saying Jim must get back for supper. They left together.

Walking back through the warm tropical evening, he tripped over a root and Samira took his arm and guided him along the footpath through the gathering darkness. She'd never touched him before and she was now walking beside him, her arm companionably through his. He started singing, but she abruptly told him to keep quiet.

"This is a Muslim country and alcoholic drinks are forbidden. Didn't you notice that only you and Yusuf were drinking, all the others abstained?"

He mumbled an apology, then stopped to have a piss. She looked away, her face expressing disgust. After he'd finished, she grabbed his arm pulled him in the right direction. He'd already started walking back to the village.

"Sophia once said that Aliyah is a Christian. Why is that? Is she able to live peacefully in the community here?" Jim asked puzzled, slurring his words slightly. She decided to humour him:

"Yes, her family have always lived in the area but never converted to Islam, I don't know why not. She's popular in the village, as you saw, her people having lived locally for

generations. Her husband was a pirate and, like Karim, was killed boarding a ship. She has three children, the oldest girl being fourteen.” Samira told him.

She took Jim to Sophia’s room, smiled and left him. That night, Jim slept badly. He was missing Sophia and remembering Angela, also thinking about Aliyah in that order. He forced his mind back to the work he was doing. Since Sophia had left, he was totally sick of the job. He was working through the hot days but without the comfort of Sophia at night. He really missed the girl.

Samira was as stand-offish as she’d always been. Malik was a continuing pain with his sarcasm and moreover often being right. Kassim was OK, but he badly wanted Sophia back, but *only* if she honestly assured him that she’d kept herself to herself while she’d been away.

Samira, guessed what was going through his mind and despaired of the slap-happy way he was starting to do the job, often forgetting to put the results into the computer. She was afraid that Hassan would lose patience and put Jim back with the spiders.

The following morning, Jim woke up with a slight headache; turned over and went back to sleep again. It was nearly half past nine when Yusuf managed to get him in the boat to carry on with the work. Jim was late again for work the following morning also, with Yusuf doing most of the work during the day. That evening Samira asked Jim for that day’s results, which he’d left on the boat. Looking at him, she’d said.

“Jim, one more mistake like that; just one more late start in the morning and you’ll be off the job permanently. Put back with the spiders or killed some other way. Yusuf can easily finish the job.

“When is Sophia coming back?” Jim asked petulantly, his normally pleasant features scowling.

“Tomorrow afternoon or night. Pull yourself together before she gets here.”

Chapter 38 – The Old River Bed – July 28th

The soundings were gradually giving a shape to the *Deep*. By this time they had nearly covered half the island's length and were working close to the mouth of the creek. The work was tedious; the evenings long and boring without Sophia's chatter; the nights dreadful. He'd taken Samira's words to heart and decided to work properly.

Yusuf and Ahmed had been away for a few days too, up north again on a special job driving trucks, leaving Jim and Abdullah in the Zodiac to continue with the soundings. Unexpectedly that afternoon, they found deep water closer to the mainland shore than anticipated. Jim was perplexed.

"Bloody Hell, the *Deep* is far larger than we thought." He said aloud, his face concerned.

The deep water lasted all the way across the lagoon to where it shelved on the island side. The next line of soundings gave the same result and the line after that. Jim thought about it, but could not figure it out. Halfway between the mouth of the creek and the Island, Jim turned the boat at right angles, heading south and took a sounding there – and found shallow water again.

Therefore this has got to be the channel leading to the *Deep*, he thought and then out into the Indian Ocean. In which case the project was in for a shock. So far the deep water had been far closer to the island than to the mainland shore. He had fully expected the *Deep* to continue like that; the whole thing being loosely shaped like a child's balloon with an extended tube for blowing.

Now his thinking must be radically revised, but he was too tired to think clearly, after his many nights of poor sleep since Sophia had left. The three lines of soundings he'd done so far confirmed that the deep water stretched from

the mainland shore right across the lagoon to the island. Also his one sounding at right angles had indicated that shallow water occurred again on the southerly side; now he would have to do some radical rethinking. ‘This *must* be the channel’ Jim thought. Shocked, he abandoned the job and headed back to the Big House, having given Abdullah and all four women the rest of the day off.

In the Ops Room he examined the chart but could only see one solution. The main channel must be in a different location than he’d envisaged! Starting from the Southern entrance, it must follow the southern coast right round to the creek. Then it would head east again and exit through the same southern exit channel. Probably with no area that could be used as an anchorage.

This meant there were two almost right angle bends to negotiate. Or even three. It would be more or less impossible to navigate without tugs. If all his work was for nothing, what would Hassan do with Jim in that case? Making up his mind, he told Samira of the possible difficulties. She looked at the chart, sighed and went to alert Hassan.

Hassan, his sons and Samira all faced Jim. They all studied the chart, saw Jim’s new soundings and asked him if he foresaw any real difficulties with the pilotage. Jim took his time replying; spreading his chart out on the table, and told them what he suspected.

“I think the channel is following the southern bank of the lagoon. In which case there must be at least one awkward right angle bend where the channel turns along the western shore as far as the creek. At the Creek, as you can see, it must take another right angle bend where it turns easterly towards the island.” Jim announced, tracing the channel’s possible course over the yet unsounded part of the chart.

“But you don’t know where the other side of this channel is yet or how wide it will be.” Malik said, in his

usual sarcastic way. "You didn't even continue sounding there."

"No, I didn't, but if I'm right there has got to be at least two right angle bends in the channel. This will be extremely difficult or even impossible to navigate without tugs. That's assuming that the channel will be even wide enough to take the ship." Jim explained bitterly, thinking he'd done all that work for nothing!"

Hassan, Samira and his two sons looked at each other and raised their eyebrows. They looked at Jim sorrowfully.

"Well, why have you stopped work?" Hassan asked roughly. "You should have continued and seen where you were at the end of the day."

"I came to tell you the bad news; so we don't waste any more time sounding. As far as I can see, the whole thing's impossible. We might as well pack up and call it a day." Jim countered. "You can let me go home now!"

"The unexpected deep water you have found seems to be in line with the creek where you tie the boats up overnight. The last line of soundings is exactly in line with it. Have you had time to explore or map the creek yet?" Kassim asked.

"No, I didn't see the need to. What relevance do you think the creek has?" Jim replied roughly.

"Maybe the creek was once a river, aeons ago, and the channel you've found is a continuation of this creek or river." Kassim said, pointing to the chart.

"You are saying then that this is not the channel at all, but a sort of extension of the creek?"

"Yes Jim, at the head of the creek, there is a *wadi* leading inland. For some time now; I've been wondering if the two together had once formed a river. You have now found deep water from the mouth of the creek to the island, which reinforces my thinking."

“If you’re right, then the one sounding of shallow water could be the other bank of this river.” Jim exclaimed, his heart dropping.

“I think the whole thing, the *wadi*; the creek and what you think is the channel had once been a river, centuries ago. Let’s go further! If this river was unable to go directly to the sea due to the island, or cliff as it was then being in its way; it may have scoured out an area in front of the cliff and formed a lake, which you are now calling the *Deep*.”

“Yes OK, Kassim, I’m with you so far, but where did the river water go from there? How did it get out to the sea as it must have done?” Jim asked, his forehead creasing with concentration.

“I can only assume that the river undercut the low lying littoral to the South of the island, forming a tunnel out to the sea.” Kassim said thoughtfully. “Maybe the top surface was hard rock with soft sand underneath.”

“I see what you mean, the coast south of the island or cliff formed a kind of bridge with the river water flowing underneath it into the sea that way.” Jim said thoughtfully, relieved. “If we follow that through logically, when the Tsunami wave hit the coast, it could have collapsed this bridge, forming the southern exit channel into the Indian Ocean. But wait a minute, what stopped the sea water coming back in to the river bed and filling it? Not now, in the past, I mean.”

“I don’t know Jim; probably the sea level then was lower than the river outlet. When the river eventually dried up, the gap was probably filled with debris until the Tsunami shifted it. Don’t forget we’re talking about millennia, not the day before yesterday.” Kassim said.

“In that case, the channel could still be where we anticipated it to be and I’ll probably find the other bank of the Old River Bed shortly.” Jim said, indicating its probable place on the chart.

“Yes, hopefully it is and the project can still go ahead.” Kassim said. “In fact I’m pretty sure that’s the case.”

“Remember when we were studying those two land maps? Couldn’t we have picked out this old river bed then by the increased negative contours then?” Jim then asked Kassim reminiscently.

“I don’t think so,” Kassim replied. “I seem to remember those contour lines running from north to south, while the old river bed is obviously running from west to east, in which case the extra depth wouldn’t be noticed. I expect the river overflowed its banks on occasions while forming the lake –

or *Deep* as you call it, but eventually penetrated its own exit to the sea.”

Jim looked at Kassim with a new respect. He was the silent one normally, rarely airing any of his opinions at the meetings.

“You have now wasted the best part of an afternoon with your wild theories. As my father said before, you should have carried on and worked it out for yourself instead of running to us.” Malik said, his voice full of venom.

“Malik’s right!” Hassan said. “Samira tells me that you have become slack and lazy since Sophia went away. Pull yourself together right now and get on with the job. Otherwise you can go back to the spiders, with Yusuf and Ahmed completing the soundings.”

Jim was really scared now. Had Yusuf been on the boat with him that afternoon, this confrontation would probably not have happened. Unfortunately he was away up north somewhere. It was true he’d lost interest in the job, each day being a little more boring. Although he knew Tarantulas were not lethally poisonous, Mygales were. Some snakes too.

“It’s too late now to restart work again. Go to your room and think of the consequences due to your present

behaviour.” Hassan told him. Jim left, his whole future again looking terrible.

Back in the main room, they were discussing Jim. Malik was all for disposing of him and finding another more capable man. Samira and Kassim didn’t agree. Hassan kept his opinion to himself. In the end Samira said that Sophia was returning that night and to wait and see if that would make a difference in his work output.”

That night around midnight, Jim was woken up by Sophia climbing into his bed.

Chapter 39 – Sophia and Jim – July 29th

Early next morning, Jim rolled out of Sophia's bed and drank a glass of water, anxious to know if she’d kept her promise during those eight days away at Berbera. She was still asleep, covered by a single sheet. Waking up, she smiled and stretched; one hand beckoning Jim back into bed, but this time he resisted.

“You’ve been away for more than a week in Somaliland. Exactly what were you doing there that took you so long?” Jim asked her. She smiled and sat up in the bed, revealing a pair of perfect breasts.

“I was only in Berbera for one day, the other days I was in Bossasso, liaising with a General from the Ugandan Army. It was an Arms Deal between Hassan and him, the weapons having been brought in by ship.”

“*An Arms Deal?* Exactly what was your role in this Arms deal?” He queried, his latent jealousy starting to surface.

“As I told you before, I was the liaison between Hassan and the General.” She explained.

“But what did you *do* exactly?” Jim asked again, determined to get their relationship sorted out.

“Do you really want to know? At Bossasso, the weapons and ammunition went down to the AMISON forces by truck. I was there with Yusuf and Ahmed, as well as some other men from the village. I bribed the Customs and the Captain of the ship to unload a quantity of those arms into *our* lorries during the nights. I also bought a few tonnes of rice to cover them.”

“One thing worries me. While you were away, Samira invited me to go to the village with her. I overheard Yusuf and Ahmed talking and laughing together. They’d just come back from driving lorries up north. I couldn’t understand it all, since they were talking in Somali. They seemed to be referring to you and the ship’s Captain and laughing. As if they were talking about sex.” Jim accused her.

Sophia took a deep breath, not realising Jim had picked up so much of the language. He was evidently suspicious, so the only way to go was to deny everything.

“They were probably laughing about the man’s attempt to get me into his bed.” She said smiling.

“I take it he didn’t succeed?” Jim asked. “At least I hope he didn’t” She smiled again but didn’t answer, since he hadn’t asked a question.

Jim looked at her, unconvinced, his eyebrows raised, his face a question mark.

“Don’t worry about it Jim. I had a job to do and I did it. Three truckloads of weapons and ammunition came down here from Bossasso for Hassan and his militia.” She said.

“But how did you accomplish that? Did you go to bed with that Captain – or even the General? Surely they must have wanted you! Were you really negotiating or just providing sex?” He asked her desperately.

“How I did the job is my business, nobody else’s. Either come back to bed and give me a kiss or go to work; I’ve told you far too much of Hassan’s business anyway.” She snapped, admitting nothing.

He stayed where he was, his whole face an accusing mask. Looking at him, she sighed and decided to go on the offensive and attack.

“Well Jim? What now? What are you accusing me of doing? Sleeping with the Captain? Making love with the General? Even if I did, it’s you who should be ashamed. Samira has told me what you tried to do with Aliyah and I was really shocked.” She accused him. Jim felt the whole argument slipping away from him.

“What I tried to do with Aliyah? What are you talking about?” Jim cried, astonished. “You mean when Samira invited me to go to the village with her. Sure, I danced with Aliyah but that was all.

“Is that’s really all? Samira told me last night that she felt

sorry for you after I went away and escorted you to the village. There you met Yusuf, Ahmed and their wives. She said there was a bit of a party and you got drunk on village brewed beer. You dragged Aliyah into a space, danced with her, kissed and started trying to feel her breasts. You even tried to take her upstairs to bed, except there was no upstairs. Samira had to pull you off the woman to stop you raping her in front of half the village. She said she’d never been so ashamed in her life before.” Sophia accused him.

Jim was thunderstruck, protesting that it wasn’t like that at all; if anything it was the other way round.

“How do you know, you were drunk at the time? Samira said she had to hold on to you to stop you falling down on the way back. Once you tried to go back to the village to find Aliyah again and continue what you’d started.” Sophia said her face stern and accusing.

“But if I’d done that, she would have been embarrassed the next morning when she was holding on to the stakes. She was normal, laughing and talking with the other wives as normal.” Jim said, with a feeling of righteous indignation. Sophia laughed triumphantly.

“She told me you’d really wanted her, a woman always knows. You had your arms round her backside and was pressing her body against yours. You even tried to hold her breasts. She told me too, that when she was holding the stake nearest the beach, you always took the position in the back of the boat where you could watch her – even before I went away to Berbera. She was embarrassed in front of the others.”

“It’s not true and you know it isn’t.” Jim protested vigorously.

“You accuse me of sleeping with the General or the Captain while all the time it’s you who tried to get into bed with Aliyah.” She said, accusingly. “I came back last night, happy to be in bed with you again after one whole week and

you were thinking about Aliyah weren’t you? You were pretending that I was her, weren’t you?”

Jim was exasperated, everything seemed to have been turned round, making *him* the guilty party. He’d started off by accusing her but was now having to defend himself. Sophia went on relentlessly, saying:

“OK I was away longer than I’d thought, but that’s no excuse to try and drag a village woman into *our* bed, is it? What’s more, Samira has told me that you’ve been getting slack and lazy. You even lost a whole afternoon’s work on some stupid idea about the channel going the wrong way.”

“But I honestly thought it was!” Jim cried, but Sophia knew she was on a winning streak.

“Samira was so worried about you being returned to the spiders that she even went down to the village and pleaded with Aliyah to sleep with you. Just for an hour or two. Aliyah refused and was shocked at the suggestion. Samira pleaded that it was for the sake of the job but it made no difference.”

Jim was aghast, speechless and wild with fury at the unfairness of it all. He looked at her sitting up in the bed

and was unable to decide what to do next. Watching him, Sophia decided to force the issue.

“Well Jim, you can go back to your room and take your bits and pieces with you.”

With that, she lay back in bed, pulled the sheet up around her and turned facing the wall. She had her back to Jim and waited for him to come to her with apologies, as she knew he would. He was shocked, the remaining months without her stretched bleakly ahead. Giving in, he joined her in bed and started kissing the back of her neck. After a while, she turned to him and allowed him to make love to her. Just that, no active participation at all.

“Right Jim, satisfied? Don’t you dare accuse me again, otherwise you’ll spend the next few months alone. You need me far more than I need you.”

Chapter 40 – The Revelation – July 31st

Two days later, Samira; Sophia and Jim entered the main room; Samira went to her usual place with her notebook handy, Jim to an old, but comfortable, easy chair, Sophia came and sat beside him. It seemed so very long ago since he’d been taken from the hut, shaking and terrified by the Tarantulas – which he’d subsequently learnt were not lethally poisonous after all. Hassan and his two sons entered the room, set up an easel and sorted out several papers. Hassan took the centre stage in the large central room.

By now, Jim was working normally, Sophia having returned. Her enthusiasm as well as the ample supply of sex she was providing had steadied Jim. She’d already told him that Hassan was going to explain the object of all the work they had been doing. Hassan started by saying:

“You were very nearly correct Jim, when you started thinking about oil. Incorrect though, if you thought no Crude Oil exists in Puntland. Think about it, we are not far from Yemen and Oman, both of which are oil producing countries. Not so very far from Sudan either, already an exporter of Crude. Why should we be exempt?” Hassan expounded.

“Nobody ever mentions Crude Oil in Somalia. Does it really exist?” Jim asked, puzzled.

“Yes, of course it does. President Barre had already signed a contract with four major American oil Companies. They are probably still waiting patiently for a definite state and proper government to be formed. Whether the contracts signed in 1991 would still be viable or even forcible is questionable, since a different administration will have taken over the country. The Chinese also are waiting in the side lines for a stable government. India too, has always had its eye on Somali Crude, so has Britain.”

“Hmm I see,” said Jim doubtfully, “Do you know how much oil there is? Do you know where it is, in which part of Somalia or Puntland?”

“Crude Oil has been found in this area. Wikipedia states that Somalia, together with Djibouti, Ethiopia and Sudan could be a major Crude Oil exporter in a few years; producing some three million barrels a day by the year 2020.” Hassan replied.

“But those contracts must have been signed with Somalia when it was still one country. Will the contracts still be valid here in Puntland?” Jim asked; doubtfully.

“If a proper Government and administration are formed at Mogadishu; Puntland may re-join Somalia, but that’s a far distant dream. But for the present, as far as those contracts are concerned, I have no intention of abiding by them. Nor do I want to involve the Oil Majors at all. Listen

to me and try not to interrupt again until I have finished. OK Jim?" Hassan stated. Jim nodded his compliance.

"Here in Puntland, we have seen the consequences of the Oil Majors in countries like Nigeria, Venezuela, Yemen and other oil producing areas – countries you Westerners consider part of the Third World. Despite their large Crude Oil deposits, most of those countries are still desperately poor, the oil profits going out of the country. My intention is to take the Somali oil fields by force, keeping the oil majors away, so the Crude Oil revenues will be for Puntland, maybe eventually for Somalia too." Hassan paused to light a cigarette.

"I will be at the head," he continued, "I will employ independent persons to run it, keeping the Americans and the Chinese out - by force if necessary. The best time to accomplish this is *now*; while the country is still in a mess, with no stable government and fighting against Al Shabab"

"...Is the Crude Oil potential what the Islamists are fighting to get hold of?" Jim interrupted.

"I don't know, it could be a part of their objectives. Anyway nobody's attention will be on oil at the present time,

or even in the near future. I want the major share of that oil.

For myself and my family!" Hassan declared proudly.

With that, he slammed his clenched his right hand into a fist and slammed it down on the desk in front of him. He continued:

"If necessary, I will break away from Puntland and create another state. Or even take over the disputed region and form a state from the Somaliland border as far as the border with Somalia. The tribes in between will probably be with me, once the Crude oil is an established fact. Either that or be left behind."

The cigarette smoke from the three Somalis was beginning to turn the air blue at the ceiling.

“You are going to create a whole new country?” Jim asked, astounded. “Will the fact that you have access to Crude Oil be enough? Won’t you need an army? Does the tribe now in the Disputed Region agree, or even know about your plans? What about Somalia?”

“Yes to all those questions. I could probably take over all of Puntland tomorrow without even involving the Disputed Region. Crude oil will be the means to that end.”

“Sorry, Hassan, I’m not with you. How will future Crude Oil reserves help you now?” Jim asked, puzzled.

“You had better be with me Jim! Don’t you see? A tanker, loaded with good Crude Oil will suddenly appear out of this completely unknown lagoon. This will certainly claim the world’s attention and will almost certainly attract potential investors. Look at the facts Jim, there is no real government or police force to stop me and I’ll prove that Crude Oil shipments are ready now. Then I’ll be in a commanding position; able to choose how and with whom to exploit this Crude. No Oil Major would dare set up against me in this war-torn country. We will also prove that the world must be far more aware of us than it is at present.” Hassan said.

He suddenly jumped to his feet and made a dramatic announcement, exclaiming:

“I intend having my own Country and my own Crude Oil.”

Sitting down again, he wiped the sweat off his brow, turned over a page of his notes and resumed his monologue:

“What I intend doing is to load a tanker with Somali Crude oil and sail her out from this lagoon. I’ll try and answer your obvious questions now, so please don’t interrupt again until I have finished.” He glanced round at the assembled faces and resumed:

“Your main question must be – ***Is there a working Crude Oil pumping station?***’ The answer is no there isn’t. But there is a working oil rig which is capable of pushing

up Crude Oil, capped at present of course, but working. It has never been in production, but was ready when President Barre was overthrown in 1991, remaining closed since then. A pipeline actually exists from that rig as far as the head of the creek here. It passes down the wadi and was planned to go south as far as Eyl but stopped here, when President Barre was overthrown”

“The second question must be, as you have probably guessed, *‘How do we get the oil to the ship?’* The answer to that question is through a flexible rubber pipeline laid down beside the creek, under the surface of the lagoon and up the ship’s side into her oil cargo tanks.”

“The third question then is, *‘Where are we taking the oil to?’* That I am negotiating at present. Little Aden is the nearest foreign oil port, but probably not the best for our purposes. I had thought about Kwinana in Western Australia but it is probably too far away. Maybe Karachi or India. India is probably best. If India is assured of a relatively cheap Crude Oil source from here, it will avoid their ships going into the Persian Gulf. Later on, a refinery will be built for oil products”

“The next question is, *‘Where are going to get the tanker from?’* The answer to that is to hijack one, bring it into the lagoon to load, then sail it out to whichever port we decide.”

“Another question is, *‘Where is all the money coming from to start these operations?’* The answer to that question is from the proceeds of Piracy. My profits, if you like, due to funding some of the Pirate gangs. Any further questions?”

“Yes” said Jim, “What possible effect can one loaded tanker have on the world? Nobody will take any notice, apart from deploring the fact that she’s been hijacked. There is also the question of how much Fuel Oil bunkers the ship will have on arrival here. This will limit how far you can

take the ship. I can't see any of the Navy or Royal Fleet Auxiliary supply ships out there willing to supply bunkers, can you?"

"Good point, I'll take it into account. If the ship has adequate fuel on board to reach Kuwait or Ras Tannurah, then Mumbai or Karachi may be feasible."

"Look Hassan," Jim said quietly. "Don't forget you are going to bring the ship *back* to Eyl, then up to the lagoon. And *then* on to her chosen destination. You are going to have to choose your ship carefully. Most tankers going to the Arabian Gulf to load will have just sufficient bunkers to arrive there; plus say three to five days reserve." Jim paused for a moment, wondering how to phrase the next bit. He continued:

"The bunkers for the loaded passage or even the round trip will probably be taken at the refinery at the same time as the cargo. If you capture an empty tanker, say off the Kuria Muria islands and bring her back here, she may not have sufficient bunkers to go anywhere much by the time she arrives at Eyl, not even Mumbai or Karachi."

"What do you suggest then?" Hassan asked. That thought had occurred to Kassim, but Hassan had ignored it.

"Make sure the ship is bound for Singapore or somewhere East, or South Africa. She'd have sufficient bunkers on board to get there."

"OK Jim, I'll bear that in mind. To resume; we'll be announcing to the world that we are capable of producing small quantities of Crude at present. We will then announce that a contract will be awarded to any *independent* firm who will build a pumping station and a possible refinery later. I will also poach expatriate expertise and labour to run things, with me staying in overall command. A new concept for the new country. Not for existing Oil Majors like BP or Shell." Hassan said, his eyes alight.

"But don't you think the Oil Majors will squeeze you out? Do you think they are just going to welcome you to the

gang and then ignore you? I'm sorry Hassan, but I can't see it coming off. You'll have too many heavy canons against you."

"Look Jim, the area we are sitting on at the moment is vast untapped source of Crude oil in a world where a lot of the older fields are running dry. Added to that is the fact that one producing rig is already *here* and capable of producing! The new fields are mainly in Arctic regions with all the difficulties and expense due to ice and permafrost to overcome. Or deep down in the sea. I've already negotiated a refinery with an East European country to process our oil, if India is not possible." Hassan said.

"Why an East European Country. Why not shuttle the Crude Oil to Little Aden, then let them refine and market the results. It'd be a lot cheaper."

"I don't want to involve Yemen at all. The country's not stable. We will start off small, with a couple of chartered tankers and expand when the time comes. Eventually we'll build a refinery here. I must emphasise that the expatriate work force will be salaried and be paid by this country, not by an intermediary oil Company. You, Jim, can control future tanker loading, if you want a job here permanently. If you agree then we'll pay you for these months you have been working here." Hassan said, wiping his brow.

Sophia looked up at these words and wondered if this was a possibility for Jim and her.

"Well thanks, OK we'll see." Jim said, relieved that sabotage was ruled out. "It still seems a long shot to me, but I suppose you've thought it through thoroughly. I wonder why no other War Lord has thought of this."

"It must be started now," Hassan continued. "It is the one and only chance for a determined person, or rather family," Hassan continued, indicating his sons, "to carve out and finance a little empire before the oil majors come storming in. Now, while the country is in a real mess. I, with my

sons, am that determined person! I have the means and the military personnel.”

“How will you avoid all the Navy ships out there? They’ll be waiting for you, once your ship is outside the twelve mile

Limit.” Jim queried, pointing out to sea.

“We will welcome them and then ask them politely to escort us to where we decide to go.” Hassan retorted.

“After all, we don’t want to get hi-jacked ourselves.”
He added, with an unexpected touch of humour.

“Before leaving home to join the *Dawn Splendour*, I heard rumours about something called ‘Shale Oil’. The term used was ‘Fracking’. It seemed to be something like pressurising from the surface. The newspapers were not too clear about the process and it seemed like something in the far distant future. Can’t you wait and see what that is all about?” Jim asked.

“No, I can’t wait. We’ve already got one rig that can produce. This Shale Oil or whatever can never replace the enormous quantities of oil needed at present in industry.” Hassan replied.

“Another thing Hassan, you said you were going to get the Crude to the ship by a flexible rubber pipeline. From where? To where? Please explain how?”

“We’re getting prepared now to start laying pipeline to the lagoon from the already existing pipeline at the head of the creek. It’ll take a few days to get all the pipeline sections here and hide them. Now the Island may be known about and more helicopter flights likely, the pipe laying will have to be done at night. By day, the pipeline will still be visible until the lagoon is reached. We’ll have to think of a way of hiding it.”

“Why not use the creek itself,” Jim suggested. “I haven’t looked to see how deep the water is there, but it could conceal the pipeline completely from air observation. Or even observation from other War Lords.”

“Use the creek for what? To hide the pipeline? How?” It was Malik again, as unpleasant as ever.

“You say there is an existing pipeline at the creek head? Why not connect a section of flexible pipeline to that existing steel pipeline and lead it down into the creek, until there’s a portion on the creek bottom? That shouldn’t be too difficult to hide.” Jim said, thinking it out as he went along.

Glancing round, Jim saw they were all waiting for his next words. He wondered why he was helping the project so much. In reality, he had pretty well taken over command of the whole operation – using Hassan as a sort of Supply Superintendent!

He’d almost believed Hassan when he’d outlined the aims of the project, but was he, Jim, being fooled? Once a tanker was actually in the berth, were they really going to load a cargo of Somali Crude? Or was that just a load of old cods-wallop, with the tanker being used for some kind of sabotage.

“You say your men will be working at night. Each night after it gets dark, lift the end of the submerged section out of the water on to the bank beside the creek. Then connect two, three or more sections on to it, finally pushing the whole lot back into the creek before daylight. Leave the blank on the last section’s flange though, or else the whole lot will be full of water and too heavy to lift out.”

“That means we will have to pull it out of the Creek each night. It will be far too heavy anyway.” Hassan objected. He reached for his cigarette case, getting another one out and lighting it from an expensive lighter. Puffing smoke, he looked at Jim through half-closed eyes.

“I’m not sure about that, you only need to pull the end out of the creek, not the whole pipeline,” replied Jim, waving away the smoke. “Can you get hold of a Heavy Duty Chain Block; you know the kind of thing I mean, worked by a

long endless chain on a ratchet system. Any heavy Industry workshop should have one.”

“I’ll have to contact Djibouti again, Mogadishu is getting

too dangerous now with Al Shabab controlling most of the town. What do you intend doing with it?” Hassan asked.

“Attach the hook to the end of the pipeline in the water and heave enough up so that some of it can be laid beside the Creek. Then you can take the blanks off and bolt the extra pipeline sections on, as many as your men can handle during the night. Then push the whole pipeline back into the Creek before daylight with jemmies and crowbars.”

“The block will have to be attached to something though. What do you think?”

“Hmm. Good question. Some kind of Sheer Legs might do the job, I don’t know. Say two or better still, three heavy logs well grounded into the earth slanting towards each other; all of them thoroughly lashed together at the top.” Jim said,

He was already drawing a diagram on a sheet of paper and pointed out the sheer legs with a block at the crown and the pipeline being hauled up from the creek.

“Like that somehow. Make the pulley block fast to the crown of the sheer legs, then take the hook down to the creek. Use the endless chain to heave the pipeline up to the crown; then lash the part of the pipe level with the creek bank to something secure there. That done reverse the ratchet and use the endless chain to lower the flange down to the bank of the creek.”

Hassan looked puzzled, Kassim’s face lit up with a smile and he rapidly explained in Somali what Jim was trying to say. He was usually the first to understand, then Hassan or Malik. Hassan nodded confirmation at Jim who continued his explanation!

“OK, when you let the end down on the sand; take the blanks off and bolt the new sections on one by one. It might

work, or it might not. You'll have enough bolts since the blanks won't be needed any more, but make sure you use the right kind of oil-tight gaskets or joints to put between the flanges. Or else you might end up with a lagoon full of Crude Oil. Each bolt must be hardened right up with the correct size spanner. Start with the top; then the bottom bolt; followed by one each side, then the rest of the bolts; tighten them hard up in that order."

"Yes I see," said Hassan. "We are going to have to shift the sheer legs each night, to where the new end section of the submerged pipeline will be. I can use a day gang to do that, anyone spying would have no idea what they are doing or why. I have a lorry and some canvas, so we can make a sort of tent arrangement against the truck to hide the work from prying eyes. We will try it out at least for a couple of nights."

Neither Sophia nor even Samira normally contributed much at these meetings. Samira was taking notes for any proposed expenditure or Emails abroad and Sophia writing notes for the minutes. This time Sophia spoke up:

Why is it necessary to use sheer legs, or whatever you called them?" She asked, "You were talking about Lorries; when I was in Somaliland a few days ago, I saw a man with a fleet of them. I noticed one of the Lorries had a crane on it and saw some of his workmen using it. When they used the crane, some things on the side were lowered to stop the lorry falling over, I think. The crane seemed to be telescopic or something as well. It extended anyway."

Jim, Samira, Hassan and his two sons all looked at each other. Jim spoke for them all:

"By Christ, Sophia, that's exactly what we need. We've been wasting an awful lot of time by considering sheer legs and heavy lift blocks, when the answer was staring us in the face. Good for you Sophia." He turned to Hassan. "How about it Hassan? Can you get a heavy duty lorry, one like

Sophia said, with stabilisers and expanding crane with a Safe

Working Load adequate for the job?" Jim said.

"Maybe the crane could also be used as well to lift the Work boat out of the water to fit the Navman." Hassan said thoughtfully "Although I think the boat would be too heavy"

Jim agreed and said that the crane should have a built-in Safe Working Load cut into it. Hassan said they'd try to get a lorry like that by the end of the week.

"You are supposed to think of these things!" Malik said, in his usual wicked temper. "You've already lost a day's work and now you're relying on a woman to think for you."

Chapter 41 - Poor Jim - 23rd August

Right, breakfast and then back to work, Jim commanded himself, heaving himself out of Sophia's bed. It had been over three weeks now, since he and Sophia had been fighting over the week she'd spent with the General. She'd pretty well subdued his jealousy but not entirely. The subject of giving up his wife and children for her was never mentioned again. She was not too worried, it was still early days.

There *was* no breakfast, nothing laid out, no smell of cooking, nothing. Sophia joined him, laughed and said.

"Oh Jim I'm sorry, I completely forgot. Today's the first day of Ramadan. Everybody will have had their breakfast already, well before dawn. There'll be nothing to eat or drink until after sunset tonight."

At the lagoon, they'd continued taking soundings, with Jim occasionally being the stern lookout watching the leading stakes. With the women there, it was always a

joyful occasion. He was picking up more and more of their language now. He was careful now *not* to take the stern position when Aliyah was holding the nearest stake.

Jim and his crew were sounding the last of the *Deep* before it narrowed down to the channel leading out into the Indian Ocean; when they were overflown by a Royal Navy helicopter. Jim had first noticed it to the south, darting from the sea to the shore and back again. When overflying the boat, Jim had looked up briefly before Yusuf and the other two shook their heads and told him to look down.

Neither he nor they even glanced at the helicopter again, which Jim thought would probably puzzle the Pilot. People always instinctively look up when one passes over, sometimes even for aeroplanes. The chopper continued to the north, spending some time over the village and disappeared towards Cape Gardafui. Noon came, but this time he and his gang continued working until two-thirty in the afternoon.

Finished for the day, the men and their wives went home to sleep the rest of the afternoon away, until it was time to prepare and eat the large meal after sunset. At three, Jim received a summons to see Hassan and his sons.

“What do you think, Jim? Was this overflight looking for you?” Hassan said, “Yusuf said you gave it a brief glance and didn’t look up again.”

“No, I didn’t look up again nor did they, which is not normal when a chopper flies overhead; it’s instinctive to look up. I hope for your sake that it’s not made the crew suspicious.”

“Better that than the pilot getting a good look at you. He’ll take for an Arab.”

“It was way to the south when I first saw it.” Jim went on to explain. “The helicopter seemed to be working its way up the coast and finally disappeared to the North. It was dodging about between the sea and the shore, probably looking for Pirate hide-outs.”

“Do you think it was verifying the island exists? Which reminds me, I heard a helicopter early the other morning, just after dawn, but didn’t see it.” Hassan said thoughtfully.

“Yes, it may have been doing that at the same time. A previously uncharted Island would cause a lot of excitement in Naval circles. They all want a chance to have an island or stretch of water named after them, although the chances are very slim now. Although I don’t know. If the pilot had seen it on the last overflight, I feel sure he would have been back a lot sooner. Maybe they still don’t know it exists. Anyway I feel certain the main object of the flight was looking for pirates’ nests.” Jim said, yawning, he was hungry.

“Well, I hope you are right, the job's going pretty well at present and I don't want it stopped.”

“Look Hassan, we’re only guessing at the moment. Even if they have discovered the island and photographed it, I don't expect the chopper to return again. They will probably use the photographs to issue a Notice to Mariners. Since it’s no danger to ships that pass by, they will probably wait until a proper government is formed here before it can be properly surveyed and a new chart issued.” Jim said, thereby ending the discussion. Hassan changed the subject.

“As you must know by now, Jim, today’s the start of Ramadan. Up to the present, you and your gang have been starting sometime between seven-thirty and eight, after breakfast, and have been working all day. This will have to change now; if you want breakfast, you will have to be there well before sunrise at 0556. Start work at 0630 until 1430; then have a sleep until Dinner at 1900. Fridays now will be a day off, Yusuf and the others already know this. The lights will stay on all night now.” Hassan explained and then continued:

“As you know the pipe-laying gang started a week ago and have reached about halfway up the creek. They will start work now at 1930 until 0300 in the morning, when they will stop for their breakfast.”

Jim hated the idea of getting up so early to eat breakfast, but felt compensated by the early afternoon finish. Having got out of bed at the normal time that morning, Jim didn't feel the need for a sleep that afternoon. Entering their room, he looked at Sophia and once again felt a surge of love for her. The memory of that afternoon she'd asked Yusuf to cut the sounding line suddenly overwhelmed him.

So much so that he picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. She was laughing as he tried to tear off her clothes and his at the same time. Once again he swore his love for her, a subject he'd not mentioned since her visit to Bossasso. She was relieved and immediately used her skills until he was ready again. They stayed in bed until it was time to eat their evening meal.

The *Deep* had widened out but not enough to turn even a small ship round. Hassan's son was correct in guessing that it wasn't the channel they found that time. Almost certainly an old river bed and lake from centuries ago. It was in line with the creek, so probably the creek and wadi were part of the river system as well. Just as Kassim had stated.

Since most of the old river bed was as deep as the *Deep*, and wider than the beam of most small tankers, it could prove useful for turning the ship round. A valuable bonus perhaps. They continued sounding with the two boats for another two days when the *Deep* started to lose its width. Since they were now closer to the Southern end of the island, Jim assumed the deep water would soon narrow right down to the southern channel.

His assumption was proved correct in the next few days. The channel led out past the Southern Spit into the open sea, with plenty of water there. The original river must have been flowing more or less below what is now the Southern entrance, with the Tsunami completing the present channel. In fact the water was deeper in the channel than in the *Deep* itself. To Jim's annoyance, Malik had been correct criticising him for the loss of an afternoon's work.

As a matter of interest, he took the Zodiac to the Northern entrance. The exit there from the lagoon to the Indian Ocean was less than one metre deep. The job was as good as finished as far as the soundings were concerned.

* * * * *

On August 30th, it was three and a half months since they'd started sounding the lagoon and one hundred and forty-one days since his abduction from the ***Dawn Splendour***. Over four and a half months! Despite his captivity, he couldn't help feeling proud of himself. Charting an unknown lagoon and sounding it deep enough to take Tankers was no mean feat, considering the tools they had.

Those two old fishermen had been right and he idly wondered how they knew. They obviously hadn't sounded the lagoon themselves, so they must have seen the area before the tsunami created the lagoon. At the meeting that evening, Jim told Hassan about that day's work and their need to think of better ways to delimit the ***Deep***. The usual four were all there.

"I'm going to have to mark the perimeter of the Deep and move those stakes closer to where the deep water is twelve metres or more. Where they are now is too far away. The problem is that the sodding stakes are only three metres long. I suppose ten to twelve metre stakes don't exist do they?" Jim said, pointing to his chart.

"Why not use buoys?" asked Malik, with his perpetual scowl. "Empty Petrol and diesel drums for instance, there are plenty of those lying around the villages. They will float, if their caps are screwed on tight. Can't you anchor them with weights to the bottom? This would solve your problem, something you should have thought of yourself."

Jim flared up, started to say something to Malik, when Hassan raised his hand and stopped him: saying:

“OK Jim, calm yourself. Is Malik right? Could old drums be used as buoys? Tied to a large rock on the bottom of the *Deep* by rope?”

“Yes he is,” Jim answered angrily. “Can Malik tell me how to estimate the length of the rope needed to counter-act the tidal rise and fall? If the line’s too short, the bloody thing will be submerged at High Water and possibly out of position over the shallows at Low Water. Go on Malik, tell me!” Jim said abruptly, wondering how Trinity House solved that problem.

They discussed the problem and came up with an answer. Place the buoys at High Water, then manoeuvre the ship or ships only at slack water at the top of the tide.

“Incidentally Jim, do you still want that *Navman* depth sounder?” Hassan asked. “I managed to locate one on sale at Djibouti, but surely it’s too late now, since you have very nearly finished the job. Besides which, do you know how to fit it in the boat? Will you need a mechanic, or do you have enough mechanical ability to fit the thing yourself and connect it up electrically? How are you going to get the boat out of the water to bore a hole in the keel or the bottom?”

“Yes I still need it. I helped my cousin fit one on his boat once when he had her out of the water. If it’s a new one, still in its box, then it should have instructions how to fit it as well. It took us about a day and a half to fit. I’m not sure about taking the boat out of the water though; it’s made of wood and pretty heavy. Maybe we could careen it and work between two high tides. There’s obviously no crane here strong enough to lift it out of the water.” Jim answered.

Jim knew the limited accuracy of his soundings, as well as the areas missed. The soundings he’d been doing with the hand held line were at five metre intervals along each line of soundings; the lines themselves being also five metres apart.

Between two soundings on one line and two parallel soundings on the next line, there was an unsounded gap of twenty-five square metres, minimum. Any of these twenty-five metre rectangles could hide a large rock or other impediment on the sea bed. The shallow part of the lagoon could be ignored, but the *Deep* itself must be checked with the Navman.

Since the *Navman* had no paper record, the *Deep* would have to be patrolled by the work boat over its whole area, the depth readout being carefully watched. This could only been done at the slack water during Low Water Springs, also the low tide either side. Since he'd used ten metres as the loaded draft, then the whole *Deep* plus the channel and enough of the Old River Bed must be no less that twelve metre at Low Water Springs. Any reading less than that would have to be investigated. Examining the Tide Tables he saw the next Spring Tide was in ten days' time. Explaining his thinking to Hassan, he advised him to go ahead and buy it.

Book Four – London and the Indian Ocean

Chapter 42 – The Spy –August 26th to September 8th.

The *Loch Kelliesport's Zodiac*, rolling heavily and occasionally shipping water, left the beach with Abdul's message at 0340 LT on her way back to the warship. Abdul then cycled back to the village he was staying in and slept until midnight. Then he roused himself, ate some food he'd been saving and cycled back to the place where he usually left his bike.

He climbed the hill and was satisfied to see that there were no remains of the dog he'd killed two nights previously. To be on the safe side, he placed some pieces of poisoned meat on the path below him. Settling down to watch the operations, he received a shock.

Along the bank of the creek, there were three torpedoes lying end to end. Another torpedo was half in and half out of the water, bent so that it was aligned to the others on the beach. Bent?? 'Surely Torpedoes aren't flexible, they can't bend like that.' He asked himself, with a sinking feeling in his stomach.

It seemed to be joined to a similar torpedo like object and a third one joined to that. From the lorry, some of the gang were handing down yet another one and Abdul suddenly realised exactly what he was looking at. He had trouble believing his eyes. He had imagined all kinds of weaponry being lifted out of the water; including more torpedoes; a bomb or at the very least, a weapons stash for the pirate gangs.

It turned out to be, of all things, a pipeline section! A normal, flexible, hard rubber pipeline, about twelve inch or 305 mm diameter. Probably five metres long. What he'd thought was the torpedo propeller housing was the metal flange of a normal pipeline section.

To confirm this, the section of pipeline that had just been handed down from the lorry was placed so that the two flanges were face to face. The blanks were removed, a gasket inserted and the two flanges bolted together. Abdul hoped they're using proper jointing material. The flange blank on the end of the final section was left bolted on.

At 0430 all the men spread themselves out along the extended pipeline at intervals, with heavy poles. Unlashing the original section from the lorry, the working gang gave a concerted heave, levering the exposed pipeline sections into the creek with an almighty splash. The gang cheered and slapped each other on the back. The two guards, dog and

all, joined in the happy celebration. Abdul realised the final blank had been deliberately left in position to stop the submerged pipe from being filled with water.

Now he was going to have a problem with London having previously told them the creek was full of torpedoes!

Well before dawn, the gang tramped back to their village to eat the morning meal their wives were cooking. They would return that same evening, having consumed their evening meal, well after sunset. Abdul had trouble believing what he'd been watching. None of the scenarios proposed by the MoD in London tallied with what he'd seen.

Had it been only one section of pipeline involved, he could have asked himself if that section could be filled with explosive; then put aboard a tanker and left lying around the deck looking normal, later to be detonated in a busy port. But no, that scenario wouldn't work, not with three sections that night, and presumably three the next night and so on.

The villagers were skilled and knew what they were doing, which presumed it was an on-going procedure. They seemed to be laying a pipeline from somewhere inland to the lagoon, it looked to be about twelve inch diameter but he wasn't sure. Bigger than that would have meant far more hazard to the work force. Apart from the work force, he'd seen Hassan and two other men, but Turner was not there.

Which meant there were two jobs going on; working in the lagoon by day under the guise of fishing and laying a pipeline at night with labour from the neighbouring village. Evidently the pipeline, submerged in the creek, would not be visible during the day, even from a helicopter. After the gang had passed on their way back to the village, he settled down for a day's observation.

What should he do now? Send another *Samson* message to the ***Loch Kelliesport*** and confess his error? It was now a

different ball game since the operation seemed peaceful. He thought they were probably laying a complete pipeline out to the presumed deep water he'd been told about in London. Since this would take several days or rather nights, there was no hurry, he would continue to carry out his task.

Besides which, he was getting good money for this job and was worried they might replace him with a more skilled operative.

The first movements were at 0630, when three men came from the village and were joined by another from the house. The latter was clearly white and closely resembled the photograph of Turner, with his beard and Arab head dress both in place. He seemed to be the one in authority? They boarded a Zodiac type boat and headed for the area where most of the stakes were. Abdul watched them for most of that day to see if there were any differences in procedures.

There were, for a start there were no women holding the stakes in position. The workboat was loaded with petrol and diesel drums, probably empty. Each drum was then attached by rope to weighted rocks and used a buoys. Obviously delimiting deep and shallow water.

He waited until nightfall when the village men came and started extending the pipeline by another three sections, then cycled back for a good night's sleep. The next day at daylight, he'd try and find where the pipeline came from and

what was on the other end of it. It seemed probable the pipeline would continue inland from the head of the creek.

It could be buried though, since they were hiding the newly joined sections in the creek before dawn. In which case, he would have to look out for disturbed earth, rocks obviously out of position and other signs of a quick burial job.

He mounted his bike, which he was beginning to hate, rode to the head of the creek, keeping clear of the big

house. There, he received a pleasant surprise; a shallow Wadi continued inland, along which there was an unburied pipeline. It was obviously not new, like the sections he'd watched being manhandled out of the truck. It was old, painted black and made of steel, even rusty in places; probably having been there since before 1991. The pipeline was kept off the ground by a series of wooden cradles, stretching back as far as he could see.

Still on his bike, he used the Wadi to follow the pipeline in a westerly uphill direction, jolting over the rough ground. Occasionally he had to dismount and push the bike through heavy scrub. He arrived at an oil rig, probably twenty odd years old and never used. The well was capped; with a strong gate valve on the downstream side securely lashed and padlocked. Abdul could not see any pumping arrangement and wondered if there would be sufficient pressure to ensure a flow of Crude oil as far as the presumed anchorage.

Not far from the rig, he noted two round tanks, which he tapped with a piece of steel he'd found lying around. The hollow sound indicated they were empty and obviously intended to be used as Storage Tanks, about four metres high and six in diameter. He looked for but couldn't see a pump. The whole lot was screened by trees and bushes, camouflaged by paint, the colour of which was barely distinguishable from the colour of the earth.

Looking through the screening trees, he saw the lagoon about ten kilometres away and well below his eye level. It'd been hard work cycling up, but going down should be a doddle.

Whipping out his telephone cum camera he took a photo of the rig and tanks, as well as a view of the lagoon, intended to show the height difference.

The whole thing made a weird kind of sense. A tanker would presumably anchor in the lagoon and be filled with Crude oil from this abandoned well. Then what? He cycled

back to the creek, trying to estimate the distance. Possibly ten to twelve kilometres and all downhill, thereby adding the force of gravity to the equation. It was obvious he'd been seen during his bicycle rides, mostly by goat and camel herders but didn't think presence would have aroused any suspicion. He returned then to his lodgings for a good night's sleep.

Next morning, September 3rd, he awoke before dawn, had a meal and cycled to the hill, arriving there just as dawn was approaching. The village gang had long gone back for their morning meal and the day gang had not started. He settled down to watch. Soon Turner and the three Somalis took the workboat out into the lagoon, instead of the Zodiac and continued laying buoys.

At 1100 by Abdul's watch, the work boat headed towards the creek. Instead of tying up at the entrance, she continued right up the creek to the far end and made fast to a tree on the bank. All four of them left the boat and dispersed, Turner back to the Big House, the others to the village.

At 1400, Abdul saw the ebbing tide had grounded the boat; all four men came back and canted her over to her port side, exposing most of the bottom, effectively careening her. Two of them scraped and cleaned the hull of the boat; while Turner and the other man carefully cut a hole in the bottom, near the keel. Working quickly before the tide came back in; they pushed an object through and made it watertight.

That at least, is what they seemed to be doing; he could not see exactly what was happening, it was shady and the creek bank partly hiding his view. After nightfall, they finished by torchlight before the next high tide, unlashed the boat, started the Zodiac and towed the work boat back to her

berth at the seaward end of the creek. Turner then went back

to the Big House and the other three to the village.

Abdul waited until the village gang had started on the next three pipeline sections. Turning his gaze towards the house, Abdul considered his main problem now was getting Turner by himself to question him. The pipeline gang were occupied, lights were going off at the Big House, so Abdul decided to try his luck.

Using the skills the British Security Services had taught him, he waited until eleven and belly-crawled up to the house and climbed up on to one of the verandas unseen. Having watched the two guards laughing and joking with the night gang, he felt confident enough to carry out his plan. He carefully inched his way up the wall until he was at eye level with the one of the windows.

The plan was simple, if Turner was in a room by himself, Abdul would try and attract his attention by tapping on the window, holding up a photo of Turner's wife and kids. Then, if all went well, arrange a meeting with him.

Abdul approached one of the windows and peeked through. A Somali woman was sitting reading a book. She looked up but evidently didn't see him. The second room was unoccupied. Turner and an Indian woman dressed in a sari were in the third room, working together on what seemed to be a used nautical chart. Having completing that, they put the equipment they were using away and went into another room. It looked like a small living room. The woman made two cups of tea; they chatted for a while then Turner disappeared into an adjoining room while she washed up the empty cups.

Abdul crawled round the corner of the house to reach the window of what turned out to be a bedroom. Turner was already in bed, covered by a sheet. Abdul was about to tap on the window and hold up the photo where Turner would see it, when the Indian woman entered the room; undressed and joined Turner in bed.

It was obviously a nightly ritual, but as far as Abdul was concerned - a stunning performance. He was entranced, unable to tear his eyes away. The sheer grace of her movements plus the body she revealed transfixed Abdul. As he watched, Turner turned to her and they started to make love. This was a disaster; the man was never alone, with his boat crew by day and this exotic young woman at night.

He wondered what the Somali woman was doing there by herself. From the casual glance he'd got of her, she seemed to be a real beauty, like so many of the women in this part of Africa. In all, Turner did not seem to be having a bad time of it. He was a hostage yes, but seemingly well-treated with even the provision of at least one sleeping partner.

He heard a shout and saw a security guard running towards him. The other guard, further away, also started running with the dog. Abdul did not hesitate; he leaped off the veranda and ran towards the outer perimeter, avoiding his hideout. A bullet whanged past his ear.

Looking round hastily, he saw the first guard had stopped running, seemed to be badly winded and was aiming a revolver at him. The second guard was far behind, but still running. Luckily for Abdul, the latter didn't have the sense to release his dog, which was barking continuously.

Slowing his run down to a canter, he found his bike and was soon safe, back in the far village. He carefully cut up and burnt the photograph of Turner's wife and children, since it would no longer be needed. Abdul cursed himself for staying too long on the veranda, realising he'd 'blown' the operation sky-high. Acting like a Peeping Tom, he'd been watching the Indian girl undressing, of all stupid things. 'Still', he reasoned with himself, 'I have at least made certain there is little or no chance of seeing Turner alone.'

Abdul reckoned his best bet now was to forget Turner; abort that part of the operation and re-join the ***Loch Kelliesport***. He may just as well take the first rendezvous agreed with Commander Donaldson. Thinking of the report he'd have to make on what he'd seen so far, he decided to omit his foolish voyeurism. Had he not stayed too long there, allowing the guard see him, he might have been able to watch the strip-tease each night.

In all, he reckoned he'd found out the fundamental part of the operation; a secret pipe laying operation from a Crude Oil rig inland out to the supposed anchorage in the lagoon. It would take how long to reach the deep water? There was about 400 metres to go, he estimated. What was the length of each pipe section? Say about five metres. That would be $400/5 = 80$ lengths. Three sections a night was what he'd seen them accomplish so far, therefore $80/3 = 27$ nights at the present speed.

That was working in the handy creek though, how would they manage in the lagoon itself? He did not know but reckoned he should add another five or ten days on to overcome any difficulties. Let's say over thirty-five days. Always supposing there were sufficient pipeline lengths available.

He was supposed to have found out from Turner the depth of the lagoon, what it was going to be used for and if Turner was in any immediate danger. Perhaps he could talk to one of the men working with him, but this was unlikely. Knowing there would soon be an investigation, including the village he was staying in, also that he was the only stranger in the village, he paid off his room, gave the bike back to the Old Man, walked a few miles inland and hid out in a group of trees.

He again pondered over the question of a report to London. He ought to contact the ship with the portable VHF Commander Donaldson had given him in case of emergency and report his findings. These could be

immediately coded and sent on to London. But no, there *was* no emergency; it seemed to be a peaceful operation due to continue for at least another month.

He decided not to bother, having already made a fool of himself by reporting a torpedo; let them worry about it for a couple of days before mentioning the torpedo was part of a pipeline. His first rendezvous was on the September 8th at 0330 on the beach eight kilometres south. It was then soon after midnight on the fourth, three full days to wait, plus half a day. He decided to spend the remaining time in the capital of Puntland, Gorawe, and ask some discreet questions there.

Now he had no transport at all, having given back and paid for the bike, which had turned out to be a first-class torture machine. Its saddle was worn away until it was almost a skeleton, its rubber padding almost non-existent. One gear only and the tyres had to be pumped up again each hour. He was glad to be rid of it?

He hitched a lift to the next village inland, from there another broken down lorry shuddered to a halt about fifteen kilometres before Gorawe. He finally reached the capital on foot, thoroughly exhausted. Some modern cars, Fords, Peugeots, even a Cadillac had passed him, but he'd hadn't tried to stop one. They were obviously bought and driven by members of a successful Pirate Gang.

Once there; by careful questioning, he found out that the operation at the lagoon was not quite as secret as it appeared to be. Nobody was aware exactly what was happening there, but they knew there was something important brewing. He heard a rumour about a possible look-see by a militia patrol. Using his dollars as bribes, he was told that Malik, the elder son of Hassan, had been seen round the capital lately, and seemed to be making plans with some very peculiar men, some of them obviously not Somalis.

Quitting Gorawe on September seventh, Abdul paid for a lift to the village where he's been staying and found the villagers angry. Apparently, two fishing boats had arrived that morning and towed a seemingly derelict old barge away. It had been there for years and was used by the village youths as a handy diving platform. Its loss would be badly missed. They thought it was being towed south in the direction of Mogadishu. Abdul added the information to his report in case it had any relevance to the operation at the lagoon. He then started the eighteen kilometre walk back to where the boat would pick him up.

At 0330 on September eighth, Abdul was waiting on the beach. He heard the subdued engine noise as the Zodiac nosed gently on to the beach and took him off, back to the *Loch Kelliesport*. Job done, but none too well, as he was only too well aware. Being distracted by the Indian woman stripping off seductively was no excuse, pleasant to watch though, but no excuse. An exciting performance, which he would have to be discreet about. That, together with the mistake about the torpedo was not going to enhance his career as a spy.

As soon as he re-joined the *Loch Kelliesport*, she sped over to Victoria on Mahé Island, the capital of the Seychelles where Abdul boarded a plane to London. As the helicopter flew over the town of Victoria, he noticed a lively market in the capital and a clock tower that resembled Big Ben – or at least a scaled down copy of it.

Chapter 43 – The Lagoon – August 28th

Back in the big house, Sophia had joined Jim on the bed, they were just snuggling down for the night when all hell seemed to break loose outside. There were shouts, bullets being fired, the dog was barking. They heard footsteps

running outside their bedroom; followed by a thump as someone apparently vaulted off the balcony. A few minutes later, Hassan arrived running and burst into their room without knocking.

“That was a spy.” He shouted, out of breath. “He was on the veranda, looking through the windows.” He was breathing heavily, obviously out of condition.

“What about your Security Guards? Didn't they see him?” Jim asked calmly.

“My two Security Guards are useless; one was shouting and shooting at the spy. The other one was running with the dog. He didn't even think to let the dog off the lead so it could do what it was trained for. Did either of you see him? He must have been looking for you.”

Neither Jim nor Sophia had heard or seen anything suspicious. Samira neither, who had entered their room, having heard the disturbance. Hassan summoned Malik to the room immediately, repeating his statement that the man was a spy obviously looking for Jim,

“Why should he be looking for me? As I said last time something like this happened, I've been here over five months now. If they were really looking for me, they should have done so five months ago. Everybody probably thinks I'm dead by now anyway. Why do you think he was a spy; and not just someone looking for a job, like that man who came the other day; the one you sent off with a flea in his ear? He may have come back looking for trouble.”

“I'm sure he was a spy and very likely looking for you.” Said Hassan, Malik agreed with him.

“The spy then, was he white or black?” Jim demanded, badly worried.

“Black of course, nobody in their right minds would send a white man to this country as a spy. This has happened too soon after the helicopter flight and I do not believe in coincidences. I feel sure he was spying for the

Americans, or else looking for you.” Hassan was rigid with anger.

“Spying for the Americans!” Jim shouted incredulously, thrusting the sheet back. “Why on Earth would they send a spy here? To spy on what? Have you considered that the spy, if that’s what he was, could have been spying for the Puntland government? Or even for another War Lord who wants a slice of your cake? Nothing to do with the Americans or the British. Certainly nothing to do with me.”

A guard came running into the room, looking scared and spoke rapidly to Hassan, who looked really perturbed. The guard gave Hassan some objects in a grubby sack.

“The man on the veranda *was* a spy!” Hassan shouted, making the statement a threat. “The guards have found his hide-out on top of that hill. They found these binoculars; a camera and other things that have been abandoned there, as well as some food. He was looking through your window when the guard saw him.” Sophia gasped, realising what she’d been doing at that time.

“I repeat,” said Jim. “Who do you think he was spying for? The locals in the other villages must be getting suspicious by now. My view is that he is working for another War Lord.”

“The binoculars are Barr and Stroud, British I believe.” Malik said, taking them from Hassan and looking at them.

“So what? They can be bought anywhere; they could even have been taken from one of the ships at anchor waiting for the ransom to be paid, as you’ve been doing yourselves at Eyl. It only proves someone is watching you, but not who.” Jim said truculently. “In fact the ones I’m using now, which were stolen off a Swedish ship, are also Barr and Stroud.”

He had the impression he was fighting for his life. Hassan and Malik were looking at him, their faces grim and their eyes hard. Sophia’s face was stricken, even Samira looked

worried. The tension in the room was steadily mounting. Malik turned to Samira:

“Are you really sure, I mean really positive, that none of those messages you have sent for Jim could have contained hidden messages or hints that he is still alive?”

“Of course I'm sure; Hassan looked through them the other day when the helicopter flew over. He found nothing, nor will you. I suggest you have a look at them yourself.” Samira said icily, throwing a key at Malik.

Jim was becoming afraid, aware the job of sounding and buoying the lagoon was all but completed; only too well aware that Yusuf, Ahmed and Abdullah could easily finish the job without him. His only safeguard was that he, and only he, could pilot a ship in and out of the lagoon. He turned to Hassan and said:

“Let's think this through, Hassan. The messages have all been to firms, not to persons. Nor were any persons named in the texts, they were definite enquiries for information I needed to do this job. A job I am being forced to do against my will. Do you honestly think the managers of the various firms receiving these E-mails have got together and talked to each other; then realised the messages were connected to my disappearance - five whole months ago?” Jim stated, then took a deep breath and continued:

“You've been to London, lived there too; can you realistically imagine them doing this? They will have far better things to do than waste their time on idle speculations. It's busy London we are talking about, not Mogadishu!”

“The British police may still be making inquiries and have pieced these messages together.” Malik contributed.

“Pieced what messages together?” Jim demanded, his temper rising. “You've seen them all, at least Hassan and Samira have. There is nothing to piece together; they are just messages asking for information. The police wouldn't be involved at all; busy London Managers have far better

things to do than showing the thousands of emails they get daily to the police.”

Samira obviously agreed with Jim's summing up and echoed his sentiments. Hassan started to look convinced and relaxed, the tension dropped. Sophia suddenly started crying. Sobbing with relief; she sprang naked out of bed and nearly knocked Jim over as she rushed into his arms, tearfully kissing him. Suddenly realising her state of undress, she jumped back into the bed again and pulled the sheet over her head, laughing. This broke the tension completely and they all laughed with her, apart from Malik.

Jim felt a wave of relief wash over him, he'd been really scared. Over the last few months, his constant fear had largely vanished. He was even thinking Hassan might let him go home, once the project was completed. Now he wasn't so sure. Surely everybody in England would consider him dead by now. Nobody would dream of connecting the messages Samira had been sending for him, one or two of which he'd asked for things he knew didn't exist.

He would have to be very careful of Malik; he was the only one really suspicious now and nasty with it too. Jim wouldn't be at all surprised if, when the pipeline was working as they hoped, Malik would depose his father and take over the whole thing. ‘Uneasy lays the head that wears the crown’ or words to that effect.

Suddenly the night was riven by the high-pitched howling of the Rottweiler. They went outside on the balcony and saw the dog was in convulsions and died soon afterwards. The guard was in tears, he said he'd given the dog a piece of meat they'd found at the spy's hideout. Hassan and Malik raged at the guards; eventually things calmed down.

“Obviously the spy has been watching for some time.” Hassan said. “A village dog barking two days ago and now the poisoned meat. He was looking in your window when

the guard saw him.” The suspicion had returned, his eyes accusing Jim.

“You can be assured nobody is looking for me.” Jim said, his fear resurfacing.

Hassan and Malik left then and went back to the creek, where the village gang were still joining pipeline sections together.

“What can you tell me about Malik?” Jim asked Sophia later before going back to bed. “He seems a right evil bastard to me.”

“You’re right Jim, absolutely right. I think he’s got a cruel streak in him. I know he wants me, but I’m protected by both Hassan and Samira. They are the only two who can control him, Hassan because he is his father, Samira, I don’t know why. I didn’t tell you before, but Ngaya thinks Malik may be plotting against his father.” She said, they discussed this for a while but came to no conclusion.

“Well Jim, the bed’s waiting and so am I. What are you going to do about it? Can you still get it up after all the drama tonight? There’s no point in going to sleep again, we’ll soon have to get up for breakfast; so what about it?” She said with a grin, her hand feeling for him, laughing as she felt his immediate arousal.

Not for the first time Jim wondered at himself. She’d been with him for how long now? Since June 11th. It was now the end of August, say nearly eighty days. Which divided by three, that’s pretty near three whole months, except that week she was in Bossasso, about which he had suppressed his doubts.

She still had the power to arouse him whenever she wanted. He was amazed at his eager response and staying power. It must be something to do with the climate, or perhaps his subdued fear of never leaving the country alive. Sophia, he thought, was a natural giver, nothing was ever held back. He, then was a natural taker. She’d been back

two days from yet another trip to Berbera, getting the Navman set he wanted.

She'd left with Kassim at Five in the morning, arriving back just before midnight. Had she behaved herself? He wondered. The answer to that was no. She'd worked with the man before, a Bulgarian. He was the man who had raped her that night in the hotel and had given her \$150 as conscience money. Having completed the present transaction in good time, she'd allowed him a quickie for \$50 before returning to the Puntland border and Kassim.

Later, Jim asked Sophia why Kassim, Hassan's youngest son, wasn't at the meeting. She told him that Kassim had gone to a village some ten kilometres north a couple of days ago to inspect a barge there. If it seemed in good condition, he would hire two fishing boats to bring it down to the lagoon."

"That's good news as far as the pipe-laying is concerned;

it'll make things a lot easier. Pity though, he wasn't here tonight, I could have done with him on my side." Jim said sleepily.

Sophia knew he was right, Kassim usually agreed with Jim's views and occasionally took his side against Hassan. She liked Kassim and knew he liked her. Had Jim been proved guilty of communicating with the authorities in London with the messages Samira had been sending for him on Internet, Hassan would kill him, despite the rapport that had grown between them. Only Kassim could have saved him.

She was almost certain Malik was plotting something over and above Hassan's plans. She'd trusted Ngaya and felt certain his casual observations had merit. Was Kassim involved as well? Were they both plotting against their father? Or Hassan, could he be fooling everybody here and wanting more than just to export Crude oil?

Book Four – Events in London, and Puntland

Chapter 44 – MoD – August 31st

When Abdul arrived back in London, neither he nor Mr Dudley could make the former's observations conform to the latter's ideas. The cock-up regarding the torpedo was explained. Had Abdul not been disturbed by the stray dog, he would have stayed in position and realised the suspected torpedo was only an ordinary pipeline section. He'd been too quick off the mark in an attempt to prove himself at the job; causing the warship's Zodiac to re-enter Somali waters again, risking a possible international incident.

Abdul had found no evidence of potential sabotage using ships to destroy ports; nor an increased threat to hi-jack ships. Mr Dudley wondered if it could be a bunkering station for ships at anchor or running out of fuel. No, surely not! Abdul said the pipeline was coming from a Crude Oil rig further inland - not even the Somalis would put Crude Oil directly into ships' bunker tanks.

All told, it seemed a peaceful operation which, although slipshod, might just work once certain problems had been resolved – such as laying the pipeline in the lagoon itself.

Mr Dudley now needed to consider whether the involvement of the MoD should continue as before, or whether to label it as 'No Hazard Situation'; leaving it up to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to try and get Turner released. Before deciding, he arranged a conference with the Chairman the following Monday, August 31st who, in turn, invited Tom Murchison and Mrs Turner. Mr Dudley as usual opened the proceedings!

"The spy I sent into Puntland was told to contact Mr Turner and find out just what is going on at the lagoon site. His report of a torpedo being lifted out of the creek was totally false; the torpedoes turned out to be pipeline

sections. Turner spends his days with three Somalis sounding the lagoon.” He hesitated, looked at Angela and said:

“The evenings seem to be spent with a young Indian woman, probably making fair copies of what had been surveyed during the day. I'm sorry to have to mention this Mrs Turner, but he spends his nights in bed with that same Indian woman, seemingly a long-standing arrangement. He was never alone long enough to be approached.”

Angela gasped and glanced at Tom, then rapidly looked away. The Chairman caught the look and smiled an 'I thought so' kind of smile, which was completely wrong. Nothing was going on between the two. Mr Dudley continued:

“None of the scenarios discussed at our last meeting seem to be correct. A gang from a nearby village are bolting three sections of pipeline together each night, from soon after sunset to before dawn. Those three sections are themselves bolted on to the end of an existing pipeline running underwater from the head of the creek. Well before dawn, the three connected sections are then levered into the creek. He found out the pipeline originates from an abandoned Crude Oil rig some ten or so kilometres inland.”

On the map of the lagoon, he indicated the creek and the direction Abdul had taken to find the Oil Rig. The spy's findings surprised the persons in the Chairman's office. Mr Dudley continued:

“As I say, three sections of pipe per night were bolted on and the whole lot dropped back into the creek. This seems to be a secret operation, with the sections being joined at night and hidden in the creek during daylight hours. Let's assume they keep up the figure of three sections each night with a distance to go of some 400 metres. Say about twenty-seven days, to reach the deep water. My guess is a few days more than that, as they will have problems laying

pipe in the lagoon itself. Say thirty-five days, assuming they only work at night.”

“I don't understand, why is this being done secretly? Why

not in the open? What is he going to do, load a tanker there? Then what? Sail her to where? It just doesn't make sense!”

Tom exclaimed, a frown on his face.

“More to the point” said Mr Harding. “Where are they getting the money from to pay for all this? He is employing labour from a neighbouring village and buying sections of pipeline from somewhere. There cannot be that many just lying around rusting since 1991. I think we can assume this money comes from Piracy.”

“I have given a lot of thought to this recently,” said Mr Dudley, opening up his brief case. “But have come to no conclusion. Is the War Lord doing this secretly? Our spy seems to think the man who ordered him off the property is in charge of the whole affair. It is he who is directing the pipe laying gang; also the nearby village is supplying the labour.” He paused to blow his nose then continued:

“We know the lagoon is being sounded for a reason. The stakes we formerly thought were fishing stakes, now suggest they form a boundary between shallow and deep water. This is confirmed now by the boat crew laying buoys. Petrol and diesel tins mainly, the Agent says. Do they plan to bring a tanker through the southern channel and anchor her there, in the lagoon? And then what? Or they going to fill her up with Crude Oil and sail her somewhere?”

“One thing is certain. We know Turner is alive and being forced to work there.” Tom contributed.

“Is he being forced or doing the job for money? I'm sorry Mrs Turner but we must face the fact that an Indian woman is involved. Has she persuaded him to work for money? Are they going to be running a tanker operation?

Did he know any Indian women before he joined that ship? Just how reliable is your husband?"

"Don't you mean Jim Turner, my past husband? Obviously he's not reliable at all if he's sleeping with an Indian woman. The government can do what they like but I want no more of him." She re-joined angrily, then added. "To my knowledge he's not known an Indian woman before." Having said that, she burst into tears.

"Anyway, to get back to what we were discussing before, one possibility is that they are trying to create a little Kingdom on the quiet with Crude oil the bargaining factor. A little Kingdom for himself. It might seem crazy, but to secretly load a tanker with good Crude oil and sail it out into the middle of the world's Navies could, and possibly would, make a definite statement. It could even attract investment into the country that it now sadly lacks." Mr Dudley concluded.

Opening the file, he took out some papers and studied them, about to continue when the Chairman forestalled him, saying:

"What tanker? Surely they are not going to charter one for the operation?"

Tom idly wondered if he was looking for quick Charter Party with the pirates! He wouldn't put it past the man.

"They will either use a hijacked tanker already there, or even hijack another one for the purpose." Mr Dudley replied, looking up from his notes, frowning.

"What are they going to *do* with the tanker then?" Tom said. "Where on earth are they going to sail the damn ship to? Didn't the spy find out these things?"

"Apparently not. It was only a low-scale operation; Abdul was about the only semi-trained Somali operative we could get hold of. I've got the impression he blew the operation. He never even got close to talking to Turner."

“Hell I hope not; we want Jim Turner back unharmed. I only hope the spy won't be blamed on him.” Tom said, glancing at Angela.

“You mean to say you've sent in a poorly trained spy who's bungled the operation, putting my husband in even greater danger?” She said, rising to her feet. She was white faced, anger and fear showing in equal proportions.

“No I don't think so. Why should it? Don't forget he's been there over five months now. They are far more likely to blame another War Lord or the Provisional Government, such as it is. I suggest you calm down young lady.” Mr Dudley said, looking at her.

Tom got the impression Mr Dudley is not at his best with women and is even a little bit afraid of them. Afraid of their reactions, at any rate, probably being the effect of a Boys Only Public School.

“Calm down?” Angela exclaimed, astonished; her arms akimbo; eyes blazing. “First of all you tell me my husband has taken an Indian Mistress. Then you say you sent in an incompetent spy who's made a mess of the job, probably endangering him even more. After all that, for God's Sake, you have the nerve to tell me to calm down!!”

She was shaking with anger; Tom stood up and went across to her, put his hand on her shoulder which was roughly shaken off. Her tears were not far off. Once again, both Tom and Mr Dudley were up against Angela's anger. Mr Harding was watching the by-play with amusement; even more convinced something was going on between Captain Murchison and the wife of the abducted Officer. Mr Dudley sighed and said:

“Anyway, coming back to what I was saying before, we know three or four American oil Companies had contracts with ex-President Barre back in 1991. Whether they are still valid or not is a different matter. We also know China is interested in the area and is waiting for a stable

government. I think it very likely that this Hassan is hoping to cut out the Americans and Chinese before they arrive, ending up controlling all future Crude oil production. He probably thinks now is the best time to do this, while the country is still in an ungovernable mess.”

“What? With no previous experience in the oil industry?” Mr Harding contributed. “What contacts has he got? Will the Oil Majors let him in just like that? They will just laugh at his pitiful little ship full of Somali Crude and pull the plug out from under him.

“Maybe they will, but at the moment, it is the only thing that makes sense. Perhaps it is only now he can do this, before a stable government takes over and other oil Companies come rushing in.” said Mr Dudley. He then turned to Tom and asked if it was feasible to load a tanker that way.

“Yes, it’s feasible. Assuming the pipeline continues along

the bottom of the lagoon and is buoyed so that it could be hooked on to the ship’s gear, then it’s possible. The end of the pipeline can be lifted up by the ship’s crane or derrick, lashed to a strengthened section of the ship’s side rails, the end lowered and bolted on to the manifold. I can’t answer for the safety of the job though, nor if the pipeline will even fit the ship’s manifold. I can foresee plenty of difficulties coming their way when they start connecting and laying pipeline in the lagoon itself.” Tom said, looking at Angela and wondering if she was going to explode.

“Yes I was wondering about that myself.” Mr. Dudley said slowly. “Another thing my spy mentioned was anger in the village he was staying in. It appears that two fishing boats arrived there and towed a derelict old barge away, which the village youths had been using for years as a diving platform. They reckoned it could be going down to Mogadishu; but perhaps it’s only being taken as far as the

lagoon. He only mentioned it in passing, as it were. What do you reckon?"

"A barge would certainly help, providing it had a flat surface area large enough to bolt at least two sections of pipeline together. Ask the warship if they noticed it, and if so, where did it go?"

"OK I'll ask Commander Donaldson and let you know tomorrow. Another question Captain Murchison, is there any way we can measure the deep water area from the photographs? I'll come back to you later, when you've had a chance to think about it." Mr Dudley asked.

He then turned to Angela, who had recovered her composure, but was still flushed with anger.

"Sorry about the shock, Mrs Turner, I debated with myself whether to tell you or not. You can rest assured your husband is not doing anything the United Kingdom may find traitorous. He seems to be rather an unusual hostage though, in that he is apparently well treated, actively working and keeping his mind occupied."

"With an Indian woman keeping his body nicely occupied at night! Maybe it's not traitorous to the Government, but certainly traitorous to me. I was feeling sorry for him being some, what, five months now without sex, no more than that; he'd already been away three months on that ship. All this time I have been worrying about him being beaten, starved or killed, and there he is, living the life of Riley with probably strange food and the nights taken care of."

Her tongue was almost tripping over all the words pouring out of her mouth. She was bright-eyed with anger over the inept spy, as well as indignation about her husband's affair with an Indian woman.

"Bravo, Mrs Turner." Mr Dudley said. "Well Captain Murchison, have you come up with any possible way to

measure the deep water area yet? I want to know; so that we can estimate what size tanker they can get in there.”

“And to get the bugger out again fully loaded. Without tugs, it’ll be one hell of a job getting her out stern first. As far as the measurements are concerned, I don’t know. There is no large scale chart of the region, but we know the cliff is over two miles long from the Pilot Book – assuming that cliff really *is* the Island. I’ll try and give you some kind of estimate tomorrow.”

“You think turning the ship round presents a problem? Are you are sure it has got to be turned round?” Mr Dudley asked thoughtfully, stroking his chin.

Tom explained the reasons so that she, not it, must be sailed out bow first, since there was no question of using tugs

Continuing that theme, he stated:

“The measurements will confirm that, also whether it is possible to turn a normal size tanker round. A small product Coastal tanker may be the largest possible ship that could be used. But would that create the effect you think they want? What we cannot guess at this stage, is the depth of the deep water, which will limit the draft and therefore the size of the tanker to be used anyway. That’s another thing your spy should have found out but didn’t. Bit of a balls-up all round, wasn’t it?” Tom said, looking up at the ceiling.

“It has got to be possible to turn the ship round!” Mr Dudley persisted, flushing. “They must have thought it all through beforehand.”

“Only if they *knew* the ship had to be turned round. Oh! I was forgetting that Turner would know. As far as I can see from the photos the deep water seems to run from that creek out to the Island where it is blocked. Then it turns southwards out to the Indian Ocean, almost as if it was once a river, centuries ago. If the water is equally deep in that part of the old river, then maybe a larger size ship could just

about use it for turning round. It'd be one hell of a job though without tugs?"

"I'll get on to the Captain of the *Loch Kelliesport* tomorrow and ask him as well, since he can actually see the island, at least by radar. We'll assume your deduction is right and the island was created by the Tsunami. Both of you can work along those lines. Incidentally, please note, all of you, what has discussed in this office today is confidential."

"Confidential?" Angela said, alarmed. "How can I keep it confidential? I've already told the bank, the Pension Fund, Jim's union and others that he's alive; especially the bank."

"Mrs Turner," Mr Dudley said, annoyed. "You had no right to do that at this point in the proceedings. Don't forget you have signed the Official Secrets document."

"But that was only for the Island, nothing else as far as I can see. My husband's salary was cut in half for a month or so, then stopped altogether. How am I supposed to live?"

"Mrs Turner is right." Tom said, springing once again to her defence. "But the Company will probably be reinstating it next month. Anyway Mr Dudley, in answer to your question just now, please ask the Warship to measure its length by radar, the cliff part that is, to confirm that measurement tallies with that of the cliff in the Pilot Book. Then, if the island is as rectangular as the photographs show, then we'll know the North/South measurement of the lagoon."

"That will give you what," countered Mr Dudley, gazing up at the pictures of ships on the wall.

"From there, we can possibly give a good guess as to the width. From that we may be able to work out an approximate area for the deep water, by using the stakes defining the area. It won't be completely accurate, but probably good enough." Tom said, easing his cramped legs and stifling a yawn.

Mr Dudley agreed and promised to have the measurement for Tom by the following morning. He warned the Chairman and both Tom and Angela once again to keep silent about Turner's activities in Puntland. Although he said nothing at the time, Mr Dudley was obviously annoyed that the spy he'd sent in was so inept. There had been little choice, due to the lack of suitable Somali men and the minimal training he'd received. All this, Mr Dudley confessed to Tom after the Enquiry.

"Hey wait a minute" Tom said, suddenly thinking of something, "What about bunker fuel, Fuel oil and diesel? If the ship they are thinking to hi-jack is on its way to the Arabian Gulf to load at Kuwait say, she'll probably only have enough to get there, plus five days reserve. If she's captured far away in the Indian Ocean or far up the Omani coast and brought *back* to Eyl or another one of the pirate anchorages, then she may not have sufficient bunkers left to go anywhere. They would have to make sure to capture a tanker going to the Far East or Southern Africa, with sufficient bunkers aboard to get there."

"Yes. Good point Captain" Mr Dudley said abstractedly. Tom looked at him thoughtfully and said:

"Mr Dudley. Is your Ministry *still* concerned, now that the whole thing looks to be a peaceful operation? Apart from the hijack itself that is. Since you *do* seem to be concerned, is there something worrying you that we should know about? I

thought Mr Turner would be safe now and probably let go afterwards, is this still the case?"

Mr Dudley hesitated, he respected Captain Murchison and considered him clever enough to work out for himself the possibilities that Mr Dudley was contemplating.

"Mr Harding is probably correct when he said that the Oil Majors may well pull the plug on this enterprise. What *really* worries me is that Hassan could be looking south and

involve Al Shabab. In which case Al Qaeda could reinforce that organisation with disaffected Taliban and other Jihadists. Right now the Somali army and the AMISOM forces don't seem to be gaining ground at all, nor are they losing ground. Or he could be looking north to Yemen, who seem to be infiltrated with a branch of Al Qaeda. And Pakistan? Although still with NATO at present, parts of that country seem to be allied with the Taliban."

"You are saying then, that Somali Crude could well be up for grabs and could soon be under Al Qaeda control? Tom asked, probing.

"I hope I'm wrong, this would ignite the whole area; including India if Pakistan becomes involved. Anyway, Captain Murchison, please keep your ears open for any more indications from Somalia. The whole thing could be serious and perhaps catastrophic"

"Something else is bothering me." Mr Dudley went on to say. "We've dismissed the submarines since Abdul admitted the mistake over the torpedoes. However I wonder if this lagoon could *still* be used as a secret or semi-secret submarine base. Let's not forget Iran. We know they have submarines; we also know that they are allied to the Hezbollah in Lebanon. If a hi-jacked ship could anchor there, with full tanks of fuel and diesel oil; she could be used for directly refuelling submarines. Also the spy mentioned that Hassan's son had been seen recently in Gorawe talking to foreigners. Whether this was for Hassan or a plot against him, we have no idea. Furthermore, I'm under a lot of pressure to release the *Loch Kelliesport* and to return her to the Atalanta fleet."

"Your point about Iran and Hezbollah is disturbing, Mr Dudley," Tom said thoughtfully; "but surely both of them are Shia Moslems, not Sunnis and the Somalis are mostly Sunnis, according to Wikipedia."

* * * * *

With that, the conference ended, Angela and Tom left the office then, hardly daring to look at each other. Since it was nearing the end of the working day, he took her along to a pub and bought her a whisky, had one himself as well, since they both needed the stimulus. Tom sipped his while Angela drank hers down in one gulp, shuddering as the liquid went down her throat. She banged her empty glass on the table top, ordered another whisky for them both, poured the second one down her throat just as quickly and said belligerently:

“Well Tom, It’s tit for tat as far as adultery is concerned with Jim and me. I don’t feel so guilty after all, while that old leech of a husband of mine has probably been fooling around for months. What’s going to happen now Tom?”

“Tit for tat? What adultery are you talking about, Angela?” Tom demanded. She regarded him scornfully.

“Captain Jack Knowles and me. The weekends he was on that Gas Course at Southampton you sent him to. A couple of other occasions too. Never mind that, I’ll wait for Jim now like a good wife. And then what, hit him over the head with a rolling pin? What I’ve learnt today puts a different complex on things.” She said angrily.

“Maybe Jim had no choice in the matter...” Tom started to say, when she interrupted scornfully.

“... No choice in the matter? Don't be daft Tom, he could have politely refused. Oh God, I've just had another thought. There's a whole lot of AIDS in Africa, the whole continent is rife with that and HIV? Supposing Jim's caught it from her? He'll have to have a good medical examination before I let him anywhere near me and the children again.”

She then signalled the barman for another whisky for both of them, which Tom silently countermanded behind her back. He drank some from his first glass and paid the barman for the second round of whiskies; which he didn't

want anyway, the damn stuff usually gives him indigestion. He saw a look of determination in Angela's eyes.

"Oh come on now, don't look on the black side, I'm sure he hasn't been in contact with an HIV source. I read only the other day that Somalia is relatively free from HIV compared to other African countries. On another occasion I read about prostitutes in Northern Kenya, just to the south of Somalia. They practice unprotected sex and don't seem to catch AIDS at all. Whether it's true or not, I don't know, probably not. What now, do you want to go home? I'll see you back to Liverpool Street." Tom said dismally.

"I'm going home now and I'll find my own way, thank you. My affair with Jack is finished, Kaput." Angela said truculently. "And as for you, you can stop hanging around me like a Mother Hen."

Having finished her second glass of whisky, she picked up Tom's second glass and gulped that down as well. Unused to strong drink in such quantities, she was starting to slur her words.

"I hope you and Jim don't break up over this, it would be a shame if you did." He said dolefully.

"Would it?" She asked, waving the empty glass of whisky at him. "It's all your fault, sending him to that ship!" She said.

Having said this, she signalled the barman again for yet another whisky, which Tom again signalled the barman to ignore. She picked up the half full glass from Tom's first whisky and drank that straight down as well. Picking up her handbag, she walked out of the pub unsteadily. Her intention was to go to Bond Street Underground station for Liverpool Street and home. Attracted by the calm of Green Park, she crossed the road to enter the Park without looking and was nearly run down by a taxi.

Tom, worried about the state she was in, having drunk over three and a half glasses of whisky, rushed out of the pub in an attempt to catch her up. She was nowhere to be

seen so he decided to go straight home. Hailing a passing taxi, Tom gave the driver his address at Harrow.

“Harrow? Harrow-on-the-Hill? Blimey, that’s going to cost you an arm and a leg, Mate”

The taxi braked suddenly, screeching to a halt. Tom, not having put his safety belt on, fell on to his knees on the floor. He stood up and saw Angela’s shocked face through the taxi’s windscreen. He opened the cab door and pulled her in, halting the stream of verbal abuse from the taxi driver and telling him to carry on.

‘Bloody Hell.’ The taxi driver thought but didn’t say. ‘I fucking nigh killed the woman and now he’s gone and picked her up! Not a bad-looking bird either.’

She was crying in the cab, her face in her hands, sobbing her heart out. Recovering later she looked up, then out of the

window. Puzzled, she said drunkenly:

“Tom, this is not the way to Liverpool Street. Please tell the driver to turn round and go back east. Either that or drop me at the nearest tube station.”

“This cab is going to back to my flat at Harrow. Look at you! *Look* at the state you’re in, you can’t go home to your children like that. You’re drunk; hardly surprising the way you knocked those three whiskies back, plus most of mine as well. When we get to my flat you’re going straight to bed for a good sleep – don’t worry, I won’t touch you.” He said flatly,

shocked by the state she was in.

Suddenly realising he had no cash to pay for the taxi; he leant forward and told the driver to stop at the nearest bank with a *‘Hole in the Wall’*. The cab driver complied, stopping at a bank close to Baker Street tube station. Getting out of the cab, Tom pushed his card in, dialled his Pin code and took the money.

He wondered if Angela would take advantage of the stop and disappear into the underground system. She was still in

the car when he got back, stony-faced and staring ahead. Gradually she relaxed and started laughing hysterically. Tom slapped her face once, not very hard but it stopped her. She looked up at him astonished and then dozed off.

At Tom's flat, he prepared a meal for both of them, sausage, egg and tomatoes, a good fry-up. They both ate ravenously, Angela suddenly smiled and said, still slurring her words:

"OK Tom, now you've got me here, what are you going to do with me?"

"I told you in the taxi that I wouldn't touch you. When you've finished eating you can go straight to bed in the spare room." He said severely, wiping the last of the egg off his plate with a slice of bread.

"You know Tom; you didn't have to nearly kill me, before abducting me." She said, having difficulty pronouncing the word abducting.

Although it was only six in the evening, she undressed and went to bed and fell into a drunken sleep almost immediately; Tom phoned up her mother explaining the circumstances and that he'd put her on the train the following morning.

"Thank you Captain Murchison. May I call you Tom? So

you have put her to bed. Why don't you join her there? I'm sure she wouldn't mind." Mrs Patterson said. She laughed and put the phone down.

Tom was shocked, both at her mother's suggestion and his own surge of longing to do just that. He wavered but in the end stayed up and watched television until eleven pm, then undressed and went to his own bed, but had difficulty sleeping.

He was unable stop thinking about the woman in the spare bedroom. Although she'd been drunk, had been unpleasant to him and walked out of the pub; although

she'd confessed to sleeping with Jack, boasted rather than confessed; he still badly wanted her.

No way was he going to take advantage of her drunken state. Drowsily, he thought back to the first phone call after the hi-jack, then to the visit at her house at Chelmsford the same day. She'd never really been out of his thoughts since then.

He'd welcomed her phone calls, admired her fortitude and the way she'd stood up to the Chairman and Mr Dudley. The chairman had really put the cat among the pigeons when he'd confronted Tom with his suspicions. Eventually he dozed off, then slept soundly and was woken up by her warm body climbing into his bed.

* * * * *

When Angela had left home the previous morning, there was no intention of spending part of the night with Tom. But then, she hadn't known her husband was sharing a bed with an Indian woman. Nor had she ever drunk so much whisky before! Or any whisky at all come to that. And as for being nearly run over by a taxi!! Luckily it was a taxi with Tom in it. No longer a widow, she was the adulterous wife of an adulterous husband.

She had woken up in a strange bed in a strange room, the first rays of dawn were lighting up the window. Finding an old dressing gown of Tom's, she wrapped it round herself and made a cup of tea, which nearly made her sick. She was prepared to leave quietly without disturbing Tom, but her brain was still fuddled from all the whisky she'd drunk.

Before getting dressed, she looked into her handbag and realised she had no money; just the return tube ticket from Bond Street to Liverpool Street and the return half from there to Chelmsford. Neither did she have her credit card, which she'd given it to her Mother who'd offered to do

some shopping for her at Ipswich. She didn't have a chequebook either.

What to do? She couldn't walk from Harrow-on-The Hill

to Liverpool Street. She dimly remembered Tom saying that he'd reimburse her for the fare, Chelmsford to London and back, the taxi ride as well. In which case, she'd better wake him up and ask him for the money.

Still in Tom's old dressing gown, she opened his bedroom

door and went in. Looking down at him sleeping peacefully, she thought about all he'd done for her since the hijack; all the phone calls she'd made, at times when he was obviously busy; how nasty she'd been when he came to her house; how she'd stormed at him for not showing her the clipping of Jim's abduction. Finally she remembered what she'd said in the pub before walking out. Now she was going to have to wake him up and ask for money.

She knew he'd wanted her for a long time; so making a decision, she shrugged off the dressing gown, pulled aside the sheet and light blanket covering him and got into his bed. They made love twice, before she fell asleep again, still in his bed. He too, dozed until eleven when she woke up.

"Sorry I got so drunk yesterday. I've never been like that before in my life. Did you phone my Mum? What did you tell her?" She asked him, turning half round in the bed to look at him.

"I told her the truth. That you'd drunk too much and I had to put you to bed." Tom admitted awkwardly, unable to meet her eyes.

"And what did she say to that? Did she give you a hard time for making me drunk? Did she scream and shout at you and call you an opportunist?" She asked him, giggling.

"No, in fact she asked why I didn't join you there." He said, embarrassed.

“Did she now? Well why didn’t you? I was so drunk, I probably wouldn’t even had woken up.”

“I thought about it, but it would have been taking advantage of your state.” Her confessed.

“So you waited until I took advantage of you.” She said, laughing. “Right it’s just on Midday now. As a thank you, I’ll cook us some lunch then I am going back to bed for an afternoon nap. It’s up to you then; whether you follow my Mum’s advice or not, but I must be back at Liverpool Street station in time to catch the 1830 train.”

With that, she got up and rummaged around his tidy kitchen. Finding some haddock, she cooked two fillets in milk and they had a strictly non-alcoholic lunch, followed by an afternoon in bed until it was time to drive her to the station. She frankly amazed him by her enthusiasm.

On the train she realised that, for the first time in her life, she’d committed adultery. With Jack, she’d thought she was a widow, but she’d known her husband was alive when she’d joined Tom in bed. ‘Well, why not?’ she thought. ‘After all Jim’s sleeping with an Indian woman and has probably been doing so for weeks, if not months.’ And!! What’s more...

...‘Even my own mother suggested it!!’

Not only had she suggested it, but urged Captain Murchison, a man nearly fifty, to join her in bed. This was the second time her dear old Mum had more or less pushed her into bed with a man. Succeeded too!! On both occasions! What did that make her? Come to that, what does it make me?

He hadn’t been bad though. He had a nice firm body, no fat on him at all. Unlike both Jim and Jack who were beginning to show a bit of extra flesh round the tummy. Well he can take Jack’s place as an occasional lover – at least until Jim comes back.

‘Mummy was right in her evaluation. I do need men! To put it crudely, I enjoy having sex at regular intervals and Tom has been good to me.’ She admitted to herself.

With a jerk, she realised that people in the carriage were looking at her strangely. Had she spoken out loud? Was she still a bit under the influence of all that whisky? Looking out of the window, she saw the familiar approach to Chelmsford. The train started slowing down and she got up and went to the door.

Once home, her mother was cooking dinner; the children curious about her absence. She told them she’d been too late at the Ministry of Defence; the last train had gone before she’d been able to get away. A statement which seemed to satisfy the children.

Having eaten the dinner her mother had cooked and put the children to bed, her mother asked her:

“Did that nice Captain Murchison join you in bed or were you too drunk to notice?”

“No he didn’t. I saved him the bother by getting into his bed early this morning.”

“And stayed there all afternoon?” Her mother asked.

Chapter 45 – The Lagoon – September 5th

The work boat was now back in service with the Navman installed. It had only taken one tide to fit the echo-sounder head in the keel and further day and half to get it working. At one time Jim had thought he’d have to careen the boat again to fit the Speed Log, but Ahmed had proved to be a good mechanic, between them had made the machine work. The rest of that afternoon was spent adjusting it and verifying its accuracy against the three stakes he used daily, comparing the results to Mogadishu plus the thirty-five minute delay.

The following morning, Jim and Ahmed continued to use the hand sounding line from the Zodiac to lay buoys in their correct positions, while Yusuf and Abdullah checked the shallow water depths with the Navman from the workboat, making sure they'd missed nothing. That evening Hassan called another meeting, with Malik and Jim.

"First of all you Jim, How quickly can you complete your work in the lagoon. I want the lagoon sounded, buoyed and ready by Eid el Fitr on the twenty-first or twenty-second. Are you ready to lay the pipeline in the lagoon itself?" Hassan asked, aching for a cigarette, but observing Ramadan.

"I don't know. When is Kassim going to arrive with that barge he's supposed to be bringing here? If it's not usable, we're going to have a real problem; the work boat's deck is far too small and cluttered to work on." Jim replied.

"Don't worry; it should be here by tomorrow or the day after. Kassim had to take it down to Eyl to get some patches welded up with a portable welding torch, taken from one of the ships there. The fishing boats are probably bringing it back now. Kassim will be on board one of them to make sure it arrives here safely. They will stay here working with the barge until the job is completed."

"It'll be invaluable," Jim said reflectively, "assuming it has a large enough deck area. Not too large though or they'll

have a job getting the thing through the Southern entrance." The meeting concluded at that.

The next job was to extend the pipeline from the mouth of the creek out to the anchorage. To do this they placed three sections on the beach, close by the creek entrance. There were sufficient men from the village to walk one section into the sea, leaving its flanged end on the beach. The second section was bolted on and walked into the sea in its turn; with the workboat lifting and pulling the section

already in the sea; leaving its flange on the beach. The third section was then bolted on.

This time, with both the workboat and the zodiac lifting and pulling, plus log rollers placed underneath they managed to get all three sections into deeper water with the last flange of the third section still on the beach.

Now they had to connect the three pipeline sections in the sea to the last section in the creek that the night gang had completed. Using the crane on the lorry, the flange of that section was lifted on to the beach and the two flanges connected. They then pushed that final joint back into the lagoon.

There was now a pipeline all the way from the oil rig, the whole length of the creek and extending into the lagoon for fifteen metres, where the water was deep enough for the barge and fishing boats to work.

To everybody's surprise, Jim's included, the pipeline did not sink completely to the bottom of the lagoon, which made towing it far easier. Then he remembered an incident a few years previously when his ship had discharged a full cargo of Gas Oil at the buoy berth outside Mogadishu harbour.

The pipeline was the same type of hard flexible rubber. After having completed the discharge, the ship pumped air through the pipeline to the shore, clearing it for the next cargo. A valve ashore must have been partially shut after a while, since the whole pipeline suddenly rose to the surface like a whale breaching, surprising the whole crew.

The pipeline in the lagoon was not floating completely on the surface; it was below the surface but not dragging along the bottom. When filled with Crude Oil or water, it would sink completely. Jim reckoned this was proof that the joints had been properly placed between the flanges and the bolts tightened hard up. As a final touch, the work boat hammered stakes on alternate sides of the extended pipeline.

Exhausted, they were congratulating themselves when a warning shout made Jim look up. He saw an armoured truck and a camouflaged staff car some distance away, travelling fast and trailing clouds of dust, obviously coming towards them. The military convoy came into the grounds and a high-ranking officer wearing a smart, well-tailored uniform left the armoured car and entered the house accompanied by an armed soldier.

He introduced himself to Hassan as a Colonel in the newly formed Puntland Government Militia, shook hands with Hassan and stated arrogantly:

“Starting from tomorrow morning, I'm going to station some soldiers here. They will be armed and in radio contact with the headquarters in Gorawe. Meanwhile I have orders to search your house and grounds. You have an Arab working here. Send for him now so I can check his papers.”

Hassan savagely vetoed the plan, stating that he was working for the Puntland Government and there was no Arab working on the site. Which was true – at least the latter part was.

“If you are not aware of what we are doing here *for* Puntland, then you are obviously not meant to know. Where are your orders? Show them to me.” Hassan said, his tone brisk with authority.

The colonel searched through his jacket and then mumbled that he had had left the orders back at the base.

“You haven't got any, have you? Here is my authority from the Puntland government.” Hassan said.

He showed the colonel a forged and stamped document stating that he, Hassan, was working directly for the new provisional President. Sweating, the Colonel stuttered an apology and took his platoon away, richer by a few dollars in cash. Hassan told Jim later that there was no Government militia, another War Lord had tried to edge his way in to whatever was happening at the lagoon.

* * * * *

The following morning, two fishing boats arrived towing a barge. Hassan had already told Jim the fishing boats would stay and help out as long as needed. The barge was large enough to work on, obviously hastily repaired.

Jim in the workboat picked up the buoy marking the end of the extended pipeline and passed it to one of the fishing boats. The flange and about two metres of the pipeline section was lifted by the boat's derrick and landed on the deck of the barge and lashed there. A five metre section, already on the barge was rolled into place and the two flanges connected.

Both fishing boats' derricks then lifted the extended section of pipeline above the barge's deck, while the workboat towed the barge five metres forward. Another pipeline section was then bolted on. Slowly the whole pipeline was bolted on section by section and laid in the lagoon.

The workboat also picked up sections of pipeline from the beach and ferried them out to the barge; until the whole operation finally reached the position Jim had calculated to anchor the tanker. It was a lengthy process and not as easy as it sounds.

The fishing boats were uncooperative at first, until Malik waded in with his fists. Then they had to experiment how much pipeline could be landed on the deck so the barge did not take too much list or stern trim. Little by little, they overcame all these difficulties and that part of the job was completed.

By September 20th, the lagoon had been sounded; the deep delimited and sounded by hand to a minimum of twelve metres; a complete pipeline extended from the Oil Rig inland out to the proposed tanker anchorage.

The only job left to do was to use the workboat at the next Low Water Springs to ensure the **Deep** had no hidden

snags, missed when sounding by the hand held sounding line. That evening, Jim requested a meeting with Hassan.

“Look Hassan, I am cooperating with you fully, using my expertise to help your project. When all this is finished and you have got what you want, I want your solemn promise that I will be released unharmed and given a free passage home, preferably accompanied by Sophia. Both Samira and Sophia can witness your signature.” Jim demanded.

“OK Jim, you have my agreement, Sophia can type it out tomorrow and I'll sign it along with Sophia and Samira as witnesses.” Hassan promised. Malik, unseen by his father, smiled evilly at Jim, slightly shaking his head in negation, as if to say ‘it will never happen.’ Jim smiled back cheerily,

“Where are you finding all these pipeline sections from, Hassan?” Jim asked puzzled.

“They were in the country prior to 1991 then abandoned after President Barre was ousted. I took them some years ago, hiding them a few kilometres away in an unused wreck of a factory. A factory my father had taken over from the Italians and which I still own. It is derelict now and I can bring the sections in by covered lorry any time I want.” Hassan replied. Jim realised Hassan must have foreseen this operation many years previously.

Another job still waiting to be done was to verify the soundings in the *Deep*; the Channel out into the Indian Ocean and part of the Old River Bed; all to a depth of more than twelve metres at Low Water Springs. At this depth a tanker of 35,000 tonnes Deadweight would be the maximum they could handle. This is where the new Echo Sounder in the work boat now came into its own, the one Jim and Yusuf had fitted a couple of weeks previously.

Jim looked up the time and date of the next Spring Tides. It was in two days' time. Waiting for Low Water, Jim and his three caballeros crisscrossed the *Deep* in the

workboat over three days, carefully watching the depth recorder. On each of the three days, that is the day before Low Water Springs, the day itself and the day after; they sounded for three hours on each of those days, one hour before LW, at slack water and an hour after.

The previous soundings, using the hand-held sounding line and correcting it from Jim's graph were more or less accurate. No unforeseen boulders or other projections had been missed. The differences between their handheld soundings and the boat's new echo-sounder were nearly always on the side of safety, deeper rather than shallower. Jim was rather proud of the result.

He reckoned the lagoon made a near perfect natural harbour for a future tanker port. It would have to be dredged properly; a long loading jetty built there with Chicksans; an adequate system of buoyage put in place and storage tanks constructed between the big house and the village. The area would need a pumping station too, close to where the rig is situated.

If both entrances could be widened, it could be made into a neat little tanker port on the lines of Willemstad in Aruba, which has similar features to the lagoon. It too, has an island with two channels. A tanker could enter by one of the channels, load at the jetty and sail out of the other channel. Both channels would have to be enlarged and deepened; with the Entry and exit channels changed at each change of monsoon.

Jim remembered Uncle Bob telling him about the old days in the 1950's and early 60s. On the Prince Line Far East run, his ship was one of ten ships moored in Colombo harbour to buoys forward and aft. When the monsoon changed, all ten ships had to change direction by 180° to face the next monsoon. It had been chaos with tugs, pilot boats, lighters full of tea chests to be loaded and boats belonging to ship-chandlers all getting in each other's way. But, like most chaos's in that sub-continent and its

appendage, the job eventually got done to everybody's satisfaction and the ships ready to face the next monsoon.

Chapter 46 – Preparations – September 24th

Jim was summoned to yet another meeting with Hassan, his younger son plus the two women. After talking for a while in their local dialect, Hassan turned to Jim saying:

“Five weeks ago, I told Malik to plan the hijacking of a tanker about 35,000 tonnes in ballast. He has identified three suitable ships, two of which have already passed through the Suez Canal and are now close to the Bab al Mandeb straits. At the same time, I have recruited a gang of pirates to board the vessel, using a Mother boat and skiffs. When one of these tankers passes the Longitude of Bossasso, they will discreetly follow the ship and board her; just over a week from now.”

Hassan looked at Jim and continued; his voice became hard and threatening:

“I want ***you*** to be on that boat with Malik and the pirates; then ***you*** will take the ship directly into the lagoon and anchor her in the ***Deep***.”

Jim sprang to his feet, his heart plummeting, horrified at the suggestion.

“No Hassan! I'm not going to be involved in an Act of Piracy, which is what I'd be doing isn't it? Now the job is almost complete, I want to leave as you promised a few days ago and even signed a paper to that effect. I will *not* board a ship with a gang of pirates.”

“Jim, you ***will*** board that ship with Malik and the pirates.” Hassan said, becoming angry.

The last few words of that sentence had been deliberately spaced and spat out. Jim felt his stomach coil; the fear that had largely faded away over the months of

captivity had now returned with a vengeance. It had always been there in the background but was now staring him in the face. Feeling sweat gathering on his forehead, he said:

“Are you crazy, Hassan?” Jim said shocked, staring at the

man. “You are telling me to board a ship I’ve never seen before; to take over the command just like that; bring her through the channel and anchor her in in the lagoon? It’s impossible!”

“You will have fully armed men with you. The crew will obey you or be shot.”

“What I have done so far has been done under duress, which I should have refused, spiders or no spiders. I don’t want to spend the rest of my life being condemned by my peers as the infamous *White Pirate of Puntland*. Don’t you realise I could never go home again to Britain, without being arrested and imprisoned?” Jim exclaimed.

“Our pirates and innocent fishermen are being imprisoned all the time, thanks to the various warships out there, usually in Kenya and Somaliland. Why should you be any different? You have been working for us for so many months now that you will be considered as an accomplice anyway.” Hassan countered, pointing to Jim with his cigarette.

“Accomplice bollocks!” Shouted Jim, by now really worried. “God-dammit, I was forced ashore at gun point, nearly killed by your bloody spiders, kept here and forced to work.”

“If you refuse, Jim, or start making trouble, I’ll dispose of you and take an officer off an anchored ship to do the job. It will only cost me a few days extra before he’ll be ready to carry out my plans.”

“He will need the best part of a month!” Jim exclaimed savagely. “He’s got to figure out where and even how to anchor her there. He’d have to understand my buoyage system and the tides as well. As for turning the ship round!

Look Hassan, I've got to refuse. There's no way I can go leaping aboard a ship, waving a gun around, threatening brother seafarers. I've worked hard for you and your project, but what you're asking me to do now is impossible."

"Right Jim, Sophia will have all this information in the computer, as well as your chart of the lagoon and anchorage.

It should only take a couple of days for him to know the area.

Hassan stated menacingly.

"You are out of your mind if you think that! What now? Are you going to kill me?"

"Your life depends on your cooperation now, Sophia's life too."

"Sophia's life?" Jim queried, his heart pounding. He turned to look at her and saw she was crying.

"Yes hers too. She obviously hasn't persuaded you enough. I won't need her anymore."

Jim felt the net closing round him. He would have to comply eventually, his back being metaphorically up against a stone wall. The ruthless way Hassan commanded the neighbouring villages left no doubt in Jim's mind that Hassan would do exactly what he said. Thinking back over the last few months since his abduction, he realised that everything he had done for Hassan was leading up to this:

To force him to commit an 'Act of Piracy'. Under duress of course, but still an Act of Piracy against a ship.

The reasons for Sophia's acquiescence, even the paper signed by Hassan paying his fare back to the UK were all part of the trap. A honey trap in a way. He'd been the equivalent of a mule, with fear as the stick and Sophia the rewarding carrot. If he carried out Hassan's plan, he'd never be able to return to England without being arrested. He thought for a while then addressed Hassan calmly:

“For Christ's sake Hassan, take the bloody ship to Eyl as normal, but *without* me. Then, have a couple of armed guards take me aboard as a captive at gun point and make it look good – but without actually hurting me, OK? That way, you will only lose a day; two at the most, your way would take considerably longer. Don't forget I know the lagoon and *Deep* better than anyone else.” He said and looked at Sophia who was staring at Hassan, shocked.

“Yusuf, Ahmed and Abdullah know it as well as you do.” Hassan pointed out, angrily.

“Let them do the job then and I'll go home. Yusuf knows about ships too, but I don't think even he could navigate a ship through that twisted channel, let alone turn her round afterwards and the sail her out again, fully loaded! He was only an AB, with no idea about loading tankers or sailing them.”

“I'll have the kidnapped Officer to do that part of the job.” Hassan replied.

“Look Hassan, do it my way, take me on board at gun point and leave Sophia alone; keeping her well away from your son Malik. I'll do the job as we've been planning up to now. It will be only a day lost, two at the most, but so what?” Jim said, pressing his point home

He was fighting for his life now, Sophia's as well. He continued speaking to Hassan:

“Look at it this way. I've got to have time to make sure the ship's Officers obey my orders, which won't be easy. Your men will be there as threats, but I'm going to need more than a threatened crew to pull off the job. I have *got* to be forced aboard at gunpoint, threatened and seen to be working under a constant threat of death.”

“Why Jim, why do you need all the officers and crew? Except for the Engineers on duty, they will all be locked up, except for the Engineers on duty who will be forced to obey your commands by my men. You will control the ship, Yusuf will steer, Ahmad and Abdullah will work the

anchor. Armed men will make sure the Engineers obey your commands. ” Hassan said.

“That won’t work either. I’ll need a full back-up team of Officers to get through that tricky southern entrance. Don’t you realise, Hassan, that if I am forced to do this, then I will never be able to live peacefully in England again having carried out an Act of Piracy. If you insist, then I will run the ship aground in the channel at full speed and block the entrance to the lagoon.”

“My men will stop you.” Hassan countered, his anger Visible, unused to such defiant arguments against his authority.

“Your men won’t know what’s happening until it’s too late. The shock will disorientate and confuse them; during which time I’ll go down and release the Officers and crew.” Jim countered.

Hassan was silent for a few minutes. Kassim spoke up then in Somali and Jim sighed with relief, since Kassim usually agreed with him when arguing with Hassan; he felt sure he would do the same this time. Listening to the ensuing dialogue between the two Somalis, Sophia suddenly gasped, stood up and walked across to Jim, held his hand and stared defiantly at Hassan, shocked. Kassim spoke directly to Jim:

“I don’t honestly believe you would carry it out. Your life is far too precious for you.”

“Precious? If I’m in prison condemned as a pirate? Or if I have to stay here with you lot for the rest of my life? No I’d take the chance and wreck the ship. I mean it. What happened to the peaceful operation you were all so proud of? You know, loading a cargo of Crude and sailing out with it for the sake of you, your family *and* Puntland. You’re turning it into a warlike operation.” Jim said.

“I’m telling you one more time to do it the way I want.” Hassan snarled.

“And I’m refusing one more time! Even if one of your men has a gun at my head going through the channel, he won’t be able to stop me. Just one unnecessary helm order and it’ll be too late.” Jim reiterated his face angry and his eyes blazing.

The battle continued for ten more minutes, until Hassan eventually agreed for Jim to board the ship at Eyl at gun point, as previously agreed. He insisted though that two hostages would be taken ashore and kept there until the ship arrived at the anchorage. If the ship carried them, they agreed on two cadets, to be looked after by Sophia or Samira, frightened by the abduction but not harmed.

Chapter 47 – London - September 25th

Things had quietened down as far as Jim Turner was concerned, at least from the Company point of view. Tom Murchison had no idea what they were planning, neither at the MoD nor on board the Frigate; although he found out later. With nothing coming in regarding Jim, he’d taken over his real job again, as head of the Marine Superintendents Dept.

He was concerned; the *Chesham* was on charter again, scheduled to pass through the Gulf of Aden in ballast on her way to Singapore. She’d sailed from Porta Marghera near Venice with Captain Knowles in command. Although Tom felt confident Jack would stick to the established safety routes and make himself known to the Royal Navy, he decided to call him on the ship by satellite.

“Good morning Jack, Tom Murchison here. Bit of luck for you wasn’t it, discharging your last cargo at Porta Marghera; almost on your doorstep at Monfalcone. Is Sonia sailing with you this time?”

“No, she loves to come occasionally, but gets seasick nearly all the time. In any case I wouldn't want her on board in these Pirate waters. I stopped the Third Engineer's wife from coming, which made me somewhat unpopular. Did you want something?”

“No not really, just to give you the latest situation update concerning pirate activities. They are capturing ships and fishing trawlers off the Seychelles now. Have you thought up any special deterrents to stop them boarding? Frankly, I'm at a loss to advise your best route to Singapore in these circumstances.”

“Tom, I'm not going to tell you what we've done as anti-pirate measures; they might have found a way to intercept

Satellite calls. Any news of Jim Turner yet?”

“No nothing. When you take bunkers from the barge at Singapore anchorage, be sure you check the amount on the barge both before and after the transfer. They'll try all ways to stop you. It's a new Company and the *Seer Green* got caught out there a few days ago and was short-loaded on Fuel oil bunkers.” Tom advised, feeling his phone call was inadequate.

“OK will do, I'll have to go now, there's a lot of traffic around and we're about to pass through the straits of Bab el Mandeb. Cheers, see you soon.”

Tom didn't mention that Jim was alive, in case the kidnappers were able to listen in to conversations by satellite. Thinking back over the last few days, Tom wondered how it was all going to end. He'd been shocked when Angela had told him about her and Jack Knowles; although that was before she'd known Jim was still alive. But what about the other night when she'd climbed into his bed? He should have chucked her out but hadn't, despite what her mother had said. God! *What a mess this was all turning out to be!*

Tom was told later that Mr Dudley had been in touch with the Admiralty concerning the future role of HMS ***Loch Kelliesport***. Whether to return her to the Atalanta anti-piracy patrols or to continue with her mission concerning the island and what was happening there. Was there any need for her to waste time in those waters, now they knew it was a peaceful operation? Or seemed to be! It had been decided to give her two more days, if nothing new came up by then, she'd resume her normal patrol duties.

Mr Harding the Chairman, was at a Board meeting where he was having a hard time trying to persuade the Board to replace Turner's half salary. By promising Mr Dudley not to mention Turner was alive, meant that the Chairman was fighting his Board of Directors with both hands tied behind his back. In their view he was dead and it was up to the Insurance or Government to start looking after his wife. After

all, there was Widow's Benefit from the National Insurance. What about the Merchant Navy Officers' Pension Fund?

By this time, Tom had worked out the approximate area of the presumed anchorage, using the radar measurement supplied by the ***Loch Kelliesport***. Since the island seemed rectangular, the inland facing side would probably be more or less equal to the seaward measured side. This would give him the North/South length of the lagoon itself. From this it was easy to interpolate the width of the supposed deep water area.

Tom reckoned turning the ship round would be a very difficult manoeuvre, unless the stretch of water at right angles to the assumed deep water area could be used. That's assuming the water is deep enough since they had no idea of the depths Jim and the three Somalis had obtained.

Four days later, Tuesday September 29th 2009, news that the 'Chesham' had been hijacked somewhere off the coast of Oman stunned the Office.

No-one had ever expected one of *their* ships to be hijacked! What the hell was Captain Knowles playing at? Had he not kept a proper lookout? The ship was no longer in the Safety Zone, which didn't extend beyond the Gulf of Aden, but he should have kept contact with the Navy. Where the hell were all these anti-pirate measures he didn't want to tell Tom about?

A previous board meeting had dismissed the idea of having armed Security guards on board. Partly due to the expense and partly due to the long legal battles if innocent fishermen were killed by mistake.

(At that time, in 2009; the British Government didn't encourage the use of Security Guards on British Flag ships. It took them four years to decide, and even then definite rules of engagement were never properly laid down. An Italian ship was arrested off the coast of India, the charge being that two Indian fishermen had been killed as suspected pirates. The ship and crew are still there).

The phone rang and a hysterical babble of Italian came over the line. It was Jack's wife, Sonia. Switching to English, she said she was catching the next flight to England. Tom was to meet her at Gatwick and take her straight to No.10, Downing Street for a rendezvous with the Prime Minister.

"Don't waste time, Captain Tom. Start organising the rendezvous right now for tomorrow morning!" She demanded, on the point of screaming.

Startled, Tom nearly said 'yes'. He calmed Sonia down a bit, then phoned Angela and told her the news, which she'd already heard on the radio. He also mentioned that Sonia was catching the next flight to England. Angela said she'd phone Sonia right away with an invitation to stay at Chelmsford with her.

"There's no point in poor Sonia going to a hotel. She can stay here with me and the kids." She said.

“Don’t forget the warning from Mr Dudley about Jim’s activities.” Tom warned her. “You’d better not mention what’s happening in Somalia to Sonia. For all we know, it might come under the ‘Official Secrets Act.’”

Tom thought to go and see Sonia at Angela’s place but decided it was wiser not to. In any case, he would be far too busy in the office, trying to sort out problems concerning the hijacking. He was fielding inquiries from wives and parents, contacting the manning agents in Manila, Gdansk and the Ukraine. The worst job from the Company’s point of view was cancelling the present Charter Party and the future one that had been lined up: It was going to be a non-stop weekend all round.

The hijacking of the *Chesham* put the whole Company into an uproar. Furious accusations were flying around; Captain Knowles was thought to be a fool, an incompetent Master or an unfortunate victim – depending on who was doing the talking. The Chairman and Human Resources Manager both blamed Tom for promoting him, saying it was far too early. Tom blamed the HR manager for giving Jack a poor back up crowd of Officers – especially his Chief Officer. He also blamed the Chairman for employing cheaply-paid Non-British officers, as well as the MCA for issuing Certificates of Equivalent Competency. The Engineer Superintendents blamed the Deck Superintendents mainly Tom, for not giving the ship proper lucid instructions on the situation.

The Company accountants and shareholders publicly blamed everybody, from the Chairman of the Board of Directors down to the Office Boy – if they’d been lucky enough to have had one! The poor DPA (Designated Person Ashore) for the ship was almost in tears, with all the mud being flung around.

Soon everybody came to their senses and stopped blaming each other. They waited for the ransom demand to arrive, which seemed to be taking its time. The British

Newspapers, including Lloyd's List had got hold of the story, mainly because it was one of the very few British ships taken. Angela phoned and said that Sonia had arrived and was staying for the weekend, then going on to Jack's parents in Romford. Surprisingly, the abduction of Jim Turner was still unknown to the Press, the secret having been well-kept.

So, there we were then. Tom thought; two husbands facing God knows what after their ships had been hijacked. Two wives coping as best they can, as they are accustomed to do in normal circumstances. Two children with no knowledge of the danger their daddy was in.

Eight days later, October 6th, the Chairman summoned Tom to his office. Mr Dudley was there; both of them looked grim, staring at him accusingly. As usual, Mr Dudley opened the proceedings.

"HMS *Loch Kelliesport* has been waiting twelve miles off Eyl for the *Chesham's* arrival there. She anchored there on the afternoon of October 4th, some more pirates boarded and the original ones left. Two days ago, on Tuesday 6th, she hove up her anchor and sailed into that lagoon, at the same time the warship's helicopter overflew the site and obtained these photos. What do you think they are doing?" Mr Dudley asked, handing them to Tom.

"It seems obvious to me they are taking the pipeline aboard with the crane's runner. Didn't the ship send the chopper go back for another look?" Tom said, puzzled and worried.

"Unfortunately, it broke down. But we can no longer ignore the possibility that she's loading a bomb or a Weapon of Mass Destruction. *Loch Kelliesport* cannot see her visually, since she is on the twelve mile limit and the island is obstructing his view."

"Look Mr Dudley, what do you want me to say?" Tom said, getting annoyed. "Your spy saw them bolting sections of pipeline together, he also found an oil rig, and he noticed

a barge being moved away from a village. To me all this means she's going to load Crude Oil. To think they're lifting a WMD out of the sea is ridiculous."

Tom was really badly worried now, for the safety of Jim Turner, Jack Knowles and the whole of *Chesham's* crew. It could only have been Turner, who piloted the ship into the position she's in now, but where was Jack Knowles and what was he doing while this was happening? Had he been killed by the pirates? Exactly how deep was Jim in with his captors? If Jack is still alive, how did Jim force him to obey? Has Jack been a partner to the operation all along?

Did the whole crew just agree to go and load Crude in the lagoon? How many crew deaths would it have taken Jack to comply with their wishes? Was Jim Turner responsible for those deaths? Had he joined the pirate gangs and gained a small fortune?

At this point the phone rang; the Chairman picked it up and passed it to Mr Dudley, frowning. A look of consternation came over the latter's face. He gave the phone back and said grimly:

"There seems to have been some sort of fire fight there. The *Loch Kelliesport* has heard what seemed to be small arms fire, although being twelve miles away it's hard to be sure. The Captain wants to know whether to send a helicopter from another warship, also what his 'Rules of Engagement' back to the office and sort things out.

"Now, wait a bit," Mr Harding said to Mr Dudley. "Just remember it's a British flag ship out there being menaced, stuck in a country where there is no real rule of law. There is a British warship just twelve miles away keeping out of Puntland Territorial waters. I suggest... No! Dammit. As Chairman of the Company, I *demand* that the warship enters those territorial waters, actively placing herself where the *Chesham* can be seen and protected if she comes under fire. Don't pussyfoot around with these 'Rules of

Engagement', just keep in mind that the ship and the crew are British, whom the Royal Navy has the duty to protect."

Despite all their previous rows over the past years, Tom had to admire the old boy's direct confrontation with the Ministry official. He was wrong though about the crew being all Brits. For a start, the ratings were Filipino, the Second Mate Ukrainian and Third Mate Polish. The engineers mostly Croatian and even one Egyptian. Only the Captain, Chief Mate, Chief and Second Engineers and two cadets were British. Even the cargo she could carry was International. Tom didn't bother mentioning this to Mr Dudley though.

"We cannot just go into the territorial waters of another country, certainly not without stirring off a lot of controversy in the rest of the world, as well as the left wing here in Britain." Mr Dudley said, aware both men were looking at him critically

"Mr Dudley" The chairman countered, "your department will have far more criticism from the huge moderate population of this country if you don't do something decisive. Especially if the serious newspapers take you on."

The Ministry man left then, with a muttered promise of 'We'll see, we'll see' to pacify relations with the Chairman. Mr Harding and Tom then discussed what was happening on the Chesham and whether Turner had a hand in it. The ship was obviously going to be loaded with Crude and then what? Were they going to sail her away to somewhere? What was going to happen to Turner then?

Tom had another look at the photos taken by the warship's helicopter and was puzzled by the ship's position. She was where he'd expected her to be, but facing a in a Southerly direction instead of Northerly. She must have turned round when she was light ship, which made sense.

* * * * *

Back in his office, Tom phoned Angela and told her that things were starting to happen. He couldn't tell her exactly what, since Dudley had bound them to secrecy, although he did go as far as to say the *Loch Kelliesport* was standing by there, ready to intervene if necessary.

"That's good," she said, "I'll tell Sonia, she's still here with me, although she going to spend few days with Jack's parents in Romford tomorrow. Mum and the kids are going to Whipsnade Zoo next weekend with my sister and her children."

"Why don't you go with them?" Tom asked. He was still worried about the situation in Puntland.

"No, she's got three kids, plus my two, I just couldn't face it. Anyway, I'm still working out what to do about Jim and the Indian woman when he comes back. What am I going to do about it? Confess my own sins with you and Jack and call it quits? Both Jim's boss and his best friend?" She said. The thought of her confessing brought Tom out in a cold sweat.

"If you and Jim split up, I'll be there for you. Don't forget that!" He managed to say.

"It's nice of you to say that. You didn't have to, you know. It was I who got into your bed that morning!" She said, her voice sounding demure. "I was drunk at the time."

"I know you were, but you'd sobered up by then. But that doesn't excuse me, does it? I've been wanting you for weeks, months in fact. Right back to the time in April when we were in the restaurant. Remember? You me, Jack and Sonia; your uncle was there as well. I was comparing you and Sonia and you won." Tom said.

"You mean to say you were sitting there, eating your Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding, wondering if I better in bed than Sonia?" She exclaimed laughing. "Sonia's the sex symbol, not me!"

“On the surface, yes maybe. But somehow you seemed to eclipse her. Even though you were obviously distressed at the time.”

“Come off it Tom! I suppose I shouldn’t have kept phoning you as much as I did. I should have been outraged at your Chairman’s innuendos about the two of us, not treated it as a joke.” She said, then paused, made up her mind and continued:

“Remember the first time we met? At the Isle of Grain some years ago, when I came down to be with Jim? And again at Rotterdam? You know! The time your wife caught you looking at my cleavage?” She said laughing. “Right Tom. Are you ready for a whole weekend with me? I’m free from the ninth to eleventh when Mum and the kids will be at Whipsnade with my sister. Any offers? A nice cuddly weekend in a hotel somewhere?”

Tom gasped, both shocked at the invitation and excited by it. He knew he ought to refuse, he desperately *wanted* to refuse but couldn’t. There was a long pause and she started laughing.

“No? Never mind then, I’ll settle down with a good book

and be a good girl.” Angela said with a rising inflexion on the last few words, making the whole phrase a question. The pause lengthened, by this time Tom was sweating. She laughed and said:

“Next weekend sounds good to you then, does it? OK, why the hell not? Friday 1830 at Liverpool St. Station. Be there!” She said quietly and put the phone down.

Tom went hot and cold all over and very nearly phoned back with an indignant refusal; but knew he’d be there, waiting to make love to the wife of one his Officers!

At Chelmsford, Angela put the phone down with a grin and saw Sonia looking her shocked, having overheard some of the conversation. She wondered how long she’d been there and hoped she hadn’t heard the reference to Jack. She

wondered why she so enjoyed tempting poor Tom. Maybe because he was the Boss man, employing both Jim and Jack.

She wanted no more of Jack, Jim was having it away with that Indian woman, probably has been for months and probably still is. He might never come home. Why should she wait for him? Why not please her Mum and have a weekend with Tom?

No way did she want to spend a solitary weekend at home, knowing her husband was in the arms of another woman. Nor did she want to go to her sister. She felt the need for male company and Tom would do. As for sex, that had been good with Tom, far better than she'd expected. Be nice if they went for a ride in his car, out into the country somewhere. She'd suggest it.

It was her mother's suggestion that she should try Tom, just as it had been when she'd pushed Jack her way. 'OK Mum' she thought, 'I've had Jack and now it's Tom's turn. And after Tom, what?' Got any other ideas?

Sonia, who'd been silent until then suddenly spoke to Angela, sounding shocked:

"You are going to spend a whole weekend with Captain Tom? But you know Jim is still alive, don't you? And what

was that about Jack? What sins were you referring to?"

"I was talking about Jack and I some twenty years ago, when we nearly made love. I was fifteen and he seventeen. It was my sister that stopped us in time." Angela replied, thinking quickly.

"You knew each other intimately twenty years ago? Nobody's told me! How dare you refer to me as a sex symbol. I have only made love to one man – and that man is Jack, only Jack. Please drive me to the station now.

Sonia was perturbed at the way Angela had tempted Captain Murchison over the phone. Had she tempted her

Jack that way as well? Would Jack have succumbed? She wasn't at all sure.

Chapter 48 - Indian Ocean - October 2nd to 5th

“Wow! That’s a relief getting clear of the Gulf of Aden! We can take it easy a bit now, can't we? No more doubled watches!” The Chief Officer of the ***Chesham*** asked Jack just before dawn.

“I’ll be writing up the Night Orders telling the Watch Keeping Officers to be even ***more*** vigilant now” Jack replied angrily. “We're clear of ***that*** stretch of water yes, but there hasn't been a hijack in the Gulf of Aden since July. The pirates are now hijacking ships in the Indian Ocean, sometimes close to the Seychelles. You should ***know*** that if you’ve been reading the reports coming in.” Jack had stated angrily, then continued:

“As far as I'm concerned we're still in danger. Pass it on to the other officers and lookouts. No way am I going to stop the doubled watches.” Jack replied, annoyed at the complacency implicit in his Chief Mate's remark. 'God help us if they all think like that' he thought.

Since leaving the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, he had taken the ship through the *International Recommended Transit Corridor*; then followed the Omani coast. Soon he would have to alter course to the South East towards the Seychelles, then the Maldives and Dondra Head, the Southern tip of Sri Lanka. From there, he would steer almost due East, directly for Pulu We; the island at the Northern tip of Sumatra.

Then into the Malacca Straits, passing through the narrows at One Fathom Bank, and on to Singapore; where

they would load AvGas and MoGas at Pulu Bukum for Japan. He had been Captain for six months now, after taking over from Captain Wilkinson in Vancouver and enjoying some leave between ships.

Once clear of the Somali pirates, he would have to prepare his ship against pirate attacks in the Malacca and Singapore Straits. He remembered Jim telling him about the time he was on a Kuwaiti ship attacked by pirates once they had cleared the Straits. Three men had come over the stern, forced Jim and the Captain to open the safe, tied them up and escaped with over \$9,000. 'What a life', he thought dismally.

He was dead tired, having stayed on the bridge since his conversation with Tom before the Straits of Bab el Mandeb. Three full days without sleep, apart from an occasional catnap in the Pilot's Chair. He went down to his cabin for a toasted egg sandwich and cup of coffee, swore bitterly when he realised the newly signed-on Filipino steward had added sliced gherkins to the sandwich, which Jack had to carefully pick out and throw away.

Jack reread the letter he'd received from Angela at Porta Marghera stating that, although she'd thoroughly enjoyed the two weekends with him, the affair between them had finished; they could remain friends but she would no longer have sex with him. She now believed it possible that Jim was alive and she was going to wait for him. It would be better all-round if he, Jack, stuck to Sonia in future. Luckily Sonia had not been aboard when the letter arrived, or else all hell would have broken loose.

Jack being Jack, felt sure Angela was bluffing and only needed a phone call to change her mind. They'd both been sure that Jim was dead and he wondered why she now felt he could be alive. She hadn't elaborated on that in her letter, so he dismissed it as a guilt feeling on her part. Or perhaps she needed to know his intentions concerning Sonia. He'd

contact her by Satellite phone before Singapore and find out.

He fell fast asleep in his chair. Not even the steward taking the dishes away woke him up. The Chief Mate on the bridge, nursing his injured pride over the abrupt answer he'd received from Jack, did not phone down either.

The alarm sounded stridently. At the same time Jack heard the rat a tap of bullets striking a bulkhead somewhere on the accommodation, followed by the distinctive sound of broken glass.

He raced to the bridge to find what he'd been dreading, a pirate boat full of armed men, about half a mile away, pointing an assortment of weapons at the bridge. A rocket propelled grenade passed over the ship between the bridge and the foremast, exploding in the sea. Jack went to the VHF and made a 'Mayday' call, hoping to alert a near-by Warship.

Radio Officers were nearly an extinct breed now. Since both senior officers were trained to do the job, Jack swore at the Chief Mate and ordered him to activate the radio and send an SOS, although he doubted there would be sufficient time. He switched on the AIS Automated Identity System, so the Navy could follow them and then started to turn the ship towards the pirate in an attempt to ram them – or at least to confuse them. But it was far too late.

All this was happening simultaneously or nearly so. The Pirate boat had already put a skiff in the water, which even then was coming alongside, easily keeping up with the ship's speed. The pirate skiff crunched alongside, put up a couple of ladders and several pirates swarmed aboard. Jack and his crew could only watch helplessly. They made straight for the Bridge, Radio Room and Engine Room, taking control.

Herding Officers and crew into the crew mess room, their mobile telephones were confiscated. The Chief Pirate and two others appeared on the bridge and told Jack to steer

directly to Eyl and anchor there. Jack worked out the ETA at Eyl would be about 1000 on the fourth.

The pirates consolidated their hold on the ship, collecting in any mobile telephones previously missed or hidden. They locked the Radio Room and destroyed the only computer used by the crew for contact with their families. Gathering all the officers and crew in the Crew mess, The Chief Pirate told them:

“You are all hostages now; you and your ship will only be released when the ransom is paid. Until then, carry on as normal and do not make any moves to retake the ship. We have guns and we are not afraid to use them.”

What Jack did not know, was that his ship had been taken due to her size, her destination and consequently the amount of Bunkers she would have. Malik had asked contacts in the UK to look out for tankers of 35,000 tonnes deadweight sailing in ballast to anywhere East of Suez or to ports in Southern Africa.

In most Companies, there is often an enthusiastic junior employee, who sees no harm in talking about his job. There was no secrecy anyway, the Pirates could even buy a copy of Lloyd’s List, although they usually only list the tankers they know about. In fact the *Chesham* had been listed.

Malik, the eldest son of Hassan, had difficulty finding tankers in ballast that were *not* bound for the Arabian Gulf. He eventually found two, both sailing from Southern Europe, both bound for Singapore to load products on the same day.

One had sailed from Piraeus in Greece, the other from Porto Marghera in Italy. Neither ship had employed Security Guards to ride shot-gun and were the only vessels available within the time limit set by Hassan. Contacts in Ismailia confirmed that both had arrived and made the transit. Both ships had sufficient bunkers to reach Singapore plus the usual five days reserve.

* * * * *

Sailing from Port Suez, Jack had noticed plenty of small fishing boats but took no notice, apart from having to avoid one that got too close. Sailing down through the Gulf of Suez, that same fishing boat trailed astern, unnoticed. Once clear of the Gulf and well into the Red Sea she'd dropped back out of sight, following the *Chesham* on radar and AIS, until Jack switched it off before passing through the Bab el Mandeb Straits.

It was too late, off Djibouti; a genuine Somali fishing boat took over from the Egyptian one, remaining in sight visually. Hassan's armed Pirate boat relieved the boat from Djibouti as the ship was passing north of Bossasso. When Jack altered course to the South East, the pirates had waited for a moonless night and then increased speed keeping astern of the *Chesham*.

At daylight, the pirate boat increased speed again and moved up to a position half a mile on the *Chesham's* port quarter. Jack was asleep in his cabin. The Chief Mate, still nursing his grudge on the bridge, had neglected to keep a visual or radar look out. He had, stupidly and against express orders, even sent one Filipino Look Out down to make some tea and toast for him. The other lookout was told to tidy up the wheelhouse. So much for doubled lookouts! Finally the Chief Mate saw the pirate boat and sounded the alarm.

One of the pirates fired an Automatic weapon at the Engineer Officers bulkhead, smashing one of the windows. Jack raced to the bridge and started turning the ship to port, which did alarm the pirates, but the Pirate at the helm was not confused. One of the pirates fired a rocket propelled grenade across the deck of the *Chesham* and into the sea the other side, taking good care not to hit any part of the ship. They went alongside then and successfully boarded. A very tidy operation.

After threatening all the Officers and crew, the senior pirate introduced himself as Malik and followed Jack into his cabin, and asked him:

“Are your cargo lines twelve inch?” Jack was astounded by the unexpectedness of the question? He considered refusing to answer, but what good would that do? A sort of wartime ‘Name Rank and Number only’ refusal to answer. Hell, they had only to look at the plans stuck up on the bulkhead outside his office to see the answer for themselves.

“No, nothing that size into the cargo tanks. They are all 350 millimetres or 14 inch diameter. The only 12 inch line goes straight to the fuel oil bunker tanks.” Jack replied.

“Do you have any means of cross-connecting the bunker line to the cargo line or lines? Don’t you have a spool piece or something for that purpose?” Malik insisted.

He obviously knew something about tankers and their line

Systems and connections.

“For what purpose?” Jack asked. He was completely taken aback by these questions.

“For using the twelve inch line to load Crude Oil into your cargo tanks?”

“Crude Oil!” Jack shouted. “Load Crude Oil, you must be out of your mind.” He was unable to believe his ears.

Jack wondered briefly if it was in fact he, himself, who was going mad. Crude? Here in Somalia? The ship had been attacked and taken over by armed pirates, presumably for ransom. OK so far! But now they were sitting in his cabin discussing cargo pipelines and connections. As if the ship was in Mina al Ahmadi discussing a normal loading operation with the Loading Master. Malik stared at Jack until he’d answered the question:

“We don’t need a spool piece to do that” Jack said eventually, “I am sure we have a twelve to fourteen inch reducer on the ship somewhere. What cargo are you talking

about? Where is it going to be loaded? Where is it for? Who is it for?"

Jack silently cursed himself. Why tell the man about the reducers? Why not let him find out for himself? Although it seemed the man knew something about tankers since he'd been asking about spool pieces. At least one existed on the *Chesham* but only a twenty-four to thirty-six inch one in the pumphoom for joining the cargo line to the permanent ballast line in an emergency.

"Thank you Captain, for answering my question. You will be told later what will happen to you and your ship."

"If you're thinking of putting explosives of some sort into the tanks and blowing the ship up in New York or somewhere, then do not expect any cooperation from myself nor my crew."

Malik unexpectedly laughed and said: "Why is it always New York that is considered a worthy target for suicide ships? No Captain, we are pirates, not terrorists; although you may find the distinction a little hard to believe at present. I can assure you that we have no plans to destroy part of that country whose President is the same colour as us. Satisfied Captain?"

Jack took the ship to a couple of miles off Eyl and anchored her there just after noon on the fourth of October. A fishing boat immediately set out from the shore with more heavily armed men, who came aboard and relieved the original pirate gang. A bulging suitcase was handed over and the original pirates went ashore, having done their job; some of them having bulging suitcases themselves, after ransacking some crew cabins before leaving.

The newcomers were Malik's key men, hard as nails and totally different from the pirates they relieved. They were sober, not excitable and with no evidence of drugs. Ignoring the crew, they reported to Malik, who briefed them and allocated their areas to guard as well as organising a shift

system. Gathering his Officers and senior ratings later in the Smoke-room, Jack told them:

“We’re probably going to be here for several months before the ransom is paid by the Company. Right then, we’ve got to keep the crew, and ourselves, occupied all that time. Since there’ll be no chance of contacting wives and girlfriends, it’s going to be difficult to keep the morale up. But we’ve got to try and keep on trying. We can have horse race meetings each weekend, parties in the smoke-room twice a week. Competitions. Deck golf, even deck cricket. As far as the work is concerned; carry on, on a strict Nine to Five basis. You’ve got a unit to change sometime, haven’t you Chief?”

“Yes, but first of all, we’ve got to strip down the Condensers and clean them. I’ll start tomorrow; it’ll help to keep the lad’s minds off the present situation.”

“Don’t any of you get any stupid ideas about taking the ship back.” Jack continued. “This new crowd who have just joined look far more murderous than the ones they took over from. We’re not living an adventure story nor a Hollywood movie, so let’s have no stupid heroics. Don’t run away with the idea that these pirates are just cowboys because they are black. They seem to be highly experienced, competent men.”

“It’s strange,” the Third Engineer cut in, “I was on the *Amersham* with Jim Turner and Captain Forbes when we took on a full Somali crew, about ten years back. They were good sailors but this lot seem totally different. Incidentally, thanks for stopping my wife from joining.”

“Right then” Jack continued. “I want this morale business done properly, well organised and efficient. For instance, the Chief Mate here can organise the main deck for the deck sports. Use white paint to mark out a golf course right round the main deck; with the tank coamings and PV lines as obstacles.

“Yes all right,” the Chief Mate replied sulkily. “I’ll get one of the cadets to do it.”

“You’ll do the bloody job yourself, Mister Caldwell.” Jack retorted, thoroughly angry. “I need the cadets for other things. Also mark out a cricket pitch on the Helicopter landing area, being the only space large enough without obstacles. The Second Engineer can organise the golf mallets, as well as the cricket stumps, bats and balls. I think the horse racing circuit needs repairing too; please see to that as well, also one of the dice is missing, so you can make another one.” Jack said firmly, paused then continued.

“The Second Mate and Third Engineer can organise evening competitions in the Officers’ Smoke room or Crew Mess room. All the officers can think up card or word games and suggest them to the organisers. For competitions such as darts, choose team leaders other than myself and the Chief Engineer. We’ll just be part of the teams. All agreed?” Jack was glad he hadn’t brought Sonia with him. He could imagine the state she’d be in now, like a prowling tigress protecting her young. God help poor old Tom Murchison, dealing with both Angela *and* Sonia! He then relapsed into gloom, thinking how he could have avoided the pirates.

The fault was the Chief Mate’s but the responsibility was his alone. Had he been on the bridge, he could have used the practised anti-pirate procedures. The Chief Mate should have done that anyway, even in Jack’s absence, instead of sulking like some spoilt kid until it was too late. He doubted they would have worked anyway. Having answered a couple of questions, he went on to say:

“The pirate chief has told me that we are going to load Crude Oil. No mention of where or when or even how. I told him we would never cooperate. As far as I know, no other ship taken by the pirates here has ever faced anything like this before. The men now aboard do not appear to be a Pirate gang, like those that first captured us. By the look of them, I reckon they are far more dangerous than the real

pirates were; they look to be right hard buggers. At the same time, they seem to be far more organised, less volatile and certainly more disciplined than the original pirates.”

Jack then turned to his Chief Mate, one of the few British Officers left in the Company. Jack had experienced problems with the man from the day he’d joined. Not drink problems, luckily, more like jealousy since he’d been passed over for promotion by Tom Murchison. Nigel Caldwell was older than Jack and convinced he should have been in command. He could do his job OK but was constantly sullen and uncooperative.

“I want you and another Officer to go round the cabins and collect up all the beer and spirits; I don’t want these Hard Men to get hold of any drink. The last thing we need are drunken heavily armed Somalis running around. I’m not all that sure of some of our own crew either in that respect.”

He turned to the Chief Engineer and said,

“The Filipinos are normally good with booze, but once boredom sets in, even they might start getting out of hand. Don’t go keeping any bottles for yourself either.” The Chief Mate protested but eventually obeyed the order.”

* * * * *

Jack remembered Tom telling him about a time when he, Tom, had been stranded at Beirut airport in January 1992 during one of their civil wars. The transit lounge was full of people waiting for flights, most of which had been cancelled. Drunk, heavily armed Swedish peacekeeping soldiers were staggering round the lounge looking for trouble. A word, or even a look, was likely to cause a clenched fist to be slammed into faces.

The atmosphere was electric with tension and downright fear. Tom had been in the filthy toilet when his flight was called, running back to the desk, he was told it was too late.

Luckily he'd had enough dollars to bribe his way aboard to the seat allocated to him.

Alone in his cabin that evening, Jack thought over the events of the last two days; his row with the Chief Officer; the hi-jacking; the arrival of the new gang of Somalis to replace the original pirates; the strange conversation with the one who seemed to be the boss man and finally being told the ship was going to load Crude.

The latter seemed to make no sense at all. Where could they load Crude Oil? For what purpose? To take where? He also felt guilty about letting Captain Murchison down by allowing the ship to be taken so easily.

He then started thinking about Sonia and her probable reaction to the news of the hijacking. She was probably screaming down the telephone to Tom at this very moment, he thought. Or even to both the British and Italian governments. What a situation, both Jim and he hijacked, Jim kidnapped and probably long dead, himself safe so far, but for how long?

Sonia would contact Angela and then what? Commiserate together? She'd be making Tom's life hell, probably ganging up with Angela to form an action committee.

Sitting down, he thought about his life in Italy with Sonia. It was hectic and enjoyable with a fabulous wife, living in a good flat overlooking the Adriatic. Luckily he liked the Italian pasta food. Monfalcone was a shipyard town, the whole area thinking and breathing ships, handily situated almost halfway between Venice and Trieste.

Climate wise, there were hot dry summers and cold winters with the Bora wind whistling down from the mountains. Sometimes in winter it was a "Black Bora," piercingly cold with driving rain from a black threatening sky.

Why, he asked himself, was he taking opportunities to sleep with Angela when he had that lovely sexy Sonia all to

himself? He supposed Angela had always attracted him – having very nearly made love to her when he was seventeen, interrupted by her sister. Upon returning from his first trip, she'd gone and found another boy-friend. He'd been hurt and hadn't tried to push his way in, which, with hindsight, he realised he should have done.

Then she'd married Jim and he married Sonia, who was all he could ask for in a wife, spoke perfect English, knew ships, had a buoyant personality and was superb in bed. Why bother with Angela then? She was not as good looking as Sonia, but she had a sort of magnetic pull about her.

True, Sonia loved showing him off to her friends, organising evenings in coffee bars, or beach parties in the summer. But they were all so very young, so was Sonia. Sometimes in their company, he felt like an elderly uncle. They were polite to him; these young Italians, most spoke English in varying degrees – but they were so young! Angrily, he balled up Angela's letter and tossed it away.

Chapter 49 – Jim Takes Over – October 3rd

Back at the lagoon, Jim and his gang had drilled a hole with a jack hammer on the island's Northern and Southern extremities, putting in stout wooden posts and embedding them with concrete. They were working full time now, Ramadan having ended with the celebration of Eid El Fitr some twelve days previously.

They were just starting to dig a third hole on the mainland shore when Sophia arrived, saying that Hassan wanted to see Jim and Yusuf right away. Jim told Ahmed and Abdullah to carry on with the hole, then dig another one at the spot already picked out and start putting the posts in.

“Malik captured a tanker two days ago, which seems to be the right size, and should be anchoring off Eyl now. You

are to go down there now and go aboard at gun point, as we agreed. Yusuf here will be one of your guards. Malik will take you to the Captain and then you will bring the tanker up here and anchor her in the *Deep*. I hope, for your sake, the soundings and buoyage have been done carefully.” Hassan demanded, after the two men had arrived.

“Hey, wait a minute, Hassan.” Jim said abruptly. “I’m going to need two days minimum to explain what’s going on. I’ve got to convince the Captain to give me his ship. He is in command and hasn’t achieved that position just by obeying anyone who walks aboard and gives orders. Then he must study my chart until he knows it as well as I do. We’ve got to discuss getting the ship through the southern channel, then consider ways of turning her round, once loaded.”

“Jim, we’ve got the guns, plenty of them. If he doesn’t obey, then we’ll start executing his more expendable men, one man each hour until he capitulates.”

“No Hassan, that’s not the way to go about it, nor am I going to stand by while you murder seamen, expendable or not. Killing will solve nothing. If you do that, then either myself or the Captain will drive that ship hard aground in the channel at full speed and block your only entrance, then try to get away by lifeboat.” Jim said almost snarling.

“My men aboard will stop you!” Hassan replied, his face angrier than Jim had ever seen it.

“We’ve been through all this before! Your men won’t realise what’s happening until it’s too late and the shock will disorient them. By the time they realise what’s happened, we’ll be away in the lifeboats and you’ll be left with a blocked lagoon.” Jim said angrily, knowing what he’d just said was well-nigh impossible. He continued:

“You’ve already agreed I can go aboard as a prisoner under guard, why try to turn me into a killer, murdering Merchant Seamen.” Jim was sweating freely, determined to win this last phase.

“Well. What else do you suggest then?” Hassan asked, appearing to give in.

“Take me aboard as a captive, which I am, and treat me as one. I need to explain what you want to do and why; also to explain that, despite the guns, this is basically a peaceful kind of operation. A way to demonstrate that Somalia has Crude Oil, which can be exploited for the good of this poor failed country.” Tom stated then went on to say:

“Look Hassan, I’ve got to have the ship’s cooperation. Or else I’ll be ringing the Engine Room telegraph with nothing happening and giving helm orders which are ignored. I’ll be acting as a pilot, but the Captain will be operating his ship.” Jim paused, hoping he’d convinced Hassan. Then he continued:

“For this, I will need two days and with only the minimum people on board carrying guns. The Captain must be made to realise his ship is an *experiment* to load Crude Oil from Somalia for the *benefit* of Somalia; and that nobody is going to be killed or hurt.”

“I’ll take the Captain and Chief Engineer off and hold them hostages against the crew’s good behaviour?” Hassan Replied, his face becoming livid.

“You’re talking about the two men who run the ship. If we need to take anybody off and if she’s carrying cadets, then take them off, but don’t hurt them at all. They can come here at the big house where Sophia and Samira can look after them. They are not needed for operating the ship and will be far more valuable as hostages than Filipino Crew men, or even the Officers.” Jim argued. He was exhausted, hoping he’d convinced the man.

He didn’t like the idea of abducting two youngsters, but it seemed to be the only solution – certain they would be well looked after by the two women. Once again, Kassim broke in, evidently on Jim’s side. Finally Hassan said.

“OK Jim. Two days and that’s all, if it doesn’t work out as you say, then we start the executions, with you choosing who to execute.”

“No, you’ll have to kill me before I do that!” Jim said, meaning it.

“Go down there now, under guard, and bring that ship up into the lagoon and load her with a cargo of Crude oil, with the two cadets as hostages against your non-compliance. Or as hostages against your inability to convince the ship’s Captain and crew. The name of the ship is the *Chesham*.” Hassan stated in a tone that brooked no more arguments.

“The *Chesham*!! Oh Jesus!!” Jim cried, horrified. “Not the *Chesham* of all bloody ships. Don’t you realise she’s one of my Company’s ships? No way can I go on board her pretending to have been a shackled prisoner all these months. I probably know the Captain and most of the officers and they know me. This is going to be a fucking disaster for me!”

Jim was spluttering by this time, almost shocked out of his mind.

“Do you know the ship then; have you sailed on her before as Chief Officer?” Hassan asked, smiling.

“Yes, Many times, and her sister ship, the *Amersham*” Jim answered.

He was getting desperate now, shaken by the thought of facing men he’d sailed with; had laughed and joked with and now convincing them to load a cargo of Crude.

“Good, you will remember how she sails and manoeuvres. Right, You, Yusuf and two others will go down to Eyl by car and go aboard, with you at gunpoint. Malik is already there and will present you to the Captain. You will bring then the ship up here with no further delay.

“OK, I’ll do my best, but under protest.” Jim said forcefully, but inadequately; having no-one to protest to. Changing the subject he continued:

“Have you heard any more about what’s happening in Gorawe? Will there be any attempt to send their militia here? Or a militia from other clan chiefs?”

“Don’t worry, Jim, the militia at Gorawe can only be small and badly equipped. I have a tribal army myself, trained and equipped, in a camp not far away, who will be more than a match for anything the provisional Government can send to invade us. Several of them are guarding the pipeline and rig now.” Hassan said, his temper fading.

‘God help us,’ thought Jim, ‘where the hell has he got an army from?’ He hoped to God the whole thing would not degenerate into a fire fight between two amateur armies with all the latest modern weapons. The arms, he assumed, were by courtesy of that Ugandan General, for which Sophia had been an instrumental part of the negotiations. Hurriedly, he banished that thought from his mind and concentrated on the discussion with Hassan.

“You’re full of surprises, Hassan; a secret army, no less. Are they local or mercenaries? No, don’t answer that! Samira and Sophia will be staying here to look after the hostages. Please make sure that those two posts on the shore line are completed and well cemented in. I’m going to need them for turning the ship round.” Tom said, frowning.

Sophia, who’d been listening, suddenly spoke up, saying indignantly: “Staying here? Me? I’m coming down to the ship with you, Jim. Why waste two or more days with you on the ship and me here? The ship’s got beds hasn’t it?”

She laughed when she saw the shocked expression on Jim’s face. It was bad enough going aboard the ship where he probably knew most of the Officers – but accompanied by his sleep-in mistress as well, it’s just wasn’t possible. Hassan laughed and vetoed the idea anyway. Sophia muttered mutinously for a good five minutes.

Jim was not looking forward to re-joining his old ship, as it were and wondered who the Captain was. Probably Captain Wilkinson, who should have left the *Amersham* by

now and finished his leave. Maybe with Jack Knowles as his Chief Mate, although he was stemmed for the *West Wycombe* as far as he could remember, unless everything had changed. That is one advantage of just three tankers and a limited amount of officers qualified to man them. You could often see into the future and judge who was likely to be where. Naturally, he knew old Frank Wilkinson, a Captain in his late fifties and a strict disciplinarian.

Jim didn't relish taking over his ship and expected a lot of protests, especially when the Old Man saw the home made chart of the lagoon and the deep water anchorage. He'd go hopping mad when he saw the amateurish job he'd done there. Empty petrol drums for buoys, stakes stuck in the mud! And as for turning the ship round afterwards, using four posts stuck in concrete, the old bugger would go spare! Not to mention the possibility of a minor war going on between rival tribes equipped with all the latest modern weapons.

He was far more concerned about the reaction from Captain Wilkinson when he walked aboard, than he was about the possibility of refusing Hassan.

Basically, what difference did it make taking over one of his own Company ships rather than a ship of a different nationality? Even though he was guarded and brought aboard at gunpoint, he'd have more of a job convincing his own previous shipmates. Especially if they'd sailed together in the past – which was quite likely. They might even laugh at his newly attained rank of Pilot/Loading Master in an unknown lagoon!

On the other hand, had it been a Russian or German ship he was to take over, he realised the constant menace of guns would have been necessary; hoping the crew wouldn't prove to be so stubborn, that guns would probably be used with resulting fatalities.

Thirdly, if she was an old Flag of Convenience rust bucket like the *Dawn Splendour*, with Officers and crew

who didn't give a bugger anyway, he'd probably be home and dry.

Well, it had turned out to be the ***Chesham***, very likely with old Frankie Wilkinson in command. Perhaps he wouldn't be recognised, bearded and wearing his Kheffiyah and white robe.

Hassan had already told Jim that he and Sophia could sail out with the ship when she finally sailed - to wherever she might be bound. That would also be a shock for old Frank Wilkinson, a moralist if ever there was one. It would soon be the latest Company gossip as well, no keeping it from Angela in these circumstances. What a mess this all was. Why, in God's Name, did they have to go and choose the ***Chesham*** of all bloody ships?

Nobody blindfolded Jim this time for the trip back to Eyl, and he saw what a desolate country it is.

"How long before the ship is back in the lagoon again?" Yusuf was sitting next to Jim asked.

"Probably about two or three days, why?" Jim replied, having a pretty good idea of the man's next words.

"Two three days without wives! My wife and your Sophia back there and us here? You get the ship back up as fast as you can, OK?" Yusuf said, laughing.

At Eyl, the first ship he saw was the ***Dawn Splendour***, the ship he's been abducted from all those months ago. She was still anchored there, rustier than ever; evidently those evaporators must still be working. 'How many months now,' he asked himself. 'Let's see, it was early April when the pirates had clambered aboard, it's now October, that's six whole months!' Despite himself, he felt a dash of pity for the old Polish Captain, the two Syrian Officers and above all, for the Filipino crew. He resisted the temptation to wave as they passed astern of her.

He then picked out the ***Chesham*** gracefully swinging to her anchor among all the other ships waiting for their ransoms to be paid. He was very nervous on the boat trip

out, imagining the shock on old Wilkinson's face when he realised who he was! He even wondered if the 'Old Man' would be fooled by his coming aboard with a gun at the back of his neck.

The last time he'd sailed with old Frank Wilkinson, it had been very much a Master and Mate situation. He'd never called Captain Wilkinson 'Frank' to his face and he'd always been addressed as 'Mister Mate' or Mr Turner. With Tom Murchison now, when he'd been Captain, things had been far different, but the ship run just as efficiently.

Chapter 50 – The Discussion – October 3rd.

On board the *Chesham*, Jack was looking out of his forward facing window and saw Malik meeting four men at the gangway. One an Arab, dressed in a djeballa with a Kheffiyah on his head was being pushed forward by a Somali man with a gun, the barrel of which was only inches from the Arab's back. The three of them disappeared into the accommodation. Jack heard the rattle as the lift doors opened in the alleyway near his cabin.

Malik, having met Jim at the accommodation ladder, escorted him to the Captain's cabin, where the two old friends stared at each other, shocked speechless!

Jack collapsed on to an easy chair, disbelief written all over his face, but it was Jim Turner who was the first to recover his wits.

“For Christ's Sake, Jack, what the hell are you doing here in command? I felt sure it would be old Frank Wilkinson. I'm glad it's you though.”

“Jim!” Yelled Jack astounded. “It *is* you under that beard, isn't it? We all thought you'd been killed months ago! Have you been a prisoner ashore here since last April? What on earth are you doing dressed like an Arab? Why

have they brought you aboard at gun point? By Christ, it's bad enough being captured by pirates without being faced with ghosts as well." Jack was in shock, blabbering all these questions in gasps.

"When they told me it was the *Chesham* I thought Captain Wilkinson would be here. When did you get your command? Oh forget that, when did you last see Angela? How is she coping? Is the Company still paying my salary into the bank? And the children; how are they and what have they been told? I've been worried sick about what's happening at home." Excitedly, Jim was also pouring out questions.

Malik interrupted the talk saying: "You two know each other? Well, you will have plenty of time to compare notes later. I want this ship moving by tomorrow morning, he knows where to," Malik said, indicating Jim with his AK47, a gun Jim was beginning to recognise. Malik turned to Jack saying:

"Captain, order your Chief Engineer to have the engines ready tomorrow morning at high tide. Turner here will show you the charts tonight; so you can both discuss the route together. This man will stay here guarding you, so don't think about discussing things like taking the ship over or escaping." He said, indicating Yusuf. "He understands English?"

Malik left, the two men stared at each other, scarcely able to believe their eyes. They had sailed together as Apprentices on the old *Beaconsfield*; rented the flat at Kilburn together with two others when up for their Master's ticket. Jim had married an old childhood friend of Jack and they'd kept in touch.

"Angela's coping OK; the Company halved your salary for a couple of months then probably stopped it entirely a month or so ago, despite Tom Murchison's best efforts on your behalf. The children are well, but I don't know what

Angela has told them. Her mother took them to Canada for ten days recently.” Jack said, answering Jim’s question.

“Has she sold the house? Does she think I’m still alive?” Jim persisted.

“She was certain you were alive at first, but not now, not after all this time. She is still living in your house and the Union is helping her as far as possible. Tom thought you were still alive though, since he couldn't see any reason to take you ashore just to kill you. Now please tell me what's going on? Why are we sailing tomorrow and where to?”

“But what about the mortgage repayments?” Jim’s head was bursting with questions.

“I’m not quite sure, but I believe the Building Society has

frozen your repayments for a while at her request, probably backed up by the lawyers from Nautilus. Now tell me what the... what’s happening here?”

He was uneasy with Jim, thinking back to his affairs with Angela. For the first time, he realised that, not only had he betrayed Sonia, but had cuckolded Jim as well, three times and counting! No four times! Although, in fairness to himself, he’d thought Angela was a widow. Jim cleared his throat and said;

“First of all, Jack, I am a captive and have been held here for so many months I've lost count of them. I have been scared shitless into working for them, but for reasons that will astonish you as they did me. Get it into your head Jack, that these men are not terrorists, at least not in the manner of Al Qaeda. Nor are they Pirates. The Chief here on board is the son of a Warlord who wants some territory for himself. Creating a mini state as it were, within the state of Puntland. The Crude Oil you are going to load comes into the equation.”

“Who says I’m going to load a cargo of Crude?” Jack said loudly; belligerently.

“Don’t be stupid, Jack. It’s a question of either *Do it or Be Killed*. Here look at this.”

Unfolding his *Eastern Approaches to the Gulf of Aden* chart and smoothing it out, he pointed to an inland area, close to the Indian Ocean and continued:

“This is where we are sailing to” he said, his finger indicating an area on the chart. “Hold your breath, Jack. The chart is wrong. You see that tiny straight bit of coast there; there’s a sketch in the Pilot Book showing it as a high cliff with low-lying littoral either side of it. That cliff is in fact an island; the area inshore of it is now a lagoon, with entrance channels both sides of the island.” Jim told him.

“I don’t believe this!” Jack countered bluntly, his face a picture of doubt.

“Here, take a look at this land map of the area.” Jim said, unfolding it on the table. “OK, you see that high rectangular block of land there by the sea? Look closely at the contours and compare them with the picture of the cliff in the pilot book.”

“You’re telling me that cliff there is now an island?” Jack questioned doubtfully, his attitude full of disbelief.

“Yes, now listen carefully! The lagoon behind that island is not visible from the sea. Do you understand so far?” Jim asked.

“I understand what you are saying, but have great difficulty accepting that the chart is wrong and that nobody has corrected it, or even noticed it.” Jack said, shaking his head.

“There’s an explanation for that, which I’ll come to later.” Jim insisted, stroking his beard.

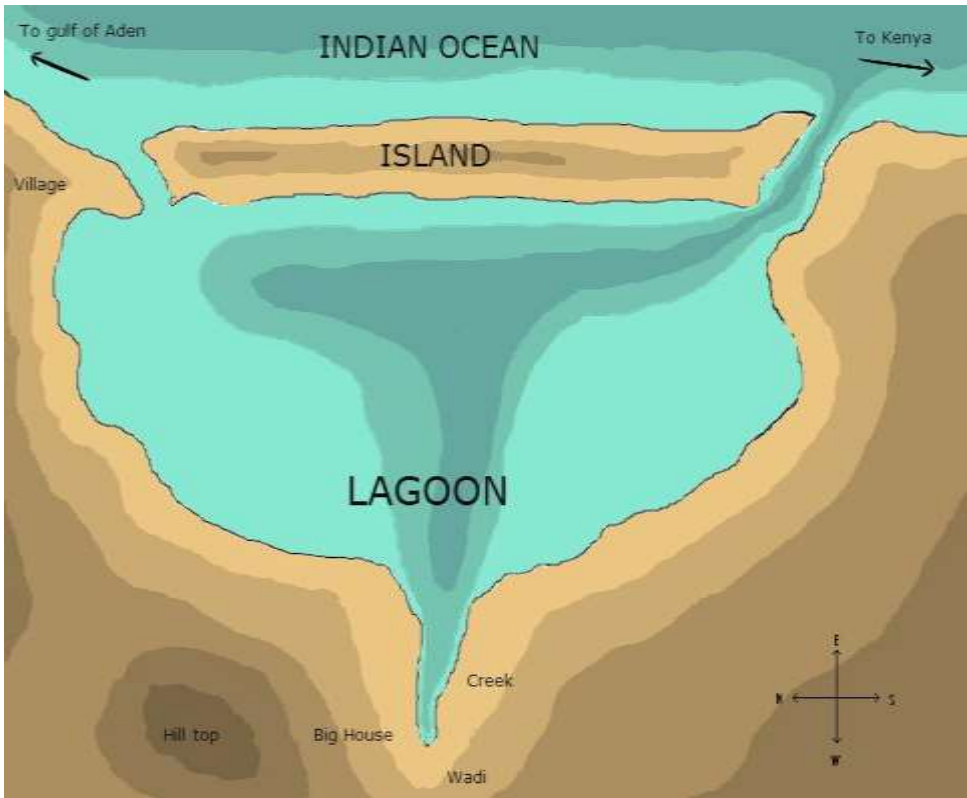
Jack phoned the bridge and asked the watch keeping officer to bring the same chart and Pilot Book down to his cabin. The Ukrainian Second Mate brought them down and returned to the bridge, puzzled. He thought he’d seen the Arab character sitting with his Captain before but couldn’t think where. Jim turned his chart over and displayed his

carefully drawn plan of the lagoon, the result of several months' hard work. Weighing the chart down with glasses and empty teacups, Jim continued:

"This, Jack, is what is really there. There's the island, it's almost a perfect rectangle with sheer sides and it compares to the land map I showed you. The area of sea hiding behind the Island, I've called a lagoon to differentiate it. This part of the lagoon here is a deep water anchorage with a channel leading to it from the South." Jim said, his forefinger tracing the channel from the Indian Ocean round the South of the island and into the *Deep*.

Jack looked at the map, doubt and even disbelief showing on his face. Comparing Jim's chart and Pilot Book to the ones brought down by the Second Mate; Jack protested:

***The Chart showing the Lagoon and its
Anchorage***



(A rough map – not to scale. The island is just over three miles in length. The distance between the village and the Big House – about two Kilometres. The Deep Blue water indicates depths of twelve metres or more; the medium blue water indicates depths from six to twelve metres; the light blue water indicates shallow depths from zero to six metres.)

“This is bloody incredible; do you honestly think I'm going to believe this load of poppycock; islands appearing out of the blue, with lagoons and channels. You must think I'm bloody daft.” Jack shouted.

“Believe me Jack. This all exists and this is where we're going to load a cargo of Somali Crude. For Christ's Sake

have a good look at my chart; I've spent bloody months surveying the whole area, sounding the depths and buoying it." Jim persisted, knowing he'd got to convince Jack.

"Load a cargo of Crude Oil? You mean there's Crude here in Somalia? Ready to be loaded aboard a ship and exported? You're out of your mind." Jack said forcefully.

"Right, let me continue, just concentrate on this chart I've made, OK? You can see the channel passes round the southern end of the island and then into the *Deep*. There is enough space to anchor a ship there, and certainly enough depth, which you can see from the soundings. *This* is where we're taking your ship to anchor."

"What's all this 'we' Jim? Are you actively working for these... these pirates? I saw they had a gun at your back, but somehow it doesn't seem very convincing. Have you taken up Piracy? Are they paying you for all this work that you have so obviously done for them? Have you stashed away a small fortune?" Jack demanded. He was staring hard at Jim as he said these words.

"Oh don't be bloody stupid, Jack! I'm a captive and was forced to work on this project. Paying me? What with, Somali shillings? Of course they're not paying me. I'm a captive here and if I hadn't agreed, I would have been dead long ago. The 'we' I referred to was you and me, Jack. Us two!" Jim replied vehemently.

"I'm not taking this ship anywhere at all; I'm going to wait here until the ransom is paid and I trust you'll join me in the refusal. If we both refuse, then there is nothing they can do."

"Except kill both of us and kidnap an Officer from another ship, which they've threatened me with a couple of times already. There are plenty of them out there at anchor, waiting for the ransoms to be paid. There's sure to be one of them who'd agree to do the job, even if only out of boredom! Look Jack, these people are completely ruthless.

Don't underestimate them. They have threatened to kill a crew member for each hour of refusal."

Yusuf, listening to all this, called Malik on his mobile phone. Malik arrived, his abnormally mild manner gone. Pulling a hand gun from his robe, he aimed at Jack's knee and said:

"Either you get this ship moving tomorrow morning, or I'll shoot and you'll be a cripple for the rest of your life. You have two Cadets on board; they will be taken ashore now."

He spoke rapidly to the guard outside; who nodded and left. Minutes later, there was some shouting. Scared young English voices pleading for help; scuffles as other crew members tried to help and were roughly pushed back. The atmosphere was tense and ugly.

Both Jack and Jim were shouting at Malik, who had his gun trained on Jack, Yusuf's gun on Jim. Malik raised his hand gun and fired just one shot over Jack's head, stopping their protests and re-aiming the gun at Jack's knee.

"My men are taking these two boys ashore to a house by the lagoon where they will stay until this ship arrives there and starts loading. Then you can have them back. If you refuse, they will never be seen again. Your decision, Captain and your responsibility."

White faced, shaking with anger, Jack remained silent for a while biting his lip; then said:

"You're bluffing; nobody has been killed yet in this piracy lark, as far as I know."

"Jack, believe me, this is nothing to do with Piracy." Jim said. "These men are *not* pirates; Malik here is the son of a local War Lord who wants to control all future Crude Oil production and exploitation. It may not look it, with all the guns around, but this is basically a peaceful operation."

"Right Captain," said Malik, his finger tightening on the hair trigger. "Look at the alternatives. If this ship goes to the lagoon and loads Crude Oil, those two cadets will come

back aboard, none the worse for their adventure. Alternatively, if you stick to your refusal, we will carry on with our project using another ship. You Captain will spend the rest of your life as a cripple wondering what's happened to those two young men, because nobody will ever see them again. You, Mr Turner will remain in Puntland until another ship takes the place of this one."

"By Christ Jim," Jack said angrily. "You've got yourself mixed up in some right evil bastards; haven't you? If those two lads are hurt in any way, I'll hold *you* responsible. Yes you Jim! Right then, we'll sail the day *after* tomorrow at 0700. The Engineers have started overhauling the condensers and they are in bits now. OK? Satisfied?" His temper now overcoming his fear.

"Captain Knowles and I are going to need all day tomorrow studying my chart, the tides and discussing the best way to anchor the ship. More importantly, how to get the goddam ship out again. Where to turn and how to end up. I've even got to convince him the lagoon really exists. Hassan has already agreed to two days, but I think only one extra day will do. "

Malik grudgingly agreed after talking to his father on his cell phone and then left. Looking at Jim, Jack said:

"What are you talking about Jim, when you say this is a peaceful operation? Do you call taking two young cadets off a ship and threatening me with their deaths if I don't comply, a peaceful operation? The whole affair seems criminally insane to me."

"For the Love of Christ, Jack. Just listen to what I've been trying to tell you all along." Jim retorted, angrily. "The only way we can get them back safely is to take the ship up there and load Crude Oil. Just you keep that in mind, OK? Right, now listen to me and don't bloody interrupt."

Jim then explained Hassan's idea, his plan to end up fully

controlling all Somali Crude Oil output, the present time being ideal to carry out the operation. A time when this poor failed country has neither the means nor the will to stop him.

After a long and heated argument with both of them reduced to shouting at each other at times; plus Malik's occasional intervention with threats to torture the two hostages and take more; Jack finally agreed.

Then Jack had the nasty job of telling his officers, with Malik and Yusuf covering them all, including Jim, with their guns. They were all angry, upset by the abduction of the two cadets and further upset by the job they were being forced to do against their will.

Jack and Jim hated each other; their earlier friendship had completely evaporated. They almost came to blows on more than one occasion. Jack hated to be put into a position of illegally using his ship to load, what in effect was a contraband cargo of Crude. Jim hated being forced to argue with Jack over every single item, he also felt the combined hatred from the rest of the ship's Officers. They obviously all blamed him and thought he was doing this for a fortune in cash.

Eventually they both calmed down and faced up to the reality that the job would have to be done. There was no escaping that fact. The rest of that evening and most of the next day was spent with the two Master Mariners poring over Jim's homemade chart, the Tide Tables and discussing possible exit solutions. Entry into the lagoon, seemed to pose some problems, but getting the ship out again, fully loaded, caused a wide difference of opinion.

Jim wanted to anchor the ship heading North in the northern part of the *Deep*; load the Crude Oil there; *then* backing the ship into the Old River Bed to start turning her round. To do this, they would use four ropes or wires, one on each bow and each quarter, possibly the anchors as well. Her head would then be pointing east towards the island.

Then, by judicious use of these four ropes as well as the main engine, they would edge the ship out, back into the *Deep* heading South; ready to sail out through the southern entrance channel.

Jack disagreed. Why do a tricky manoeuvre like that when the ship was fully loaded, at her maximum draft? Surely it would be better to do this in a ballasted condition, before loading.

“Look” said Jack thoughtfully. “The ship is in ballast now, with a draft of four metres forward and six metres aft, or thereabouts. I can pump out more ballast and reduce that after draft to five metres, if necessary. Why can't we sail directly into the Old River Bed and anchor her there?”

“Not possible Jack, since we'd have to keep well to the starboard side of the channel close to the island, then make a right angle turn hard to port to enter the Old River Bed. It can't be done without tugs; the swing will be far too wide and she'll go aground on the bank about there.” Jim said, pointing to the North bank of the Old River Bed where it joined the *Deep*”

He demonstrated, using a matchbox to show the difficulties of rounding the ship as Jack had suggested. Both men knew the ship and her manoeuvring characteristics well.

It was a nasty decision to make.

“OK, the whole bloody idea of loading Crude there is crazy anyway. I reckon we should avoid too much fancy manoeuvring at the loaded draft.” Jack said. “Don't forget, she's my ship and my responsibility, you're only a self-appointed pilot. Unless I say so, my Officers and Crew will obey me, not you.

Jim had expected a hard time from Captain Wilkinson, in fact had been relieved to find out it was his old friend on board instead. Even so, Jack was pulling rank on him now. Both of them were becoming angry again. Jack looked disgustedly at his one-time close friend and said:

“Take those Arab clothes off. You can have an old pair of white shorts and a shirt of mine. You may as well at least look
look like a ship’s officer again.”

“Jim agreed and got changed, visualising the difficult manoeuvring to be done. He realised the djeballa could seriously hinder him if, or likely when he’d need to run from side to side of the bridge. On the other hand he’d become thoroughly used to and had even liked wearing the Kheffiyah and robe.

“OK, I’m inclined to agree with you about manoeuvring into the Old River Bed when she’s in ballast.” Jim conceded. “But it’ll have to be stern-first rather than bow-first. It’s obviously better to do that from the start. But we can’t load her there! The buoyed end of the pipeline is over there.” He said pointing towards its position on the chart.

“This whole bloody thing is impossible.” Cried Jack. “Go and find another smaller ship and leave us alone.”

“Jack, your idea of backing the ship into The Old River Bed when light ship is good. Why can’t we then manoeuvre her *out* again facing south when she is still in that condition? *Then* back her up to the where the end of the pipeline is?”

They looked at each other, their mutual antagonism momentarily forgotten. Jim pressed home his argument.

“It’d be one hell of a job loading her in the Old River Bed

anyway. We’d have to search for the pipeline, find it and then grapple it; lift the bight out of the water; unbolt the flanges and then let the unused section fall back into the lagoon. That’s if we could even find it!”

“Yes I suppose you’re right.” Jack said, his previous animosity returning.

“Let’s think it out by stages.” Cried Jim. “Stage one, we go in on top of the high tide at slack water as far as we can before going aground. Stage two, we take her stern first into

the Old River Bed on the ebbing tide. Stage three, we manoeuvre the ship out of the Old River Bed at the next slack water, facing the way out. Stage four we back her up to where the buoyed end of the pipeline is and load the cargo. That sound OK to you?"

"Yes I suppose so. Stage three is pointing to the Southern exit channel. Can't we just put her Full ahead and sail out."

"And the two cadets? Not with a crowd of armed gangsters aboard!" Jim replied. "Right, I suggest we bring the three Navigating Officers down as well as the Chief Engineer and discuss it with them. See what they suggest."

The discussion lasted all the forenoon, was bitter at times

continued well into the afternoon before each man knew what needed to be done. The Officers were still upset. In the first place about Jim, one of their Company Senior Chief Officers agreeing to do the job, back in April. Secondly about the abduction of the two cadets, none of them, however, were willing to put the Cadets' lives at risk – assuming they were still alive.

They eventually agreed to do the job, after Jim had told them about Hassan's Private Army and his ruthlessness. He pledged his word that the Cadets would not be tortured and nothing bad would happen to them if the ship arrived safely in the lagoon.

"You realise this ship is on clean cargoes at present" Jack said to Jim later, "We're going to have one hell of a job tank cleaning after loading your dirty Crude into my nice clean tanks. What's its source anyway?"

Jim considered it wiser not to tell Jack about the single oil rig, unused for nearly twenty years. After the three Mates and Chief Engineer Officer had left the cabin, Jim told Jack about his captivity and why he'd agreed to carry out Hassan's wishes so readily. In the end Jack realised what Jim had been through. He'd already seen Jim's face

when he'd been abducted, thanks to that clipping from the French newspaper.

The terror of being forcibly taken off his ship at gun point; the sheer loneliness of solitary confinement; the absolute horror of the Tarantulas and the pressure on him from Hassan. Most men would have cracked. No mention though, of the creature comforts provided by Sophia. Jack was bound to find out soon enough anyway, when they arrived at the lagoon the following morning.

"Look over there Jack," Jim said, pointing out of the bridge window. "There's the ship I was kidnapped from last April, the *Dawn Splendour*. That's six months she's been hanging round here; if we get this ship out of here loaded, then we'll be away out of it, on our way to somewhere. Better than hanging around like her, don't you think?"

"She's still here? Tom told me her ransom had been paid. They even asked him for another Chief Mate."

Chapter 51 – The Manoeuvre – October 4th and 5th.

Early Sunday morning, just before daylight, the *Chesham* left the anchorage at Eyl. Jack navigated her up to the position where they'd decided to start the pilotage, with Jim taking over from there. They were both nervous about Stage One, especially getting her through that small Southern Entrance. If that failed, then the other three stages would no longer be necessary. It was early October, warm with little wind, shortly before the North East monsoon was due.

Jim checked the tide tables, taking into account the thirty-five minute time difference between the port of Mogadishu and the lagoon. They'd decided to use the slack

water period at the top of the tide to transit the Southern Entrance channel and to use the ebbing tide to turn the ship into the *Deep*.

“Right Jim, she’s all yours.” Jack said. “The 10cm radar is on the five mile range, North up. The other one is on the one mile range, also North up. I expect you remember how to work them. Myself, as well as the Chief and Third Mates, will be with you up here on the Bridge; the Second Mate and Bosun forward standing by the anchors. The Chief Engineer will be up here as well, the Second and other Engineers down below, ready to react quickly.

“Thanks Jack, please have both anchors ready for dropping if necessary.”

“They’re both ready, OK go ahead! My SMS system states a port to port, berth to berth Passage Plan must be made, so here it is. Eyl anchorage to the Lagoon.”

Scowling with repressed anger at the situation, Jack offered a sheet of paper with a straight line drawn from the word EYL to the words NO MAN'S LAND in block capitals. Jim was as nervous as all Hell and the silly diagram calmed him down. Shrugging his shoulders, he signed it as the *Chief Pilot of Nowhere Much*; appreciating Jack’s gesture.

Taking over as a pilot, Jim rang for slow speed, gingerly conning the ship between the first two Petrol Drums he'd used for buoys, entering the narrow channel during slack water. The next pair of buoys indicated a massive, near right angle turn to starboard. They'd both been worried about this turn and agreed to increase speed, hoping to stop the swing before hitting the shallows close to the island. They also hoped to slow her down enough to anchor the ship before she went aground in the Northern part of the anchorage.

“Half Ahead Please; Hard a Starboard. Cross your fingers all of you and hold your breath” Jim shouted. But in his nervousness, he’d left it too long.

The ship started coming round but far too slowly. Jack swore, dived for the Engine Room Telegraph and rang Full Ahead. She came round faster and only just made the turn, hitting and sinking the port hand diesel drum buoy.

“For the Love of Christ” shouted Jim. “She's swinging much too fast now. Midships the wheel! Hard a port! Stop engines!” The orders came rapidly.

The swing to starboard was halted about a metre from the buoy close to the island but the speed was still far too great. Jim caught a fleeting glimpse of the island shore flying past. She started swinging to port, still too fast. Far too quickly another danger menaced them; the ship was fast approaching the shallows on the northern side of the Old River Bed.

“Wheel midships! Hard a Starboard! Full Astern!” Jim yelled, hoping the starboard wheel, followed by the transverse thrust from the astern movement would be powerful enough to stop the swing to port. Slowly the ship's head swung away from the shallow water.

“Stop the Engines; Port Twenty” Jim said, relieved now the second danger had been avoided. He was sweating badly, but was now able to steer the ship directly towards the northern end of the *Deep* but still too fast.

“We've got to let go both anchors” Jack yelled, raising the *Walkie Talkie* to his mouth ready to give the order. Jim grabbed Jack's hand, forcing it down to stop him issuing the order, yelling:

“Never mind the fucking anchors! At this speed you could easily lose them. Port 20; Engines Slow Astern. It's a soft bottom Jack, even if she does go aground, if we act immediately, she'll probably come off OK.”

The ship was now on her projected course line heading up the *Deep* towards the original anchorage position but was obviously going to overrun it. Each astern movement he attempted now would risk the transverse thrust piling the ship up on the Island shore.

Jim ordered a Stop; then slow astern with the wheel still hard to port to counter-act the Transverse thrust. He then stopped the engines, let her swing to port then a half astern until she was slow enough not to do too much bottom damage if she touched. The engine was stopped when the ship eventually glided slowly aground at the far end of the *Deep*. Both of them were drained but knew the worst was over.

The rest, though difficult, was a job that could be done slowly, thinking out each step; no frantic dashes through narrow channels and praying the ship would react properly. Both men recognised each other's capabilities and were even beginning to renew their previous friendship, although the rest of the Officers and crew were still sullen.

"We'd better take soundings of the Fore Peak and the forward cargo tanks" Jack said, "See if they've been damaged at all."

"Not yet, we've passed the top of high water now and the tide's ebbing. Spring tides were a couple of days ago. If we don't get her off the mud now; within the next few minutes, we may have to wait some twelve days until the next spring tides." Jim said, yawning.

"Don't you remember the old saying, Jim? Never go aground with both anchors still in their hawse pipes. You've gone and done just that; haven't you?" Jack quoted.

"Yes Jack, but remember the other old saying – When in danger or in doubt, run in circles, scream and shout! We just about avoided that." Jim replied, laughing.

He rang Full Astern on the ER Telegraph. After several minutes; the ship vibrating heavily, slid off the mud into deep water. He then ordered:

"Stop Engines now! Slow Ahead! Let go the Port Anchor to three shackles! Stop Engines!"

The anchor thundered down, metallic dust and grit covering the Fo'c's'le Head, holding the ship against the ebbing tide. She was now heading North with her stern near

the junction of the Old River Bed and the *Deep*; ready for the next stage. Jim then called Yusuf to use both boats to take the head and stern lines ashore, using men from the village to handle them.

The starboard headline was taken to the new bollard on the north part of the island, the other to the mainland shore opposite. The starboard stern line to the southern part of the island and the port sternline to the mainland shore opposite.

“That’s the first stage completed.” Jim said, relieved the ship was back in deep water and safely moored. “Better give all hands and ourselves half an hour’s rest, before we start getting her into the Old River Bed. Can your stewards rustle up some coffee?”

After the break, they started the next difficult part of the job. Using Malik as an interpreter, Jim summoned both fishing boats to the bow. The windlass was put in gear and the starboard anchor slowly lowered until mostly in the water. With the help of Yusuf and Ahmed in the work boat, the crew of the two fishing boats lashed the anchor between them with slip wires.

In tandem, the fishing boats took the anchor close to the part of the Island directly opposite the Old River Bed, with the Bosun slacking the anchor cable at the same time. Jim was in the Zodiac supervising where to drop the anchor. Once in the position opposite the Old River Bed, they let slip the wire ropes allowing the anchor drop to the bottom.

With the ship safely moored, with all four ropes fast, the port anchor out to three shackles and the starboard anchor out to four but unused at that stage - they decided to knock off for lunch. After lunch the Bosun hove the port anchor clear of the water. It was no longer needed but available in an emergency. All was now ready for the next operation. Stage two.

The difficult manoeuvre of swinging the ship into the Old River Bed was soon under way, on what was left of the

ebb tide. The bosun put the starboard windlass in gear and started heaving up the slack of the anchor chain; the anchor dug in and held.

The crew aft heaved on the both stern lines; the crew forward slacked the forward headlines until the stern of the ship was overlapping the entrance to the Old River Bed.

Letting go the port anchor again to stem the ebbing tide, they prepared to swing the stern to port, so that half the ship was in the Old River Bed and half still in the *Deep*. The starboard head line was let go and the workboat took the end of it to the bollard on the south part of the Island, leading to the starboard quarter.

The port headline was let go and taken to the bollard on the northern part of the island. The port sternline was let go and taken to the north bollard on the mainland shore. The starboard sternline was shifted to the new bollard on the south part of the mainland. When all was ready, the bosun raised the port anchor off the bottom.

Then by slowly heaving on the port stern line and the starboard headline, at the same time heaving on the starboard anchor and checking with the port headline and starboard sternline, the ship slowly slid into position half in the Old River Bed.

They'd had problems with the two fishing boats, now being used as tugs and pushing where required, due mostly to language problems. In the end Jim put Yusuf and Ahmed on each of the two boats as interpreters. That didn't work either; orders yelled through the 'Loud Hailer' were largely incomprehensible to them. Even the Walkie-Talkies were of little use in these circumstances.

Eventually Jim asked Malik to release the two cadets, putting one on each fishing cum tug boat. Malik agreed and spoke into his phone. Jim saw Samira bring the two lads out of the house and on to the zodiac, where Yusuf took one to each fishing boat. It was a time consuming process, Jim giving the orders, the Chief Mate repeating them by Walkie

Talkie to a cadet, the latter explaining them to Yusuf or Ahmed who translated them into Somali to the skippers.

It was almost dark by the time they were safely moored in the Old River bed and they stopped for the night, despite Malik's protests. Jack rang *Finished With Engines* on the Engine Room Telegraph and sighed with relief. The exhausted bridge team congratulated each other on a difficult job well done. Jim looked at the shore; which was crowded with people from the village who'd been watching the whole operation.

The two fishing boats came alongside and both cadets, Yusuf and Ahmed climbed aboard. The hostile atmosphere on the ship eased, now the two Cadets were safely back aboard and not harmed at all. This had been augmented by Jack telling his Officers about Jim's history as a prisoner, forced to sound the lagoon or face torture. The Cadets said they'd been well looked after by two women but the food was appalling....!

A shout came from the shore and an excited female figure came running out of the house, jumped into the Zodiac pleading with Abdullah to bring her out to the ship. It was Sophia who came running up to the bridge, threw her arms round Jim's neck and kissed him; her body movements leaving no doubt as to their relationship. Jim pushed her away, red-faced and thoroughly embarrassed.

A whole load of guilt slid off Jack's shoulders as his mind

remembered that afternoon in Chelmsford with Angela, as well as the two weekends. He'd also heard a rumour going round Head Office concerning Tom Murchison and Angela but didn't believe it. What a fouled-up mess this was whole thing was turning out to be, at least as far as personal relationships were concerned.

Before dark, the work boat went back to the creek, where three Somali women and some small children scrambled on

board and headed towards *Chesham*.

“What the devil’s going on?” Jack asked. “Are they coming aboard? Who are they?” Jim looked at Yusuf who was grinning happily.

“These ladies are my wife and the wives of Ahmad and Abdullah.” He said, “You want we have no pleasures tonight, with us here on the ship and our wives ashore? No way, not after three days without our wives.”

After an early lunch the following day, Jim waited for the Low Water slack period before the tide started flooding before attempting to shift the ship out of the Old River Bed and into the proposed mooring. They all turned to, with both cadets, Yusuf and Ahmed on the fishing boats ready to carry out the last stage of the job. Stage three was now under way.

The starboard windlass was put in gear and the bosun started heaving away; Both stern lines were slacked with the two head ropes taking up the slack. When the ship had reached the position where they thought they could slowly start swinging her Ninety degrees to starboard, they stopped, hove tight and made fast all four ropes; then hove home the starboard anchor, no longer needed.

With the two fishing boat/tugs pushing on the port bow, the crew heaved on the starboard head rope, slacking the port head rope and both stern ropes. A short burst on the engine, with the wheel hard a starboard completed the turn. She was now out of the old river bed, facing the exit channel. They had to stop then and let go the Port Anchor again to three shackles, stemming the flood tide. That anchor, Jack thought, had been going up and down like a whore’s drawers.

All four ropes now had to be shifted one by one, so that the two stern ropes were leading astern, the port stern rope to the Island’s northern point, the other to the shore opposite. The two bow ropes were similarly shifted, the port one to the Island’s southern point and the other to the

shore opposite. The ship was now facing the way out through the Southern exit channel, the island on her port side.

The port anchor was slacked and; by heaving on the two stern ropes and slacking the two forward ones, the ship reached a position where she could attach the crane's runner to the buoyed pipeline. All sighed their relief, exhausted having completed a difficult job under poor conditions. There was still about an hour's daylight left to connect the pipeline. They had completed stages three and four successfully.

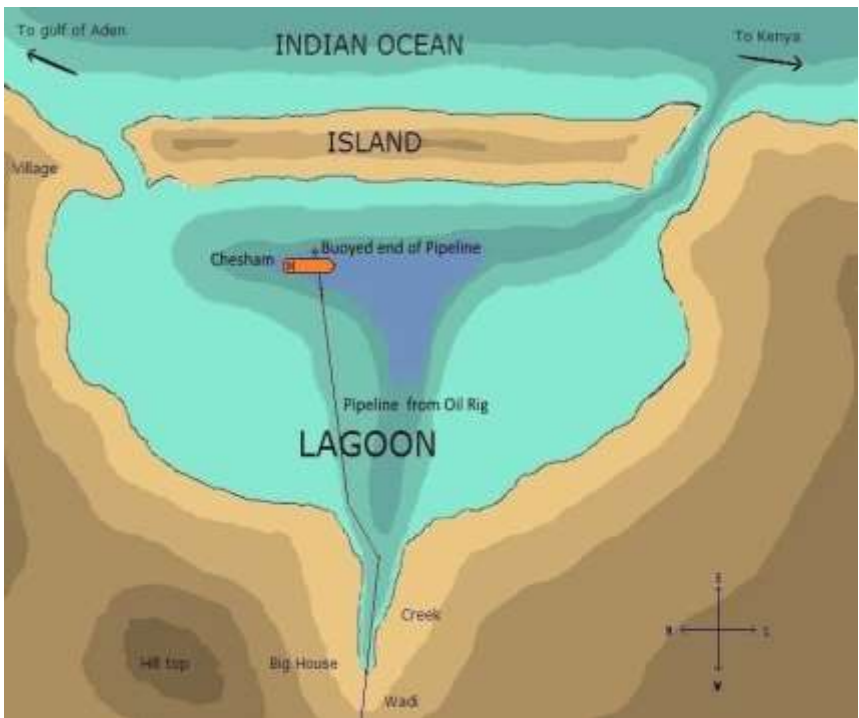
The runner from the crane was lowered to the water's edge and Yusuf in the Zodiac connected it to the buoy with a wire sling. A shout came up from the work boat; the Second Mate gave the age old hand signal for the bosun to heave away on the runner. The end of the pipeline slowly emerged dripping from the sea; the pipeline that Hassan's men from the village had connected, section by five metre section, all the way from the head of the creek.

The pipeline was lashed to the strengthened ship side rails and then the end was lowered until the flange was in a position to be connected to the port manifold. The blank was taken off, a new gasket inserted and the flange bolted to the twelve to fourteen inch reducer already in place. They were ready to go.

Jim and Jack, now friends again went down the Accommodation Ladder to the work boat and sailed round the ship, taking soundings to verify the minimum depths. Satisfied they went back aboard and up to the bridge again. By this time, the Chief Mate was in the Cargo Control Room lining up the valves to drop out some ballast water by gravity, to be followed later with the ballast pump. He came up to the bridge and asked Jim:

"What's the Specific Gravity of the Crude we'll be loading? Are we taking a full cargo or what? What about communications with the shore?"

“I’ve no idea,” Jim replied, frowning, “nor do I know its temperature. You’ll just have to take a sample at the manifold and measure it as best you can. And yes, they want a full cargo loaded. I think you’d better work on the draft alone until you reach ten metres on an even keel. Or as near as you can get to it. There’s only a two metres Under Keel Clearance at Low Water Springs. The work boat or Zodiac can take you round the ship to check the draft. Use one of them as often you need, but keep to ten metres, OK?”



*(Map showing the final position of the **Chesham**. The light blue coloured water denotes shallow water. The medium blue shows depths of more than 12 metres; the darker blue depths more than 15 metres.)*

"I established a two Metre Under Keel Clearance, so please make sure the ship loads to no more than ten metres even keel. If that's not possible for some reason, then with no more than ten metres at the stern." Jim told the Chief Mate.

The Royal Navy helicopter came over again, took some photographs and then hesitated, as if debating whether or not to land on the deck. The pilot evidently saw the array of guns and decided to go back to his ship.

"Work out the stresses each hour and keep her well within the limits, pumping out the ballast as necessary." Jack instructed the Chief Mate who was still waiting. "If you see that an Even Keel is not possible within the stress limits; then load her to a stern trim with the after draft at ten metres. Use the boats to check the draft each hour as well. We'll only load during daylight hours."

By then it was getting dark and Jim stopped all operations until daylight the following morning. Malik started to protest. Jack told him the Officers and crew needed their sleep. This was a completely makeshift procedure; they were about to load a cargo of unknown quality in an unknown anchorage; with no idea of its flow rate; neither its Specific Gravity nor anything else. No shore lights existed to back up the ship's deck lighting. For minimum safety, daylight was essential. Jim agreed with Jack and Malik had to accept it. He was now in the hands of professionals.

Next morning Jim and Yusuf resumed connecting the pipeline to the ship's manifold. The Second Mate signalled the bridge, that all was ready. Jack turned to Malik:

"Right, we're connected up and ready to go. I hope you have bolted all those flanges together properly, with the correct oil-tight gaskets, or else there'll be Crude Oil all over the desert and the lagoon as well. Start slowly, very slowly until we can see if everything is OK."

Malik talked to his younger brother on the cell phone, telling him to slowly open the gate valve at the rig, the

capping system already open. Slowly the pipeline filled up, stopped by the gate valve at the head of the creek. The latter valve was slowly opened in its turn, bringing the Crude Oil to the ship's manifold valve. So far so good. The Filipino Pumpman slowly opened the manifold valve; monitoring the manifold connection to note any leakage.

The Chief Mate in the Cargo Control Room had already opened the tank valve of one tank to verify the flow, with the Second Mate on deck confirming the Crude Oil was going into that tank. The Chief Officer then opened the tank valves on the rest of the first set of tanks to be loaded, carefully watching the gauges in the Cargo Control Room. Jack and Jim sighed with relief, but Jim still worried that Petroleum Gas would be present in the Crude, risking an explosion.

He told Jack to make a 'No Smoking' rule for the ship. Yusuf blew a series of blasts on the ship's air whistle and the waiting crowd from the village cheered and stamped their feet. Some even started dancing. Jim and Jack were starting to realise they had completed a nearly impossible operation safely.

"They seem to be a happy crowd." Jack said later to Jim, when they were relaxing in the wheelhouse.

"Yes they will be, now they can see Hassan's plans are working and they may soon be rich from the oil revenues." Jim replied, happy for the village people, whom he'd come to like.

"I gather Sophia is your mistress. She looks superb and I hope for your sake, she's as good in bed as she looks to be. You're a lucky bugger aren't you? First Angela at that party, now this knock-out. Incidentally, what are you going to do about Angela and the children? I feel a bit responsible for her like, since it was me who introduced you?"

"Jack I don't know." Jim answered, irritated by the question.

“Well, you’d better give it some thought hadn’t you?” Jack persevered, wondering if he could keep Angela if Jim stayed with the Indian woman.

“OK. But first things first. Look Jack, I’m coming back with you on this ship, Sophia as well. She’s had a terrible life here in Greater Somalia.”

“God Almighty” Jack exclaimed. “Are you seriously thinking about taking your mistress back to England with you? And on my ship too! What about Angela?” Jack demanded, Jim had no answer to that.

The two old friends got up and went to a window overlooking the main deck. They watched the Pumpman and crew checking Crude Oil was going into the right tanks and there were no leaks at the manifold. Malik was determined to speed up the loading, the Mate increased bit by bit, far too slowly for Malik, but there was not much he could do about it, except to make empty threats.

“In fact it was Hassan who told Sophia to keep me happy, although she denied it.” Jim said, “I suppose the reason was to give me something resembling a normal life while working for them.”

“I repeat, Jim, you’re a right lucky bugger. You get hijacked off a Liberian tanker, kidnapped to the shore, then forced to work on a job most Officers would give their eyes to do. And with unlimited sex too. The Indian woman looks to be a right handful in bed.” Jack said.

“Oh she’s that alright. I was kidnapped ashore expecting all kinds of hell, which it was at times. I was never physically hurt, although constantly abused verbally by Malik. Sophia seduced me after a month or so on Hassan’s say-so, I suppose to make me work better. That, together with those three celibate months on the *Dawn Splendour*; plus my constant fear of never seeing Angela or my kids again... well I was ready for it. Obviously there’s no way of keeping quiet about all this, especially if Sophia comes

back to the UK with me. I honestly don't know what to do about Angela, I'm very fond of Sophia but then there are the kids as well to think about."

"How about a Gin and Tonic Jim? I hid a bottle for my use." Jack said, smiling; "I bet you've forgotten the taste of Gin."

"Christ yes, I haven't touched a drop of alcohol for months. Apart from some illicit home brewed beer once." They went to Jack's cabin, and Jack searched for the bottle.

"Right Jim," Jack said, handing a glass to Jim. "I don't think *Cheers* is the right expression to use in these circumstances. Let's drink to our successful escape."

"On the *Dawn Splendour* we managed to collect and hide all the booze. Incidentally, as I mentioned before, the Somalis you have on board here are *not* pirates. They are all working for Hassan, the local War Lord. This ship was specially targeted due to her deadweight and overall dimensions. Not by me, I'd have preferred any other ship in the world to one of ours." Jim explained.

"Um yes so would I" Jack said ruefully, then grinned. "Anyway you look well enough. What's the food like here?"

"Food's OK once you get used to it! Don't run away with the idea it's been all beer and skittles. I've had a constant feeling of fear, mostly submerged, but always there. I've been ill a couple of times as well, Sophia nursed me on those occasions. At one time I thought I was getting Malaria." Jim said soberly. "Another time, when Sophia was away for a while, I got so pig-sick of the work that I almost went on strike." Jim said, remembering that bad time Sophia had been away.

"As for me, I made a bad mistake by bollocking the Chief

Mate for complacency, then went down to my cabin for a toasted egg sandwich and fell fast asleep in the chair. The sod never thought to wake me up; nor did he keep a proper

lookout. He even sent his watchman down for some tea and toast for him. Had I stayed on the bridge, perhaps we could have avoided this.” Jack said angrily, “I can never forgive him for that, nor do I ever want to sail with him again. He’s been trouble from the start.” Jack said grimly.

“Logged him did you?” Jim asked, referring to the OLB, the Official Log Book, used in conjunction with the Voyage Log Book. The OLB records disciplinary actions as well as weekly Lifeboat Drills and other events.

“Yes, I wrote it up in the Official Log Book, with the two Lookouts as witnesses. But the fact is, I should have stayed on the bridge.”

“I shouldn’t blame yourself too much, Jack. I gather the ship has been followed the whole way from Suez. Samira mentioned that once, but I never thought, in a month of Sundays, that it would be the old *Chesham*. I was wild when I found out and tried to refuse to come. Incidentally, I thought old Frank Wilkinson would have been in command here. Where is he now?” Jim asked.

“Paid off sick in Vancouver with cancer. We’d both been sent out to the *West Wycombe*, in Seattle; where the silly buggers had spilled some Diesel into the dock. Captain Rogers and his Chief Mate were about to be taken off the ship by the US Coastguard and the Chief Engineer had already been arrested.” Jack replied solemnly.

“Arrested? The Old Man and Mate taken off?” Jim said, surprised. “Just for a Diesel spill?”

“It was more than that. The US Coastguard inspector found a pipe by the Oily/Water Separator and thought it could be an illegal by-pass. It was one hell of a mess. Once the Coastguard had finished with the ship, we went up to complete loading at Vancouver. You’ve been there a couple of times yourself, haven’t you? Anyway, we bloody near hit a column on the Second Narrows Bridge on the way up to the tanker berth. Once we were tied up, he collapsed. At

first we thought it was a heart attack, but it turned out the poor old bugger had cancer. I took over and the Company confirmed it after completing that commission. Had some leave, went on an LPG course and joined here. Under the circumstances, I'll waive the £100 bet we had about who'd be first to be promoted. Had things been different you might have won." Jack stated.

"Oh I'll pay it, a bet's a bet. I'm sorry to hear about old Frank Wilkinson though. He was a stubborn, grumpy old bugger at times, but I liked him and respected him as Master. Congratulations on getting the promotion by the way. I bet Sonia's over the moon about it. Angela must have been sick with envy." Jim said, grinning.

Jack told him more about the oil spill at Seattle, then about the Electrician and his Sister-in-Law, which had them both laughing.

"Anyway, Good old Tom solved all those problems and away we went to load products at Vancouver?" Jack continued.

"Yes, I know the berth, way up beyond the Second Narrows Bridge." Jim said. "We loaded products there for Inchon once, on the *Amersham*. The shore foreman told me the cargo was being pumped over the Rocky Mountains all the way from Alberta. The berth was close to a railroad and I saw a long loaded Goods Train trundle by. That same foreman told me it was going to Halifax over three thousand miles away! Did you take the Great Circle Route to Japan through the Aleutians?"

"Yes I did. I saw that train you're talking about; bound for Halifax. The third Engineer was going home on leave and wanted to cross Canada by train, but it seems only Goods Trains do it now. Anyway Jim, I had to load that cargo as normal and act as Captain too. That bloody *West Wycombe* is a real unlucky ship; everything seems to

happen to her. Oil spills; groundings; frequent near misses; problems with port authorities - the lot. And now a near miss at the Second Narrows Bridge at Vancouver.” Jack said, thoughtfully.

“Talking about the Second Narrows Bridge? I remember Angela’s Uncle Bob telling me it had collapsed once and had

to be rebuilt.” Jim said, remembering the conversation.

“Anyway back to the *West Wycombe*, the same Captain, Chief Mate and Chief Engineer came back and relieved us at Ras Tannurah after they’d had some leave. They’d been told in no uncertain terms by Tom Murchison, to take that bloody

ship apart and find out why all the bad luck has been happening and to stop it once and for all.” Jack said.

“In that case, they’ll probably stay on that ship for the rest of their lives.” Jim said, chuckling.

Jack stopped the cargo loading at nightfall, stating that he wanted to keep his Officers and crew fresh for the morning. The loading procedure was more or less stop and go depending on the various leaks on the old pipeline between the well and the Creek. The two friends talked well into the evening, reminiscing about their lives, about when they had been cadets together and their vision of the future. Or even if they had a future! The level of gin in the bottle got lower and lower. Sophia was waiting in a spare cabin, wondering when the men would stop reminiscing.

“By the way, how is that beautiful Sonia of yours?” Jack asked, feeling tiredness drift over him.

“Still the same as ever. We seem to spend more time in coffee bars and night clubs than we do at home. Nice though, but a bit exhausting. Now both of us away to our beds and you to your woman – if you’re not too drunk to perform.” Jack said indicating the near empty gin bottle.

Cargo loading was restarted the following morning at daybreak. It was obviously going to take a long time, days or even weeks to load the whole ship. As dawn was breaking, Sophia asked Jim if he'd ever met Jack before, since they seemed to have a lot to say to each other. Jim told her about their apprenticeship when they were on the old *Beaconsfield* together and sharing a flat in London when up for their Master's ticket. Both he and Jack were suffering headaches.

"It was Jack who introduced me to Angela at a party. They were both at school together and their parents had been friends for years. In fact she has known Jack far longer than she's known me. He thinks I should have stayed loyal to Angela and refused you."

"Refused me!" Sophia commented indignantly "Look at the state you were in! Look at what you'd have missed. Talking about that, Aliyah is coming aboard tomorrow to have a look round. OK?"

She screamed as a burst of small arms gunfire shattered the calm, coming from the South. Return fire came from various camouflaged points between the house and the lagoon. The firing became intense and lasted about twenty minutes before the invading troops surrendered to Hassan's private army, leaving five of their comrades dead.

A few stray bullets had hit the ship but didn't penetrate the inner hull of the cargo tanks or cause casualties. Nor were there any casualties to Hassan's Private Militia, who were well dug in.

Hassan interrogated the survivors who told him the Provisional Government was assembling a larger force with greater fire power. They were just a patrol and had not expected any resistance. The Colonel who'd come for baksheesh the other week had been one of the casualties. Neither Malik aboard nor Hassan ashore seemed at all worried by this fire fight.

Both Jack and Jim were worried though, fearing Rocket Propelled Grenades or Mortar Bombs could be used against the ship. The funnel had already acquired a couple of bullet holes. Hassan and Malik compelled them to carry on with the crude oil loading, assuring the two men that any further troops could be adequately coped with. Samira came aboard then, saying that Kassim had sent her there for safety; she was given a spare Officers' cabin to sleep in.

Jim had settled himself into the Owner's Cabin aboard with Sophia, continuing their still steaming relationship. Aliyah came on board for two days and did Jack's washing and ironing for him, for which he gave her a few dollars.

Jim was beginning to have a bad feeling about the job. The fire fight had badly alarmed him, although Malik didn't seem at all perturbed. He had not seen Hassan since joining the ship at Eyl. Sophia then told Jim what she'd learned from

the Ugandan General, something that had been that had been worrying her.

Even Samira seemed worried, although Malik still seemed super-confident, making Jim wonder what else was in the wind. Were they really just going to sail out with a cargo of Somali Crude? Nobody spoke in front of Jim anymore; since they knew he'd picked up sufficient of their language over the months.

There was something about Malik that disturbed Jim; free from his father, he seemed a different man, as unpleasant as ever but more confident. He was still in control on the ship, but his mind seemed to be on other things.

Sophia too was troubled, having overheard part of a mobile phone conversation between Malik and Kassim. She confided to Jim that maybe another ship would be involved after the *Chesham* had loaded and sailed. Malik had seen her then and chased her away with threats.

On the plus side; the ship's Officers and crew were happier, knowing there was a good chance of escaping after the cargo had been loaded. No longer would they have to wait months for the ransom to be paid, dealing with pirates.

Chapter 52 – The Escape – October 9th to 11th

The *Loch Kelliesport* was still waiting for orders; Commander Donaldson wanted to take his ship to a position where he could see both the ***Chesham*** and the lagoon, visually. The spare part having arrived, the helicopter would soon be in service again. From the previous overflight he guessed it was a pipeline being hauled out of the water to load Crude Oil. He could not, however, rule out the suspicion it could be a bomb. Calling a meeting with his Officers, he gave them the latest facts and guesswork.

“I feel sure that sooner or later we will have to go in and see what is happening. At present I am not allowed to penetrate the twelve mile limit of this God Forsaken country. But that could well change at any moment and if it does, things may happen quickly. I don't reckon we'll have to use any heavy armament, but very likely small arms. Even an armed shore party cannot be ruled out.” He turned to his Executive Officer.

“Please organise that and let me know the details later. For the moment we're staying here, but be ready!”

On the ***Chesham***, Crude Oil was still going into their tanks, slowly, but with occasional surges. Jim wondered if that was the way the oil came out of the ground. Sophia was still aboard and determined to stay there. Samira was also there, having stayed on board since the shoot-out ashore. She didn't know what to do, but thought she was safer on a

ship than in the big house. Jim tried to persuade her to come to England with Sophia but she repeated that she didn't want to leave Somalia. Aliyah had gone back ashore.

"If you come to the UK with us, you could claim asylum," Jim said to Samira, fearing for her future safety. You have already lived, studied and worked in the UK, so I think it would be easier for you than for Sophia."

"Jim, you're turning my ship into a floating bloody hotel, taking the two women with us" Jack said later, when Jim had recounted the conversation to him.

"Jack you've got no choice." Jim said forcefully. "When your ship escapes from this hole, Sophia and I will be aboard whether you like it or not. Samira too, if she wants to come. You're going to need me to help you escape anyway."

"All right then, we've got some spare cabins, you three might as well come with us as far as the next port, wherever that may be. Unless we get blown out of the water first! This voyage has gone all haywire anyway. Have any of you got any papers? You know what I mean – passports or other silly little bits of paper like that? Will Malik let them come with us when we sail?" Jack demanded.

Sophia did have a current passport issued by the new state of Somaliland, she was still a subject of that country. Samira's Somalia passport had expired years ago and Jim's papers were probably still on the *Dawn Splendour*, his Passport, Discharge book and Master's Ticket. He could have asked Yusuf to go aboard that ship to get them, when they were down at Eyl, but the thought had not occurred to him.

Since the battle four days ago, there had been no further development. Both Jim and Jack were nervous though; the cargo was going far too slowly and they were worried over the difficult manoeuvre to get the ship through the exit channel safely. Neither of them was looking forward to that.

It seemed too quiet ashore; the house was empty now that both the girls and Jim had left. Hassan was nowhere to be seen, leaving decisions to Malik on board and Kassim ashore. Jim and Jack decided to confront Malik saying:

“Look Malik,” Jim said, “I feel sure the militia will be come here back in force pretty soon. If you want to get crude oil out of the country, then I suggest that we stop loading now and sail. We’re about a third full anyway, surely that’s enough to make the splash your father wants. We can get under way as soon as the pipeline is clear and manoeuvre out

of this goddam hole. Otherwise we’ll probably all be killed.”

“Stop the Crude right now.” Jack demanded. “Tell your men to close all the shore valves, because my sailors are going to start disconnecting the hose right *now*. If you don’t shut that valve, you’re going to have the lagoon full of Crude oil.”

Malik scowled at them, looking ready for murder. He contemplated shooting both of them; before realising he would be shooting the only two who could take the ship safely through the tortuous channel. He reiterated that he wanted the ship filled to capacity; no militia, neither from the provisional government nor other war lords was going to stop them.

“I will not stop the oil from being loaded; my men will shoot anyone disconnecting that hose!” Malik shouted, sounding nearly demented.

Chapter 53 - The Attack – October 11th

It happened two days later just after dawn on Sunday October 11th. A tank lumbered into view, reminiscent of an old World War Two tank, old but still lethal. Its first shell

flew over the ship and exploded against the island cliff. The gun turret swivelled through 90 degrees and the next shell hit the Big House, starting a fire. A crescendo of small arms fire raked the burning house and the surface of the lagoon, some bullets hitting the ship's hull, but not penetrating the inner hull of the cargo tanks. Hassan's private army seemed to have been taken by surprise.

Jim yelled at Malik to stop the cargo loading and went down on deck with Yusuf to disconnect the pipeline. Abdullah sped the Zodiac ashore and closed the valve at the head of the creek. He gave a sudden scream and fell, shot through the leg, which was welling with blood.

Ahmad had already gathered the three Somali wives and children, herded them on to the workboat and took them to a point just below the village where they could wade ashore. Heroically, he then returned to the ship, helping Jim and Yusuf disconnect the pipeline. The port side of the deck was partially protected by the width of the ship, the manifold system including the catwalk and various tank coamings

Belatedly, Hassan's private army began to return fire, the bullets failing to penetrate the tank's armoured plating. But at least the tank stopped firing at the ship, concentrating on further demolishing the big house. Soldiers on both sides were shooting as fast as they could load; whatever else the country lacked, it certainly didn't lack guns and ammunition.

On the ship, Yusuf was standing on top of the manifold trying to see if Abdullah was alive. Jim grabbed his arm and shouted:

"He's not badly wounded, come on! If the ship's tanks are hit, there'll be a massive explosion and we're all dead. Get your spanner on those last fucking bolts."

The tank swung its turret back to the ship, the next shell just missing the accommodation block, followed by another, which demolished the starboard lifeboat. Shrapnel

from this, penetrated several cabins in the vicinity. The crew and the two remaining women were reasonably safe, hiding in the refrigerating flat, probably the safest place under the circumstances. Luckily the tank commander didn't try to hit the cargo tanks, turning his turret once again to the big house which was now in flames.

Had the double hull of a cargo tank been penetrated, an explosion would have probably followed; or at least a major fire. A Rocket Propelled Grenade erupted from behind the house and just missed the tank. On board the last bolt came free and the end of the pipeline quickly blanked. Yusuf cut the rope lashing holding it against the ship's side rails with a fire axe. The pipeline swung free, its end still held by the runner from the crane. The sailor in the crane cab, terrified by a bullet just missing him, leapt down and ran to the dubious safety of the accommodation.

Ahmed, having returned to the ship, climbed up into the cab and managed to swing the crane out-board so that the pipeline was almost clear of the ship. While trying to reverse the runner and lower the end of the pipeline down into the lagoon. The control lever stuck in neutral.

The weight of the pipeline took over. Jim managed to jump clear, but the metal flange at the end of the pipeline struck Yusuf on the head, killing him outright. It then hit the ship's side rails with a crescendo of sparks, continuing down into the sea. The still attached wire rope runner curled round Yusuf's still upright dead body, overbalanced it and dragged it down into the lagoon. Another fusillade of bullets swept over the deck and Ahmed slumped over the crane controls, dead.

Jim looked for and found a pair of wire cutters and cut the runner, part of which went tumbling down into the sea, further covering Yusuf's body. He then ran back aft to the bridge, miraculously dodging the bullets sweeping the main deck; shocked by the deaths of Yusuf and Ahmed, both of whom he'd come to like.

The Ukrainian Second Mate and the Filipino bosun ran forward, doubled up through the hail of bullets, along the port side of the main deck and reached the Fo’c’s’le head. They wanted to start heaving the port anchor but were forced to take shelter behind the solid steel bulwarks there. Jack was on the bridge, ready to manoeuvre the main engine as soon as the anchor was in gear and off the bottom.

Both Jack and Jim were in a quandary. They needed to get the ship out of the lagoon into the open sea. If they stayed in their present position, sooner or later a Rocket Propelled Grenade or a shell from the tank would penetrate a cargo tank. Or reduce the accommodation to rubble and fire. On the other hand, they were reluctant to order the crew to leave their place of relative safety. The open decks were still being swept by bullets; the big house was in ruins. The tank swivelled its gun back to the ship, fired two shells, both hitting the accommodation, then...

With no warning, the tank blew up!

Unseen, neither by the ship nor by the opposing militias, the

Loch Kelliesport had steamed to a position just outside the Southern Channel where she could see the battle; fired at and squarely hit the tank; leaving it a burning wreck. Two boat loads of armed sailors were heading for the Southern channel, under covering machine gun fire from the warship. The fighting ashore petered out, leaving an unearthly silence, broken only by the screams of the wounded on both sides.

Both militias ashore had stopped shooting. To Jim’s dismay, the two fishing boats fled out of the lagoon; he’d been counting on them for assistance when taking the ship out through the exit channel. Jack called out the ship’s crew, so he could start manoeuvring the ship. Most of the armed Somalis on board, bewildered by the rapid turn of events

were at a loss what to do. Malik enraged, took a revolver out of his robe and pointed it at Jim, shouting.

“It was those Emails you sent to London, that has caused all this. The warship is here because you hid messages in them. ***You are coming ashore with me - now!***”

Covering the ship’s personnel on the bridge, Malik screamed orders in Somali. Three men threw down their guns; picked Jim up bodily and threw him over the ship’s side into the lagoon. He landed badly and was only half conscious when a boat crewed by Somali villagers hauled him into the boat. Malik and two others jumped overboard and were picked up by the same boat, which sped to the shore. The two naval launches were still negotiating the Southern Channel and could do nothing.

Jack ran to the bridge wing; saw the boat was now more than halfway to the shore, with Malik pistol whipping Jim. The Somalis still on board the ***Chesham*** threw down their arms and surrendered to Jack, who had no idea what to do with them. To be on the safe side, he and a Filipino sailor collected up all the high-tech guns and threw them over the side, except for two, which Jack stowed away in his cabin wardrobe.

The VHF set, silent up to that point, came to life. It was Commander Donaldson, who told Jack to stand by to receive the Helicopter, already on its way to the ship. The Chief Mate came up then having taken a Roll Call. He told Jack that four Filipino deck hands; a Junior Engineer and the Second Cook had been wounded in the fighting, one of them seriously.

The warship’s helicopter landed on the main deck of the ***Chesham*** with a dozen armed sailors, the Doctor and Commander Donaldson. Jack quickly told him what had happened so far, urging him to send men ashore to find Jim Turner.

“You are saying that Turner’s been abducted *again?*”
The

Warship's Commander asked Jack, confused.

"Yes, the bastards threw him over the side and a boat picked him up, Malik jumped as well and got into the same boat. I saw him hitting Jim with the butt of his pistol." Jack cried, fearful for Jim.

"Then, we'll have to go and get him, won't we?" The Commander said. He went to the VHF, dialled the warship's listening channel and started to give orders for an armed search party, but realised it was too late. The boat had been abandoned at the shore and a car was already heading out of the area, probably with Jim in it.

"I think you'd better stand by and get your ship out of here as soon as possible, Captain Knowles." He looked at his watch. "It's just after midday now and you certainly don't want to risk spending another night here."

"But what about Jim Turner? Can't your men go ashore and find him?" Jack demanded. "He's been abducted twice. Surely your men can land and get him back before we leave."

Looking at the shore, Commander Donaldson realised it would be a hopeless search and recalled the search party launches. Although the fighting ashore had stopped, the remnants of two heavily armed Militias were still dug in on the foreshore.

"Look at the shore Captain" The Warship Commander pointed out. "He could be anywhere there. Also a car's just left the area. I've already killed the men in the tank and saved your ship. There are two armies or at least militias out there and if they combine, they can still make things very difficult for both our ships. Right, get your men moving now. I'm going back aboard my ship to make a report to the Admiralty.

Jack was astonished that it was just after midday, the battle seemed to have been going on for an eternity. Having made the plea to the Warship Captain, he too realised it was hopeless. He summoned his Chief Mate and told two deck

officers to organise things for a hasty departure. He asked Commander Donaldson for half a dozen sailors to help out his diminished crew.

Sophia, her hands covered in blood from the wounded Philippino sailors she'd been nursing, arrived on the bridge and asked where Jim was. She screamed and beat her forehead with her fists when they told her Jim had been thrown into a boat and taken ashore by Malik. She pleaded to be taken ashore and was refused. Her forehead was stained with blood where she'd been beating it with her fists.

Looking at the smouldering ruins of the Big House, she saw angry villagers examining the dead and wounded on the battlefield and shaking their fists at the two ships. She realised then that she would have nowhere to go, nor anyone to protect her, even if Hassan was still alive.

"What am I going to do? Jim was going to take me to England to demand political asylum. What about Samira?" Sophia asked, sobbing.

"Who's this Samira then?" Queried Commander Donaldson, who was still aboard the *Chesham*.

"A rather beautiful Somali woman working with Hassan, Jim volunteered to take them both to England with the ship. The last I heard she was considering the offer. From what Jim has told me, neither of them have any future here, especially if Hassan is dead." Jack replied, then turning to Sophia, he said: "Please go and find Samira, I want to talk to you both and decide what we are going to do."

"Where is this Hassan then?" Commander Donaldson demanded. "He caused all this with his cock-eyed scheme of getting oil out of the country."

Sobbing, Sophia started to leave, when one of the surrendered Somalis spoke to her in his own language. She looked horrified and translated:

"Hassan *is* dead, Kassim killed him when the fighting started and he and Malik have taken over now. He also said

Jim was put into a car and driven away.” Sophia knew for certain she could never go back to Puntland. Hassan was now dead and she would have no protection.

“That settles it then.” Commander Donaldson said. “I’m going back to my ship now. Get your ship out of here as quick as possible. There are two militias out there, both silent at the moment. How long do you think it will be before one man there fires a gun and the whole thing erupts again?” He paused and then went on to say:

“Look Captain, we’ve both got to press on, I’ve got some of your badly wounded men to get to a hospital, away from this country. You’ve got a damaged ship to get repaired, with a cargo of dubious Crude Oil. Right then, get under way as soon as you can or even quicker. Do you want any of my men to help out?”

“Yes, half a dozen should do. My Filipinos are good but not used to being under fire. While you’re at it, can you spare a couple of launches as well? To push the head round at that right angle bend in the channel. Jim was counting on using the fishing boats, but they’ve both buggered off”

“OK will do. As far as your two women passengers are concerned, keep them aboard. I feel sure there’s going to be an Enquiry about all this and they’ll certainly be needed to tell their story as witnesses.”

Jack pointed to the chart and showed him their proposed exit. Two launches were agreed upon and VHF channels selected for the manoeuvre. The port anchor was put in gear and the Bosun began heaving away, the ship’s crew and borrowed sailors started slacking down all four mooring ropes.

There was some shouting from the shore and bullets were fired at the ship, the ricochets hurtling around the open decks. A Rocket Propelled Grenade hit the accommodation again twice, causing another Filipino

casualty. The Warship's light armament swept the shore with tracer bullets finally silencing all opposition.

Realising there were no boats to let the mooring ropes go from the shore, Jack yelled into the walkie-talkies to abandon all four of them. Not so easy since some were still made fast to their drums. The Filipino bosun cut each one with wire cutters or axes and they were able to get under way.

Suddenly there was a vast explosion ashore and the late afternoon sky to the west lit up. The oil rig had blown up. Flames were seen shooting up into the sky ten kilometres away, minor fires erupted at places along the pipeline as far as the creek.

The pressure from the explosion surged along the steel pipeline in the wadi and blew the gate valve off at the head of the creek; spewing gallons of burning crude oil into the lagoon. Jack at this point was starting to negotiate the exit channel. Fire from the burning crude was sweeping towards the ship with the ebb tide.

Jack rang Emergency Full ahead and managed to escape, but, by doing so, ran aground once and skated the ship over the soft mud bottom until he reached the safety of the Indian Ocean, where the *Loch Kelliesport* was waiting.

Looking back, Jack saw that the whole surface of the lagoon seemed to be ablaze.

There was one more duty for the warship to do, before finally leaving the area. The helicopter took the remaining Somalis ashore, the ones who'd surrendered to Jack and had been transferred to the *Loch Kelliesport*. The helicopter returned and took the recently wounded Filipino rating back to the warship. Jack ordered one of the fridge chambers to be cleared for the body of Ahmed, surprisingly the only fatal casualty on board the ship.

Outside the twelve mile limit, Jack handed the ship over to the Chief Mate with instructions to follow the *Loch Kelliesport*. He was picked up by the helicopter and taken

aboard the warship, together with the naval ratings who'd been handling the mooring ropes. Commander Donaldson was waiting for him.

"I'm in communication with the Admiralty, the MoD and your Office in London on a safe Conference Line; both Captain Murchison and your Chairman want to speak to you. We are waiting for them to decide the next step."

The ***Loch Kelliesport*** was told by the Admiralty to stay with the ***Chesham*** and escort her to Dubai for repairs. Commander Donaldson handed the telephone to Jack. Captain Murchison was the first on the line and Jack made his report after the initial greetings and congratulations.

"I'm sorry to say that Jim Turner has been retaken ashore, he was still alive when I last saw him, but was being repeatedly hit with a pistol. Four Filipino crew have also been wounded, three from the deck crew and one Catering, also Junior Engineer. All five are here in the warship's hospital with their Doctor in attendance. He'll be making a full report about their condition later. I gather they will remain on board here until they can be discharged ashore into hospital at Dubai." He paused, getting his thoughts in order.

"As far as the ***Chesham*** is concerned," Jack continued, attempting to place all the morning's events in their correct order. "There is extensive damage from three or four Rocket Propelled Grenades and a couple of shells from a tank. Yes, that's right; a tank has been shelling us! Thankfully the cargo tanks weren't hit. The damage is extensive but not serious enough to disable the ship. The starboard lifeboat was completely blown away. Coming out of the channel, we touched bottom a couple of times at full speed, so there's bound to be some bottom damage as well. The bow also touched, in fact, grounded on entering. I'll fax a preliminary damage report tomorrow afternoon, when the Chief Engineer and I will have had time to make an initial examination." He'd stopped to think what else to tell them.

“That’s all I think... Oh yes we've got two women passengers aboard. They both request a passage to the UK where they will claim asylum. One is ethnic Indian but with Somaliland residence; the other, a Somali woman with no papers at all. Both Jim Turner and I have promised them a passage to England. I sincerely hope that the Company will comply and will do so at Company’s expense. Quite frankly, I think they are the only reason Jim Turner kept sane throughout his five month ordeal. I certainly don't intend dumping them ashore - neither here nor at Dubai, without your promise to get them to England.”

Jack was laying down the law; at the other end of the line, both Captain Murchison and the Mr Harding the Company Chairman looked at each other, shrugged and agreed. Jack paused and drank some rum flavoured coffee from a cup one of the ratings had brought him. He’d been fully prepared to fight his Company over the two girls’ passage to England. Continuing, he said:

“One other thing, Jim Turner was taken ashore again by the son of the local War Lord who instigated the affair. He and some Somalis then jumped overboard and were taken ashore in the same boat as Jim. I have the dead body of one Somali aboard, which I have put into one of the fridge chambers, Dubai will have to deal with it. Please note that this gang are *not* the usual pirates, although Hassan, the War Lord, did fund some pirate gangs and received Cash repayments from them. He too is dead now, I believe. The real pirates only hijack ships by hazard, but the **Chesham’s** hijacking was planned from the day we left Italy, according to Jim. Apparently, we were picked up sailing from Suez, followed by radar by a relay of fishing boats staying out of sight until the last one boarded us.”

“You have done well Jack, very well,” said Captain Murchison. “Don’t worry about making a preliminary damage report. I’ll be joining you when passing Khor Fakkan with the Engineer super and probably the Dry-dock

manager. Fax me the women's full names, dates of birth, marital status, passport details etcetera. Have a word with your Officers and see if any of them want to leave the ship at Dubai, fax the results to the Human Resources Manager, asking for their immediate reliefs. Please tell the Filipino crew they will also be relieved at Dubai with a substantial bonus. Captain Todd will relieve you soon after arrival there." He took a deep breath and would have continued but his Chairman broke in:

"Captain Knowles. Thank you for saving the ship. As far as your two *unauthorised* passengers are concerned, they'll have to leave the ship in Dubai. I will arrange visas etcetera for them to be on the same flight to the UK as you. They will probably be needed for an Enquiry into the whole affair anyway. After that, it is up to the Border Police to decide what will happen to them, although we will help as much as possible. Please report to this office as soon as you arrive at London, before you go to Italy. Here, Captain Murchison wants another word with you."

"Hullo again Jack, It's about the Crude oil you've got loaded in your tanks. We have no idea about its quality. I want you or your Chief Officer to measure the amount you've got aboard, take a couple of Specific Gravities and work out the tonnage to be discharged. I think you've got some oil hygrometers aboard. Don't take any risks with it, it's probably highly volatile. If you've got time and think it's safe enough, try to transfer the stuff into as few tanks as possible, within the ship's safe limits of course. Telex or Fax the results to me through our usual agent in Dubai. I'll be on tomorrow's flight to try and sort it all out and find some tankage space for the Crude. See you in a couple of days."

The conference line was closed, Jack then addressed Commander Donaldson:

* * * * *

“You know, Ted, I’m not at all sure it *was* you who killed that tank crew. It was all a bit of a balls-up. I was watching the tank at the time and saw two simultaneous explosions. One from your ship, the other a Rocket Propelled grenade fired from the site near the house. I consider it was the RPG that hit first and blew up the tank, killing its crew. You just added to the inferno.” Jack said, addressing Commander Donaldson, having terminated the conversation with his Head Office.

“Trying to soothe my conscience are you? It doesn’t really matter which hit first, the intention of hitting the tank and causing the deaths was there. I could have ordered a ‘Near Miss’ and frightened the wits out of them, but didn’t. Have you any idea what that explosion ashore was?”

“I think it must have been the oil rig sourcing the Crude we’d been loading. If there’s going to be an Enquiry about this, then I will willingly come forward and testify on your behalf.” Jack replied.

“Don’t worry Jack. There *will* be an Enquiry and you *will* be called upon to give a statement. The two women too. I’m sure of that. Don’t you realise, a British Warship has gone and invaded a foreign country without orders and acted contrary to the present ‘Rules of Engagement’. There is also the question of people killed in the battle, some by my ship. It is a serious matter and could well result in a court martial for me. OK back to your ship and follow me to Dubai. We’ll make sure you are not hijacked again.” Commander Donaldson said, smiling.

A sailor came in and handed Commander Donaldson a message.

“Look Jack, I think you’d better get back to your ship, or what’s left of it, we’ve just received a cyclone warning.” He said, reading the cable, and giving Jack it’s last known position. To Jack, this was almost the last straw.

The two ships had already left and were bound for Dubai. The few odd lights on the Somali coast were receding, but the flames from the oil rig were still just visible. The following morning, Captain Murchison came on the satellite phone again to Jack.

"I'm sorry Jack, but there's been a change. No way will Dubai receive the Crude oil you've got in your tanks. I can't honestly say I blame them. You are going to have to anchor off Khor Fakkan until we find a refinery that will take it. Either that or carry out a ship to ship transfer there at Khor Fakkan – if we can even find a ship to take it. You are going to have to tank clean and gas free after the cargo's been transferred. Especially since your clean oil tanks have been contaminated with Crude." Captain Murchison paused, what he had to say next was not pleasant.

"As you probably know, Captain Todd has only just been promoted to Master, neither Captain Wilkinson nor Jim Turner are available, so I'm afraid you'll have to stay until the ship dry docks. Sorry about that, but I'd far rather *you* looked after the tank cleaning and gas freeing."

"OK" Jack said, sighing. "Will you send my wife out to Khor Fakkan? Also I want a good competent Chief Officer; the one I've got now is about as much goddam use as a sore arse is to a bicycle rider! What about our two passengers, Sophia and Samira? What's going to happen to them? The Company has a moral responsibility to get them to the UK, at least."

"The two women will fly to London; they'll be needed at

the enquiry if there is one. The *Loch Kelliesport* has now received orders to steam full out to the Seychelles where they will land your wounded crew members into hospital there. Then she will be returning to her duties with the Atalanta EUNAVFOR anti-piracy patrols. Another warship will come and escort you, at least as far as Ras al Hadd, probably Australian. We are trying to work things out with

the authorities at Sharjah, Dubai and London for the two women passengers, but it may take some time. They will have to stay on board until the authorities give them permission to land.” Tom stated, and then continued talking:

“Your wife is taking some holiday and flying out to Dubai and should join you at Khor Fakkan as soon as you arrive. Captain Todd and a new Chief Mate will be joining one day later to help out with the gas freeing. The Chief Engineering superintendent and dry-dock manager as well? Make sure you’ve suitable accommodation ready.”

“Suitable accommodation Tom? You must be joking. Our accommodation took the majority of hits and is in an indescribable mess. You’ll all have to live ashore and commute to the ship.” Jack said bitterly, his own cabin having been pierced by shrapnel. He then went on to say:

“OK Tom, as far as I can see, it’s going to be touch and go whether I’ll even be home for Christmas. Why not get Angela Turner’s Uncle Bob out from France to do the Ship to Ship transfer job? Jim told me once that he was doing the similar transfers during the Iran/Iraq war for Kuwait. Not the kind of thing you’d forget, a bit like bicycle riding, I imagine. By the way, you’ll have to send some more mooring ropes out to Khor Fakkan. We had to abandon all four of ours, too many bullets flying around at the time.”

“OK. Why did you use the wires with rope tails instead of mooring ropes?” Tom asked him.

“Jim and I talked about that but we reckoned we’d need extra lengths to get her into the Old River Bed; whereas the wire ropes would probably be long enough.

Chapter 54 - London – October 11th

In London, Tom woke early on that Sunday morning in a bad mood, worried about the *Chesham*, wondering what was happening aboard her and what the final outcome would be. He knew there had been some shooting, Mr Dudley had told him that before going back to his Ministry. The ship still had to quit the lagoon, obviously not an easy job.

Thankfully the *Loch Kelliesport* was waiting twelve miles off the area, ready to help if needed. There had been nothing further Tom could do and he was now in a hotel bedroom with Angela, the wife of Chief Officer Turner.

Like a young twenty-year-old fool, on Friday the ninth he'd been waiting at Liverpool Street Station for the 1830 train to arrive. He hadn't seen her at first and hoped she wouldn't turn up. Then prayed she would. She'd then appeared from behind a group of soldiers whom she reckoned had come from the garrison at Colchester.

"Do you want to come back to Harrow with me?" Tom had asked her.

"No. Why drive all the way back to Harrow in the rush hour, Tom? I've booked us into a hotel in Bayswater for tonight and Saturday night with Sunday night an option. That OK with you?" She'd asked, smiling as she saw his eyes widening.

What she hadn't bothered to mention, was that it was the same hotel that she and Jack had used a couple of months previously. The weekend passed pleasantly; During the days, she'd taken him to places he hadn't known existed. Little Venice; The Whispering Gallery at St Paul's Cathedral; A trip on Number fifteen bus from Baker Street to Tower Hill and even Windsor Castle.

But now on Sunday morning, Tom was perturbed. He loved her and had frequently told her so. But she'd brushed the words aside and never mentioned the subject herself. He badly needed a definite commitment from her.

Tom was worried too about the *Chesham* and what was happening in Somalia, Had she loaded the cargo of Crude yet? That there was nothing he could do bothered him. He was in contact with his Head Office by cell phone, but there was nothing new. He knew he should be there, waiting for news and not in bed with Angela. Certainly not with her of all people.

He'd almost decided to get up, dress and go to the Office when she stirred, stretched and pushed the sheet clear of her breasts. At the same time, she kissed him and his good intentions disappeared. He asked her to live with him; divorcing Jim if he ever came home. She laughed and stated firmly:

"Look Tom, when I thought I was a widow, I slept with Jack. Now I'm in bed with you, knowing my husband is still alive. I have enjoyed the occasions with both of you but that is as far as it goes. If Jim comes home, I'll probably stay with him. If not – well I'll think about that later." She said.

"But I love you and want to be with you permanently. I want us to live a normal life together; if you keep your job, I'll move to Chelmsford and take a flat there." Tom pleaded desperately.

"As I say, Tom, I have enjoyed the weekends with you and Jack but I love neither of you and have no intention of living with either of you permanently."

She got out of bed then and got dressed. Tom remained where he was, watching her when she snapped;

"Come on Tom. Get up. Go and pay the bill, then take me to Liverpool Street station. I'm going home now. I'm sorry Tom, I'm going to wait for Jim. If something happens to him and I take another man into my life, it'd be neither you nor Jack; it would somebody completely unconnected to shipping. Last night, or rather this morning was the last time, although we can still remain friends if you like."

Tom, who had been expecting this, felt a sudden surge of

anger. He considered being magnanimous in his defeat but was too jealous.

“In that case, why in God’s Name did you entice me to come and make love this weekend? You seemed to enjoy it as much as I did. Or did you?” Tom demanded angrily.

“You didn’t need much enticing did you?” She countered, starting to get dressed. “It’s *you* who should have enticed me! I feel sure Jim will be coming home soon, if he accepts that I have been sleeping with you and Jack, then we’ll stay married. If not I’ll find another man – not connected with the sea or shipping?”

“You’re going to tell him about us, and about Jack too” He said, horrified. “You can’t do that!”

“Yes of course I can and I will. There’s no way I’m going to hide things. Look Tom, when Jim was first abducted, I was in a terrible state. You know that. I was facing seven years of widowhood. You have helped me to face things and have actively worked hard on my behalf. For which I’m extremely grateful.” She said, smiling up at him.

“I thought it was my duty to help you. To make things easier for you.”

“Yes I know you did, Tom. You would have liked to make love to me from the start, wouldn’t you? Your eyes were, how can I say? Devouring me throughout that dinner at Marylebone. Even the dinner with Uncle Bob, Jack and Sonia, I felt your eyes on me.” She said.

“Yes I suppose I loved you from the start. I’ve never met a woman like you before.”

“You didn’t do much about it did you? That dinner at Marylebone for example, you should have tried your luck in the taxi on the way to Cricklewood. I might have agreed, but you were too timid.”

“Too timid? You should have given me some sign. I guess you were laughing at me.” Tom said forlornly.

“Anyway we couldn’t have done much in the taxi, could we?”

“No not in the taxi. There are plenty of hotels in the area round Cricklewood or Golders Green. Julie wouldn’t have minded if I’d taken you up to bed there. Anyway, Jack came one Wednesday afternoon when I had a day off. He took me to lunch, then promptly made love to me in my own house. That was before you took me to dinner. Then the Gas Course at Southampton happened and we passed both weekends together. Oh yes, one day a lecturer was ill and I drove down to Warsash and back in a day to have a nice little bit in a boat he’d borrowed. As for you, you didn’t even organise *this* weekend. I did. OK you say I enticed you. It’s you who should have enticed me!”

“Won’t you come back to bed for just one more time? He pleaded.

“No Tom, I’m not getting undressed again. If you want to make love for the last time, it’ll have to be up against the wall. Jack and I did it that way once and it was pretty good.” She said, smiling at the memory. “No? OK, don’t bother getting up, I’ll go by Tube.” With that she briefly kissed him and left.”

Getting into his car, after getting up, dressing and paying the hotel bill, his cell phone rang. It was the duty Superintendent at Head Office, telling him to come directly to the office, something terrible was happening. Tom drove through West London, parked just anywhere, running the last quarter mile to the Office.

There the Duty Super told him a phone call was coming in shortly from HMS *Loch Kelliesport* about damage and casualties on the *Chesham*. The Chairman had been called and had also arrived; Jane and a couple of the other Superintendents living locally had also come in to the office.

The news was dreadful, Jim abducted again, some Filipino crew and a Junior Engineer wounded, the ship hit by shells from a tank also by Rocket Propelled Grenades. Jack went on to say that he saw Jim being badly beaten with a pistol by the man Malik, while the boat was on its way to the shore. He also mentioned two women were coming back with the ship as well, one of them being the Indian.

Discussing the situation with the Admiralty and MoD on the conference line, it was decided to send both ships to Dubai, the *Chesham* for dry-docking, and *Loch Kelliesport* to land the wounded men into hospital. This was changed the following morning with the warship going to the Seychelles and an Australian frigate taking over the escort duties.

After having talked with Jack and given him some instructions. Tom discussed the situation with the Chairman. Both of them knew Tom would have to go to Dubai and then on to Khor Fakkan in the next couple of days to survey the damage.

Before going home, he had to tell Angela the news about Jim being recaptured by the pirates. His third and hopefully final phone call to her with bad news. The first call, back in April, advised her about the hijacking, the second, a week later, told her Jim had been abducted. Now this third and worst call of all, to tell her that Jim had been recaptured and badly beaten.

He waited until he was sure sufficient time had passed for her to reach Chelmsford and then made the call. They were all in the conference room at the time, except for Jane; who was sitting at her desk. There were three Superintendents in the room including the Duty one. Tom and the Chairman and a couple of Duty men from other branches were also there. When Tom called Angela and told her the appalling news, her scream could be heard all over the offices, her next words too!

“My God; we were probably in bed when all this happened. Don’t you ever come near me again. It’s finished between us.”

Appalled, Tom realised that Jane had anticipated the call, listened in and turned on the loud speaker. Angela’s scream and her words had resounded all over the office.

Angela and Tom hadn’t been nearly as discreet as they’d thought. With all the inter-office gossip, his name was now going to be mud. Jane, Good Old Jane, still acting as his conscience, came into the Conference Room, approached Tom and slapped his face hard, twice, in front of the Chairman and other men. She had long been suspicious of the relationship between her boss and Mrs Turner.

A couple of the Superintendents cheered her, the others looked embarrassed. Being Sunday, he decided to go home and arrived about midnight by train, his car having been towed away.

The next few days in the office were rotten, they were all

subdued in Tom’s presence and nobody knew what to say to him. Jane was stony-faced and answering only in words of one syllable. Unfortunately, he had to use her as he was desperately trying to find some means of getting rid of the unwanted Crude Oil loaded on the **Chesham**. The Human Resources Super was doing an excellent job, getting personal to join the ship at short notice.

* * * * *

On Monday, October 12th, the **Chesham** faxed, saying she was caught in a Tropical Cyclone; the **Loch Kelliesport** having left them to take the badly wounded men to hospital at Victoria. The Australian Frigate **Adelaide** would be joining early the following morning. Christ, Tom thought, Jack was in his first year in command and had already faced a hijacking; forced to load a cargo of unwanted Crude; got

caught up in a war and could now be in the middle of a Tropical Cyclone. He finally arranged for a Ship to Ship transfer and tank washing at Khor Fakkan anchorage and dry-docking at Dubai.

Chapter 55 – The Cyclone – 13th October

Next morning on the bridge of the *Chesham*, Jack studied the weather reports. He was relieved to note the Cyclone was heading towards the Southern Coast of India, in which case they should miss it completely. Tapping the aneroid barometer over the chart table, he was puzzled by a significant pressure drop. Since clearing the Somali coast Jack had decided to head more to the North East; passing well to the East of Socotra, then continuing on that same course to the coast of Oman; finally following that coast round to Ras al Hadd.

If the cyclone kept to its predicted course and speed, they should miss it altogether. He advised Captain Donaldson over the VHF what he intended doing, the latter acknowledged and told him:

“Look Jack, we’ve got to leave you now and press on at full speed to The Seychelles to offload your wounded men, especially the Junior Engineer and an AB who are both in a very serious condition. The Australian Frigate HMAS *Adelaide* will be with you at dawn tomorrow and will stay with you as far as Khor Fakkan. Good luck Jack I hope the Cyclone keeps well clear of you. It looks to be heading for the West coast of India, but I’m not convinced about that; you’d better keep an eye on the barometer.”

They chatted for a while after that and the warship sped away. Several hours later, Jack was just starting to relax in his cabin when the Third Mate phoned down.

“There’s a boat load of Somalis a mile away to starboard with guns.”

Jack raced to the bridge, then as an afterthought, raced back down to his cabin and took the two guns he’d kept back out of his wardrobe. Back on the bridge, he and the other Officers looked at the boat, which altered course to approach the *Chesham*. The boat came in swiftly and they heard the now familiar sound of small arms fire. Jack sighted his gun on the boat and pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. The Chief Mate having taken the other gun was having a similar problem. The Ukrainian Second Mate grabbed Jack’s gun, fiddled around with it and fired a long burst at the boat. The Polish Third Mate, did the same with the gun the Chief Mate had been trying to cock.

Defeated, the boat altered away from them, throwing one, obviously dead body into the sea. The two Junior Officers handed the guns back to the two Senior Officers with slight ironic bows and wide grins on their faces. Jack made a silent vow never to criticise East European Officers again.

Back in the wheelhouse later that same evening, Jack saw with horror that the cyclone had altered course to the west and was threatening Northern Puntland. Through the wheelhouse window, Jack observed the sea had become flat calm, but saw a rising swell coming from four points on the starboard bow, an indicator of the storm’s centre. Estimating the speed the Tropical Cyclone and taking into account his present course and speed, he was heading slap bang into the middle of it.

Even with an undamaged well-found ship, this was something to be avoided; his present situation was far from that, after all the damage received from the war they’d just escaped from. What to do? He couldn’t stay on his present course. He thought about making a run for Aden, trying and outrun the cyclone, but Socotra Island was in his way! If he tried and the engine conked out on him...! He shuddered at

the thought. He decided to change course radically and head South East; after all, by its laws the cyclone shouldn't recurve towards the South.

Tropical Revolving Storms usually recurve towards their respective poles - North in the Northern Hemisphere and South in the Southern Hemisphere. Not always, mind. There are always the mavericks!

The damn thing didn't even have a name; it was officially called Tropical Cyclone O4A. Jack was badly worried over the state of his ship. If the sea had remained calm as it normally did between monsoons, they stood every chance of reaching the Gulf of Oman safely. Jack called up HMAS *Adelaide*, announced his present position, his intended course and speed and asked him to come as soon as possible, they may need help. The warship answered, stating their ETA for 0500 local time the following morning - Tuesday October 13th. 'Just hang in there' Jack was told cheerfully. Listening to the Australian accent; he waited to see if the word 'Mate' would be added, but it wasn't.

The swell, which had been on their starboard bow before Jack had altered course, steadily got worse and was now about four points on their port bow, causing both a pitching and rolling movement. The first licks of wind reminded Jack of what was yet to come. He'd been caught in TRSs before, but never as Captain. He knew all the rules like...

'When facing the wind, the storm centre will be in the direction of your extended right arm.'

How often had he stood there on past occasions, on the wing of the bridge like a scarecrow, with his right arm out and the howling wind driving rain and spray into his face? He was deadly tired too, what with the escape, another attempted hijack and now this.

By morning the ship was in serious trouble. Seas were breaking over her; she was rolling and pitching like a maniac. Since less than half of the proposed cargo had been

loaded, Free Surface effect from half-filled cargo tanks and half-empty Permanent Ballast tanks compounded the rolling, the fluids surging from side to side. They were in one hell of a mess all round! Through the gloom, the welcome shape of the Australian warship appeared like a ghost. She also was having a bad time of it.

The phone rang, it was the Engine room stating that sea water was leaking in, not much at present, they said. The pumps were handling it easily enough. The Chief Engineer Officer came on the phone then and said:

“You remember the shell that destroyed the starboard life-

boat? The Boat Deck was crumpled up like paper and the Main Deck underneath was also damaged by blast and shrapnel. I think it must have opened up one of the welds on the ship’s side plating. Anyway, water is running down the inside of the shell plating and collecting in the bilges. The pump’s handling it OK for now.”

The port side accommodation ladder, left unsecured after the battle and flight from the lagoon had been torn off its mountings and was now being washed around the main deck, threatening to break open Tank Coamings. The ship’s side rails had already been bent out of shape in places. There was nothing they could do, to venture out on deck was something only boys’ adventure books recommended.

Nevertheless, the Chief Mate, with the Polish third Mate and Filipino Bosun, roped together, *did* go out on deck and tried to jam it. Knocked down by a large wave, they came close to being killed. Jack’s opinion of his Second in Command improved greatly.

Without warning the ship slid off to port, despite the helmsman frantically spinning the wheel to starboard. Jack sprang to the Engine Room Telegraph and rang Half Ahead increasing speed from dead Slow ahead, using the engine to bring the ship back into the wind.

During this manoeuvre, an extra large wave broke flooded over the starboard side hurling tons of water across the deck, under the catwalk and poured over the port side. The ship listed heavily to port at a perilous angle, but being a well-found ship, she slowly righted and came back into the wind. Jack then rang dead slow ahead again.

Looking out on deck, Jack saw the accommodation ladder had gone from the main deck - washed overboard by the wave. On its way, it had smashed a hole in Number Five port wing tank coaming. Jack reckoned some seawater must have entered the tank and would continue to do so with each wave which pounded the main deck. This in time would cause a list, as well as adding to the Free Surface Effect. Another danger! Neither that tank, nor the sister tank on the starboard side had been loaded with Crude.

The only solution was to line up the cargo system, open the valves on that tank as well as Number Five Starboard tank valve to equalise the list, then pump the water out of both tanks through the ballast line into the sea. Luckily it was a modern ship, with all the valve operations inside the Cargo Control Room. Maybe, just maybe, they would be able to contain the flooding.

Jack reported to the attending warship. A leak in the Engine room, No 5 port and starboard wing tanks filling up with seawater. Please stand by to Save Our Souls! A thumping was heard on the ship's port side below the waterline. Jack ran to the bridge wing and looked over, with the wind tearing at his hair.

He saw what was left of the Accommodation Ladder was still attached to the ship by the wire from the fixed gangway davit and was now threatening to pierce the shell plating below the waterline.

The Second Mate, third Engineer and the Filipino Bosun grabbed the wire cutter and ran out on the storm riven deck and cut the Gangway Davit Lift wire. One end flipped back giving the Second Mate a nasty cut on his face but they all

reached the accommodation block safely. The crane sank into the depths, having tried to sink the ship; the Second Engineer inspected the shell plating carefully from inside the Engine Room, noted the buckling caused by the accommodation ladder but found no leakage.

After that, the storm passed them by and Jack managed to slowly resume his course to the North East rounding the back of the cyclone as it passed to the West. The motion was still uncomfortable but no longer dangerous. The equally battered Australian frigate accompanied them. The badly wounded helmsman and Second Officer were transferred to the warship when the weather was calm enough for helicopter operations.

Upon reaching the Kuria Muria Islands off the south Omani coast; the two ships followed the coast to Ras al Hadd, where they turned westwards into the Gulf of Oman. The warship landed the two wounded men at Muscat and resumed her patrol duties. Jack anchored his battered and brutalised ship off Khor Fakkan on Sunday, October eighteenth.

Khor Fakkan is a small port in the Sharjah Emirate on the Gulf of Oman about thirty miles south of the Quoins, a small group of islands at the entrance to the Arabian Gulf between the Musandam Peninsular and Iran.

He later heard that the Cyclone had not moderated before reaching Somalia and had caused severe damage to parts of Puntland. The port city of Bossasso was inundated by rainstorms and severe flooding was experienced as far South as Eyl. The cyclone had not in fact, recurved to the West; its initial position had been wrong, which both Jack and Commander Donaldson had doubted.

Jack realised he was lucky to have sailed from the lagoon before the Cyclone caught them there. He would never have managed to escape through the narrow channel and would have been driven aground.

Chapter 56 – The Village - 11th to 23rd

October.

When Jim Turner was thrown off the *Chesham*, he'd been stunned and weighed down by his clothes. Dazed, he'd tried swimming back to the ship, but was seized and hauled aboard a boat. Malik and two others were also picked up by the boat, which then sped back to the shore. With two men holding Jim, Malik savagely pistol-whipped him; being sure the emails Jim had sent to London had resulted in the arrival of the British warship.

His men finally intervened and stopped Malik from killing Jim outright, by which time he was already unconscious. On reaching the shore, they quickly carried Jim to a hiding place and then waited to see if the British sailors would land on the beach to look for him. Kassim then drove the only car out of the area, just enough to hide it; hoping the warship would assume Jim was inside it.

The following morning, Jim slowly became aware of his surroundings, but was scared to open his eyes. He could feel a hard mattress beneath him, realised he was unshackled and could hear the sound of children playing. Forcing his eyes open, he saw that he was in a room lying on a bed; children were running around half-naked and playing games on the floor. An attractive young girl about fourteen or fifteen years' old; looked up from a book and yelled at them to be quiet. Seeing Jim was awake she gave him a bowl of water and mimed that he'd be getting fed later.

He was in a hell of a state; his face and shoulders were just one tremendous beat of agony. He had been cut and severely bruised by the Pistol whipping and was now in considerable pain. He even wondered if any of his facial bones had been broken. Thrusting aside the sheet covering

him, he staggered to his feet, realised he was naked and fell back into bed again, clutching the sheet. The young children screamed with laughter while the girl modestly looked away.

Aliyah, in whose house he had been hidden, shooed the children out, then stripped the sheet off him again and washed him all over, to the glee of his now appreciative audience, who were now looking in at the door and through the windows. She then put some kind of dressing on his face, soothing the pain a bit. Before she'd finished, he'd drowsed off to sleep again, reaction having set in.

Upon finally waking up, it was dark; the house was quiet except for sounds of people sleeping. Turning over in the bed he felt a warm body asleep beside him. Stretching his right arm out, felt another smaller body, also asleep: all three of them in the same large bed. Remembering what Sophia had once told him, he realised he was sandwiched between Aliyah and her daughter.

He wondered where Sophia was, why wasn't she there beside him? Where is she? Why am I here with Aliyah and not back in the Big House with Sophia? He badly wanted to get up, but was unable to do so, without waking one of the women either side of him.

Puzzled and still half dazed, he fell asleep again. It was daylight when he finally woke up; both Aliyah and her daughter were gone. Where the hell were his clothes? Aliyah came back again and using his poor command of the Somali language, asked where his clothes were. She smiled and handed them to him, at the same time holding up five fingers.

She helped him to get dressed and five minutes later, Kassim came in with Abdullah, the only survivor of his boat crew. Kassim told Jim that Hassan was dead; Malik and Kassim were now in charge and there would soon be another ship to navigate into the lagoon, followed by a submarine.

“Where’s the *Chesham*?” Jim asked him, wincing with the pain from his yet unhealed cuts and bruises.

“Sailed two days ago while you were unconscious.” Kassim replied.

“And Sophia?” Jim managed to ask, Aliyah’s ointment was wearing off and he was suffering waves of agony.

“Both Sophia and Samira were on the *Chesham* when she sailed out. The British warship left as well.”

“The Crude Oil? It’s still on the *Chesham*?” It was a silly question, which he realised as soon as he’d said it.

“Of course it is. We have no intention anyway of messing around with Crude Oil. There are far more important things to do now, and we want you up and working for us.”

Jim felt a wave of depression sweep over him; he’d been abducted once, nearly escaped and now re-abducted again. Aliyah came in then and anointed his face again, easing the pain significantly.

Kassim explained that the Oil Rig had blown up and a Crude Oil fire on the lagoon had demolished many of the buoys and stakes. He told Jim that he would have to replace them before the next tanker arrived with a cargo of Diesel. He would also have to make another chart, since his original home-made chart was still on the *Chesham*.

“You mean another ship will be coming here, *loaded* with a cargo of Diesel fuel?” Jim managed to say through split lips.

“Yes.” Replied Kassim “A special diesel fuel mainly used for Submarines.”

“What submarines? Are you going to load that ship with Crude Oil as well for your father?” Jim asked, confused.

“Iranian submarines. Malik has been in contact with the Iranians for a long time now and this lagoon has been picked as a perfect setting for a secret submarine depot outside the Persian Gulf. We are not, nor ever have been

interested in the Crude Oil concept. That was Hassan's baby. My father is dead now."

"You mean you want to still use the lagoon now?" Jim demanded, amazed. "Both the lagoon and Island are already known about, at least in London. The lagoon will be surveyed by satellite and any ship entering would immediately be known. In any case, I doubt a submarine could get through the channel submerged." Jim said, trying to sit up.

"First of all, after the warship and your old ship had left, Crude Oil poured into the lagoon after the Oil Rig blew up followed by a major fire. Most, but not all, of the Crude was burnt away by the fire and the whole area looks completely devastated, polluted and unusable. If we act quickly and get the Iranian tanker in, discharged and out again, than it's still feasible to use submarines under the cover of darkness."

"What you're proposing is pure fantasy. Surely Iran hasn't agreed to this mad scheme?"

"We have been in touch with members of their Navy for a long time now. Tomorrow, you will go to what's left of the Big House with Abdullah. The Operations Room you were using does not seem to be too severely damaged. You will probably find your notebooks still there unharmed, maybe the computer still working. Then you will re-moor all the missing buoys and make up a new chart." Kassim's tone was menacing, Jim had never heard him talking that way before.

"So your father was lying all the time, when he said the lagoon was used to promote Somali Crude Oil?" Jim demanded, surprised at what he was hearing.

"No; as I said just now, that really *was* his idea. We would have let him have his little Crude Oil triumph, and then depose him. Malik went over his head and organised this with the Iranians. It would have worked, except for your emails alerting the British Navy. The arrival of the

British warship with the strange sounding Scottish name wrecked our plans, Hassan's as well."

"But what about the militia fighting you, the tank as well. Who sent them? The remnants of the Puntland Provisional Government? Like the previous time when that Colonel came?" Jim asked, his features still contorted with pain.

"No, another War Lord sent them, they won't come again, most were killed and the British warship conveniently dealt with the tank." Kassim replied.

"Wait a minute, let's get this straight. You are going to hi-jack another tanker, this time loaded with Diesel oil to be used as fuel for submarines?"

"No Jim, not a hi-jack, she's an Iranian tanker, coming straight here as soon as we tell them it's safe. The tanker will discharge its cargo into two unused oil tanks near the Oil Rig." Kassim said. "Later, the Iranians will send a ship equipped with buoys to replace your petrol drums."

"Is the oil rig still working? I thought you said it had been blown up." Jim asked, confused.

"Yes it has. As I said before, it'll be a *loaded* tanker that will discharge diesel oil into those two empty tanks, using the still existing pipeline, most of which is still usable; the damaged sections will be repaired or replaced. You will start work tomorrow, go to what's left of the big house, find your notes and replace the damaged or sunken buoys. Abdullah here will be with you all the time; he remembers all that you've done before." Kassim and Abdullah left, the latter limping.

* * * * *

A few minutes later Jim heard a scream, he started to get up and see what was happening, when Aliyah ran over and pushed him back on the bed, shaking her head. Holding her right index finger against her lips for silence, her left hand

physically held Jim down on the bed. Through the open doorway, he saw Abdullah return back to the village, waving a blood-stained knife, followed by four men carrying the dead body of Kassim. Jim started to struggle up but Aliyah firmly held him down, shaking her head and hissing at him to keep quiet.

Ten minutes later, he heard the sound of an automatic weapon and another scream of agony, followed by another group of villagers carrying the newly killed body of Malik. Suddenly frightened, Jim looked up at Aliyah, raised his eyebrows in a silent query, wondering if he would be the next victim. She shrugged her shoulders in a 'don't know' answer. Jim felt sure he would be the next to be killed.

Two women came to the door, who Jim recognised as the widows of Yusuf and Ahmed, both obviously distressed. They said a few words to Aliyah, which Jim didn't catch; Aliyah then released her hold on Jim and all three women stood framed by the open door, their arms folded in front of them, their faces stern; their bodies denying entry.

Aliyah told him later they'd been there to save Jim from a summary execution. Aliyah's standing in the village, plus the wives of Yusuf and Ahmed, both of them now widows, had saved him. Apart from that, Jim himself had been popular in the village and had made a fair attempt to learn their language. The bodies of Malik and Kassim were towed out to sea through the Northern channel and abandoned to the Indian Ocean sharks

* * * * *

Later that day, Jim walked down to the beach and looked up at the sky. He saw low clouds appearing, which grew thicker and thicker, the breeze had dropped and there was an atmosphere of stagnant calm. As he watched, the clouds grew blacker and more menacing, a spot of rain fell on his forehead, then another and soon there was a downpour.

With a wallop, the wind came, soon strengthening to gale force, then later to storm force. The surface of the lagoon was whipped into waves, far larger than those caused by the Southwest monsoon.

Soaked to the skin, Jim realised it was a typhoon, or rather a Cyclone. One of the rare Indian Ocean Tropical Cyclones that turned towards Somalia. Most of them north of the Equator haunted the southern Indian, Bengali or Bangladeshi Coasts. Jim ran back to the hut through drenching rain. Aliyah, her daughter and the other children were there, huddled together, rain was pelting in through windows that had frozen with rust in the open position.

The floor was beginning to be flooded; insects washed out

of their hiding places were either skittering on the water or drowning. A brilliant lightning flash illuminated the black evening sky, followed by a roar of thunder. Waves from the Indian Ocean were pouring into the lagoon through both the north and south channels, significantly raising its level, flooding the lower reaches of the village. The workboat and the zodiac were both torn from their moorings and swept on to the shore. The population could do nothing except remain cowed in their leaking hovels.

Looking up, Jim saw a drip of water appear from the flat roof above his head. The drip solidified into a slight runnel of water, which quickly became a stream. Plaster came down followed by agglomerate, enlarging the hole. Seemingly solid rain hit the floor and flooded out through the open door; through which more rain was entering on the wind. Twice, Aliyah and he had to shift the bed to avoid further roof leakages.

The storm continued throughout that night, the following day and only eased down by the third morning. By midday, the villagers had started cleaning up the mess and counting the cost. Jim overheard a damage report in English over the girl's short-wave battery radio. The Port of Bossasso was

devastated, but Berbera had escaped the worst of the cyclone damage.

Fishing villages from Eyl north to the Gulf of Aden had lost most of their fishing fleets, houses destroyed and huts blown away. There was serious coastal flooding and some areas inland were also waterlogged by heavy rain. An appeal for help was broadcast, since the seasons' crops had been wiped out in many areas.

Jim approached the ruins of the Big House, which was a mess. Walls damaged by the tank but left standing had been blown down; the creek had overflowed, flooding the house with brackish seawater. A flash flood was surging down the wadi, destroying some of the wooden supports for the original pipeline. Jim was unable to reach the house and feared snakes. It seemed obvious that the plans of Malik and Kassim to create an Iranian submarine refuge would never have worked. They were both dead anyway.

The computer was probably wrecked too, the whole lagoon area would need to be re-sounded and recharted! The work that he, poor dead Yusuf and Ahmed, as well as Abdullah had accomplished washed out in a single cyclone – which he later heard had been given the number O4A, not even dignified with a name.

Sadly remembering the time when he and Sophia were in fits of laughter, creating his home-made chart, he wondered where she was now and what she was doing. Returning to Aliyah's place, he helped her clean up, tried to repair some of the wreckage inside and to mend the holes in the flat roof.

Jim was rapidly learning their language now, since there was no one left to talk with in English. Neither Sophia nor Samira; neither Hassan Malik nor Kassim; neither Yusuf nor Ahmed. Abdullah was still there, but his English was poor. Poorer even than Jim's Somali.

That night, he'd hesitated before getting into bed. Both Aliyah and her daughter were there. The elder woman

spoke sharply in Somali, the daughter laughed and got out of the bed and left the room to sleep with the other children. Aliyah opened her arms to him and he gratefully surrendered to her body with that exciting warm velvety skin. The following nights, the girl stayed in the bed and slept while Jim and Aliyah were making love.

On Sunday October 18th, Jim was loafing on the beach when a helicopter flew overhead. He stripped his shirt off and waved. The helicopter pilot put his machine in hover, while inspecting the figure on the beach through binoculars. The pilot thought it could be the missing Turner and landed. Jim boarded the helicopter, after turning to wave at Aliyah

Chapter 57 – The Iranians – October 18th

Looking down, Jim saw that Aliyah had been joined by her daughter, both waving goodbye to him. So were several men and women from the village.

The helicopter was Iranian, he was taken to an Iranian frigate that was on its way back to the port of Bandar Abbas after forming part of a patrol against Somali pirates. Jim pleaded to be taken to the Seychelles, but the Captain refused. Three days later, the ship arrived there and Jim was taken ashore. A car with a Naval Officer and two ratings took him to what he realised was a large Naval Base.

There he was interviewed by an Admiral, judging by the amount of gold bands on his sleeves. Jim was asked if he knew Malik and Kassim and if they'd told him about future planning. Jim could only tell the Admiral what Kassim had told him before the Tropical Cyclone, also that they were both dead.

“Did they tell you that Iran is preparing to use the lagoon as a submarine bunker station?” The admiral asked.

“You can’t be serious!” Jim exclaimed. “The whole world must know about the lagoon by now. I wouldn’t be

surprised if the Americans have already plotted it by satellite.”

“So what can the Americans do about it? Bomb the place and cause a world war? They wouldn’t even dare blockade the place.”

“The whole lagoon and the surrounding area is devastated from the cyclone. It’s full of burnt out crude oil. The steel pipeline running down the wadi has been severely damaged; most of its trunnions swept away in a flash flood. All the buoys and stakes are destroyed or out of place. What would happen if one of your submarines was damaged in the entrance. There are no repair shops nor persons skilled to run them.”

“Tomorrow morning you will be flown to Teheran to be interviewed again. If necessary we’ll send you back there to redo all the buoyage, this time with the proper equipment.” The admiral said.

Jim’s heart sank. To be sent back there and work for the Iranians?

It suddenly struck Jim that only he knew what the Iranians have been planning. Nobody knew he was alive; nor where he was. If the Iranians killed him, nobody would ever know.

As far as he knew, nobody had witnessed his rescue by an Iranian helicopter, apart from Aliyah and her daughter. But did they know it was Iranian? He was sure not! The Iranian Captain had refused to land him at The Seychelles and he was now in Iran, with no money, nor any identity papers. Had the Iranian Captain or the Naval Officers here in the base, reported his rescue to the British Government? Was he in fact rescued, or in deeper trouble? The Iranians could kill him, bury his body and that would be that.

The interview had been brief and the same Naval Officer and two ratings escorted him back to a car. To his surprise, they took him to a hotel and warned him to be ready by ten the following morning. They gave him 10,000 rials and told

him to buy some clothes and other toilet necessities; Jim had been living in the same shabby clothes for months and worked out that he had the equivalent of £250 sterling to spend. He immediately spent some of the money at a Barber shop, having his beard shaved off and his hair cut.

There were no visible restraints on his movements and that evening he visited a large crowded market. He'd been in enough hotels round the world to know he'd be better off buying the clothes he needed from a bazaar. The atmosphere in the town seemed relaxed, the people friendly and even willing to talk to him in English.

He was tempted to phone home but didn't. He felt it better to wait and see what the Iranians wanted before telling the world he was alive. He wondered if he was being followed and his movements reported, but could see no sign of this happening.

The next day, he was taken to the airport and flown to Teheran and interviewed, this time by four very Senior Naval Officers and two civilians. One of which he thought was very close to the President Ahmadinejad.

They asked his views on the suitability of using the lagoon as a Submarine Base. He told them that, in his view, the plan was a no-go and never would be. Nor had it ever been in his opinion! The water was deep enough for small submarines on the surface, but certainly not a Kilo Class boat submerged.

He told them the lagoon was patchy with Crude slick; the buoys were just petrol drums and stakes stuck in the mud. In any case, the storm had destroyed most of them. There was only one chart of the area, which was now either on the *Chesham* or the *Loch Kelliesport*.

"What would happen if one of your boats got damaged there, perhaps in the channel? There are neither workshop facilities, nor a trained population for this. The country is still divided, no proper Government and scarcely any police force, no facilities there for crew shore leave either."

The men conducting the interview were polite and spoke excellent English. They told Jim that there had been no real intention of creating a base outside the Persian Gulf and certainly not one in Somalia. Malik had persuaded an elderly Admiral it was a good idea, but none of the rest of the Admiralty staff had even seriously considered it. The elderly Admiral, he was told, was soon to be retired!

Jim then asked if he could see a British Consulate and go home. He needed papers too, a passport and a free ticket. He was asked to do a quick drawing of the lagoon and the approximate position of the *Deep*. He saw no harm in complying since the lagoon must soon become general knowledge. He was given an office to work in.

That evening he was taken to the British Embassy where they gave him a travel passport and sufficient cash to get home. They arranged a flight to Heathrow for him on the following day, Friday October 23rd. By this time he'd discovered Iran was not the dour closed up kind of country he'd been led to believe.

The population was friendly and talkative, the shops full and the two hotels, one in Bandar Abbas and the other in Teheran were world-class. The afternoon before leaving Teheran, Jim phoned his wife from the British Embassy, asking her to meet him at Heathrow, the following afternoon. October 23rd. He failed to realise the shock that phone call would precipitate.

Chapter 58 – Crude Transfer – 14th October

Thankfully, Tom left the office and caught the flight to Dubai on Tuesday, October 14th; where he would spend several days finalising arrangements with the local agents and dry-dock manager. He would also arrange visas and

travel documents for Samira and Sophia, who would remain on board the *Chesham* until arrival at Dubai.

On Saturday October 17th, Sonia arrived at Dubai and was taken to the Dubai Hilton for the night. The following day she and Tom shared a taxi for the long drive over the mountains to Khor Fakkan in the Sharjah Emirate, then finally out to the ship by boat.

Tom had always been fascinated by the trip from Dubai to Khor Fakkan. The road crossed the range of dorsal mountains that run down the Musandam Peninsular as far as Muscat and further. On the Dubai side, the scenery was pure desert, just sand, sand and more rolling sand. The taxi stopped at the peak beside an Indian or Pakistani shop selling cold soft drinks. On the Khor Fakkan side, the scenery dramatically changed.

There was still some sand, but plenty of rocks and boulders, even occasional small stunted trees and some scrub. Cooler too. Khor Fakkan is in the Sharjah Emirate, the Emir has a palace there high in the mountains overlooking the Gulf of Oman. It also has a large offshore anchorage.

Before arrival at Khor Fakkan, Sonia mentioned that it was a pity Jack's last leave had been curtailed, having joined the *Chesham* early.

"Don't worry," Tom replied "The two weeks he spent at Southampton on the Gas Course will count as leave earned and will be added to any outstanding leave."

"What Gas Course at Sout'ampton?" She said sharply, her accent starting to show. Tom realised she didn't know and then remembered Angela saying that *she'd* been with Jack on both those weekends. He had no idea what to say next, but hastily temporised:

"Oh sorry Sonia, I was mixing him up with another Captain. It was Captain Taylor who went on the Gas Course." Tom said, hoping she'd believe him.

He was sorry as soon as he'd said those words. He was not a natural liar and thought she'd be better off knowing the truth about her husband. However everything was in such a mess at present, he didn't want trouble between husband and wife further complicating the issue. He made a mental note to warn Jack

"But I thought Captain Taylor was on the *West Wycombe*." She said. Not yet suspicious but not far short of it. He was unable to meet her eyes.

He'd managed to convince her in the end; she pretty well *had* to believe him, after all he was the overall boss, but she didn't look at all happy. There were too many loose ends. One of which had occurred when she'd been staying with Angela after the *Chesham* had been hijacked. She'd heard Angela on the phone mention something about her husband but not exactly what.

She had a horrible feeling Angela had lied to her at the time. Was Captain Murchison lying as well?

Looking back; she remembered just how shocked she'd been when she'd heard Angela inviting that same Captain Murchison, the man sitting beside her now, for a weekend in a hotel. Not just inviting him but tempting, almost daring him to meet her at the station in London.

She had no idea if Angela had succeeded or not, nor did she care! Angela had obviously already slept with the boss man, but had she slept with her Jack as well? It seemed more and more likely.

They arrived at Khor Fakkan just as the *Chesham* was approaching the anchorage offshore. Boarding by launch with the new Filipino crew, they found a weary Jack, almost asleep on his feet, numb with fatigue. Since the Cyclone, he'd been short-handed, the wounded Second Mate and helmsman having been transferred to the Warship. Wearily he calculated the wages for the departing crew and signed on the new arrivals.

When he finally managed to get to his cabin, pretty well

a zombie due to fatigue, he found Sonia in a rage. She'd found some scuffed sandals and other bits and pieces that Aliyah had left behind in his cabin, expecting to return the following day. Jack, nearly asleep on his feet finally admitted that a Somali woman had done some washing and ironing for him.

"And what else?" She'd demanded, her eyes blazing with fury. He told her that nothing else had occurred.

In the taxi ride across the mountains, Captain Murchison had mentioned the Gas Course at Southampton, but later denied it. He'd obviously been surprised she didn't know and became evasive when she'd questioned him. That, together with finding Samira and Sophia aboard, plus bits and pieces of yet another woman's clothing made Sonia wonder what had been going on.

She was beginning to see that Jack may not be the handsome bold lover she'd imagined. Other half-buried bits of information came back to her again. She was on the point of going home, but realised what Jack had lived through and the danger he'd been in. She decided to forgive him even if he *had* made love to the woman - something he strenuously denied.

Jack was impatient, obviously wanting her; but for the first time she was reluctant. When finally joining him in bed, she was unable to enjoy it as she usually did. Having finished, he gave her a triumphant grin, then fell asleep – exhausted. Extricating herself from his arms, she stood up and looked down at him. Angela's reference to Jack she'd overheard and now doubts about this Gas Course at Southampton worried her. What about the Indian and Somali women still on board. Both good-looking in their separate ways. Had he had them as well?

The following day, Captain Todd; a new Chief Officer; a few other Officers; the Chief Engineering Superintendent and the Drydock Manager from Dubai boarded. That same day, Jack came back to his cabin in the afternoon after

spending hours on deck and found Sonia, white with anger, her face grim, waving a paper at him.

“What’s this Jack?” She asked, her Latin temperament starting to boil over. “A certificate qualifying you competent to sail on Liquefied Gas Tankers? A course lasting two weeks, from July twenty-seventh until August seventh? You told me you were on board this ship then and had already sailed.”

She had her diary open, a diary she kept religiously, both for the good and now, the bad things in her life. Jack could hardly deny it; he stammered something about the course happening at the last minute with no time to tell her about it. Grimly, she questioned him again.

“You could have told me by phone or Internet when you were there. Where were you that weekend, the First and Second of August? You certainly didn’t come back to Italy, did you?” She said, regarding him, her face taut with fury.

“No, I went to Mum and Dad in Romford. Where do you think I went?” Jack replied shortly.

“But you didn’t Jack. Don’t take me for a fool. Your mother phoned *me* that Sunday, asking *me* if I knew where you were. I thought it a bit strange at the time, but I told her you’d already sailed on the *Chesham*. She’d seemed surprised and said she didn’t think the ship would be in Rotterdam until later in August. I thought she was mistaken at the time but now I’m starting to add two and two together. *So Jack, where were you that weekend?*”

The last sentence was almost a scream. She was far too angry to cry.

“Oh yes, I remember now. I stayed at Southampton to do a bit of studying.” Jack said hotly.

“I don’t believe you. I know you well enough to know you’re lying. Right, where were you and with whom?” She was furious, her fingers itching to strangle him.

The silence lengthened and then she produced her trump

card! The letter from Angela that Jack had received at Porta Marghera came thumping down on the table separating them. She'd found it by accident when tidying up his cabin. The wastepaper bin had not been emptied since he'd thrown the letter there. It was crumpled, soggy with teabag stains, but

still readable. Looking at him, Sonia said pityingly:

"You were with Angela, weren't you? Your old childhood friend and Jim Turner's wife?" Her fury was now turning into contempt.

Jack's face gave him away, he tried to deny it but she eventually dragged the truth out of him, although he only admitted to one weekend with Angela. In tears of rage, she said:

"OK Jack, get the agent to arrange a flight to Italy for me tomorrow. I'm going home to see about a divorce. I would have accepted you sleeping with that village woman, that was when you were in danger, but I cannot ever forgive you for sleeping with Angela! Nor can I forgive your Captain Murchison for lying to me in the taxi. I'm going to the shore with Captain Murchison this evening when he leaves the ship. He can arrange my passage home to Italy."

"Also Jack" she added quietly, "looking back, I'm certain it was more than just one or two weekends. Well you can have her now, for what she's worth. You know, I even believed she was my friend. What about these two women who've been with you on the ship. Have you had them as well?" By now she was in tears, Jack tried to approach her but was waved off.

It all came pouring out then, starting from the afternoon of Mrs Knowles party. Sonia was shocked at Angela's behaviour and her easy acceptance of Jim's presumed death.

"Incidentally, my dear faithless husband. You are not the only one. When I was staying in Chelmsford with her, after this ship had been hijacked, I overheard her on the phone

planning to spend a weekend with your Captain Murchison.” She said triumphantly.

She’d been longing to tell Jack about her promotion to a Management position. But now she never would. She left that evening, despite Jack’s pleadings, Tom Murchison arranging her passage to Dubai, then back to Italy. Jack should have got rid of the evidence before arrival at Khor Fakkan. He’d meant to but was far too busy with the cyclone; the passage round Ras al Hadd; signing on and signing off crew members and the rest; he just hadn’t got round to it. The previous Filipino steward was one of the wounded, transferred to the *Loch Kelliesport* and the newly arrived one had not had time to clean up the mess.

* * * * *

The question of what to do with the dead body of Ahmed surfaced. The Sharjah Emirate didn’t want it, neither did Dubai. It was generally thought that Captain Knowles should have quietly thrown it overboard before arrival. Tom solved the problem through the Agency at Sharjah.

He paid for the burial out of his own pocket with only himself, Samira and Sophia present as mourners. The two women had been allowed ashore just for this one occasion and were watched closely by the police. Both women were crying as the dead body was lowered into the grave, wrapped in a sheet. Tom too was sad, Jack having told him about Ahmed’s heroic return to the ship in the middle of the battle.

Jack also told him about the attempted second hijacking and mentioned that, in his opinion, the attack had been warded off by his Ukrainian and Polish junior Officers. He also mentioned their heroic actions during the Cyclone. Tom, too, decided to accept these East European Officers without his previous grudges against them. The Chief Officer’s role during the cyclone also impressed him –

although he still had to sack the man, due to his failure to keep a proper lookout in known dangerous waters.

Before leaving London, Tom had arranged for a Greek Company to take the unwanted Crude Oil. The Greek Company had chartered an old tanker, also under the Geek flag to take the Crude oil by Ship to Ship transfer. To Tom's agreeable surprise, they offered to take the tank cleaning slops as well – for a price!

A Company belonging to a local Agency would supply the Yokohama fenders, cargo hoses and a tug, also an experienced Pilot/Loading Master to carry out the transfer. Angela's Uncle Bob was not called upon, it being too long since the Iran/Iraq war; in any case his Master's Ticket had long since expired.

Tom congratulated Jack on his successful escape from the lagoon and sighted all the damage sustained by the ship. Before settling down to evaluate the repairs, Tom met Sophia and Samira; advising them that they'd have to stay on board until Dubai before catching a plane to the UK. To his surprise, he was attracted to Sophia; something her radar was already aware of. She'd felt his eyes on her during the burial of poor Ahmed.

The transfer went well, despite the Pilot/Loading Master initially refusing to join the battered wreck of the **Chesham** alongside the Greek VLCC. He thought it safer keep both ships at one hundred metre distance from each other and rig up a floating pipeline. Tom ridiculed the idea saying too many dhows would ignore the warnings and sail right into it; causing a massive pollution.

The Pilot/Loading master had insisted that the hole in No; five port wing tank was repaired before the transfer began. A hasty cement block was put in place. Since the starboard side of the **Chesham** was in a far better condition than the port side, the Pilot/Loading Master eventually decided to bring her starboard side alongside the port side of the Greek tanker and using doubled Yokohama fenders.

Normally the port side of the *Chesham* would have been used so that the Transverse Thrust when going astern could be used. In this case the Pilot insisted upon using two tugs. Tom had no choice, but to agree.

The Pilot eventually brought the *Chesham*, being the smaller ship, alongside the anchored Greek ship. Doubled Yokohama Fenders were strung along the starboard side of the *Chesham*; hard rubber cylinders about five metres long by two metres in diameter, tractor tyres chained round them. With the help of two tugs, the Pilot/Loading Master slowly manoeuvred the *Chesham* alongside the port side of the Greek ship, so that the two manifolds were in line. Both ships were fully inerted and two hard rubber cargo hoses were connected to both ships' manifolds.

The Somali Crude Oil was successfully transferred to the Greek tanker. Compared to the *Chesham*, the Greek ship was huge at a quarter of a million tons deadweight. It was considered too risky to carry out Crude Oil Washing during the discharge, not enough being known about the quality of the Crude.

Tom had been hoping the sale of the Somali Crude would go a long way to pay for the damage to the *Chesham*. This was largely negated by the Greek Company agreeing to take, but also charging for the slops and tank washings.

The *Chesham* then cleaned the tanks that had been contaminated by Crude Oil, while still inerted. Clean water from the sea was pumped through fixed revolving nozzles inside the emptied tanks, washing them thoroughly. The oily/water mix was pumped directly into empty tanks on the Greek tanker, where it would later be separated. After two days the last tank was clean. All concerned gave a concerted Sigh of relief.

The moorings were let go and the Greek tanker sailed to an unknown destination, after signing the Cargo Manifests,

Time Sheets and other papers. The tug took the Yokohama fenders and hoses away, the Pilot/Loading Master finally leaving with the tug.

On board the ship, the long process of gas freeing the tanks had begun. Air driven fans pushed air through tubes to the bottom of the tanks, forcing Cargo and Inert gasses out through deck openings. Eventually each tank contained zero gas and twenty-one per cent Oxygen, as measured by the ship's calibrated instruments. By this time she'd weighed anchor and was heading for Dubai, accompanied by two tugs. The Drydock management were rubbing their hands with glee about the major repair job heading their way.

During the gas freeing, Jack spent most nights out on the Main Deck, supervising the job, together with the new Chief Mate. Captain Todd meanwhile, was supervising an internal clean-up of the accommodation and any repairs that could be safely carried out at the anchorage. He also supervised taking on board extra life rafts to replace the missing lifeboat.

By the time the gas-freeing was nearly complete, he took the ship over from Jack, who went ashore and convinced Tom by phone to send him home from Fujairah, instead of staying on board until Dubai. Jack's abrupt departure had dismayed Sophia, who had regarded him as a possibility after his wife had stormed off.

Fujairah is a large town to the South of Khor Fakkan and in the Dubai Emirate. He was put up in a hotel there until a seat became available on October 23rd. The day before his flight, he'd telephoned Angela with his time of arrival.

* * * * *

Sophia, having overheard the row between Jack and Sonia and her consequent departure from the ship, realised Jack had been sleeping with Jim's wife. She was in a devil of a

quandary having loved Jim; but he'd been abducted again and was probably dead. This left her in an unenviable position, since she now had nobody to help her upon arrival in England. Even Captain Jack had gone.

She badly needed someone to plead for her through the Immigration controls at London. Or else she would be sent back, at least to Somaliland – since she had a current passport for that country. She was determined not to be sent back to where she'd been so happy as a child and badly used as a young adult.

The only solution was to find someone to plead for her, to

support her claims for residency in the UK; a sponsor. But who though? Samira was also in the same situation but did not seem to care either way. They scarcely talked at all now, their former relationship of mistress and assistant no longer applicable.

Sophia needed, let's face it; she needed a man to vouch for her, a man willing to marry her, if necessary, so that she could reside in England permanently. Perhaps the only way of achieving this was to use the skill and experience she'd picked up as a Call Girl over the years.

Jim, the man she'd loved, had been retaken by Malik; was he still alive? Probably not. Why hadn't the British Navy searched for him ashore? She would have to forget Jim and to turn to someone else. Who though? The original ship's Captain had left, his relief was already married. Everybody had told her there would be an Enquiry and she'd be needed, but after that, what? Back to Somaliland?

So who then? There were no other unattached Englishmen aboard, the rest were mainly Polish or Ukrainians, some Arabs too. How long would it take before the Enquiry, she wondered? She remembered that older man, Jack's boss and Jim's too who'd been on board the first two days. She knew she'd attracted him, despite his advanced years.

What about Captain Murchison then? Jim had told her once that he had been divorced some years previously. He'd obviously been attracted to her but he was old, probably about fifty. Although she reckoned he was probably no older than most of the rich powerful men she'd slept with when liaising for Hassan in Somaliland. All of whom could still get it up when in bed with her, most managed at least twice! So now decide, 'yes or no'?

She decided to wait for him to make a move in her direction, as she was certain he would. Before going alongside at Dubai, Captain Murchison came aboard with a chemist and the Dry dock manager to inspect the tanks, certifying them clean, gas free and the ship safe for hot work. Visas had been issued, both for the Dubai Emirate and the UK, also a travel passport for Samira.

Arriving in the dry-dock at Dubai, both girls were taken ashore and put up at the Dubai Hilton, arranged by Tom Murchison who had booked them in a few days earlier. That evening Tom escorted both Sophia and Samira to have dinner with him and took Sophia along to the bar afterwards; Samira having declined and returned to her room. Being unused to alcoholic drinks, Sophia had wisely abstained, but enjoyed the atmosphere in the bar.

Tom Murchison was evidently well known there and was soon discussing ships with other men like him – mostly English expatriates. He wanted Sophia but knew he had to be careful; in the Emirates sex between unmarried partners often resulted in prison, followed by deportation.

Tom escorted her back to her room and shook hands with her, his eyes pleading. She kept hold of his hand after the handshake and led him inside. They spent that night together but had breakfast separately in the restaurant. Tom then had to leave and go back to the ship.

Although he was twenty-two years older than her, Sophia felt relaxed with him and treated him as she had treated Jim, a kind of happy laughing sex; far different to

the *Take it or Leave it* attitude of Angela. Being unmarried with no children, he'd promised her that he would do all could for her to be accepted in England. Tom returned to the hotel later that afternoon and sought out Sophia. She ran into his arms and they made love again. Afterwards, Sophia said to Tom:

"Tom; there's something you should know about me." She said hesitantly. "I was sleeping with Jim Turner in Puntland, before he was recaptured." Tom smiled at her and said.

"Yes I know that, I've known about it for a long time." He was quietly triumphant and decided to tell her the rest.

"You knew about it? I suppose Captain Jack must have told you." She said, uncertainly.

"Look Sophia, about two months ago we found out where Jim was, the lagoon and island as well. We also knew you were living with Jim. What we didn't know was what Hassan was planning to do." Tom said, enjoying her look of amazement.

Tom went on to tell about the mysterious Emails received by *Brice and Somerville*. How various items of information had come to light and about the spy they'd sent in. Sophia was shocked, realising Malik had been right about the emails that Jim had been sending via Samira. Looking back on the whole affair, it now seemed amateurish and shabby and probably would never have worked.

"And Jim's wife? Does she know that I have been sleeping with Jim? Has anyone told her?" She asked Tom.

"Yes. I'm afraid she does know. She was with me in the Office when the spy's report came in." He replied.

The following morning, Friday, October 23rd, Captain Murchison, Sophia and Samira caught the flight from Dubai to London Heathrow. The day before leaving Dubai, Tom phoned Angela, telling her his arrival time at Heathrow.

Chapter 58 – Heathrow – 22nd October 2009

Angela was at home, her mother back with her, following the news of Jim's second abduction. During lunch the phone rang. It was Jack Knowles, stating he had left the wreck of the *Chesham* and was arriving at Heathrow from Fujairah the following day at 1540. Would she please meet him at the airport? She'd hesitated and then said:

"Why don't you get a transfer straight to Italy, go home and sort your marriage out? I've just received a letter from Sonia's Advocate stating I'm responsible for your Divorce."

"That's exactly what I want to talk to you about. Please meet me off the plane and drive me to Mum and Dad's at Romford. I've got nowhere else to go! I want to talk to you about Jim too; we were together for a few days at the lagoon. Anyway I want to see you again." Jack pleaded.

After hesitating, she eventually agreed to meet him at Heathrow, but was determined not to get further involved with him. A few minutes later, the phone rang again. This time it was Tom Murchison.

"Hi Angela, I'm landing at Heathrow tomorrow at 1530 from Dubai. Can I come and see you, so that I can tell you about Jim and his recapture. Or better still, could you come to Heathrow and meet me? The Indian woman and a Somali woman will be on the plane as well, but will be stopped by Immigration. Perhaps you'd like the opportunity to talk to the Indian woman"

"Look Tom, I don't really want to meet you again. Nor her neither." She'd replied shortly, then hesitated.

Since Tom's flight from Dubai would arrive at roughly the same time as Jack's flight from Fujairah, she surprised Tom by finally saying 'yes'. She needed answers to a few questions. She wanted to know if Jim had still been alive

after his second abduction. Why couldn't Jack have stopped Jim from being recaptured? What was the Warship doing at the time? Surely the Royal Navy had the men, equipment and guns to have stopped this from happening? Has Jim been killed this time? If possible she would ask that same question to the two women being held by the Immigration Authorities. Finally she would tell both men never to contact her again.

Mrs Patterson, listening to the telephone conversation, or at least as much as she could hear, smiled and asked:

"Was that Captain Murchison on the phone? I'm sorry to say this, but Jim must be dead this time. You are going up to London tomorrow, so why not pack an overnight bag and go back to Harrow with him. Go on! I'll look after the kids for you. I'll probably take them to West Hampstead to see their cousins for a day or two.

She felt the need to push her daughter into a firm commitment, feeling sure Jim was dead.

"Oh Mum. Please give over. OK, I've spent one weekend with him which neither of us enjoyed much. The last thing I want now is a weekend at Harrow!" She exclaimed, then wondered if her mother was right.

Once again those two fatal words **WHY NOT** flashed into her brain. Remembering the last conversation she'd had with Tom, she knew he would willingly move to Chelmsford and take a flat there until they could marry. She almost made up her mind to go when the phone rang again. Sighing Angela picked it up:

"Angela, it's me Jim! Can you and the kids meet me at Heathrow tomorrow? I'm flying in on an Iran Air flight from Teheran at 1500. I've got no money, no card, no cheque book nor any other papers apart from a travel passport."

One hand flew to her mouth as she nearly fainted with shock and dropped the phone, the colour draining from her face. The room seemed to revolve round her for a minute or

so. Staggering to the nearest chair she sat down, her face as white as a sheet. Mrs Patterson, alarmed, picked up the phone and was shocked in her turn when she recognised Jim's voice. Without speaking to him, she handed the phone back to Angela, who eventually found her tongue.

"Teheran! What are you doing in Teheran, of all places?" She cried, saying the first thing that came into her head. Her face gradually regained its colour.

They didn't talk for long over the phone, since Jim was calling from a busy Consulate office, nor had they been in contact since just after Christmas, eight months previously. Recovering, she said she'd meet him at Heathrow alone; her

Mother would stay and look after the children.

She was shocked; all three of her men were arriving at Heathrow about the same time on different planes. She was pretty sure that neither Jack nor Tom knew the other had phoned her; nor would either of them know that Jim had also contacted her.

But Jim's precipitate arrival at Heathrow from Teheran of all places was something else altogether. She knew she had a lot of explaining to do, the letter she'd received from Sonia's Advocate for a start! She'd have to play that one off by accusing him of sleeping with the Indian girl. What about her then? Why was she in England too? Surely she and Jim were not going to continue their little adventure here?

Her dear old mum had just suggested another weekend with Tom and she'd almost been on the point of agreeing. Both of them having thought Jim was dead after his second abduction.

"Oh My God!" She said out loud. "What a bloody awful mess I've gone and got myself into."

Mess or not, she would have to fight her way out of this one. She asked her mother's advice, who told her she'd

have to sort things out with Jim as quickly as possible. Not a great deal of help there!

At ten past three the following afternoon, she met Jim off the plane from Iran. He had no luggage and she hurried him out of the terminal into her waiting car, before passengers from the other two planes had cleared Customs and Immigration.

Mr Dudley, having been warned by the Consulate in Teheran of Jim's arrival was held up by a traffic accident at the Chiswick Flyover and arrived too late. Using his authority, he soon found out that Jim had indeed been on the flight and had been met by a woman. Guessing it had been Angela who'd met him, he decided to let them have the weekend together.

When the passengers from Dubai were finally cleared, Tom Murchison was still there waiting for Angela when Jack walked out of the Customs area from the Fujairah flight. They greeted each other, but neither made a move to leave. After talking to each other for a while, they realised they were both waiting for the same woman who was not going to turn up. Jack returned to his old home at Romford and Tom to his flat at Harrow-on-the-Hill.

Angela drove their car home to Chelmsford. She was too busy driving through London's traffic to talk much and wished she'd brought the children with her. Upon arrival home, Jim and Angela looked at each other, strangers after all those months.

The children were beside themselves with excitement and were chattering away to him, recalling all their exploits at school and their visit to Toronto. Her mother had gone home feeling guilty, having been keen on seeing first Jack then Tom replacing Jim – actively encouraging her own daughter.

That Friday night in bed, they were uneasy and hesitant; their first attempt at making love was a fiasco. To Jim, she was so sophisticated, too sophisticated to make love to! For

her, Jim was a stranger, a man she no longer knew. It was the same next morning; they were completely unsynchronised; twelve years of marriage notwithstanding. There were too many unsaid things on both sides.

On the Saturday morning, she made a decision; packed their two reluctant children into her car and drove them to her mother's place at Romford; saying she'd pick them up on the Sunday evening. Both children muttered mutinously as she left.

She decided to use the rest of the weekend to sort things out between them. She knew Jim had been sleeping with an Indian woman although he hadn't yet mentioned it. She wondered if he ever would! As far as she knew, there'd never been any secrets before in their marriage and she was determined to bring everything out into the open.

As soon as she'd shut and locked the front door, she took the fixed phone off the hook; silenced her cell phone and locked it away in a drawer. Facing Jim, she was determined to tell him everything. But before that she demanded:

"How long have you been sleeping with that Indian woman?"

He gasped shocked. Before he had time to answer, she related how *good* Tom Murchison had been to her; how certain he'd been that Jim was alive; actively looking for unusual things concerning his possible whereabouts. She also told him that it was through Tom alone, that they'd managed to hold three interviews with the Ministry of Defence. It was mainly through Tom's findings, followed by those of the MoD, that they'd found out about the lagoon and what Jim could be doing there.

She then mentioned the incompetent spy who'd failed to make contact and nearly scuttled the whole operation; finally mentioning the role of the ***Loch Kelliesport***. Jim was amazed at Tom's perseverance and the results; laughing when she told him the spy had mistaken the pipeline sections for torpedoes and the reaction in London. He was

stupefied by how much had been found out about the operation.

“Look Jim. I know about the Indian woman you’ve been living with. The spy at least found that out! Were you going to try and keep that little secret to yourself?” She said accusingly. Jim gasped with shock. She continued by saying:

“I was told about her during the last meeting with the MoD. When I heard about you sleeping with her, I got drunk that afternoon on whisky, walked out of the pub and nearly got knocked down by a taxi. Tom Murchison took me to his home at Harrow, cooked a meal for me and put me to bed – alone.” She paused, then went on to say:

“I think you can guess what happened next. I woke up, still a bit drunk from all the whisky and was still upset because my husband was having sex with an Indian woman. Sorry to tell you this, but I climbed into bed with him.” She said, watching the shock appear on his face.

“Did he...?” He began. She interrupted him determined to tell the whole truth.

“...No Jim, he didn’t refuse me and I was ashamed afterwards. Don’t forget we’d been in contact since your abduction back in April; he’s done a lot for me, advising me, putting up with my frequent phone calls asking about you. But that’s not all! To cut a long story short, I later spent a weekend with him in a hotel.”

“A weekend, with my boss? You are telling me you spent a whole weekend with my boss in a hotel?” Jim almost shouted, horrified.

“Don’t blame him Jim. Blame me, I tempted him over the phone. I was in a terrible state, knowing you were with that Indian woman. Mum and the kids were staying with my sister and I didn’t want to spend the weekend by myself. I knew the *Chesham* and had been hijacked and taken to the place or lagoon where you were. I knew Jack was in command of her. But you? Were you still alive? Was Jack

still alive? Would either of you come out alive?" She said bitterly. Wiping her eyes, she carried on with her confession.

"Look Jim, I needed company so I phoned Tom and almost begged him to spend the weekend with me – Yes, in a hotel. I only wanted company but naturally he wanted sex as well. The worst of it was; it occurred on that Sunday you were abducted for the second time." She said, choking back a sob. Changing the subject, she looked up at Jim and said:

"Right Jim, tell me about that woman from India you've been sleeping with for many months.. In fact Mr Dudley thought the spy had nearly been caught, due to watching her get into your bed one evening."

"She's Indian but not from India! She was born and brought up in British Somaliland and even went to school in Nairobi." Jim said incautiously.

"Oh Jim. Don't split hairs." She hesitated and then said quietly, wiping away her tears.

"She's in London now Jim, with another woman from Somalia. They both arrived at the same time, and on the same flight yesterday as Tom Murchison, although they may still be held by the Immigration. They arrived at Heathrow just after you." She was calm as she said this; watching his face. "Mr Dudley found out the other day that her two brothers are living in England, somewhere up North"

Still in a state of shock, he told her about Sophia; how she had kept him sane in an alien atmosphere and looked after him when he was ill. He then confessed to Angela about the promises he'd made to Sophia in Puntland. How he'd been ready to divorce Angela and marry Sophia. He'd thought it was probably the only way to get her through the airport controls.

Angela was not too shocked by the confession; realising the Indian girl had seduced a badly frightened man who

thought he would never leave the country alive. She'd been a comfort to him in a totally alien atmosphere.

"Well Jim, what are you going to do about her? In a way, she's your responsibility. You had better phone the Immigration people at London and find out what's become of her. Tom Murchison said there was a Somali woman on his flight as well. Did you have her too?" She asked him.

"That must have been Samira, and no, I didn't make love to her. I'll find out about Sophia and phone her on Monday, if she's still in England." He said, still shocked about his wife's affair with Captain Murchison. He was about to hear

worse. She sat down in a nearby chair and looked at him.

"Sit down Jim and listen to me carefully." She said, pointing to another chair opposite her. "There's no nice way to say this; but I had an affair with Jack. He came to take me to lunch when I had a day off work. After lunch we came back here, both having had a bit too much to drink. We both thought you were dead and... well it happened. We made love in the spare bedroom. I have no excuse, nor do I need one. As far as I was concerned it was a 'One-off', I was a widow and you were dead."

"But the children? Where were they? What were they doing all the time you were in bed with Jack?" Jim cried.

"They were at school. They never knew but mum found out." She said, then looked at him in the eyes.

"That's not all Jim. A couple of months later; he was sent on a LPG course at Southampton; the same time that mum and the kids were off to Canada to see my father and Wendy. We spent the two weekends of the course in a hotel together. We both thought you were dead and we honestly thought I was a widow then. However, after the second weekend, I wrote and told him that we were finished. That was *before* I knew you were alive. Sonia somehow seems to have got hold of that letter and is now divorcing Jack." She

was watching him carefully and went on to say “Let’s not make it two divorces Jim.”

“You mean she wants a Divorce because of you?” Jim asked her miserably, his fists clenched. He was shocked and angry, feeling sick when he imagined Jack and her in bed together. Seeing this, she decided to tell him everything, past and present.

“Yes of course because of me. Unless Jack had other affairs.” She said, seeing the hurt in his eyes. “Look Jim, there’s something I’ve never told you. Jack and I go back a long way; as you know our families were next-door neighbours and very friendly. Jack and I almost grew up together. What I never told you was what happened before he went away on his first trip. We stopped being kids together and became lovers. Well not quite! We were on the point of making love when Wendy came into the room and stopped us. I was fifteen then and Jack seventeen.” She paused then, her eyes on Jim, then carried on:

“When he invited me to that party at Kilburn some years later, we both knew it was an attempt to renew our previous relationship. But *you* happened to be there and I fell in love with you instead. I still am.” She was blinking back fresh tears, knowing what this confession was doing to Jim. He was silent so she carried on:

“Look Jim, look at it this way. I’ve had a weekend with Tom Murchison, which pleased neither of us. I was upset about you and the Indian girl then, realising it had probably be going on for a long time. I can make no excuses for the weekends with Jack. I enjoyed them as *weekends* and the chance to be free of the house, the kids and my job. We didn’t spend all that much time in bed. During the days, we drove around the countryside, both in the Thames Valley, and later in Suffolk.”

Jim stood up and felt like banging his head against the wall. Looking at her, he realised that, at thirty-six she was still the same beautiful woman he’d married twelve years

previously. She'd hardly changed at all; her figure was still the same as it had been before the children were born. He didn't want to lose her, but what she was telling him was like a sword being plunged into his heart.

"You have slept with my boss as well as Jack. The man I always considered a good friend? How the hell can I continue working with them? Christ. You and Jack of all people! I was laughing and joking with him when we were at the Lagoon together. It never occurred to me he'd taken advantage of you like that! I'll kill the bugger when I see him again. Tom as well!" Jim exploded, his fists clenched and his knuckles white.

"No you won't Jim. Neither of them took advantage of me. The decisions were mine, nobody forced me. How many weeks or even months were you sleeping with the Indian woman, knowing I was alive and waiting for *you*? You even told me a few minutes ago that you planned to divorce me and marry her." She said accusingly.

He had no answer to that, it had been true at the time but now seemed to be incredible. Looking up at him, she said:

"Look Jim. As far as Tom's concerned, I was grateful for all the help he gave me after you'd been abducted. He was the only person who tried to do something, when everybody else had given you up for dead. And that includes me! He helped me get in touch with your union and constantly gave me advice and tried to cheer me up."

"And Jack? Did you want to replace Sonia? Live with him or even marry him?" Jim demanded.

"No, not at all. I like Sonia. I feel terribly sorry she has found out and I'm ashamed at what Jack and I have done to that marriage." She said, then went on to say: "I had no intention of taking Jack away from Sonia. As I said before, for me it was a chance to get away from things. A chance to visit places I've never visited before. OK we had sex, what more can I say?"

The one thing she knew *must* remain a secret was the Wednesday she drove all the way down to Warsash and back for an afternoon with Jack, followed by a meal.

“So, we’re finished then?” Jim whispered, holding back his tears. “What do you want to do? Do you want me to go back to Dad’s place in Bournemouth? Share the children? Are you sure they know nothing about what you’ve been doing?”

“Nothing at all. Mum yes, she knows, but not the kids. Look Jim, as far as I’m concerned we are *not* finished – not unless you want to continue with that Indian woman.” She said, looking at him. He miserably denied any such thought.

“Look at it this way, Jim. I’ve spent two weekends with Jack, plus an afternoon. One weekend and a night with Tom. That’s a total of nine days, Jim, just nine days. Nine nights if you like since we went touring during the days. You have been living with Sophia for months, from April to October as far as I make out.” She looked at him and smiled.

“No it was June before we went to bed together.” He said, dolefully, looking round the familiar but in a way strange room.

“OK, June to October then – say at least four months you were in her bed. My total was only nine nights. Plus you were actively thinking of divorcing me and marrying her. Well, what do you suggest we do about it? If I forgive your four months, will you overlook my nine nights?” She demanded, Looking at him closely.

Still sitting down on her favourite chair, she crossed her legs. Surprised and relieved, she saw his eyes flicker down to her bare legs, then up to the outline of her breasts. She was wearing a light woollen pullover and a plaid skirt that

she remembered he'd always liked. Smiling she looked at the clock. It was still only half past ten in the morning.

"Right Jim, You are still my husband and I'm your wife and I want to keep it that way. We've been apart since just after Christmas when you joined that damn ship. Let's forget about the fiascos last night and early this morning. Neither of us were ready, we both had too much on our minds, which needed talking about."

He was still staring at her crossed legs, badly wanting to cross the space between them and take her in his arms, but was hesitant and held back.

"You want me Jim, don't you? You've got that same old look on your face. You'd better take me to bed before something explodes down there." She said, laughing.

This broke the deadlock, he reached down and took her hand. She preceded him up the stairs and into bed, where they made love until she got up to prepare lunch.

"Right Jim, let's go and collect the children now and pass the rest of this weekend as a family unit. I don't want to leave them any longer with Mum."

* * * * *

On Sunday morning, before the children were out of bed, Jim related all he'd been through at the lagoon; how surprised he'd been at the *Chesham's* arrival with Jack Knowles in command. He also told her about his second abduction, the cyclone and how he'd woken up in a Somali village house. He told her how Aliyah had saved his life and nursed him after he'd been pistol whipped and that he'd woken up in her bed. He mentioned that he'd helped her mend the leaking roof after the cyclone had passed. Angela interrupted.

"A house? What kind of a house? Why was the roof leaking?"

“The house was made of some kind of stone, plastered or cemented over with a flat roof. There were only two rooms and a tiny kitchen.” He replied.

“Wait a minute Jim, where did you sleep when you were in her house?” She asked him, laughing as he turned a bright red. “You told me you hadn’t made love to the Somali woman who arrived with Sophia?”

“No, not with Samira. Never with her. She and Sophia had left by then on the *Chesham*. This was a woman called Aliyah, I’d been taken to her house when I was abducted again.” He said, then added: “I was unconscious then. She saved my life when the villagers wanted to kill all strangers.”

“Were you still in her bed? Or was there a spare room in the house.” She asked, mischievously, trying not to laugh.

“She had three other children in the only other room. I slept in the same bed as her and her fourteen year old daughter.” He admitted. “And before you ask, then Yes, I did have it away with her. The mother that is.”

“And the fourteen year old girl as well? Well that’s something you didn’t confess yesterday when we told each other what’d been happening.”

“No not her as well, although she was still in the bed, having nowhere else to go. We did wait until she was asleep though.” He said.

At ten thirty on Monday morning, October 26th; Jim walked into the Company Head Office, causing pandemonium. Good Old Jane collapsed in a flood of tears.

Chapter 59 – Sophia in London – October

25th.

Upon arrival at Heathrow, Sophia and Samira were detained by the Immigration authorities while Tom passed through. Since the Company and MoD expressed the need for both women to stay in the United Kingdom until the enquiry; the Border Police took them to a small Boarding House or hostel at Lambeth in Southeast London. A comfortable place which was occasionally used to house potential non-dangerous deportees; needed as future witnesses.

They were required to keep in touch with a Social Welfare Officer, who was employed by the Border Police to keep an eye on them. There were others living in the hostel who were not considered to be a threat to the state.

Before being separated at Heathrow, she'd reminded Tom of his promise to help her obtain British citizenship. He told her he'd marry her if necessary to stop her deportation. Two evenings later, returning to the hostel after wandering around the streets of Lambeth, she found a message there from Jim. Excited, astonished he was still alive and had somehow managed to escape from Puntland, she phoned the number she'd been given:

"Jim, Jim, it's me, Sophia. When can I see you? What are you doing? I want to see you." She said excitedly.

"Hallo Sophia, I didn't know you were in London, I gather you are living in a hostel for detainees waiting for the enquiry. Has Captain Murchison told you about your brothers being alive in England and married? Have you contacted them yet? What are your plans?"

Sophia was perturbed, shocked even, this didn't sound at all like the Jim she'd known so well in Puntland; the man who'd promised her the earth. The man who'd sworn his love for her and promised her an easy ride through immigration. He'd even promised to divorce his wife,

marry her and live happily ever after. For the first time in years, she cried.

“Well Jim, what are you going to do about me? I’ve been told the enquiry will be held next June, can we be married by then, so I won’t be sent back? Have you started to divorce your wife?” She asked him, then another voice came on the phone.

“Sophia, this is Angela Turner speaking, I want to thank you for all you have done for my husband in Somalia and especially the occasions he was ill. He told me you have been sleeping together and also what he has promised you. I am sorry, but there will be no divorce. When the time comes, my husband and I will do everything we can for you to remain in Britain. Through the shipping company; Jim’s father; the magazine I work for and others we know. I think it is best for you to contact your brothers; maybe they can use their own contacts in the Indian or Goanese community. In any case, they can provide you somewhere to live.”

In tears, Sophia put the phone down, without speaking to Jim again. She’d been living with him for months in Puntland and he’d now abandoned her and gone back to his wife. Right then, it would have to be Jim’s boss – Tom Murchison. In Dubai he’d promised to marry her if she could not obtain British Nationality any other way; he’d also repeated it before their plane landed at Heathrow.

He was unmarried, no children were involved and he seemed to have a good, well-paying job. Pity he was so old though. Fifty years old to her Twenty-eight. That is what? Twenty-eight, Thirty-eight, Forty-eight plus two makes ten, twenty, thirty, thirty-two years difference in age. Thirty-two? Surely not! No, only twenty-two years, that’s better! For all his years, he’d still managed well in bed in Dubai, but had fallen asleep soon afterwards. Probably the result of several Gin and Tonics he’d consumed.

Right, she thought. She’d marry Tom before June the following year. So that, when the enquiry was completed,

she'd be a naturalised British citizen by marriage. Jim she would have to forget, at least for the time being; once safely married, then – who knows?

Having found out the address of The Buckinghamshire Steamship Company, she chose her day and waited on a bench in the small crescent-shaped park opposite his office. When she saw Tom leaving the building, she followed him to the Tube station, before tapping him on his shoulder. Delighted, he took her back to his flat where they spent the night.

She told him she couldn't live there permanently, due to her status and the need to be seen at Lambeth; but maybe she could manage a couple of nights a week plus occasional Saturday afternoons. This suited her since she no real wish to stay permanently with Tom, at least not before they were married, but she needed to keep him available.

The problem of the Welfare Officer was quickly solved. After the first missed rendezvous, she lured him into her bed and then blackmailed him with threats to tell his wife and his superiors at the Border Police. However she still had to report in person to Heathrow occasionally and be seen to use her hostel room.

The latter obligation was soon sorted out with the hostel Manager, which left her more or less free to come and go as she pleased. She used her freedom daily and was seldom seen at the hostel. But she needed money. She'd spent a lot of her savings buying clothes in the West End.

The second night spent in Tom's bed, she broached the subject – money for taxis and bus fares. Tom willingly set up a modest weekly sum in cash for her, as long as she maintained those twice weekly visits to him. The Welfare Officer and hostel manager also needed to be satisfied on occasions, so she could maintain her freedom to roam around London at will.

So, after less than a week in London, Sophia was supplying occasional sex to three men while waiting for the

enquiry to start. Not that she minded at all, except it was not cheap to live like that. Her hostel and meals were paid for by the Border Police, but no Pocket Money. If she didn't use these facilities, then she had to buy her own meals and use public transport.

The dollars she'd received from various men she'd slept with in Africa had now been changed into pounds sterling; safely secured in a bank account she'd opened at Lambeth. Travel by underground, bus or taxi was not cheap and she hated seeing her cash slipping away. The weekly amount from Tom was not nearly enough, she asked him for more, but he'd vacillated.

The two thousand dollars she'd accumulated *was* a lot in Puntland, but peanuts in London and shrinking fast. The Welfare Officer and Hostel Manager had no intention of giving her money, nor would she dare ask for it. If she wanted to maintain her freedom, then she would have to use the bonus she'd been born with.

She was sitting down in the crescent shaped park opposite the office waiting to give Tom a surprise visit; when a man she barely recognised walked out of the office door. Then she remembered him; Captain Knowles, Jim's old friend and formerly Captain of the *Chesham*.

They had been through a lot together. Under fire at the anchorage; the escape from the lagoon; another attempted hijack; then the Tropical cyclone. She'd overheard the row with his wife and noted her subsequent departure from the ship. She felt sure she could have had him then, had he not left the ship so soon at Khor Fakkan; leaving her with no other alternative than Tom Murchison.

Jack was now working at Head Office, a grateful Mr Harding having promoted him to a Superintendent's job as a reward for saving the *Chesham*. He was now working directly under Tom but still living with his parents at Romford. The Company had also given him a fairly substantial monetary award too. At present he was staying

at a small hotel near the office, but was searching for a flat, since he had no intention in staying marooned at Romford.

Sophia followed him to his hotel and saw him take his key from the Reception Desk. Guessing he would come down to the bar before dinner, she waited in a dark corner of the bar, almost unrecognisable in smart western clothes.

After a memorable night together, Jack pleaded with her to stay with him. The night had been good, but she didn't want to abandon Tom. She explained about her status as an alien awaiting possible deportation after the enquiry. However, she'd added:

"Maybe I can stay one or two nights a week with you here in the hotel. The rest of the week, I'll have to prove to the Immigration Authorities that I haven't absconded."

She arranged it so that she spent Monday and Tuesday nights with Jack, Wednesdays she stayed at the hostel. Thursdays and Friday nights with Tom. The weekends were free. Neither man had the slightest idea they were sharing the same woman. After a while, she managed to persuade Jack to give her a small weekly living allowance, in addition to that of Tom. Both men pleaded with her to ignore the Immigration and live with them permanently.

During her twice-weekly nights with Tom, he told her that plans were being made for an enquiry into the events in Puntland and the role of a British Warship there; the probable date being early June 2010. This alarmed her, eight months seemed a long time for the Border Police to keep her in the hostel. Who was going to pay for all this anyway?

She had not yet contacted her brothers, who had no idea she was in London, or even that she was alive. Their life would probably still be Indian, in a country where Indians tended to stay grouped together, enjoying British customs but also keeping their own. She wanted to marry, as opposed to live with, an Englishman and establish her identity as an English wife.

Samira, on the other hand was content to stay in the hostel

while waiting for the enquiry, she knew what Sophia was doing and why, but it didn't occur to her to report Sophia to the authorities. She'd found plenty of books to read, took an occasional afternoon to wander around London, visited the London School of Economics, spent a day or two in Cambridge and generally watched television. She'd also bought western clothes and looked stunning in them.

Christmas came and Tom took Sophia up to his sister's house at Monkseaton and introduced her as his future wife. On previous visits he'd contacted Doreen, but this time he didn't. Tom's family, although surprised had warmly welcomed Sophia.

In Italy, Sonia started divorce proceedings naming Angela

as the cause. The wounded Filipino sailors recovered and were repatriated to the Philippines. The Junior Engineer who'd been shot was flown to London by a special German ambulance plane and transferred to an English hospital.

Despite her well-laid plans, Sophia was still not married to Tom a month before the Enquiry began in June. He'd been called away in the Far East at a place called Keelung. Something to do with a problem on a Gas ship. He arrived home just three weeks before the Enquiry began. They got married in a Registry Office and she became Mrs Murchison. Jack, not yet divorced from Sonia and now abandoned by Sophia was furious.

Jim was still on an extended leave at present, Tom had told her that he'd been offered a job at Head Office as well. For some reason he couldn't go back to sea. He was the man she'd really wanted to live with, despite Tom, Jack, the Ugandan General and others. One day maybe?

Chapter 60 – The Enquiry – June 2010

Eight months landing at Heathrow, an enquiry was held in London;

Jim Turner being the main witness, was the first to be questioned. He was asked directly why he had agreed to work willingly for Hassan.

“I did not work willingly, at first I refused. Then they put me back in the hut and flung in two basketfuls of tarantulas not long before it was night. Believing them to be poisonous, I capitulated. Even then, I stated that I would not work if it was to turn a captured ship into a suicide ship.”

What had been so horribly frightening in Somalia sounded weak and childish when stated in London; despite a Doctor testifying that Jim suffered from and was still suffering from arachnophobia.

The tribunal then asked if he would have worked so willingly, had not Mrs Murchison been so sexually active with him. He was dumb-founded at first, before realising they were referring to Sophia.

“Look sir,” expostulated Jim angrily, “I think she slept with me to give me a more normal life and to make me work better. By then I knew what Hassan wanted me to do, but not why. I had nearly finished the job before he told me about exporting a cargo of Crude. I had doubts about his son Malik, who I knew wanted to kill me.”

Mr Dudley, who was asking the questions on behalf of the enquiry, asked Jim how he could be sure of that.

“From what Sophia, sorry Mrs Murchison, let slip on occasions. She’d been told from another source that Malik was planning something which would involve the use of the lagoon. As you know, it turned out that he was negotiating with the Iranians.”

He was then congratulated for risking his life by sending

silly messages to shipping firms in London, which Captain Murchison had picked up.

Finally Jim was asked if he thought Hassan's idea for exporting Crude Oil on a hi-jacked tanker did not border on insanity.

"Yes of course I did and tried to tell him so. By then the job was three-quarters completed. I found out later, after my second abduction, that Malik and Kassim were both using their father's concept to use the lagoon for Iranian submarines. The cyclone stopped that as well as the villagers killing both of them. I thought they were going to kill me too, but the widows of the crew I'd been working with saved my life."

He was then questioned about the Iranian connection. He stated that the Iranians had no real intention to use the Lagoon for their submarines.

There being no more questions, Jim was told that the Crown Prosecution Service did not find his conduct a sufficient reason for prosecution. The enquiry congratulated Jim for his attempts to make his whereabouts known. Also the fact that he'd received no money was also to his credit.

Angela's heart went out to him; she finally made up her mind then and there to stay married to Jim. Unfortunately she was unaware of the absolute power the media represents in this country. The Press following the enquiry were totally against Mr Dudley's summing up and said so vigorously.

Both Mrs Sophia Murchison and Samira gave evidence backing up Turner's evidence. Sophia was asked if Hassan had told her to sleep with Jim. She hotly denied that statement and told the Enquiry that it had been a love match for both of them. Nobody believed that, but were secretly envious of Jim's four months with such an attractive sexy young woman. Samira backed up her remarks.

Captain Murchison was praised for his ability, or perhaps doggedness, to add and evaluate all the pieces of information he'd acquired and realise something was happening in Somalia. Also for insisting that Mr Turner was probably alive. He was praised for his persistence in trying to reach the top, despite general disbelief. He was also commended for bringing the whole matter to the attention of the Ministry of Defence

Captain Knowles was praised for his ability to get the *Chesham* out of the lagoon under fire with so little damage to his ship. Also for manoeuvring his damaged ship safely through a Tropical Cyclone. The Officers and crew were also praised for their courage under fire. There was a mention though, that he, as Captain, should never have allowed his ship to have been taken in the first place. Asked why he didn't continue with his refusal to shift the ship up to the lagoon. He said:

“After the pirates had taken my two Cadets away, I felt I had no choice but to obey. This man Malik and several others were armed and menacing us the whole time. I stand by my decision.”

Jack had decided not to make any reference to the role of his Chief Officer in allowing the Pirate boat to come so close without seeing it. His sense of responsibility and duty left him in no doubt that he should have been on the bridge at the time – not asleep in his cabin. Mr Caldwell, the Chief Officer in question, was never called at the enquiry. His job with the Company was terminated though. Everything concerning the hi-jack and its causes having been entered by Jack in the Official Log Book.

Commander Donaldson defended his decision to penetrate the 12 mile limit and go to the aid of the *Chesham*, thereby causing casualties. He stated that he did not fire indiscriminately, only to save the *Chesham* and her crew. He admitted killing the crew of the tank, but denied any further deaths. He told the Enquiry:

“There were two militias on the shore, fighting each other. The volleys from my ship were deliberately aimed over their heads. Apart from the tank’s crew, my ship caused no further deaths on the shore.”

He was referred to the Admiralty for a possible Court Martial. The British Press savaged this decision in no uncertain terms. They thought he should have been recommended for a medal.

In the event the Admiralty did not proceed with a Court Martial.

In a final speech, Mr Dudley told the assembled persons that the enquiry could have been far more serious had the States of Puntland and Somalia protested more vigorously. The invasion by a British warship was played down, since she was instrumental in stopping yet another portion of Greater Somalia from breaking away.

At least the world now knew there *was* Crude Oil in Somalia and Puntland. The government of Somaliland and what passed for the governments of Puntland, Somalia and the Disputed Region were thankful that the Iranian connection had been exposed.

The criminal role of Sophia and to a certain extent Samira never emerged during this enquiry. These crimes included Samira’s initial blackmail of a young Norwegian to steal medicines and other items from the NGO running a refugee camp outside Mogadishu. Items which would have been better used in the refugee camp.

Sophia’s crimes would have delighted any prosecutor, none of which came to light... They included three Arms Deals which may not have happened had she not gone willingly and provided sex to the Ugandan General. Her occasional prostitution to men Hassan was dealing with never came to light either.

Neither the Welfare Officer nor the hotel manager in Lambeth admitted that they had allowed Sophia to move freely around London; they were able to keep their jobs

until the next round of lay-offs. The Border Police never found out about her activities.

Sophia, then Mrs Murchison soon to be Mrs Knowles, emerged from the Enquiry as a temptress who thoroughly enjoyed sex, a benevolent one since she'd been the reason Jim had kept his sanity and also the way she'd looked after him when he was ill from tropical diseases. Also, Jack in his evidence had told the enquiry that she'd worked hard, treating wounded Filipino sailors during the action. Altogether a good sport was the press summing up, a good sport who was always ready to jump into bed with somebody or anybody! Which, in fact, was not far from the truth.

A middle-aged man living in Cumberland was watching all this, horrified – scared he was looking at a prison sentence for abusing a minor. He'd been a geography master at the English school in Nairobi when Sophia had easily seduced him on her fourteenth birthday. This had lasted on and off for a year until they were caught. He'd been lucky to have escaped jail in Kenya and she'd been sent back home to Somaliland. If asked, she would have scarcely remembered him, having considered him a birthday present to herself. He had not the slightest trouble remembering her!

Samira's sheer beauty stunned the court, she confirmed all that Jim and Sophia had stated and refused to be drawn on her own role. She ended up with half the men in London in love with her, whereas Sophia ended up with half the men in London wanting to go to bed with her. By which time a lucky few had!

* * * * *

Jim had been surprised to see Sonia among the audience at the Enquiry. He wondered if she and Jack were together again. But no, she was there in a professional capacity since

the *Chesham* had been built at Monfalcone. The fact that the Accommodation Ladder had been torn off its mountings and had done extensive damage to the ship had been raised. Specifically to Number Five Port Wing Tank Coaming, which had been holed and endangered the ship. It had also nearly penetrated the ship's side plating below the waterline.

There was also the question of Yusuf's death. This was caused by the weight of the still attached pipeline to run back, killing Yusuf and barely missing Jim. She was not called, since Jack admitted that the Accommodation Ladder had *not* been in its stowed position. It had been left turned out and unlashed; thereby totally vulnerable to the force of the cyclone. After his escape from the burning lagoon, Jack had neither the men nor the time to secure it properly before the cyclone had hit them.

Inspection in dry-dock had found some damage to the crane's purchase block, destroying its safety lock. Pieces of metal were found embedded in the mechanism, which upon examination were found to be parts of a bullet.

Jim invited Sonia to lunch, Jack was still giving evidence and Angela was back home in Chelmsford. During the meal Sonia told Jim how she'd found out about *her* husband and *his* wife. Also her mistrust of Captain Murchison after having lied to her in the taxi. Jim realised that she was now a different person to the excitable young girl she'd been before. She was now a very attractive woman, no longer the wonder-struck young bride he'd known and liked.

After lunch, while drinking coffee in the lounge, Sonia looked at him and said quietly:

"You know Jim, we were a happy foursome together weren't we? At least the times when your leave and Jack's coincided. There was something about you that Jack never had. A maturity perhaps? You always considered me a flippant young girl, didn't you? Maybe I was then, but not

now. I'm getting married in a few weeks, this time to an Italian.

"In that case, I guess there's no chance then of you and Jack trying to live together again? I realise you were annoyed

at his behaviour but..." Jim started to say.

... "But nothing! I never want to see him again. I'm surprised you have agreed to live with Angela after what happened between them." She paused then added. "I shouldn't really tell you this, but I overheard her tempting Captain Murchison over the phone to pass a weekend with her." She said.

"Yes. She told me about that herself. She also told me about the two weekends she'd spent with your husband while he was on that LPG course at Warsash. But don't forget there are two children involved if we divorce." He replied, a little shame-facedly.

"Well that's that then, I'm off now, I've got an early flight tomorrow." She stated firmly.

"It's only three o'clock now, can't we...?"

"...No Jim we can't! Now listen to me! There are five people involved in this rather messy drama. Let us take them one by one. Your wife Angela has slept with both Captain Murchison and my husband. Sophia has slept with you, Captain Murchison *and* my husband Jack, all three of you. Captain Murchison has slept with your wife and is now married to Sophia, God help him! My ex-husband Jack has slept with your wife and Sophia." She stopped then, looked Jim in the eyes and continued:

"And you Jim! You spent months in bed with this famous Sophia and were on the point of proposing an afternoon in bed with me. I'm sick of the lot of you; I have only ever slept with one man and that was Jack. OK, to use an Anglo-Saxon expression, he gave me great sex which I willingly reciprocated, but I never expected him nor any of you to share yourselves around. I am getting married soon

to a nice Italian man and will do my best to forget all the messy English people. And to forget all these wasted months.”

With that, she kissed Jim briefly on his cheek and walked out. He was shocked at the portrait she’d portrayed but had to admit its inherent truth.

Chapter 61 – Epilogue July 2015

The Press loved it. There was warfare; one man abducted twice; two ships hijacked; plenty of sex and a dramatic rescue by the Royal Navy – what more could the newspapers want? All the dirty secrets between Angela and Captain Murchison and with Captain Knowles were dragged out. The former thanks to Good Old Jane. Also the receptionists at both hotels supplied the newspapers with photocopies of their bookings.

The Room Service receipts for breakfasts in their room were deemed expressly relevant and printed. Angela’s sex life since Jim’s abduction became nearly as famous as Christine Keeler’s, half a century before. Jim, although lauded as a hero was upset by the way the Press treated his wife.

Jim Turner and Mrs Murchison (Sophia) were targeted too. Banner headlines with accompanying photographs depicted them as ***The White Pirate of Puntland and his Sex Slave.*** Samira too was thought to be another sex slave until both Jim and Sophia denied that she’d ever slept with Jim. But she was far too beautiful for the Press to ignore altogether. Her photo also made the front pages alongside, but not linked to Jim’s and Sophia’s.

Jim Turner was unable to continue his career at sea since the MCA Doctors were unable to give him a clean

Bill of Health. One of the tropical diseases he'd caught had adversely affected his lungs. He tried foreign flag companies but they all needed the ENG 1 certificate. Following his experience on the *Dawn Splendour*, he was wary of Flag of Convenience Companies. He was offered a job by Captain Murchison, working in the same office as Jack and himself, both of whom had made love to Angela his wife. To Sophia as well, come to that. He eventually left Bucks County Steamship Company to join a Consultancy Company at Southampton.

Angela Turner, mortified by the newspaper accusations, gave up her job at Chelmsford and joined Jim at Southampton. She was sorry about her losing her career but felt a Woman's Magazine was no place for her notoriety, due to the Press. She became a freelance dress designer working from home and also wrote short stories and articles for Women's magazines. After a while, she became well regarded and was able to contribute to household expenses as well as looking after their children.

Having noted the sheer beauty of Samira at the Enquiry, she'd introduced her to a photographer. The three had formed a Company, which became profitable. Jim held the post of Chairman for that Company, in addition to his work for the Consultancy.

Tom Murchison was unable to maintain the previous relaxed atmosphere, neither at Head Office nor in the fleet. Some of the younger members of his staff considered him lucky to have had a woman like Angela in his bed; lucky too, to be married to Turner's Indian beauty. Most though were critical of him using his position to seduce the wife of an abducted officer. His marriage to Sophia soon broke down having found out she was occasionally sleeping with Jack, when he was away visiting Company ships.

He left the Company soon after that and went back to his sister's place at Monkseaton. There he lounged around unhappily until his sister urged him to contact Doreen

again. He did and they started living together. He moved into her flat at Tynemouth and eventually used all the money he'd saved to found a Consultancy Company at Newcastle.

Jack Knowles left the sea and took up a position in Head Office as a Superintendent. A position that had been awarded to him by the Chairman, Mr Harding. He was good at the job and within five years became the senior superintendent - Tom Murchison's old job. His divorce from Sonia having come through, he married Sophia after her divorce from Tom Murchison. That marriage turned out surprisingly well.

Sophia, Formerly Mrs Murchison, now Mrs Knowles, one time mistress of Jim Turner finally settled down with Jack Knowles. They bought a flat in Finchley road and she gave birth to a son. She was now the English housewife she'd always dreamed about all those years in Somaliland and Puntland. A dream that she'd worked hard to obtain, using the only means open to her. She very seldom wore her sari now, except when visiting her brothers at Leeds.

Surprisingly she wrote a book about her life which became a Best-seller. She never denied that she'd been a prostitute, but stated that she'd been happy to sleep with a variety of men who paid her. Viva the difference!

Samira, strangely enough had no trouble obtaining British Citizenship. Before disappearing into the Somali community in Britain, Angela had approached her with a photographer who had worked intermittently for her magazine. Struck by the sheer beauty of Samira, they persuaded her to become a model.

She had eventually agreed, stipulating that she would never pose naked or even in underclothes. The three of them formed a Company. Samira gained a fortune, most of which she sent back to Somalia. Both the photographer and Angela benefitted.

Good Old Jane, what happened to her? Nothing much. She'd nearly wrecked Jim and Angela's marriage; as well as alienating Tom Murchison from his office staff. When Jack Knowles became the senior superintendent, he had no time for her. He'd tried to sack her, but Mr Harding kept her on as a personal secretary until she'd retired.

Having nowhere to go, but with an adequate pension and well placed savings, Jim found her a modest hotel in Southsea where she passed her remaining days. She occasionally was called upon as a baby-sitter for Jim's children.

585 Pages. 61 Chapters 190,680 words, including the Glossary.

La Ciotat, France

Glossary – Various Terms

AIS	Automated Identification System. A ship tracking system can be used between ships or from shore to ship. Gives position Course and speed, closest approach and many other uses.
AMISOM	African union Mission in Somalia. Mostly Ugandans, some Rwandans and other African forces. Kenya has also joined, fighting in Southern Somalia.
AvGas	Aviation Gasoline.
COW	Crude Oil Washing. Washing Crude Oil tanks with Crude Oil – the tanks being inerted.
ENG 1	Medical Examination carried out by specified MCA appointed Doctors. Certificate to be renewed every two years.
FOC	Flag of Convenience. Started by Panama, soon followed by Liberia and other nations
GMDSS	Global Maritime Distress and Safety System. A certificate undertaken usually by Senior

Navigating Officers to handle the vessel's Radio, thereby dispensing with the Radio Officer or R/O. It contains various Safety components.

- IMO International Maritime Organisation. Formed by the UN in 1948 to pass resolutions concerning Safety at Sea and other international subjects.
- IRTC Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor. A 464 mile corridor for shipping Eastbound or Westbound in the Gulf of Aden. From 045°E to 053°E
- ISM International Safety Management – put in place after 9/11.
- ISPS International Ship and Port Security. Put in place by the IMO soon after 9/11.
- LPG Liquefied Petroleum Gas carrier. Cargoes of Propane, Butane or Ammonia.
- MAYDAY Emergency signal, usually by VHF. Thought to be a corruption of the French word *m'aider*. Equivalent to SOS by radio.
- MCA Maritime & Coastguard Agency. A British Government Agency concerning Safety at Sea in UK waters. Examinations for Deck and Engineering Certificates, also issuing Certificates of Equivalent Competency to foreign Officers. Search and Rescue, Pollution, Ship Surveys etc.
- MoGas Motor Gasoline: Basically petrol without the additives.
- P & I Club Protection and Indemnity Insurance schemes complementary to the Marine Hull Insurance. Covers accidents on board, cargo damage etc.
- Points A quick and easy way to indicate the rough bearing of an observed ship. A point is about 11° therefore four points on the bow is

approximately 45°. A man standing in the centre of the bridge holding his clenched fist so that the thumb is in line with the foremast, the knuckle of his little finger will indicate one point.

- R/O Radio Officer or Sparks. Very few left now after GMDSS.
- SMS Safety Management System – An off-shoot of ISM at Company and ship level.
- ULCC Ultra Large Crude Oil Carrier. Normally more than 300,000 Tonnes Dwt.
- Ullage Measurable space above the oil surface. Tankers normally load tanks to 98% capacity, allowing 2% Ullage for expansion.
- VLCC Very Large Crude oil Carrier. Normally more than 100,000 Tonnes Dwt.