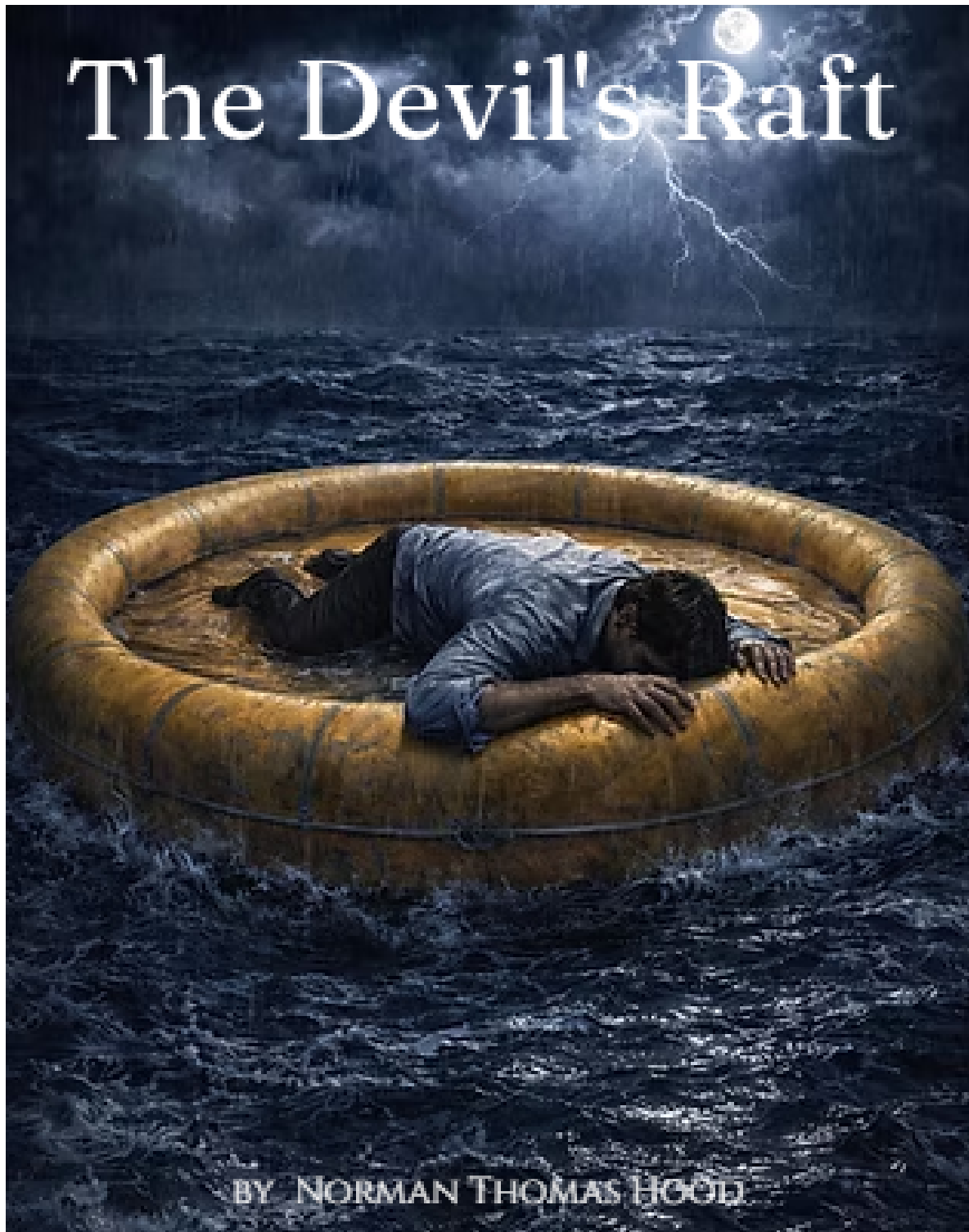




The Devil's Raft

By Norman Thomas Hood

John's head jerked up from the side of the rubber raft. Sea water had found its way into his nose, burning its way to the back of his throat. He spat and coughed until he could breathe again, then punched the raft, as if it was responsible.

Before laying his head down once more, he cracked an eye open just long enough to see if his scenery had changed. It hadn't. In every direction, there was only blue sky and open sea. Normally, that would be a beautiful thing, but he was alone and adrift.

His wife was missing. Dead, he feared. But what actually happened, he couldn't remember now. All he knew is they were together on the boat and now they weren't. It was worse than his near-drowning event from childhood. This time, death had been crowned the winner.

The sun displayed its power on the face of the water, causing John to seek refuge on the floor of the raft. He covered as much of his skin as possible from its searing rays. He had been adrift for some time now without food and water. He realized drinking from the sea would do nothing but speed his demise.

His face, neck and arms were already badly burnt. His lower lip hurt. It was split open and swollen. He winced as he licked it. There was no relief. His heart shrank at what another day or two on the sea would bring.

This is it, he thought. Someday I'll be found dead, burnt to a crisp in this yellow piece of shit!

The irony was sickening. The man most afraid of the ocean was now floating helplessly atop its foreboding surface. He imagined his wife calling to him from

her watery grave. He considered ditching the raft to join her, but his nerve quickly failed him. He would have to endure his suffering and serve out nature's slow and painful death sentence.

John had lost everything on this trip; his job, his marriage and now his wife. Any answers to what happened lay hidden in the back of his jumbled mind. His last coherent memory was arguing with the captain. About what, he couldn't recall. It was a mystery to him now, but he figured the open gash on his head was the reason for that.

He unbuttoned his shirt and spread it over himself to protect his skin from the sun's rays. It wasn't enough. The radiant beast was determined to brand him. He was slowly being baked alive!

The only remaining items he donned were his shorts, shirt and wedding ring. Everything else was gone now, probably drifting along the ocean's floor now.

He lay there thinking about his wife, horrified at the death she undoubtedly suffered. Broken marriage or not, he knew she didn't deserve to die like that. The gentle rocking of the raft eventually granted him some relief from the distressing thoughts, lulling his mind into a numb, relaxed state. Soon, memories from an early morning just weeks before flooded his mind.

"John! Hurry! You're late for work!" Cathy said, bursting into the bedroom.

He sat up in a panic, almost falling out of bed.

She quickly grabbed his arm.

"I'm just kidding, babe. It's Saturday!" She instantly regretted her prank. "Oh, damn, John! I thought it would be funny. I'm sorry."

He sat on the edge of the bed, rubbing the piss and vinegar from his eyes. Cathy was already dressed, her silky blonde hair brushed and styled. She had her makeup on as well. John looked at his phone for the time.

Where the hell has she been so damn early? he wondered. *And why bother me?*

They had resigned to do their own thing on the weekends. If she wanted to get up early, fine. But why ruin his morning? He watched her kneel down to his eye level. Her demeanor looked unexpectedly soft today.

"I know things have been a little rough between us lately, and I'm sorry about getting you up so early on a Saturday... but I have a surprise for you."

Her words found their way through his tired ears, but failed to inspire a spoken response.

A little rough... lately? More like a year, he thought.

John tried not to appear as pissed off as he felt. He didn't like surprises anymore. He was done with them.

His last surprise was finding her lying underneath a coworker on a lake's shore. It turned out to not be the first time. John learned she'd spent a lot of stolen time with the younger man. The year since had offered him nothing but pain, resentment and chronic paranoia.

He tried to shake off the painful thoughts as Cathy waited patiently for his reply. He eventually managed a partly civil one.

"Surprise?" he asked, clearing his throat. "Besides waking me up like that, what surprise?"

"Well, *two* surprises, to be exact." She watched to see if his demeanor had changed. It hadn't. "The first one is your favorite breakfast. And no, I didn't make it, so don't worry. I picked it up a few minutes ago; waffles with blueberries. The second surprise is waiting for you under your plate."

Maybe it's a bullet! he thought, though he'd have to decide who got it. But, in reality, he figured it was another *what I love about you* note.

Their counselor had recommended writing the notes and leaving them around the house. It was supposed to help rebuild their relationship. But the notes had just made John angrier, triggering the painful memories of why they were seeing a counselor in the first place.

"I'm going to the kitchen. Are you coming?" she asked.

John reluctantly followed her, ready to get whatever was coming over with. Cathy pulled out a chair for him. John saw two plates of waffles on the table.

"Happy Birthday, babe!" she said, sliding his coffee close to him.

John's birthday was at the end of July, almost a month away. She noticed his confusion.

"Yeah, I know... I'm early. But I couldn't wait! I just got the confirmation last night."

Now he really *was* confused. Last night they went to bed without speaking, as their usual. And this morning he wakes up to a happy wife, full of surprises? Something was definitely wrong, he figured. He looked down at his waffle.

Yep, mine's definitely poisoned! he mused.

He knew it wasn't, but considered switching the plates anyway, just for his own amusement. Still, he could see she'd really put some work into his birthday presentation. He didn't want to ruin both their mornings. He'd hear her out.

"I know you have a thing about open water... and boats, of course. But I also know you've told me you've wanted to *break* that fear by going deep sea fishing one day. So, I got us a reservation to do just that. A full day out on the sea! Three and a half hours of sailing... well, motoring, I guess, to a designated spot in the ocean, then five peaceful hours of fishing. We'll be back on shore by eight o'clock the same night! And if we get tired of fishing, there's room on deck to tan and relax, just the two of us. Well, the two of us and our captain, of course."

"Wow, Cathy. Sounds great, but something like that isn't cheap. Are you sure we can—"

"Got it covered! It wasn't as much as you'd think, either. Now, the boat isn't huge, but it's really nice. We'll have our own, private cabin, too. The captain has been doing these daytrips for like, twenty years.

"The boat's called the *Moirae*, after three Greek goddesses. It's going to be great, John! You just have to take off on a Friday. I couldn't get us a Saturday. I got us booked three weeks from now. A party of four bailed on the date, so we got it! Otherwise, it was looking like September. So... happy early birthday!"

"Hold on," he said, his mind reeling from her words. "Not huge? What exactly does that *mean*, Cathy? You know I can't be in a small boat, especially—"

She held up her hand to silence him, then showed him a photo on her phone.

"It's big enough, see? The boat's listed as an eight person cabin cruiser. The ad says he takes up to five guests, but so far we're the only ones booked for that Friday. We may have it all to ourselves! So no, it's not a little boat," she laughed. "Just look at these pictures. It'll be so fun! He even has a freakin' Parrot!"

She handed him the phone. John scrolled through the photos and handed it back.

"Cockatoo," he said. "Okay, it definitely looks big enough, but damn, Cathy... three or four hours away from shore?"

“Yes, dear... on the *ocean*, like you’ve talked about always wanting to do. Well, what’s it gonna be? I only have until midnight tonight to cancel the booking.”

He didn’t answer. She began to slowly pace the kitchen floor.

“Look, John, I want us to do something *new* together. I want our *marriage* to become something new... for both of us! We need this.”

She waited again for an answer. John didn’t know what to think, let alone what to say.

Additional seconds passed. He could see in her eyes how important this trip was to her. That, and the fact she was trying to do something special to save their marriage had an impact on him.

He got up from his chair, managed a smile and gingerly put his arms around her. She responded to his notion, pulling him in close. It was then he realized how long it’d been since they’d held each other. There’d been no physical contact of any kind for months now. The marriage was becoming increasingly cold and distant. John felt it was on its last legs. Arguments, accusations and angry tears were common on most days.

John wasn’t one to easily recover from being cheated on, especially after eight years of marriage. Any forgiveness he possessed had turned out to be in short supply. The slightest word, action or reaction could trigger his rage. His doctor put him on medication so he could continue working, but it was no cure for the intrusive thoughts that plagued him daily. The pain and hurt turned him into a man he didn’t want to be; spiteful, mean and violent.

Cathy had been patient with his behavior, but was nearing the end of her rope. Separate attorneys seemed to be on the horizon if things didn’t change soon.

“Geez, you looked really mad there for a minute. So, does this actually mean you’ll go?”

“No... I mean yes, I’ll go. Sorry... I meant to say I wasn’t mad. I’m just tired and grumpy... trying to process it all.”

She squeezed him tighter. “You definitely had me worried, babe. But, *really*, are you sure you want to do this? I can still cancel if you think it’s too much for you.”

“No, it sounds pretty cool. Let’s go. I can handle it, as long as there’s plenty of life jackets onboard. I’ll tell work about it Monday.”

Cathy literally jumped for joy, wrapping her arms around him for another needed hug. For the first time in over a year, they both had something new to look forward to.

John was startled by what sounded like a bird cawing overhead. His memories of that morning quickly faded at the possibility of land being near.

He peered over the side of his floating prison cell, hoping to see something more than just water. There was nothing. He turned over to look in the opposite direction. Again, just water, no land in sight. No cawing bird to be seen, either. He figured he must have been hearing things.

Disheartened, he moved to the center of the raft again. He curled up on his side and fidgeted with his shirt. There was nothing left to do but try and stay protected from the sun as much as possible. He was beginning to fall to sleep again when a sudden thought emerged.

The bird! He remembered the captain's Cockatoo. He'd heard it squawking loudly when the weather started to get bad.

The storm... the wave! Frightful memories began to surge to the front of his mind. *The fight... oh, my God!*

"Cathy!" he screamed, through dry and cracked lips.

He remembered her falling overboard when a rogue wave struck the boat. He watched helplessly as she flailed in the water, trying to keep her head above the waves! She screamed out his name before suddenly disappearing from sight. The torrid waves quickly erased any evidence of her. John recalled trying to jump in after her, but nothing after that first step!

As he struggled to remember more, all he could think of was the sound of her voice as she cried out his name. He'd never heard anything like that before. The thought of it sent chills through his body. But what stopped him from diving in after her?

My head! That's when I must have hit my head. I was knocked out!

He carefully felt along his scalp. The split was almost two inches long. Pain shot across his skull when he touched it. He jerked his hand away and returned to

his struggle for more information. He kept coming back to the moment he lost Cathy.

I should have stayed close to her. I might have saved her!

He recalled the force of the wave hitting the boat. It was akin to a train hitting a semi-truck! He heard the deckhand yelling just before it struck, desperate to get their attention. But he and the captain were busy at each other's throats.

And over what? That damn deckhand!

He recalled his violent meltdown.

I wasn't there when she needed me. I might as well have killed her myself!

The result of his actions anchored deeply in his conscience. Cathy was dead, and it was his fault. But how he ended up in the raft still baffled him. The boat was torn apart. Chunks of fiberglass in the water told him that. Did the other men survive? Were there more rafts? He racked his brain trying to piece everything together.

Then, as if his latest recollections weren't painful enough, John's mind steered him to a bitter argument he and Cathy had early that morning.

"John! Relax! We've been on the boat thirty minutes and you're already pissed off. And over nothing!"

"Nothing? Really? I saw the way that deckhand looked at you! And I saw you smiling back at him. Don't deny it, Cathy. I saw what I saw!"

"What was I supposed to do? Scowl at him? He's just a kid, John. Probably not more than eighteen years old. And I'd hardly call it a smile. I was just being polite!"

"Yeah, polite. I've seen how polite you can be with younger guys. No thanks!" he said.

"Really? Again with this bullshit? It was a *year* ago, John! I quit my job over it and almost lost you, too!" She sat down on the bed, upset even more now. "I've told you 'I'm sorry' a thousand times already. I've cried, I've begged, I've *pleaded* with you to work with me to help make things right again. I've done everything the counselor told me. What else can I do? No matter *what*, you still obsess over it. Yes, I was wrong! I was selfish... I know! I'll *always* be the guilty one,

regardless of how bad our marriage *already was* when it happened. But you don't want to talk about *that*, do you?"

"You act like it happened ten years ago, Cathy. It's still like yesterday to me! Maybe it's easy for *you* to move on, but not me. *You* weren't the one having your marriage handed back to you in a body bag. *You're* not the one living with the image of your spouse's legs wrapped around another man's waist. And now, thanks to taking off work to take this *trip* of yours, I lost *my* damn job, too! I guess that's *my* reward for trying!"

Cathy stormed out of the cabin and ran up the stairs. John started to follow her, but stopped when he saw an old man listening from a stool outside the captain's cabin. He was startled, not having seen him before now.

The man looked to be in his eighties; his face sorely weathered with time. His pants were torn and ragged. He wore a faded shirt that appeared to be part of an old navy uniform. The old man was grinning at him.

Must be the captain's father, John reasoned, trying not to stare.

He nodded to the old man and started up the stairs after Cathy.

"You can't trust 'em, you know... you never can!" the old man said, pointing to the upper deck.

John turned to face him. The old man's eyes were dark and piercing. They seemed to be gazing straight into John's head. He shot back a fast reply.

"I'm not sure what you're talking about, mister, but whatever you heard is between me and my wife."

"Seems to me she hasn't kept very *much* between just the two of you, lad," he said. "If she did it once, she'll do it again. It's just a matter of time! It's in her bones, I tell you!" The old man laughed while using his fingers to simulate sex.

John stumbled back into his cabin and slammed the door. He was too angry now to respond or even attempt going upstairs. He could hear the old man's laughter outside his door.

Who the hell does that leathery, old fuck think he is? Telling me about my wife?

He found himself pacing the tiny room.

But the old man's words had hit their mark well, causing John's mind to go down that torturous road one more time. He paced behind his closed door, resurrecting painful thoughts from the past.

I'll never be able to trust her. She acted like nothing was wrong the whole time she was screwing him! How would I even know if she was doing it again? I wouldn't!

He sat on the bed, pissed off at the old man's words and his own destructive thoughts. After a few minutes, he managed to calm down and eventually accept responsibility for the argument. He realized he had overreacted again. The deckhand had caught her off guard with his awkward greeting. What was she supposed to do, ignore him? But John used it to smack her in the face with her past again, as he had all year long.

Losing his job wasn't her fault either. He knew that. He'd missed too many days of work over the last year. His H.R. manager had told him he couldn't take off for the trip. John had practically begged the man, explaining how important it was for his marriage. But after pleading his case, the manager responded coldly.

"I understand your situation, Mr. Hinkle, but we're not in the marriage counseling business, we're in the loan business. You've missed enough time already with your marital problems. I need you here that Friday. Besides, I already have a guy scheduled off. You're just going to have to tough it out."

When John heard the callous answer, he absolutely lost it. He slammed both fists down on the man's desk, knocking over his coffee. As the man got up from his chair, John grabbed the cup and hurled it at him, shattering it against the wall, just behind his head! It turned out to be the most expensive cup of coffee he'd ever touched.

John got out of bed and set out to apologize to Cathy. He opened the cabin door, ready to tell off the old man, but the stool was vacant now.

When he reached the upper deck, he found Cathy at the helm, standing next to the captain. They were laughing and talking as he drove the boat. John watched her flip some hair away from her eyes. She smiled intently while listening to the man. A surge of anger welled up inside of John.

Only twenty damn minutes. And just the kind of guy she likes, too! Tall, dark and rough-looking... just like her freakin' lover!

He started towards them, but quickly realized the implications of having another meltdown. He turned and leaned over the side rail instead, trying hard to manage his anger. But his anger continued to grow as he heard them talking. To

him, they sounded like a couple of teenagers talking. The old man's words loomed fresh in John's mind.

The old bastard was right. Just a matter of time before she does it again!

John didn't know what to do, but knew what would happen if he showed his ass again. He took another minute to calm himself and regain some composure. He resolved to think more reasonably about their conversation.

She's not screwing him, they're just talking. People can talk. It's windy. Her hair was in her face. Don't be an asshole, John! Keep it together or you'll make everything worse!

He gingerly walked to the helm, trying his best to appear calm and relaxed.

"Mr. Hinkle! I was wondering when you'd come up here. I was just explaining what nautical miles are to your wife; the whole latitude-longitude thing. She picked up on it pretty fast, despite my silly analogies."

"Cool," John said, managing to appear interested.

After an awkward pause he turned to Cathy.

"Hey, dear... you want to get some of that sun we were talking about?"

When she didn't answer, he gently nudged her hand. She moved it away and hesitated before answering.

"Sure... sounds good," she said without looking at him. "Let me go change first."

She went below deck, leaving him alone with the captain. John noticed him putting his Ray-Bans back on.

Yeah, you didn't need those during all that eye contact you had going on with my wife, did you?

He scanned the boat for the deckhand before turning his attention back to the helm.

The captain wore a light blue Hawaiian shirt and khaki cargos. His tan left him darker than his leather Top-siders. John figured him to be going for the old *Miami Vice* look.

"You've got a good one, there, Mr. Hinkle," the captain remarked, noticing John's demeanor. "She told me this was her birthday present to you. Pretty damn thoughtful of her, huh?"

John continued looking for the young deckhand. He didn't see him.

“Yes, it is... thoughtful. Yeah, I’ve told her more than once I’d like to do this one day. Not that I thought I ever would, though. I had a boating accident when I was seven. Not on a boat like this. It was a rowboat on my grandfather’s pond, in Minnesota.”

“Minnesota? That’s a long haul. You two on vacay from there?” He adjusted his glasses.

“No, we live here. I went to FSU. That’s where I met Cathy. Been here ever since. This is just a one-day thing... her idea.”

“Gotcha. Well, glad she had that idea. It kept me from staying docked all weekend. I took you off track, though. You were talking about the rowboat?”

“I was too young to take it out myself, but I did one morning before my grandparents woke up. Rowed it out to the middle of the pond and, for some reason, tried to stand up in it. Flipped it over. Got one leg caught under a crossbeam and panicked. I almost drowned. Well, I guess I *did* drown, because the next thing I knew, I was on the shore, spitting up water. But yeah, several times in the last few years I’ve talked to Cathy about wanting to do something like this.”

He glanced around. “Your boat’s fifty times bigger than that old rowboat, though. I don’t think I need to worry about flipping over this time.” John scanned the deck one last time.

“Oh, we’re still nothing but a pea in the ocean, Mr. Hinkle. A speck of dust on a giant ball of water... ready to drink us up in half a second! But I think we’ll be okay. Been doing this for twenty years and still above the curl.” He winked and smiled at his own words, confirming John’s ‘Sonny Crockett’ suspicion.

“A pea in the ocean? Great... just when I was starting to feel good about this trip!”

“Oh, we’ll be fine. Sorry about that, Mr. Hinkle. I get a little philosophical sometimes. Too much time out here can do that to you... make a man *think* certain things. Yeah, your wife told me you had some kind of accident. It’s good you’re facing your fears. Most people would never step onto a boat again after almost drowning.”

Before John could answer, Cathy appeared at the top of the steps. She was wearing the bikini from their honeymoon; hot pink and dainty. Every curve she had was on full display. John heard a sudden gasp to his left.

“Holy shitballs!” The deckhand said. He instantly dropped his head and pretended it wasn’t him, as if it could have been anyone else.

John was instantly furious. The captain also heard the boy’s remark.

“Shane! Watch that mouth of yours! Go below and get us some water, son”

The captain spoke as if it wasn’t the first time he’d dealt with the deckhand’s mouth.

Shane started to go below as John looked at the captain for an explanation. Cathy was quick to avoid eye-contact with the young man as he passed. She quickly joined John and the captain at the helm, visibly embarrassed.

“Sorry about that, folks,” the captain said quietly. “He’s young and dumb, but means no harm. His mother’s on drugs and he was basically left on his own to raise himself. I’ve been trying to help him for over a year now. Just trying to keep him from getting into trouble. The cops were just *waiting* for him to turn eighteen. I hired him the day after his birthday.”

“Is he yours?” Cathy asked.

“No, no... he’s not mine. He’s just a kid who needed help. The boy’s father worked for my dad as a deckhand before I took the business over.” He looked around to make sure Shane was still out of earshot.

“His father had a mental... well, let’s just say he had an unfortunate accident. After he passed, His mother started prostituting herself to pay for her drugs. That boy’s seen things a kid should *never* see. That’s most of his problem, I think. He doesn’t know how to function around decent people, especially women. Never had a good role model.”

“Yeah, means no harm... right,” John said.

His heart hadn’t slowed any yet. The second he heard the kid’s comment, he wanted to take his head off! He couldn’t give two shits about his past, father or mother. Cathy redirected him before he could say anything else.

“Hey, honey... ready to get your tan on?” she asked, grabbing his hand. “I’ve got two towels and a lot of pale skin here. Let’s go fix that!”

John buried his anger for the young man and followed Cathy to the bow.

Shane returned with several bottled waters and headed straight for the couple. The captain saw and intercepted him, taking two of the bottles to deliver himself. The young man stood there, watching the exchange. He didn’t look at John, but took a long gaze at Cathy while the captain set up their lounge chairs. She noticed

the deckhand's stare and moved closer to John's side. John saw it, too, and turned to confront him. Cathy pulled at his hand, refusing to let go. She gave it three quick squeezes. John hadn't felt that for years. They were their silent *I love you* squeezes. John looked down at her. He still wanted a piece of the young man's ass. She motioned to the chairs, nudging him towards one. He reluctantly took a seat, side-eying the deckhand all the time.

The captain leaned over the couple and spoke quietly,

"I'll do my best to keep him from pestering you two anymore," he said. "So, please... try to enjoy yourselves. It's a perfect day to be on the water."

John wasn't convinced, but managed a quick nod. The Captain returned to the helm after sending Shane to the boat's stern to clean up.

"That's right, babe... breathe," Cathy whispered. "You know, it's not all his fault. I might be a little too much for this suit right now."

She adjusted her top. "I was twenty-one the last time I wore it. I think I've gained fifteen pounds since then."

John noticed her soft curves glistening in the sun. It was just the therapy he needed.

"You look great, honey," he said. "If anything, it looks better on you now." He checked behind him. The deckhand was out of sight. "Still doesn't excuse his damn mouth, though."

Cathy gave his hand three more squeezes. John was still fuming, but turned back around for her sake.

"Babe, don't get mad. And I'm just asking... but, did you take your meds this morning?"

"No. Why would I? I didn't want to be zoned-out for the trip. How was I to know there'd be a sex-craved stalker onboard?"

She kissed his cheek softly. "Oh, let him stalk. Who cares? Just ignore it. I'm yours, babe. Let's try to enjoy this before it's over. We can complain about him later."

John looked at the picturesque sky and aqua sea. He knew Cathy was right, so he resolved to get through the afternoon without any more anger issues, regardless of the deckhand's behavior.

The couple reclined in their chairs and pulled their sunhats down to cover their eyes. A calm, uninterrupted hour passed by.

The breeze was nice, but the sun's rays were overwhelming. John didn't know if the water's reflection intensified them or not, but he turned over several times in his lounge chair, just trying to keep himself from burning. It didn't help. Cathy felt it, too, and suddenly sat up in her chair.

"Oh, hell babe... I can't *do* this anymore!" she said. "I need a break. I have to get out of this heat."

"Right with you," he agreed.

Both were on their feet quickly and headed to the cabin.

"You lasted longer than most!" The captain laughed as they passed. "We have a shade screen... can tie up if you want."

"Maybe later," John said without slowing his walk. "We're going downstairs to enjoy the fan for a while."

"Below deck," the captain laughed. "We don't have a 'downstairs' on *this* vessel, Mr. Hinkle."

When they got below, John was relieved to see the old man's stool was still empty. The last thing he wanted to worry about was the nosy bastard eavesdropping on them again. They went into their cabin and closed the door behind them.

Cathy turned the fan on 'high' and pointed it toward the bed. The blades turned slowly at first but soon sped up. They both stepped in front of the moving air, desperate to cool off.

"Damn, honey, I'm sorry," she said. "It's almost too hot up there to enjoy the trip."

"Almost? My legs are *almost* fused together."

"Well, mine aren't," she said softly.

John completely missed her cue. She followed up.

"You know, honey... it took several minutes for me to get this little bikini on right. You know, to cover everything up. So maybe you could help me take it off before we start feeling these sunburns?"

They hadn't been together in that way for months. There were opportunities, but John always managed to derail them. Things she'd say or do in the bedroom unintentionally reminded him of what he walked up to at the lake, triggering an involuntary, angry meltdown. He wasn't going to mess this one up, though. He decided to keep his mouth shut, no matter what his brain threw at him. If he

caused another argument now, he knew there'd be no chance of their marriage surviving the weekend.

He carefully untied the string at the back of her neck. Cathy allowed her bikini top to fall to the floor before turning around. After a long-overdue and passionate kiss, they found themselves on the bed.

Cathy snuggled close, gently pressing her body against his. The softness of her skin sent John into a frenzy, freeing him of the tortuous thoughts he'd suffered all morning. The gentle rocking of the boat helped to set the mood as well. A passionate hour later proved John actually *could* keep his mouth shut. As they lay together under the fan's spinning approval, both hoped it would be a turning point in the marriage.

John punched the side of the raft several times. The sick irony of taking that trip to save their marriage, only to lose everything the same day.

"Sadistic, evil bullshit!" John yelled his words at the sky, punching the raft again.

He figured only a vile God teamed up with Fate could work so hard against him. But as he slumped down to the floor of the raft, he knew where his true enemies resided. They flourished in his sick mind; chronic paranoia, jealousy and rage. The guilt for the meltdowns was his. Not hers, not the deckhand's. He'd allowed his anger to control him, punish her and thoroughly destroy any chance of rebuilding their marriage.

As he lay there, lost in his guilt, something large slammed into the bottom of the raft! The force was so strong it nearly sent John over the side! He fought to stay in the raft as it was violently dragged across the surface of the water! Whatever it was, it seemed to be solid, making John think it could be a submarine, beginning to surface!

He considered jumping out of the raft, but after being dragged several yards across the water, whatever was bullying him suddenly relented. The raft drifted a few more feet and eventually came to a rest again.

John was completely shaken. He maintained his grip on the sides of the raft, too terrified to let go.

He heard someone laugh in the distance. He was being mocked, but by who? To his left, he noticed something moving under the water. He looked over the side just in time to see a huge, dark shadow crossing underneath. After it cleared the raft, a giant tail fin suddenly breached the water. It was a whale! At that very moment, the colossal beast began to turn beneath the surf. It circled around John, then surfaced long enough to take a good look at the small, yellow mystery that was floating on its ocean. When its curiosity was fully satisfied, it disappeared under the surface again.

Several minutes passed without an encore. John relaxed his grip on the raft's sides. He realized he'd most likely seen the last of the great monster. He lay down in the raft again, wondering if the whale was the last living thing his eyes would ever see.

John missed his wife. Her gentle touch, the recent whispers of 'I love you' and the cabin they made love in. They were all resting at the bottom of the ocean now. He wished he could go back in time, if only for a few hours, just to hold her one more time. He closed his eyes and thought about their last, loving moments together.

"I've missed you," she said, pulling the sheet up to her chin.

John sat up and placed a pillow behind her head.

"I have too, babe."

He kissed the side of her cheek.

"It's been too long, and that's all my fault."

"Well, you certainly made up for lost time," she said, "it reminded me of our honeymoon."

"Yeah, but you wore the bikini today... so, I was extra inspired."

He slowly ran his fingers down her leg. She put her hand over his and waited until their eyes met.

"John, this is probably *really* bad timing, but I have a confession to make, and it can't wait any longer."

Her expression had turned serious now. John's mind reeled at the thought of what he was about to hear.

Oh, hell... not again. Not now!

He lifted his hand off her thigh and tried to prepare himself for what was coming.

She continued, but looked away from him now.

"I tried to tell you this before the trip, but I couldn't. I knew it would have kept you from coming, and I didn't want to take a chance on ruining everything again. But, now, I realize you need to hear it... regardless of what you decide afterwards."

John could hardly breathe now. Once again, his heart was beating out of his chest.

"Just say it, Cathy. Get it over with, please."

She looked him straight in the eyes and took his hand. She looked nervously at her own hand, which was shaking.

"You remember when the counselor told us that willful omission is the same as lying? Well, there's something I never told you, *or* the counselor. And, to be honest, I was hoping *never* to tell you. But I realize now, it's unavoidable. You need to hear this before our marriage can truly move forward."

"Dammit, Cathy! Just come out and freakin' say it."

She nodded, then took a deep breath before speaking.

"John, baby... I've never fished before."

John let out a relieved gasp, along with several labored breaths.

"Cathy! Shit, Cathy! Don't screw with me like that. What are you trying to do... stop my heart? Why would you even mess with me like that?"

She leaned back against the headboard and turned to face him again.

"Seriously, John, I've *never* fished before... ever. And stupid me, I bring you out to the middle of the ocean, to do what? Fish! I mean, I really have no *idea* what to do up there!"

She couldn't keep a straight face any longer and broke out laughing.

John sat there with his head in his hands, his heart continuing to race.

"Like *I* do, Cathy? I've fished from shore a few times, yeah... but nothing like this. And never in the middle of the ocean."

He scooted his back against the headboard as well. Cathy grabbed his hand and smiled broadly.

"Babe, don't worry about your fishing skills, or lack of. The captain will set us up," he said. "He probably runs into this all the time. You know, you really had me freaked out. That shit's not funny, considering."

She put her head on his shoulder.

"Well, it was a *little* funny. We have to turn the corner on the past, John. And yeah, that captain had *better* show me what the hell to do. You don't want me swinging any big 'ole hooks around without knowing what the hell I'm doing."

"Point taken," he said, waiting to see if she'd caught his word play. "Look, I'll make sure he shows us the ropes before you have to do *anything*. It'll be fine. And since you've clearly squashed the mood with your *confession*, do you want to go upstairs now and get to it? We have to be close to his fishing spot soon. Who knows? Maybe you'll catch something I could mount over the fireplace."

"Yes on the fishing... no on mounting anything," she said. "But since you mentioned it, if you play your cards right and don't get pissed off again, it won't be the last time you'll catch me in the mood before this trip ends."

The way she raised an eyebrow said it all. They got dressed and made their way topside. When they'd reached the deck, John realized he was still barefoot.

"Back in a second, babe...no shoes," he said. He hurried to the cabin, grabbed his shoes and turned to go up again.

"You really believe she was thinking of *you* in there?" The old man asked from his perch. "She was imagining that lover of hers! *That's* who she was thinking about while *you* were on top of her!"

His laughter enraged John. He stepped toward the man, ready to put him on the floor. But, as mad as he was, he knew he couldn't put his hands on him. The man was just too old. John knew he'd end up killing him! He settled on telling the old relic off instead. He stepped forward until they were nose to nose. But before he could get a word out, he heard Cathy's voice calling him.

"John! You get lost down there? C'mon babe... tick tock, fishy fishy!"

He looked back at the old man, but he had vanished! John heard the doorknob clicking shut.

"Yeah, go hide in your son's cabin, you crazy old fuck!" He said through the door.

He gripped his shoes tightly and went up the steps. The captain turned when he noticed him.

"Well, there you are! Your wife said you two were ready to fish. I was beginning to think you were going to make her catch 'em all herself," he laughed.

"No... I'm here. Had some words with the old man downstairs, that's all."

"With who? Oh... don't mind *that* old bastard. He has quite the mouth on him, doesn't he? Gettin' a little too saucy in his old age. He has to stay below these days. Can't take the heat up here anymore. I'm surprised he even talked to you, though!"

"Yeah, he talked to me, alright... if you can call it that," John said.

"Okay... well, you folks ready to try for some bends?" the captain asked. "We put the sun shade up for you."

"Bends?" John asked. "Not sure what you—"

"Bending of the poles... bites. Just the way we say it around here."

John didn't reply. He was still thinking about the old man's words. Cathy spoke up.

"We're gonna need some direction first, Captain. You've got a couple of landlubbers onboard."

"Not a problem, Mrs. Hinkle. Happens all the time. We're not quite to our spot yet, but we're stopping a little early, anyway. There's some bad weather about two hundred miles west of us. It's slow moving, but we'll need to head back sooner to stay ahead of it. If the trip's cut too short I'll refund some of your money, no worries. Safety comes first on the *Moirae*," he said, looking at the sky.

"Shane! Fix these fine folks up with a couple rigs. They want to try their hands at catching old Bruce!"

John got the *Jaws* reference. He would have laughed except that Shane was called over to help.

Maybe the captain set him straight, he thought.

Regardless, it was what it was. You can't tell a man how to captain his own boat or run his business, he figured.

Shane opened a large bin and pulled out what was needed to get them started. He walked past the couple and motioned them to follow.

"We got four spots to fish from up here," Shane said, "but these two seats are best."

He got them settled and strung their lines. Instead of leaving, though, he sat down and began to relay his personal slew of fishing tips to Cathy. She listened

politely as the young man droned on. John was getting more frustrated each second. The brass deckhand occasionally attempted some humor, too, trying to impress her. John was getting close to his boiling point.

"Okay! I think we're *good* here, Shane," he said.

Shane smiled at Cathy and continued on as if he hadn't heard him. That was it. John took his sunglasses off and started to get up. Cathy knew what was coming if she didn't say something first.

"I think we've got it now, Shane... thank you!"

Shane looked disappointed, but didn't budge.

"Thank you!" she repeated. "Really... we're fine. You can go."

He reluctantly obeyed and left the couple alone. John saw him hurl a box of fishing lures into the sea.

"What the hell is *wrong* with that little shit?" he asked. "I'm seriously about to put him on his ass! I think he *wants* his ass beat!"

"Babe, please! Just try to ignore him. He's annoying but harmless. Remember what the captain said. He's had a rough life. Obviously he has no real social skills or even knows how to act in front of a lady."

"Well, no shit! But I'm telling you, Cathy, his life's going to get a lot rougher if he doesn't quit sizing you up every time he sees you!"

"Seriously, John... let it go." She glanced around, then whispered, "Please, don't let him ruin this for us. I love *you*, remember? Just focus on fishing... *and* what we were doing below deck an hour ago. He's a rude, stupid kid. Let's just ignore him."

John couldn't argue with her. She was right. He couldn't let an eighteen year-old walking boner ruin what could be a fresh start for their marriage.

He put a pinfish on Cathy's hook and helped her get the line in the water. Soon, they were fishing and relaxing under their sun hats, rods secure in their holders. The breeze off the water and the captain's sun shade helped them forget all about Shane, making for an almost perfect afternoon.

"All we need now is some good music," Cathy said, stretching out in her lounge chair.

"Yeah, the boat has electricity. So, where's the music?" he said. "I'd go crazy driving this thing all summer long with nothing to listen to but water crashing against the hull."

"Maybe the captain hates music," she giggled.

"Maybe so. He'd probably play something from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* soundtrack, anyway," he laughed.

"Well, we're certainly not going to get any internet out *here*," she said, checking her phone.

"I have a cd player if you want to use it, ma'am." Shane said, perched just behind her.

"Shit!" John said, startled at his sudden presence. He spun around. "You just can't help it, can you, boy? No, Shane! What we *want* is some fucking privacy! That's *all* we need from you! Think you can handle that?"

"Shane! Get over here!" the captain commanded.

Shane exhaled loudly and left for the helm, mumbling as he went. John and Cathy listened as he got his ass thoroughly ripped by the captain. The boy tried to argue back, but the captain wasn't having it.

"It's about freakin' time," John said, watching the brow-beating.

"Babe! Turn around. You'll just make it worse if he sees you. Leave it alone, please? You've said enough. Remember, focus on us!"

"Hard to focus with this numb-nut straight up your ass every second!" he said loudly.

She raised her eyebrows and gave him an angry look.

"Okay, okay... I'm focusing, I'm focusing," he said, quieting his voice.

Remarkably, the next two hours passed without any disturbances. The couple even dozed off from time to time. Neither caught anything, but it didn't matter. The experience was the important thing.

Midway through the afternoon, the captain walked to the bow and cleared his throat. They both looked up, clearly having been asleep.

"Folks, I don't like saying this, but we're going to have to head back earlier than I told you. The weather's moving in quicker than the forecast indicated. It's about fifty miles to the west now and coming in fast."

"Are we going to be okay?" Cathy asked, sitting up.

"Sure, sure. The storm is moving northeast and we'll be heading dead-east. That'll give us enough time to outrun it. You watch the skies. It'll be on our port side. Now, if it gets too windy up here, you'll have to go below."

The captain noticed Cathy's uneasiness and reassured her again.

"It's going to be okay, Mrs. Hinkle. We've been through this before. Many times in fact. So, no worries. The Moirae is faster than you think!"

Just then, John's pole rattled wildly in its holder.

"Oh, shit! Captain, I think I have a bite!" he said, scrambling to his feet.

"Well, I'm sorry, but you have about one minute to land it or you'll have to leave it," he told him. "We're making way for home."

As if the sky heard the captain's words, it quickly darkened. The wind picked up and the sea became notably restless. The captain's bird began to squawk loudly in its cage, adding to the drama.

"I thought you said the storm was fifty miles away!" Cathy said nervously.

"It's a pulse storm... a pop-up!" the captain said, moving quickly to the helm. "They form ahead of storm fronts sometimes. Usually, just a lot of rain and wind. Nothing to really worry about. Okay, Mr. Hinkle, reel him in. Shane, break down her rig and put it in the bin!"

John lifted the butt of his rod from its holder. He was instantly pulled forward by his catch, almost losing his grip on the pole. He got flustered trying to set the drag. He struggled with the reel, fumbling to get it set.

"Now, Mr. Hinkle... or cut it loose!" the captain yelled from the helm.

"Just cut the line, dear!" Cathy pleaded, "It's not worth it! Let's get below before the rain comes!"

"It's a big catch, babe! I'm reeling it in now... just a few more seconds!"

John continued struggling with the reel. The boat's engines could be heard grinding as the Moirae made a hard turn to starboard.

Just then, Shane grabbed the rod, just above the handle.

"You're gonna lose it, Mister! I can help!" he said, trying to pry it from John's hands.

"What the hell are you doing? Let go, asshole!" John shouted.

The deckhand held on, determined to land the fish himself. The captain saw them struggling with each other.

"Shane! Let go of the rod and get everything tied down! Hinkle, cut that line! We don't have time for this!"

Shane obeyed the captain and let go of the rod, but the rocking of the boat caused him to stumble. He fell into Cathy, knocking her to the deck! He reached down to help her up but John pushed him aside.

"Don't touch her, douchebag!" he yelled.

John helped Cathy to her feet but dropped the fishing rod while doing so. The pole was quickly dragged to the front of the bow before flipping over the top rail, straight into the water.

"Good job, mister!" Shane yelled, raising both hands to give him the 'finger'. John lost all control.

"That's it!" he yelled. "Your ass is mine now, you little son-of-a-bitch!"

He tackled the deckhand, slamming him hard to the deck! The boy lost all his air on impact!

"John, no!" Cathy screamed.

"Mr. Hinkle! Stop it!" the captain yelled from the helm.

John heard nothing. Consumed with rage, he pulled Shane up by his collar and punched him in the face, sending his head bouncing off the deck! The young man fought back as best he could, but was easily over-matched. John reigned down two more blows to Shane's face before the captain grabbed him around the neck and managed to pry him off. They both fell backwards, crashing against the storage bin! The captain's elbow happened to catch John in the face as they landed. John thought he'd been punched. He wielded around, swinging hard at the man's face. He missed the first time, but not the second. The captain was sent flying backwards. As he landed, he cracked his head on the side of the helm.

"John! Stop!" Cathy rushed over and grabbed his arm, "Stop! Stop it, John! It was just an accident!"

"Bullshit!" he yelled. "The bastard swung on me!"

John pushed her away, trying again to connect with the captain's face. Cathy fell against the boat's railing and held on, able only to watch as the two men fought. The deckhand jumped in and it became a pile of three, but only John was swinging. The other men were only trying to contain him.

By now, the rain was coming down in sheets. The sea responded in like fashion with its own, sinister intentions. The boat was sent reeling each time a wave breached the deck!

As the men fought, lightning suddenly struck the water! The sound was deafening. Cathy screamed as the thunderclap echoed across the horizon.

"That's enough!" the captain yelled, finally able to get John off of him. "Get a hold on yourself, Hinkle! We can finish this later, but this is a full blown squall! We've got to get moving fast or we'll be in real trouble! Shane, lock up the bin!"

The deckhand tried to stand, but fell back on his butt, bleeding profusely from his nose. The captain saw him and pointed to John and Cathy.

"I want you two in your cabin until we reach the shore! Don't come out unless you have to *swim* out!" You can have your damn money back! I'm not having any more of this shit on my boat! We're done here!"

"Oh, *now* we're done?" John fired back, wiping blood from his bottom lip. "Six hours of trying to keep this lapdog of yours from humping my wife's leg and *now* we're done? Stuck in a storm *you* said was nothing to worry about? Screw you *and* this floating circus! I have to deal with this asshole all day up *here* and that crazy old man *downstairs*? It's bullshit!"

The captain appeared dumbfounded at John's words. Before he could answer, another bolt of lightning struck the water! The sky was almost completely dark now, only the lightning providing any way to see.

"Portside! Portside!" the deckhand yelled, pointing across the boat.

The men looked up to see nothing, until another flash of lightning revealed a huge wall of black water looming just behind Cathy! She fell to her knees and wrapped her arms tightly around the railing's post! As her eyes met John's, the tall wave crashed over her, sending the *Moirae* on its side. Cathy was instantly swept overboard! The three men were slammed against the helm, the captain rolling over the top and into the sea as well! John struggled to hold on to something! When the wave cleared the boat, he heard Cathy screaming out his name! He managed to climb onto the side of the helm and scan the water for her. She spotted him first and screamed out his name again, desperately trying to keep her head above the water. Suddenly, as if being pulled under the surface by her ankles, she disappeared from sight. The torrid water quickly erased any sign of her. John tried to throw himself in her direction, but something crashed down onto his head, knocking him flat on his face! The last thing he saw before losing consciousness was a second wall of water looming over his head.

John punched the side of the raft again. He didn't care if he destroyed it or not. There was nothing left to remember that mattered now. His fractured mind had rewarded him all the horrid details he longed to recall. Now he could die. Tears of grief trickled down his sun-scorched face as he eyeballed the water, ready to meet his death.

"Oh, why all the tears, John? You disappoint me. She had it coming, you know... they all did!"

John spun around to find the old man perched on the end of his raft, grinning at him.

"You! This is all *your* fault! I was dealing with enough without *you* prodding me along. You made things worse. You made *me* worse! I'll kill you, you evil bastard!"

John swung hard at the man, missing him. He swung again, but the old man vanished before his eyes. John thought he was losing his mind.

I'm hallucinating! he told himself. *He wasn't here.*

"Oh, you'll kill *me*, will you? You'll kill yourself, first!"

The old man appeared behind him now, laughing maniacally. John was too weak to swing a third time. He sat down, bewildered and out of breath.

"It felt good, though... yes? Feeling the young deckhand's jaw bending to your fist? Punishing your wife for everything she's done to you? Yes, it felt good to you... I *know* it felt good!"

"You're sick!" John panted. "What the hell is *wrong* with you? And how the hell did *you* survive? You should've been the first one to the bottom of the ocean!"

"Wrong with me? *Nothing* is wrong with *me*, John. Why, I'm as pure as the driven snow!" he laughed.

"Yeah, pure evil. You're a sick, twisted, evil old fuck. And you're going to die right now!"

John gathered his strength and moved toward him again. Suddenly, an unseen force stopped him! John couldn't move. The old man leaned forward.

"My end will come as it is written. You can't do anything to change that," the man snarled. "But until then... let's just try to be *friendly* with one another, shall we?"

The old man took a much softer tone now. "I've put together quite a *surprise* for you, John. And we both know how you like surprises, don't we? Well, you're going to *love* this one. So, sit back and relax... enjoy the show!"

The old man raised his hand in the air and waved it across the sky. Immediately, the sun disappeared, leaving only the moon's dim light to see by. The wind picked up and the raft began rocking on the now restless sea.

Terrified, John gripped the sides of the raft to keep from falling overboard. Lightning struck several times around the rubber craft, illuminating a frightful sky with the sound of explosions! John was shocked to see something moving in the distance. It rocked helplessly back and forth on the sea, coming closer by the second. It was a large pleasure boat! John kept his eyes fixed on it, wondering if his mind was playing tricks on him again.

"It's getting closer, John. Who knows? Maybe you can save yourself!" the old man laughed.

John was sorely terrified, but kept looking in the direction of the boat. Moments later, flashes of lightning lit up the sky again. The boat was closer now, just as the old man said. John saw people onboard. Thoughts of being saved flooded his mind. He stood and waved his arms frantically, trying to get their attention. The old man laughed incessantly!

A hard rain began to fall, pelting the small raft. An inch of water soon covered its floor. The old man repeatedly stomped his withered feet in it, as if playing in a mud puddle! The bottom of the raft began to tear, allowing the sea to pour in! When John saw it, he screamed at the boat with as much volume as he could muster. No one seemed to hear or even notice him. It was within a rope's length now. He suddenly recognized his wife! She was standing on the deck, holding onto the boat's railing. A surge of dread ran down his spine. He recognized the captain, the young deckhand, and himself, standing across from her! He watched, stunned and confused as the men fought each other! He turned to the old man, whose laughter had now become a viscous roar!

"Here it comes, John! Don't miss it!" He raised both arms in the air as if welcoming an old friend.

John watched in horror as a huge wave rose from the sea and crashed over the boat, sweeping it onto its side! The men were tossed around like ragdolls! He saw Cathy being swept overboard, then heard her screaming out his name from the

water! John tried to jump out of the raft and swim to her, but once again, something prevented him from moving! He could only sit and watch helplessly as she disappeared under the treacherous water.

Immediately after, the boat's hull began to come apart. Noise from the cracking wood and fiberglass peppered the air with sounds like fireworks! The beaten cruiser began to sink. Soon, the Moirae was completely swallowed by the sea, leaving nothing behind but small chunks of debris and a yellow life raft that suddenly bobbed to the surface.

"That's enough!" The old man commanded.

At once, the sky obeyed him. The storm relented and the sun returned. The water became still once more, as did the raft. A feeling of rage swept over John as he turned to face the old man again.

"What the hell *are* you?" he cried out. "Answer me! Some demon sent to torture me?"

"A *demon*? Don't underestimate me, John! Look inside that wretched soul of yours and you'll see *exactly* who I am!" he said.

John watched as the man's face contorted into an even more wretched spectacle. As fear swept over him, all the color drained from his face. He fell to his knees and covered his eyes.

"Oh, care not to look at me, John? Well, you don't have to. A mirror would suffice! You and I are the same. Twins, if you will! Two peas in a pod!"

"No! I'm nothing like you!" John screamed through his tears. "We're not the same! You're the Devil!"

"Just another label from the minds of weak men, John. I'm many things," the old man laughed, "as well are *you*, now!"

"This has to be some kind of Hell! You're doing all of this!" he cried out.

"Oh, yes, John... but this isn't just *some* kind of hell! This is your *own*, special creation. The picture you've been painting your whole life! Your anger inspired me to come see it for myself! But you needed no help from me. I was merely around for conversation! I only *watched* as you became your own, perfect destroyer! The captain and his horny, little deckhand were just a bonus! You threw them in for free, John!"

He laughed menacingly, exposing a mouth full of jagged, rotten teeth.

John fell backwards from fright and tried again to hurl himself into the sea. The unseen force pushed him neatly to the center of the raft again. The old man's laughter rose again to a deafening roar, then suddenly stopped. He raised his haggard finger and pointed it angrily at John.

"There will be *no* escape for you, John Hinkle! Not yet! Not until I tire of you! I put you in this raft myself and that's where you'll stay! You are mine now!"

Only hate remained in the creature's eyes now. John was weary to the point of exhaustion. He slumped forward, the old man's horrid face fading in and out of view. Soon, blackness swept over his eyes.

A stray wave slapped against the side of the raft, waking John from his slumber. He looked around. The old man was gone. There was a strong sense of peace in the air. It was morning.

"Thank God!" he shouted. "It was a dream! Just a horrible fucking dream!"

He checked the bottom of the raft. It was bone dry. There were no rips or tears anywhere.

"I knew it! It was just a nightmare!"

He fell onto his back and stared up at the clear, blue sky. It was a beautiful sight! John had made it through his night of terror. The direness of his situation hadn't changed, but he didn't care now. The nightmare was over and that was enough. He may die, but he'd die at peace.

There was no old man anymore except the sick bastard who went down with the boat! He thought. That was more than enough to relieve his spirit.

John continued to float aimlessly in the open sea, but with a lighter spirit now. Soon, a small cloud appeared overhead and a light rain began to shower the raft. John held his shirt above his head until it was completely wet then rolled it up, twisting hard. The rainwater began to trickle into his dry mouth.

He coughed in spasms until he was able to get more of it down his parched throat. The cool rain felt like salve to his burnt skin! He let out a small laugh and knelt down, seeing a nice supply of water had pooled on the raft's floor. He began to lick at it, feeling at last there was hope.

“Yes, drink up, John... but hurry! The show’s about to begin again!”

The voice behind him sent tremors down John’s spine! His head spun around, terrified to find the old man sitting on the end of his raft again! His face turned white as he scrambled to the other end.

“Oh, you didn’t forget about me so *soon*, did you? That’s not very polite, John! I didn’t forget about *you*! You know, I never was much for nightmares. They’re just so... temporary. But you and I... *we’re* not temporary, *are* we? In fact, we’re a team now. It’s the two of us, John. Together in this miraculous little raft of mine. Forever!”

His vile words echoed through every cell of John’s body. The old man stood on the side of the raft and waved his diseased hand across the sky. Darkness fell over the sea and the wind began to howl. Soon, a familiar boat soon appeared in the distance. The old man lifted both his arms now, raising a colossal wave from the sea. When John saw it, he turned his head away, refusing to watch the horror unfold again!

“John, pay attention John! You’ll miss my favorite part!” the old man shouted.

John felt his head being turned with unseen hands to face the spectacle. The dark wave loomed high and suddenly crashed over the Moirae, sending Cathy into the water once again! Unable to close his eyes, John covered his ears, hoping he could muffle her dreadful screams. But even with his palms pressed tightly against his head, he couldn’t silence Cathy’s horrendous cries...

— nor the old man’s laughter.

The End