

GARTH JEFFRIES



STARBUCK

NANTUCKET REDEMPTION

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Dedicated to the amazing women in my life.

To my mom, for making it all possible.

To K for her thirty-five plus years of love, support and encouragement.

And to M for being the best daughter - and editor - for which a dad could ever ask.

And to DD, the most amazing man I ever met.

*Many men can make a fortune
but very few can build a family.*

J. S. Bryan

PROLOGUE



Peter Bois opened his eyes. He was lying on a hard, wooden floor and gasping for breath, pain radiating from the back of his head. He was also violently nauseous and could taste bile. What the hell just happened?

Slowly he rolled over and opened his eyes to a piercing blue sky, dappled with soft, white clouds occasionally covering the sun. The air was warm but damp, and he could smell the salt from the ocean. His body lay crammed up against a wall, his head and neck twisted at an uncomfortable angle against what looked like a short wooden bulkhead. A few minutes ago, he had been standing at Great Point at the tip of Nantucket Island, his toes in the water. How the hell had he gotten here? The shock and pain left him feeling confused and completely unsure of where he was. Flits of recent memory passed through his mind. He remembered the sun and the blue sky, the picnic with Charlotte and the kids, and the sound of the waves crashing onto the beach. He could still hear the waves, but they were strangely muted as if distant.

As he gathered his senses, he could feel that the floor was moving under him, swaying back and forth and making him feel physically uncomfortable. Suddenly, interrupting the motions was the sound of a thump followed shortly by a vibration he could feel deep into his body. It had an awkward mechanical feeling and reminded him of a time when he had gone charter fishing with some friends from the club. They had booked a fifty-three-foot sports fisherman out of Nantucket harbor and went deep offshore looking for tuna and marlin. They had been much more successful drinking beer and telling stories than catching large game fish but, in the end, had managed a few blues and a couple of stripers that salvaged the trip and made for some delicious meals with the family. The weather had blown up in the afternoon, and despite its size, the boat struggled a bit on the return. Most of the group had gotten seasick as it crashed through an angry ocean filled with large swells and whitecaps.

The motion under him felt similar, but clearly, he was not on a sportfishing boat. Peter's confusion with his situation grew more intense, and for the first time in a long time, he felt the uncomfortable stab of fear.

Gradually he worked up the strength to raise his head and look out over the wall. Waves stretched out as far as he could see. The water was a dull gray-green with gentle swells, the shadows of the clouds reflected on the surface. He could see gulls flocking in the distance and just barely make out their calls. He twisted his head around, looked up, and was shocked to see a large wooden mast with acres of white canvas all connected by a spider-web of ropes. Squinting, he could just make out two men at the very top of the mast standing inside what looked like metal hula hoops and looking out across the sea.

As his mind was wrestling with this new reality, he felt a fresh breeze on his cheek, followed by an unholy stench. The warm, moist air had been replaced by a putrid, foul-smelling smoke that brought back his nausea. He rolled over and wretched out that morning's breakfast, a breakfast that now seemed so long ago.

The sound of men started to filter in through the calls of gulls, and he could hear them shouting loudly from one to another. It was English but with an unusual dialect and many words unfamiliar to him. He also heard what he thought were other languages; Portuguese for sure and maybe Spanish. There was an urgency to their voices but with the disciplined air of men working together. They did not share the panic he was feeling.

The kick to his gut was shocking and intensely painful.

"The hell are you doing laying there green hand? Are you going to take a nap, or are you going to get back to work?"

Peter looked up as a tall, bearded man towered over him. His bulky figure blocked the sun, and his brown eyes glowered down on him. He was wearing a dark woolen coat, white shirt and had black knee-high leather boots. Oddly, Peter's first thought when seeing those boots was of Charlotte and how she looked when he had taken her out to dinner for their fifteenth anniversary. It had been a chilly evening for early October, and she had purchased the black leather boots, especially for the occasion.

The captain's boot drew back and struck him again - this time in the hip. Peter cried out in pain.

"For God's sake, man, it was only a slight thump from a pulley. You act as if you'd been harpooned like a whale. Get up and get back to work or I'll have you flogged! You know I'm not one to spare the cat-o'-nine-tails."

Peter struggled to his feet and looked about him. *What the fuck?*

CHAPTER ONE



The white Gulfstream G5 jet crossed the south shore and touched down at Nantucket Memorial Airport just after 4:00 p.m. The pilot deployed the spoilers and reversed the engine thrust, quickly slowing the plane and allowing it to make the left onto the HS 2 taxiway. After making the turn, she proceeded over to the apron space reserved for general aviation and deftly rotated the plane following the ground crews' visual instructions. They chocked the tires as the turbines wound down.

Being a Friday afternoon in the heart of the summer season, it was easy to understand how this rather small airport could be the second busiest in Massachusetts, trailing only Logan in Boston. The sleek G5 was cheek to jowl with dozens of other business jets, turboprops and private planes. It looked like half the wealth of the free world had descended on this irregular-shaped speck of sand thirty miles off the mainland.

The stairs descended, and Peter Bois appeared in the opening, his six-foot frame filling the doorway. He had put some weight on over the past few years, and as he said to himself nearly every morning, he needed to start exercising and drop a few pounds. He paused briefly, his light brown hair blowing in the wind, taking in the beautiful blue sky and inhaling a deep breath of the fresh, salt-tinged ocean air. Bois looked and played the role of a Nantucket summer resident perfectly. Just forty-four, he had made a fortune with his plastics company and was now one of the wealthiest men on the island, a pretty significant accomplishment when you consider the competition. And he looked the part as well with his youthful appearance and boyish good looks, features that attracted stares from most of the women who saw him. Those stares occasionally returned by his penetrating blue eyes.

This was usually his favorite moment of the weekend - a week's work behind him and a full two days of relaxation ahead. But not today. The day's events weighed heavily on him, and there

was an uncomfortable feeling in his gut that he was struggling to understand. Usually, he'd have been able to unwind fully during the short flight but found himself tense, almost anxious about the upcoming weekend, and how things were going to be with Charlotte. He fought the urge to turn around and get back on the plane. Instead, he stepped quickly down the stairs and walked through the general aviation terminal and out into the arrival area.

Charlotte was waiting at the curb in their black Range Rover. Peter hopped in the passenger side and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. She looked fabulous as always, and despite the tension in their relationship, she still never failed to take his breath away. Her dark brown hair was cut short, and her dazzling blue eyes were just visible through new sunglasses.

She pulled out of the parking space and drove towards the airport exit. She looked over at Peter and smiled. "We certainly missed you this week, and it's so good to finally have you here. How was your flight?"

"It was fine. And quick. Wheels-up to touchdown was just over thirty minutes. It was a short flight but long enough for the new flight attendant to screw-up my cocktail. Not only is she unattractive but incompetent behind the bar as well," Peter said and paused for a minute. "I think I'll have her fired."

"Fired for being unattractive?" Charlotte asked with a tinge of anger. Although she had no evidence Peter had ever cheated on her, she did see his eyes wander when there was an attractive woman nearby. And as a woman, she boiled at the thought that this young lady could be fired based on looks alone.

Peter ignored her comment. "I mean, how difficult is it to make a Manhattan? Take some good whiskey, add the bitters and sweet vermouth, and stir." He glanced out the window as the scrub oak, and pitch pine barrens rolled past. They came to the end of Nobadeer Farm Road and took a right on Milestone Road. For nearly three hundred years, this seven-mile stretch connected the bustling town of Nantucket with the quiet village of Siasconset or Sconset for those in the know. Summer was in high gear, and traffic down this narrow two-lane confirmed it. Hordes of mopeds, most with two people aboard, buzzed along at thirty miles per hour managing to do little more than back up faster traffic. Cars waited patiently for a clearing in the oncoming lane to pass them. Unfortunately, traffic the other way was just as busy dealing with their own menace of the powered bicycles, so opportunities were few and far between to dispatch the pests. Peter clenched his jaw and grudgingly accepted that it would be thirty or less all the way to Sconset.

"I wish they would ban those damn things," he said.

"What things?" asked Charlotte, glancing over at him.

"Those fuckin' mopeds. Dealing with them is a pain in the ass. All they do is slow things down for everyone," replied Peter.

Charlotte rolled her eyes, it was not the first time she had heard this argument from her intolerant husband. “But honey, for a lot of people, it’s the only affordable way to get around the island. Rental cars are brutally expensive, and the taxis and Ubers in summer are so busy that it can often mean hours before one becomes available.”

“Then maybe those tourist assholes shouldn’t come here at all if they can’t afford it. Go somewhere cheaper, like the Cape. Or maybe just stay home and leave the island to those who have the money to enjoy it properly,” said Peter.

Not wanting to hear another of her husband’s rants on the current state of tourists on the island, Charlotte quickly changed the topic. “So how did she screw it up?” she asked.

“Who screwed up what?” asked Peter tersely, rolling his eyes.

“Your flight attendant. If I may quote you, you said,” Charlotte dropped her voice down a bit and said in a mildly mocking manner, “Our new flight attendant really screwed-up my cocktail. Not only is she ugly and not sexy at all but incompetent as well. I’m going to have her fired.”

Peter turned from the window, his eyes sparking anger at being mocked by his wife. “I didn’t say I was going to fire her, and I didn’t say she was ugly. Only unattractive and apparently incompetent behind the bar. I asked for a Manhattan, and the bitch made me an Old Fashioned. And she used the wrong whiskey. You know I prefer Makers’, but she just pulled the well crap we got for the golf outing with the guys last month,” Peter snapped.

“So she used the wrong whiskey and added sugar when she shouldn’t have. Do you think perhaps she could have been a little nervous? After all, it was her first week on the job and the first trip with you. Don’t you think it would be the right thing to do to give her another chance?” asked Charlotte.

“I suppose you’re right. Let’s see how she does on the return trip Monday morning. We’ll see if she can get coffee and cream right,” Peter said caustically.

He turned and looked out the window watching as the scrub oak and pine gave way to open moors with its low growing vegetation of bushes and grasses. Across the moor, he could just make out the cranberry bogs and in the distance Sankaty Head Lighthouse. He lowered the window and breathed in the scents of the moor - an aroma that always takes him back to being a child when he’d ride his Raleigh ten-speed along the Milestone bike path that paralleled the road. Back to a time when things were simpler, happier, and more carefree. Back to when he wasn’t worried about quarterly results, the stock price, or what new contracts his company was landing this year that would continue to drive revenue growth in the high single digits.

Although he had been coming here since he was an infant, his first memory of the island wasn’t until he was nearly five. He had been playing in the little park next to the Sconset Market, imagining the tree was his ship, and he was the captain, sailing the high seas in search of whales.

Descending the tree to head home, Peter had stepped on an old rusty nail. His screams were followed by a trip to the ER at Nantucket Cottage Hospital. They dressed his wound, gave him a shot - which he remembered being as almost bad as stepping on the nail - and sent him home with his foot bandaged and instructions to forego his captain career for a few weeks.

“Peter?” Charlotte asked.

“Oh, sorry. I was thinking about when I stepped on the nail when I was a kid. Remember that story?” said Peter.

“Of course, especially since you remind us of that at least once a season...if not two,” Charlotte said, teasingly.

Peter replied with a chill, “I’m sorry if you have to hear it every year. It’s just that it stands out so vividly in my mind and certainly a defining moment of my childhood.” He paused briefly. “Seeing that nail poking out of my skin scared the crap out of me. Not to mention it hurt like a sonofabitch and made me scream like a baby. It was the first time I ever remember being scared, afraid of what might happen to me.”

Charlotte looked at her husband of nearly twenty years. The take-control CEO, master of the universe, and the father of her two children looked like a hurt little boy about to cry. She sensed there was more to this than just recalling a bad experience from his childhood. “Is something wrong?” she asked.

Peter looked back out across the moors. “The offices were picketed again today,” he said.

Charlotte took her eyes off the road and glanced at Peter. “What do you mean picketed...again?” she asked. “When have your offices ever been picketed?”

Peter shifted uncomfortably in his seat. “I haven’t told you, but for the past few months, an environmental group, Clean Seas Forever, has been picketing our offices. They have spent the last few Friday mornings in our lobby, disrupting our business and claiming that the plastics we produce are killing the oceans and the wildlife in it.”

Charlotte wasn’t sure which made her angrier, that this organization was targeting her husband’s company or that he hadn’t bothered to tell her it had been happening in the first place. She looked at Peter, “Who are these Clean Oceans people?”

“Clean Seas Forever,” he corrected her. “They are a very well funded group and claim to have research linking our products to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of whales, dolphins, and other marine life. They believe that these animals ingest our products, thinking it’s food, and it fucks up their insides, and they die. Personally, it’s all a bunch of hysterical bullshit and just gives these people a cause, another reason to protest.”

“Is there any truth to their claims?” she asked. “About killing marine life?”

“Absolutely not! Yes, our products can last for many years in water, but in no way will they be mistaken for food. They are clearly exaggerating the situation and using it to siphon donations from sympathetic housewives who don’t know any better. And they need the money - and the cause - because I don’t think any of these fruitcakes could get a job in the real world.”

Charlotte looked at him, “Well, that might be, but these ‘fruitcakes’ could potentially harm your business. What if they started picketing some of your biggest customers?” she asked. “Do you think they might succumb to that kind of pressure? I’d think that could potentially be bad PR for them.”

“I don’t think you understand my business,” said Peter condescendingly. “My customers and their customers need our products. We produce value-added plastics that people use thousands of times a day. It makes their lives easier and more enjoyable. They need us. They depend on us,” he finished.

“But what if more of them start answering ‘paper’?” said Charlotte.

“What the fuck are you babbling about?” asked Peter, looking at his wife like he would dogshit on his shoe.

She stared back at him, her blue eyes blazing with anger, “I’m the one who shops for this family, Peter. And when I go to the store, they ask me every single time I check out - paper or plastic?”

“Don’t bait me.”

“Bait you?”

“Yes. You know that we don’t produce those types of plastics. Those are commodity items made overseas in crappy factors using low-quality plastics and cheap labor. Our products are made of the highest quality resins and used by several premium brands in the food and beverage industry. Yes, they might end up in the ocean, but it’s guilt by association with this bunch of wackos.”

“I understand that. After all, I’ve been there with you since you bought that company,” Charlotte scathingly reminded her husband. “But it’s that guilt by association that worries me. If more and more people respond with paper as their answer, then their perceptions and preferences are changing.”

“Meaning?” asked Peter, already tired of the argument.

“Meaning that they might start cutting plastics out of their lives where they can. Maybe these people will realize that they can probably still live a happy life without your products?” she finished.

Peter looked at her, unsure of how to respond.

“I think what I’m trying to say is that you should consider transitioning out of plastics.”

“What the fuck?” said Peter, nearly apoplectic. “Plastic products make up almost our entire sales portfolio. They generate hundreds of millions per year in revenue. And if we don’t make them, then one of our many competitors no doubt will,” he snarled. “Is it my fault that people don’t recycle or dispose of their trash properly? And how the fuck can I keep a whale from eating a piece of plastic floating on the surface of the ocean?” Peter was bristling now, the recollection of the morning’s activities helping to fuel his displeasure.

“I’m just trying to help,” Charlotte said shakily. “Anyway, I thought your guys in R&D had developed a new type of plastic using natural materials that would degrade quickly in water.”

Peter snorted, “Those ‘guys’ are very highly paid chemical engineers, and yes, they have developed some resins made from natural materials. In our preliminary studies, they appear to disintegrate fairly quickly when exposed to water, especially saltwater. But we abandoned that work last year.”

Taken aback, Charlotte said, “Abandoned? It sounds like it might be a perfect solution to this problem!”

“We had to abandon it because they were proving to be too damn expensive to make. Even looking past the very high capital needed to rework the production equipment, converting our entire product line would cost us over fifteen percentage points of margin. Do you know what that means in terms of dollars?” Peter stared at her intently.

“I don’t,” said Charlotte, “Especially since you won’t share the financials with me.”

Peter ignored the dig. “Over one hundred million. Per year! Do you know what that would do to our stock price?” Peter waved his arms to make the point. “Our stock price would tank and with that a lot of my net worth.” He slumped back into his seat. “I think you like the way we live. Plastics have taken care of us financially, and I seriously doubt you would want to give it all up to clean the oceans,” he said mockingly.

“But what about the wildlife some of your plastics are hurting? Like the whales?” Charlotte asked.

“Fuck the whales. I have margins to maintain and profits to deliver,” Peter replied with an icy tone.

They drove the remaining few miles to their house in silence.

CHAPTER TWO



Charlotte pulled into their driveway, shell-covered and lined on each side with neatly manicured hedges. The hedges were a landscaping staple in Sconset, and nearly every house was fenced by these privet bushes, perfectly groomed, arrow-straight and flat-topped. More creative types pruned them into shapes like a whale, a basket, or a simple arch over an arbor, but regardless of the form, the privets defined the little village.

Growing down the center of their driveway was a thin strip of grass whose survival depended on being out of reach of the tires, and Peter hated it. It had always made him feel a little sloppy, that he wasn't keeping the grounds manicured to the level he preferred and expected. But Charlotte loved it for its charm and the way it helped to soften the approach to the house. She had convinced Peter to keep it that way.

The driveway was reasonably long and allowed them a great deal of privacy, even in this small village. Many summer residents who lived in Siasconset were familiar with the entrance, often using it as a backdrop for family pictures. They were completely unaware of the beautiful home that resided at its end.

The house was named Fernweh, German for 'longing for unseen places,' and Peter had known it all his life. More of a small compound than a house, it had been built in the 1820s by Charles Litchfield, a very successful whaling captain who preferred the quieter life on the eastern shore of the island versus the hustle and bustle of town. Initially sitting on over ten acres of land, over time, much of that land had been sold off as it passed through the generations of the Litchfield family. It was a rather large house and expensive to maintain, so when the Nantucket economy struggled as the whaling industry declined, descendants were forced to sell the land to keep the house afloat financially. In the end, it became too much for them, and Peter's

grandfather purchased the home and the remaining three acres in the 1950s after it had sat abandoned for nearly two decades.

Bringing the house back to its original glory had been an expensive proposition, but one Peter's grandfather had relished. Having made his money in manufacturing during World War II, he took to the task of restoring Fernweh with teams of carpenters, painters and other tradesmen. They were on-site for nearly three years attending to every detail of the house. The work also addressed the carriage barn, converting it into a large garage with a comfortable guest suite on the second floor, and building a small but charming guest cottage. The only structure that was not included in the restoration was the outhouse as modern plumbing and sewage had been installed. Unlike most of the houses in the village, Fernweh was sided in white painted clapboards versus the traditional shake shingle, a common trend in the 19th century as a way of demonstrating one's financial success and position.

Peter inherited Fernweh at the age of twenty when his parents had been killed in a plane crash. They had been traveling home from a ski trip in Vermont when their small plane encountered a snow squall crossing the Massachusetts border, disorienting the pilot who failed to maintain altitude as he approached the Berkshires. The aircraft had impacted one of the higher peaks killing all aboard nearly instantly. An only child, Peter had heard about the accident from a family friend as he was preparing to head home for spring break. He had been very close to his parents, and the news was devastating, particularly after the loss of his best friend a couple of summers before. He toyed with the idea of withdrawing from school to manage their affairs, but in the end, though, he decided to honor his parent's memory and get his degree in business administration.

Over twenty years later, and now the third generation of his family to oversee Fernweh, Peter took the responsibility very seriously. This house was both his first love and his third child, and he used much of his considerable fortune in maintaining it to a very high standard. The environment on Nantucket was harsh, and in Sconset, it was particularly challenging. The air was frequently damp due to summer humidity and the frequent fog banks that rolled in off the Atlantic. Nor'easters and the occasional hurricane added their own damages to the mix with high winds and torrential rains. Constant upkeep was critical to ensure that nature didn't get a finger hold on the house and damage her through rot, decay, or sheer force. It was an endless battle that Peter was determined to win for when the time came to pass it along to his children, Spencer and Sophie.

Charlotte wheeled the Range Rover up to the front of the house, and Peter jumped out. He grabbed his backpack from the back seat and headed straight to his study. Charlotte sighed and watched Peter retreat into the house from the driver's seat. After a few minutes, she slowly got out of the car and made her way up the brick path that led from the driveway to the entry.

The front door opened into a well-lit center hall with large rooms spread across either side of the house. A generous staircase led to four bedrooms upstairs. To the right was the living room and formal dining room. To the left were the family room and kitchen. Large double-hung windows covered the exterior walls bathing the house in beautiful natural light and offering gorgeous views to the lush lawn and the moors beyond. The decorations were simple and had been collected over time. There were original pieces from Peter's grandfather as well as antiques that Charlotte had found locally from trusted sources. The soft, light blue walls and glossy white wood trim created a bright and airy space that usually brought Charlotte joy. But not tonight. The short drive from the airport had left her with a heavy feeling.

Their summer nanny, Jess, had just finished feeding Sophie and Spencer their dinner and was rinsing the dishes in the sink and putting them in the dishwasher. The children had disappeared to the family room, eager to utilize their one hour of screen time.

"Did they give you much trouble?" asked Charlotte.

"No, they were great, as usual," replied the nanny. "Sophie still doesn't like fresh fish very much. I prepared some bluefish for her tonight, but she only picked around the edges. Spencer, of course, would have licked his plate if I had let him," said Jess, smiling. Charlotte stood next to the nanny with her arms crossed. "Well, bluefish can be pretty fishy. I know I didn't like it much when I was younger. Maybe next time we should try swordfish or grouper."

"Hmmm. She might like that," replied Jess. She placed the last of the dishes in the dishwasher. "Can I get you anything, Mrs. Bois?"

"Thanks, but I'm okay. I had a late lunch at the club, and I think I might just have some cheese or fruit in a little bit."

"Okay. Do you need me for anything more tonight? I was going to head into town and meet up with some friends if that's okay."

"Of course that's okay. I can get them to bed. Please, go out, have some fun and see your friends. Just do me a favor and don't drink too much," she said with a smile.

"I won't, Mrs. Bois," said Jess sweetly, and she walked out of the kitchen, anxious to start her evening.

Charlotte watched her leave and then headed past the sink and through the kitchen to Peter's study. He was at the laptop as usual and utterly oblivious to the beautiful sunset out his window. The moors were bathed in a golden hue, and the sky had streaks of purple, pink, and red. It was stunning.

"Did you want some dinner, Peter?" she asked.

Peter replied without looking up from his screen. "No, I'm good for now. I had a snack on the plane with my crappy drink." He continued tapping on the keyboard.

“Can we talk?” asked Charlotte.

“Not now. I’ve got to get this pricing information out to the Asian team,” Peter replied. “They are presenting this weekend to one of the biggest food producers in Singapore, and I really want to get that business.” He briefly looked up at Charlotte. “Give me thirty minutes, and then maybe we can meet for a drink on the patio?”

“Sure, hon,” said Charlotte reluctantly. She sighed and walked back to the family room to join the kids for some *Penguins of Madagascar*. The family room had a large overstuffed, and very comfortable leather couch that could probably seat eight in a pinch. They sat spread out on the couch with their eyes intently focused on the large flat-screen television hung over the whitewashed brick fireplace. It was Charlotte’s favorite room in the house, especially in the fall, when she and Peter could curl up and watch some college football with a fire roaring in the hearth. Spencer and Sophie laughed out loud several times at the antics of the four penguins and were both very disappointed when the credits started to roll.

“Okay, you two, time for bed,” said Charlotte. “Go upstairs, get your PJ’s on, and brush your teeth. I’ll be up in ten minutes for reading time.” Sophie and Spencer reluctantly went up the stairs. Charlotte stood and took a minute to reorganize the numerous pillows and neatly fold the wool blanket that Sophie had wrapped around her as she watched television. She walked over to the window and looked out over the lawn. The sky was nearly black but held just the faintest light of purple close to the horizon. Off to the west, she could clearly see Venus and several stars and closer to home, a handful of rabbits eating the grass over by the carriage house.

True to her promise, Charlotte was upstairs with two minutes to spare. She, Spencer, and Sophie spread out on her large bed in the master suite. Spencer clutched one of his favorite stuffed animals, a little dog named Floppy, and snuggled in on Charlotte’s left while Sophie curled up on her right. Reading at bedtime had been part of their nighttime ritual since they were barely out of the womb and her favorite time of the day. Tonight they were continuing with a treasured classic from her childhood, *The Wind in the Willows*. She read for nearly thirty minutes before she reluctantly put the book down. She could have gone on for hours, the escape into the lives of Mole, Toad, and the others a welcome distraction. Charlotte paused at the end of a chapter and noticed that Spencer had fallen asleep. Glancing at her daughter, she saw that Sophie was struggling to keep her eyes open. “Okay guys, bedtime.”

Sophie reluctantly scooted off the big bed and made her way through the door and down the hall to her room. Charlotte nudged Spencer awake, helped him off the bed, and then led him down to his room. He climbed in his bed, hugged Floppy to his chest, and closed his eyes. Charlotte brought the blanket up and tucked him in. “Good night, love,” she said. “Sweet dreams.”

She stood and made her way quietly out the door and down the hall. Sophie had already crawled under the sheets and was fluffing her pillow when Charlotte came in and sat on the edge of her bed. Sophie looked up at Charlotte, her greenish eyes fighting against sleep. “Why doesn’t dad ever want to join us when we watch TV or read?”

Charlotte felt a lump in the back of her throat. “Oh, honey. He’s just so busy with work right now. I know he wants to, but there is a lot he needs to do for the company.”

Sophie’s face clenched. “I hate that company,” she said with a grumble and rolled over. Charlotte paused and stared at the beautiful child below her. Peter was missing some of the best years of her life and worse, Sophie was noticing. She brushed Sophie’s blond hair away from her cheek and leaned down to kiss her. “Just remember daddy loves you, honey,” she whispered soothingly. “And so do I.”

Charlotte stood and quietly exited the bedroom. She glided softly down the stairs, careful to miss the two creaky treads, and walked to the kitchen. She opened the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of sauvignon blanc. She poured herself a glass, walked through the french doors to the patio, and settled in on the chaise. Laying back and looking up at the sky, she could clearly make out the Big Dipper to the north and Orion’s Belt to the south. As her eyes adjusted, more stars and constellations came into view, disrupted briefly every fifteen seconds or so from the sweep of light from the Sankaty Head lighthouse. Muffled by the distance, Charlotte could just make out the faint roar of the waves breaking on Sconset beach.

Pulling out her phone, she checked the display and saw that it had been well over an hour since Peter’s promise to join her for a drink. She raised up a bit and looked over her shoulder back toward his study. She could just make out a tuft of Peter’s hair through the panes where he was still at his desk, hunched over the laptop. Her eyes returned to the sky, and she took another sip of her wine. The night air was getting chilly, and Charlotte could feel the fog rolling in. She reflected on Sophie’s comment about the company and had to agree she was starting to hate it too. Yes, it provided for them financially, but it was also taking more and more of his time and focus away from the family. She could happily share him with his other loves of Nantucket and Fernweh. But sharing him with this company? In many ways, it was worse than him having a mistress. And she knew, deep in her heart, that she was going to need to make him see what his company, his precious Shimmo Plastics, was doing to their family.

She took a last sip of wine and accepting that Peter was not going to deliver on his assurance to join her, decided to call it a night. She got up from the chaise and walked into the kitchen, closing and locking the French doors behind her. Placing her wine glass in the sink, she looked across the kitchen into Peter’s study. He was still at it, his face buried in the laptop’s screen. She saw he must have grabbed a bite at some point as a dirty dish and a half-full glass of beer sat on the corner of his desk. Rather than cede to her nature to want to clean up his meal, she headed

back through the family room to the stairs, turning lights off as she went. Casting one last look through the house toward his study, she ascended the stairs and headed for the master bedroom.

CHAPTER THREE



Peter turned off the light in his office and went into the kitchen. With Charlotte and the kids asleep, the house was quiet, the only noises being the typical creaks and groans of an old home and a slight hum from the refrigerator. Peter grabbed a beer and headed out onto the patio. He knew that he had let Charlotte down again, having promised to meet her for a drink on the patio hours ago. He just couldn't seem to make her understand the importance of his business and how critical it was to their lifestyle and his feeling of self-worth. As he had done hundreds of times before, he told himself that they would need to accept it as part of who he was and if they couldn't do that, well, there were other options available.

He finished his drink quickly and went in for another. Returning to the patio, he planted himself on one of the chaises and looked out across his lawn. The fog had settled in and shrouded the house and the grounds in a gray embrace, bolstering Nantucket's nickname the *Gray Lady*. Many people didn't like the fog; some even found it sinister, if not outright scary. But Peter loved it. The isolation both in sound and sight comforted him and made him feel like he was home. Not the little "h" home that represents where you rest your head every night and where you get your mail but the big "H" Home that defines who you are and from where you come. And although he considered Nantucket and Fernweh Home, Peter knew sadly that he was not considered a native by the islanders. He hadn't spent winters here or gone to the local school. He hadn't played Whaler football or participated in any of the myriad of other activities that the native kids did. He and his family were just another one of the thousands of summertime residents who filled the streets and restaurants and raised the prices of everything for everyone.

Peter took a sip of his beer and wondered about how things might have been different. He had tried to talk Charlotte into living on the island year-round, right after they had married. He knew he could find a job that would pay the bills, if not take full advantage of his education, and

find a small rental cottage in town. But Charlotte wanted no part in that adventure. She enjoyed coming in the summer and fall for a few weeks but could not envision herself here year-round, particularly in the winter. Citing high rates of alcoholism and drug abuse as confirmation of her thinking, she had put her foot down. In the end, they had landed in Greenwich, where he commuted into the City working in private equity on Wall Street. The hours had been brutal, but the money was excellent, and they managed to escape to Nantucket for weekends and the occasional longer stay of a week or two.

The opportunity to buy Shimmo Plastics had changed all of that.

It had all started with an accidental meeting of an old friend from Deerfield. He had been having drinks after work at the White Horse. As usual, the big swinging dicks from the financial district were filling the place, and Peter was sitting at the bar with a few colleagues. After settling his bill, he was getting up to leave when he was bumped from behind hard enough to lose his balance. He turned quickly, ready to rail on this act of rudeness, and stared straight into the wavy brown hair and hazel eyes of Charles “Chuck” Thompson. Anger quickly faded into delight, and the two friends embraced.

Chuck was in the City for meetings on Wall Street. He was the chief financial officer of a plastics company in Connecticut, and they were looking to raise capital for a significant expansion. Despite strong financials and a solid business plan, he had been rebuffed from all of the firms he had approached, citing the company’s small size and projected single-digit returns. After calling Charlotte to let her know he was staying in the City, Peter and Chuck grabbed a booth and settled into the green leather benches. They ate and drank and talked, catching up on each other’s lives and filling in the gaps since they had last seen each other at graduation.

They also talked about Chuck’s business and the frustrations he had experienced trying to secure investors for the firm. After hearing more about the company and the business plan, Peter started to ferment an idea. He had managed to save quite a bit from his few years of work, and he had access to his parent’s money, which had sat in trust since their accident. Maybe this was the opportunity to go out on his own and control his future.

It was well into the early morning hours before they finally parted company. Peter gave Chuck a final hug and put him in a taxi then turned, walking up Bridge Street in search of a hotel.

After that initial meeting, it didn’t take long before Peter found himself a majority investor in Bridgeport Plastics Company, and he quickly went about making changes. He shed unprofitable product lines, streamlined the workforce, and renamed and rebranded the company Shimmo Plastics. Within a year of his arrival, they had increased profits substantially and had secured several significant new customers in the food and beverage industry. But his hours and workload had gone from brutal to insane. Eighty hour weeks were not uncommon, and he spent most

Saturdays and Sundays at the office. Two years in, he fired his old friend. Chuck was not strong enough from a financial skills perspective and had not been willing to put in the same hours as Peter. Despite offering to provide a strong reference, they had not talked since.

The money started to flow to Peter but with it came some costs. Sophie had been born while he was at a major industry conference in Asia. Spencer was born while he was pitching for new business in Europe at one of the world's largest water bottlers. The first words he heard from either were over a cell phone. And it was lucky if he and Charlotte were able to have dinner once or twice a week. Now here he was, over ten years after taking over the company, wealthy and successful but struggling on the home front. He admitted to himself that even though the hours were better, it was not unusual for him to work sixty hours a week. And even when he was home, he often spent hours in his office. But it was the price he had to pay for the lifestyle they enjoyed.

And it was a great lifestyle. In addition to Fernweh, they had a large home in Weston, Connecticut sitting on over four acres, the best schools for the kids, private jet access, and complete financial security. They wanted for nothing.

Peter stared through the fog, "Why can't Charlotte understand that this is what it takes?" he whispered to himself. Sighing, he finished his beer, left the empty bottle on the small table next to the chaise, and made his way over the lawn to the guest cottage. He climbed the stairs to the second-floor suite and turned in; the maids had already prepared the room for guests. The long week and the beer allowed sleep to come quickly.

* * *

Peter dreamed again of the summer he lost his best friend. In his dream, he was carrying one end of a bundle of drywall sheets up temporary stairs in a newly framed house on the south side of the island. His best friend on the island, Jack Tate, had the other end. Together they were working as laborers for a contractor who was building several new homes in an area known as Tom Nevers. It was on the south shore of the island and just a few miles along the beach from Sconset. Their jobs were pretty simple - be the muscle to move whatever materials were needed on the site: studs, drywall, bricks, cedar shingles (lots of cedar shingles), mulch, dirt, whatever. It wasn't much fun, but it paid reasonably well and allowed Peter to enjoy the entire summer on the island before he started college in the fall.

It also gave him the chance to spend more time with Jack, his best friend on the island. Unlike Peter, who only spent summers here, Jack was a native Nantucketer. His family was able to trace their lineage on the island back to one of the original nine founders. This group of men purchased the land from the natives in the mid-1600s and set about making a community focused on raising sheep, spinning wool, farming, and fishing the abundant waters that surrounded the island. Many, many generations later, Jack and his family were still on the island but were now

active in local government as well as supporting the flourishing tourist business. It was Jack's uncle, one of the largest contractors on the island, who had hired them as laborers for the summer.

"Man, that was fun last night wasn't it?" said Jack. His flaxen hair was wet with sweat, and his green eyes shimmered in the heat. "I'm not sure I've ever seen The Box so busy and with so many good looking women."

"That probably explains why it is the best bar on the island!" said Peter. "It looked like you were getting along okay with that one blond. You bailed on me - I'm assuming everything worked out?"

"Pretty much," said Jack, smiling. "We took her Wagoneer and parked down by the Coast Guard beach. She just happened to have a couple of blankets, so we went down by the water and did some whale watching if you know what I mean."

Peter smiled back, "I thought so, you lucky devil. She was gorgeous. Are you going to see her this weekend?"

"She left this morning on the 6:30 ferry," replied Jack. "She's a nanny for a family from Philadelphia. They had a rental in town and were only here for a couple of weeks." Peter and Jack carefully lowered the drywall in an upstairs bedroom and leaned it against the newly framed wall. They turned back down the stairs to get the next load. All told they would be moving several tons of drywall, which would undoubtedly help further shape their physiques. A summer of hard work and weekends on the beach had turned them into modern-day Adonises, which worked well for them as far as the ladies were concerned.

"Well, that sucks," said Peter. "Any chance she could come back on her own?"

"I asked," Jack replied. "But she's committed to this family through Labor Day and then is heading back to school the following week." Jack looked over at Peter and grinned slyly, "So, I'll need to find another girlfriend." They pulled five sheets off the back of the delivery truck and started back into the house. "What about you?" asked Jack.

"Oh, I had fun, but nothing happened. Met a few pretty girls, but either they already had boyfriends or just weren't interested. I struck out." He looked across the drywall at Jack. "What about that cute older sister of yours? Jen. Do you think she'd ever consider going out with me?"

Jack laughed. "You don't give up, do you?"

"Not when there's a beautiful woman involved."

"Well, trust me, that dog won't hunt. She's getting serious with that guy from New Jersey, and I'm pretty sure they're going to get engaged when they graduate next year."

"Bummer," said Peter. He was walking backward through the front door and started up the temporary stairs. "How much more of this shit do we have left?"

“By my count, we have six more trips, and we will be done positioning the upstairs drywall for the rockers. The downstairs will be a bitch but not as bad as we won’t have to deal with those friggin’ stairs. I’m guessing we should finish-up by three.”

“Man, I can’t wait. I was not born to do this type of work,” said Peter. “What’s say we hit the beach for a quick swim when we’re done. Get cooled off and figure out what we’re doing tonight.”

“Sounds good, man.”

After several more grueling hours, Peter and Jack pulled the last of the drywall sheets off the truck and maneuvered them into the framed out kitchen area. They checked in with their site manager, who released them for the day.

“God, that water is going to feel good,” said Peter. They walked over and jumped in Peter’s old, red Jeep CJ-5. It had been in the family for years and reflected that history with over a dozen of the annual beach permit stickers neatly lined up on the rear bumper. Peter’s dad had taught him to drive with this truck on the beach when he was just ten. Lacking both doors and a top, it was the perfect summer vehicle for the island. Peter started it up, crunched the shifter into first, popped the clutch, and headed for the South Shore. Jack slipped an AC/DC disc into the stereo, and they cranked up some *Big Gun*, excited for the possibilities that the rest of their day offered.

They followed some of the back trails from Tom Nevers over to Low Beach Road, the Jeep bouncing on the ruts of the narrow path. The road smoothed out when it turned to tarmac and, after a few hundred feet, pulled into the beach entrance just past the Loran station. Peter and Jack jumped out of the Jeep and ran toward the beach, struggling in the hot, heavy sand. There was no one on the beach and not having bathing suits, they stripped down to their boxers and jumped into the lukewarm water. The waves were nearly perfect for body surfing, and both Peter and Jack managed some impressive rides. “This feels so good after hauling all that goddamn drywall,” said Peter. “And these waves are awesome. Let’s see if we can grab some of them a little farther out.”

“I’m okay,” replied Jack. “I just want to relax and enjoy the water. Besides, I’m beat. But let’s see what you can do you, bastard,” he said teasingly.

“You wimp,” Peter said good-naturedly. “I’ll show you how to do some kick-ass bodysurfing!”

Peter turned and started swimming farther out from the shore just beyond where the current swells were breaking. He was trying to line himself up for one of the bigger waves when he felt the first grip of the rip current. It was almost as if someone had grabbed his ankles and started pulling him out to sea. Peter tried to swim back toward shore but felt himself moving farther out. He tried to swim harder, but he quickly tired, already exhausted from their long day of work. Peter began to panic, flailing his arms about, and struggling to keep his head above water. The

wave he was lining up to bodysurf instead broke on top of him, the whitewater filling his mouth and pushing him under the surface.

Jack had been floating close-in to the shore, enjoying the water and thinking about the evening ahead. He turned to see if Peter was showing off yet when he saw his flailing arms just a foot or two out of the water. “Oh, shit!” he said out loud and started swimming out to Peter. He ducked under the breaking wave and kicked harder. Peter was still fifty feet away and struggling when Jack shouted to him, “Don’t fight it! Swim parallel to the shore.”

Peter shouted back, his mouth full of water and difficult to understand. “I can’t, Jack. I’m too tired!”

“Don’t panic, Peter,” Jack yelled. “I’ll be right there.” Jack had spent a couple of summers lifeguarding and was a good swimmer as well. He closed the distance to Peter quickly, and as he neared him, he could feel the grip of the current and sensed himself being pulled out to sea along with his friend.

Peter was struggling to keep his head above the water. Jack finally reached him and came up from behind. Peter was clearly in a panic now, and Jack was extra careful not to let him take them both down. “Hang in there, Peter. I got you,” Jack said as he slipped one arm around his chest. Careful to keep Peter’s head above water, he used a sidestroke to pull the two of them out of the strong current. After several minutes of swimming and his muscles burning, Jack finally felt the rip release its grip on the two of them. He changed direction and started heading into shore, trying to leverage the breaking waves as much as possible to ease the burden of carrying his friend.

“We’re going to be okay,” said Jack. They were just twenty feet from shore now, and he was exhausted. “Do you think you can make it the rest of the way?”

Peter nodded his head and mumbled, “Yes, I think so.”

Jack released his hold of his friend and made sure he was okay and swimming in the right direction. Jack held back a few feet just in case and was starting to follow when he again felt the strong grip of the rip current.

Peter swam slowly into shore. His muscles ached, his eyes burned and his throat was sore from all of the saltwater he had ingested. Mostly though, it was embarrassing. He had been trying to show off to Jack and had nearly gotten them both killed. Approaching the shore, he finally felt the soft sand beneath him and was able to stand up and walk onto the beach. He heaved himself up out of the reach of the surf and sat down heavily in the dry sand. He looked out on the water expecting to see Jack. He thought he had been right behind him but now didn’t see him.

“Jack? Jack!”

He jumped up and ran up and down the beach, looking for his friend. For the second time in just a few minutes, he was panicking and felt the warm rush of adrenaline through his body.

“Jack!”

Peter frantically called out his friend’s name, pacing back and forth along the shoreline. But Jack was gone. Peter slumped to his knees and sobbed into his hands. “Oh, Jack. I’m so sorry. So very sorry.”

Jack’s eighteen-year-old body washed up three days later on the west end of the island, near Madaket beach.

CHAPTER FOUR



In August, dawn comes early to Sconset with the first lightening of the eastern sky just after four in the morning. Peter was sound asleep as the sun approached the horizon, and when it did break the surface of the ocean just before six, the rays flooded into his bedroom on the upper floor of the carriage house. He woke, his eyes squinting against the sunlight streaming in through the windows, turned on his bed, and propped himself up to look out the window. The fog had retreated back out to sea and been replaced with a bright blue Nantucket sky. *There is nothing quite like a Nantucket blue sky*, he thought. A vibrant, deep blue that extended from horizon to horizon, unsullied by clouds or haziness.

Dreaming of Jack always left him with a heavy feeling, a void in his heart, and feelings of guilt from being the cause of his death. *If only I hadn't tried to show off, Jack would probably be alive.* He looked out at the sky and wondered what Jack would be like now. Would he have kids? Would we still be best friends? Would I be a different man?

He swung his feet over the edge of the bed and started to dress. He wasn't sure how Charlotte was going to react to him spending the night in the guest room. No doubt, she was going to be upset, but he knew he could make it up to her. He slipped on his boat shoes and headed to the house. The maids could make the bed.

Peter walked across the lawn towards the house, stopped briefly on the patio to grab his empty beer from the night before - really earlier this morning - and then opened the French doors into the kitchen. Charlotte was sitting at the island in her robe, sipping a cup of coffee and reading the paper.

"Morning, hon," he said as he walked into the kitchen. He grabbed a mug from the cabinet and poured himself a cup of coffee. "How did you sleep?"

She looked up from her paper, her eyes were red. “I slept fine. That is until about two o’clock when I woke up and realized you still hadn’t come to bed.” She crossed her arms. “So I came downstairs looking for you, and all I found was an empty beer bottle on the patio. Where were you?”

Peter looked down at his coffee, “I ended up sleeping in the guest suite. It was late, and I didn’t want to disturb you or the kids.”

“Really? So now you’re sleeping in the guest suite?” Charlotte asked, her eyes reflecting the pain in her heart. “What is wrong with you? Why don’t you want to be with us as a family?”

“What? Of course, I want to be with you and the kids. What a dumbass thing to say. I just honestly was afraid I’d wake you.”

“Did you ever think that maybe I want you to wake me? You’re gone so much, I’d love time with you even if it’s in the middle of the night. I feel so disconnected from you.”

He walked over to her and tried to give her a hug, but she pulled quickly away. “I’m so worried about us,” she said sadly. “We’re not going to make it if things continue.”

“I promise things are fine,” said Peter angrily. “I know I put long hours in, but that’s what it takes for us to be successful.”

Charlotte looked at Peter, her eyes tinged with anger. “Things are most certainly not fine. Success, to me, is more than money and things. In fact, I don’t consider us successful. Rich, yes. But not successful. For that, we need to be together as a family.”

Peter looked down at the floor, quiet.

“Do you know what Sophie said to me last night?” Charlotte asked.

He looked at her.

“She said, and I quote, I hate that company.”

“What?” said Peter, anger, and irritation in his voice. “Doesn’t she know how much that company provides for this family?”

“She’s nine years old, Peter. She only understands that she rarely sees her dad, and when she does, he doesn’t seem to be all here,” replied Charlotte. “And to be honest, I’m starting to have similar feelings,” she said as she stood and walked over to the French doors. Looking out over the patio, she continued, “I used to see that company as our future, and as you know, I supported you every step of the way, the long hours, whatever it took to make it successful. But now that it’s successful, I don’t understand why you can’t dial it back. Can’t you hire someone to run it for you? Or better yet, why don’t you sell it and retire?”

Peter stared back at her, disbelief in his eyes, “Retire? I’m forty-four fucking years old. What the hell am I going to do with the rest of my life?”

Charlotte walked over to him and grabbed his hands. Looking into his eyes, she said, “You could spend the rest of your life with us. In fact, we could have more children if we wanted. We could travel, we could give back, there are so many possibilities. But the important thing is we could do it together.”

Peter’s face flushed, and he pulled his hands from hers. “I can’t retire. This company needs me. My employees need me.” She started to speak, but he raised a hand to stop her. “But, I hear you, and I promise that I will look for ways to cut back my time.”

“You’ve said that before and look where we are. I couldn’t even enjoy a glass of wine with you last night.”

“I know. But this time it will be different. I’ll start thinking about how I can make some changes and will put a plan together.”

“Are you sure?” asked Charlotte, her voice soft and questioning.

“Yes, I’m sure,” said Peter, and reached out to hug her. This time she acquiesced and let herself be pulled into a hug. Rubbing her back, he said, “I love you guys so much. You are my life, and I’m sorry to have caused you pain.”

He pulled back slightly and kissed her on the lips, his hand moving up to gently stroke the back of her neck. Just as he thought it might lead to more, he heard a creak from the stairs. Seconds later, Sophie ran into the kitchen dressed in her pink polka dot pajamas. “Hi Daddy!” she yelled and ran to him. Peter kneeled down and embraced her. “Morning, babycakes. Did you sleep okay?”

“I slept okay. But I had an awful dream,” she replied, her face twisting at the memory.

“I’m sorry, sweetie. Do you remember what it was about?” asked Peter.

“I dreamed that you disappeared,” said Sophie.

“What do you mean, disappeared, hon?”

“I dreamed that mom and Spencer and I were here and we wanted to go to the beach, but we didn’t know where you were. We looked and looked and looked but we couldn’t find you anywhere. It was like you vanished,” she said, her small voice trembling.

“Oh, honey, I’m so sorry,” said Peter as he reached out to gently stroke her forehead. “But please don’t worry, I’m not going anywhere, I promise.”

“Cross your heart promise?” asked Sophie quietly.

“Yes, cross my heart promise. Absolutely,” said Peter, He leaned over to give Sophie a hug and kissed her forehead.

“What’s say we wake Spencer up and head to Downyflake for breakfast?”

“Yay!” shouted Sophie.

Peter rose up and looked at Charlotte, “What do you think, hon?”

“I think that would be great,” said Charlotte, smiling and relaxed from their talk. Peter stared at her, the golden light of the morning sun reflecting off her skin, her blue eyes sparkling with love as she looked at her daughter, and thought he was the luckiest man on earth, that is if he didn’t screw it all up.

CHAPTER FIVE



Sophie volunteered to wake up Spencer and ran full steam up the stairs and into his room. Charlotte and Peter could hear her feet pounding on the floor down the hallway to Spencer's room. At first, it sounded like Spencer wasn't too happy to be woken up, but that seemed to change when he heard the reason. They heard a faint shout of "yay" and then more footsteps on the stairs. Sophie burst into the kitchen dragging Spencer by one hand, his other wiping the sleep from his eye with the knuckle of his index finger.

"Let's go, daddy!" said Sophie.

Peter looked at her with a smile spreading across his face, "Um, Sophie. Don't you think you're forgetting something?"

Sophie looked back at her dad with intense concentration. Finally, she replied, "I don't think so."

Peter walked over to her and knelt down. "I don't think we should go to Downyflake in our pajamas." He gave her nose a playful swipe with his finger.

Sophie looked down and surveyed herself and then glanced over at Spencer. She smiled and then started giggling. "Oopsie," she said, looking up at Peter. At that moment Peter saw the face of Charlotte, the face he fell in love with, the face that remained burned in his brain for weeks after he had first met her. "Why don't you take Spencer upstairs and get dressed. Mommy and I need to get ready too."

"Okay, daddy," she said and looked over at Spencer, "Come on, let's go get dressed!" Then the two of them exited the kitchen much the way they entered but in reverse, Sophie tearing out of the room holding Spencer's hand and pulling him up the stairs. Charlotte and Peter could once again hear the pounding of feet on the floor above augmented this time with the sound of

drawers being open and shut and closet doors slamming. They looked at each other and laughed. Peter stepped forward and embraced Charlotte, kissing her first on the forehead, then tenderly on the nose and then finally firmly on the lips. “I love you,” he said, pulling back from the kiss.

“I love you, too, honey, with all my heart,” replied Charlotte. They embraced a few moments longer before Peter broke away. “Why don’t you run upstairs and get dressed. I’ll get the car and pull it up to the front.”

She gave him one last quick kiss and then turned and headed upstairs.

The kitchen fell silent. Peter took a moment to look around him, his eyes settling on objects around the room, all of which held some meaning for him. Over the living room mantle was the large oil painting depicting an early America’s Cup race that his father had purchased for his mother just after their marriage. On the floor was a large and gorgeous oriental rug his parents had found at Brimfield when he was just a boy. Across the room was the 18th-century Irish cupboard that he and Charlotte had purchased on their honeymoon, their wedding china displayed on the open shelves above, his grandparents’ china stored in the cabinet below. For the first time in weeks, he felt a sense of calm and ease. Fernweh was like a wool sweater on a cold day. It embraced him, protected him, and made him feel warm.

He walked over and turned off the coffee pot, grabbed the keyfob from the junk drawer, and headed out to the carriage house to retrieve the Range Rover. It was still early, but already he could feel the dampness in the air and his blue Nantucket sky had started to turn hazy from the humidity. He opened the garage door via the code panel on the trim, started the car and backed slowly out. He usually backed the car into the garage, but Charlotte preferred to park nose in. He wasn’t sure why that bugged him so but it just didn’t seem orderly. He closed the doors with the button on the rearview mirror and wheeled the Rover up to the front of the house.

Waiting for Charlotte and the kids to join him, he opened the sunroof and lowered all of the windows. He then turned the radio on and hit the memory button for the classical station from Cape Cod. Ludovico Einaudi’s *In un'altravita* came over the speakers. He settled back in the driver’s seat and closed his eyes, the beautiful and haunting melody filling his ears. He could smell the blooms of the roses on the side of the house and the salt in the air. He felt satisfied.

The shell driveway crunched with the sound of Spencer and Sophie’s approach as they ran from the house. Charlotte closed and locked the front door then jumped in the passenger side. She looked over at him, “This music is beautiful,” she said. “Who is it?”

“It’s Ludovico Einaudi. He’s an Italian pianist and composer. I don’t know the name of the song, but I have always liked his compositions.”

“Well, it’s lovely,” replied Charlotte. She turned to the back seat, “Are you two buckled in?”

“Yep,” said Sophie. Spencer was silent but gave her a thumbs up, his face buried in a book.

Charlotte smiled at them and turned to Peter, “Let’s do it,” she said as if they were getting ready to rob a bank or storm a beach. Peter smiled back at her and started the car. They pulled out of the driveway and headed toward Milestone Road. “What do you think if we take the long way and go via Polpis Road?” asked Peter.

“Sounds great. And it’s such a beautiful day,” she replied.

“Yes it is,” said Peter. Rather than taking a left on Milestone, he instead crooked a right and took a shortcut over to Sankaty Road. Turning left, they headed out of the village.

After a few minutes, they could see the lighthouse off to their right across the golf course, its white brick and bright red band standing proudly on the bluff. Continuing, they passed the blue waters of Quidnet, the small brackish lake where Peter had sailed a small Sunfish sailing dinghy as a boy, actually winning a race much to the surprise of the people around him, including himself. It was then on through the moors, the road curving left and right, with the fresh air blowing through the open windows. Peter looked over at Charlotte, her hair rustling in the wind, looking very Audrey Hepburn-ish in her Aviators.

Charlotte caught him looking and smiled. “Do you think there is going to be much of a line?”

Peter made a face of concentration and then said, “Hmm, let’s see. It’s 8:30 on a Saturday morning in August. If we’re lucky, we should be able to sit down by early afternoon,” he said teasingly.

“Peter!” said Charlotte and playfully cuffed his shoulder.

“Seriously, I think we will be fine,” said Peter. “You know their service is great. It’ll probably be twenty to thirty minutes. Besides, we can wait outside, and on a day like today, it will be a pleasure.”

They made their way into town, rounded the rotary, peeled off on Sparks Lane, and pulled into the small parking lot of Downyflake. As predicted, it was busy, and there was a small crowd of people standing outside of the door. Charlotte jumped out to put their name down on the waitlist while Peter hung back like a vulture waiting for another car to leave and free up a parking space.

He was admiring a nicely restored early Ford Bronco when a couple jumped into their SUV and backed out. It was a bit of negotiation for the two cars to pass, but in the end, Peter got the Rover parked, and he climbed out with the kids. They caught Charlotte as she came out of the door.

“Ten to twenty minutes,” she said.

“Oh, that’s great,” said Peter. Looking down at Sophie and Spencer, he said, “What kind of donuts are you going to get today?”

The Downyflake was an institution on the island, having opened its doors in the 1930s. Peter fondly remembered his grandfather bringing him to town as a young boy to get donuts at the original restaurant site downtown. At the time, and still today, there were just a few varieties of donuts available, all cake-based. There was a sugar-covered option, not that white powdered sugar, but real granulated sugar sprinkled over the fried circular dough. Then chocolate-covered with real chocolate poured over the cake. Maple glazed and coconut rounded out the flavored options, and for those who preferred their fried dough the natural way, there was always the plain cake donut.

Spencer smiled and nearly shouted, “Sugar!”

Sophie looked up at him, beaming, “I want chocolate!” Peter tousled her hair and turned to Charlotte, “What about you, honey?”

“You know me. I simply can’t resist the sugar-coated.” She threaded an arm through his as they stood.

Sophie looked up at Peter, “What about you, daddy?”

“Me? I don’t know, it’s a really tough choice. But I’m thinking...”

Just then, his iPhone buzzed. Charlotte gave him a stern look, but he pulled his phone out anyway.

“Sorry, guys. Let me take this, and I’ll be right back.” Peter accepted the call and walked into the parking lot.

Charlotte watched him intently and noticed that his smile soon disappeared replaced with first a frown, and then anger. After a few minutes, he dropped the phone and ended the call. He turned and walked back to Charlotte and the kids.

“What was that about?” asked Charlotte, tensely, for fear of the answer.

As she asked, the hostess came out of the door. “Bois, party of four?”

Peter ignored the hostess and looked at Charlotte. “That was Janet, our office manager. Apparently, the auditors have found some issues with the company’s financial statements we released last week. And it sounds serious. I need to get back.”

“What? Need to get back? Now?” Charlotte was clearly upset. Sophie and Spencer looked at each other with confusion in their eyes and uncertain how to handle this sudden shift of emotions with their parents.

“Yes, now. I’m sorry, but I have to go. But I’ll make it up to you, I promise.”

Charlotte was silent. And angry. “What about our discussion this morning? That things were going to be different?”

“And they will be hon, I promise. I’ll start to put a plan together. But I have to take care of this. I don’t have another option.”

“Fine,” said Charlotte, coldly. “You just do what you have to do for that company.”

Peter looked at her, “And I’m sorry about breakfast. We can come back next weekend.”

Charlotte stared back, her blue eyes blazing, “On no. We’re staying. You can take the car. We’ll Uber home.” She turned to find the hostess. “Hi, we’re Bois. But it’s just three.”

The hostess nodded and headed back into the restaurant.

Kneeling down, Peter gave Sophie and Spencer a quick hug. “I’m sorry, guys, but I have to go. Have a donut for me and I’ll see you in a few days.” He reached out to embrace Charlotte but was rebuffed. “Have a safe trip,” she said unemotionally. She grabbed Sophie and Spencer by the hand and led them into the restaurant. No one looked back.

Peter watched the door close and then walked dejectedly back to the car. Climbing into the driver’s seat, he was tempted to call Janet back and tell her he wasn’t coming, that they could deal with whatever the problem was next week. But his sense of duty and drive kicked in, and he pushed those thoughts out of his mind. Calling the jet service, he confirmed an 11:00 a.m. departure which would have him back at the office by early afternoon. He started the car, turned off the radio, and drove back to the house with the windows up and the sunroof closed. The only sounds coming from the rumble of the tires, the wind over the side-view mirrors, and the hum of the air conditioning.

He got to the house and quickly backed the car into the garage. Running up to the master bedroom, he changed into more appropriate work attire and ordered a taxi. He grabbed his laptop and stuffed some papers into his backpack, and headed out the front door. The taxi arrived as promised and deposited Peter at the airport with time to spare.

It took a few minutes to find his place among the dozens of jets on the ramp. He spotted the white G5 about halfway down, parked on the eastern edge of the apron, with the clamshell door open and the stairs down. He made his way over and, nodding to the pilot, quickly climbed the stairs and settled into one of the large chairs at the front of the aircraft.

He heard the thump of the door closing and the whine as the engines were started. The pilot taxied to the runway and paused, waiting for clearance. Peter looked out the window and thought again about staying and rushing back to the Downyflake to be with his family. He was about to get up and say something to the pilot when he felt the brakes release and engines spool up. The jet accelerated down the runway and was quickly airborne. As they climbed, Peter could make out the lighthouse in the distance where just a couple of hours before he had driven by with Charlotte, the promise of a fun day together stretched out in front of them. That feeling of

lightness and satisfaction had disappeared, replaced with a sense of regret and dread. Peter pulled his eyes from the window and reached into his backpack for his laptop.

The plane banked left and continued climbing on its way to Connecticut.

CHAPTER SIX



It was the summer of 1995 and Charlotte was nervous. She had known Peter Bois less than a year, and here she was traveling to visit him and his parents on Nantucket Island. As a girl who grew up outside of St. Louis, she was entirely unfamiliar with the geography and culture of the East Coast. When Peter had told her about their summer home, she had to pull out a United States map to even understand where it was located. And that map hadn't been particularly helpful. It just showed a speck of land south of Cape Cod and east of Long Island out a bit in the Atlantic. Her mother though had been the smart one. She and Charlotte had gone to a local bookstore and purchased a travel guide named *Cape Cod & The Islands*. Fearing embarrassment with Peter's family, she had read it cover to cover to fully orient herself with the area, its history, and the strange names of the towns, like Hyannis, Madaket, Wauwinet, Yarmouth, and so many more. Being the detail-oriented person she was, she even made a cheat sheet on an index card as if she was going to an art history exam.

She and Peter had met the very first day of orientation at the University of Richmond in Virginia's capital city. He and his roommate were throwing a party in his dorm room and invited their orientation groups to join. Charlotte had reluctantly agreed to the invitation more out of boredom than any curiosity or desire to meet more people. And her first impression of Peter was certainly not very flattering. She had arrived at his dorm and found him quite busy with a short, busty blond. He stopped kissing her long enough to say hello and invite Charlotte to join them on a trip downtown. Having been warned that very day about going out with hormone ridden college males, she politely declined. She had a few sips of a very cheap beer and then headed back to her room, hoping that she'd not run into him again.

And that desire had been granted, at least for a few days. Charlotte had signed up for French 101, which met Tuesdays and Thursdays for two hours, starting at 11:00 a.m. The first class was

the Tuesday after Labor Day, and she arrived and promptly took a seat in the front row. With her textbook laid out in front of her, she opened a new college-ruled notebook and neatly labeled the date, ready to capture the notes from the lecture. The professor was in the middle of introducing the semester's syllabus when Peter stumbled into the classroom and plopped down next to Charlotte. He was wearing bright yellow Bermuda shorts, a navy polo, dirty bucks with no socks and a pair of Ray Bans. His hair was still wet from the shower, and he clearly had not been up long despite the class's late morning start time.

He apologized to the professor for his tardiness - had actually used the word tardy - and leaned over to Charlotte and mentioned that he'd not been able to get to the bookstore and purchase his textbook, would she mind if he shared hers. She smiled faintly and reluctantly angled her book to him. Little did she know that this minor event would totally change the course of her life and her future.

At first, they had just been friends, sharing notes from class, and occasionally studying together. They would talk about girlfriends and boyfriends, good dates and bad, and events around their Greek life. Over the semester, their friendship grew, so when Peter asked her to join him for their social after the last home football game of the year, it was easy to say yes. Following the game, they had gone to his fraternity house for a party and danced the night away. Despite that terrible first impression in his dorm room, she found Peter to be charming, kind, considerate, and with a sense of humor that often had Charlotte in stitches. She found herself falling in love, and it wasn't too much longer when he shared similar feelings for her.

Things had gotten more serious during the spring semester, and their relationship became a staple on campus. When May rolled around and with it the end of their freshman year of classes, they had talked about if and when they would see each other during the summer. Charlotte would be working for her father in his law office in St. Louis and had some flexibility for travel. Peter would be working construction on Nantucket and only had weekends free. They had agreed that Charlotte would come for a week's stay in July - right in the middle of the summer - so they would only be apart for a month or so on either end. Not knowing Peter or his family, her parents had reluctantly agreed to the trip, but only after her mom had a long conversation with Peter's.

Now here she was, on a small commuter flight, preparing to land at Nantucket, and feeling very nervous, partly because she had never been on such a small plane but more so at what lay ahead of her with Peter and his family. She knew his family was wealthy and was afraid they would look down their noses at a simple midwestern girl.

The twin-engine Cessna 402 eight-seater landed at Nantucket and taxied to the commuter terminal, where the pilot swiveled the plane and shut down the engines. The propellers rapidly slowed to a stop sending a shudder through the airframe. One of the ground crew opened the door while another went to the nose to empty luggage. With the low ceiling of the plane,

Charlotte stooped and awkwardly walked to the exit stairs and then took the two steps down to the tarmac. She looked over at the terminal, saw Peter, and waved. He smiled and waved back. A buzz of excitement went through her, and she hurried into the terminal where Peter met her with a ferocious hug and a long, lingering kiss.

"Welcome to Nantucket!" he whispered into her ear. "I'm so happy you're here!"

"Me too! I have missed you so much," she replied. He took her hand and they walked over to the baggage area. Belaying the wealth that came through the airport every day, the baggage claim was nothing more than an angled wooden deck where the bags were thrown after being retrieved from the plane. The luggage cart pulled up, and Charlotte pointed out hers as they slid down towards them. Peter slung the duffel over his shoulder, grabbed the suitcase in one hand, and with the other grabbed Charlotte's hand and led her out of the terminal. The family's red CJ-5 was parked just outside. Peter threw the luggage in the back and helped Charlotte into the passenger seat. She had never ridden in a Jeep, let alone one without a roof or doors, and found it exhilarating.

Peter crunched the Jeep into first and popped the clutch. Charlotte cried out in delight and grabbed the windshield header to stabilize herself - the last thing she wanted to do was fall out of the car. He accelerated slowly out of the parking lot and then shifted up to second when they got on the street. He looked over at Charlotte, "How was your flight?"

"Oh, it was fine," replied Charlotte. "But I have to admit I was more than a bit nervous on that little plane. It bounced around quite a bit, and it seemed like we were flying awfully low."

"Yeah, it's certainly a different way to fly than on the big jets the airlines have."

"For sure. And why is the airport called ACK? That just seems really weird."

Peter chuckled. "Well, the urban legend says it used to be known as Ackerly Airport until it was renamed Nantucket Memorial. But the truth is that the Navy had exclusive rights to three-letter airport designations starting with N. So since NAN was out as an option, they picked the next logical three letters, which ended up being A, C and K or ACK."

"Hmm." Charlotte thought for a minute and said with a smile, "Well, I guess it could have been worse. It could have been ANT or UCK."

Peter laughed and looked over at her, his brown hair tugged by the wind, "Very true!" Charlotte reached over and grabbed his hand. "God, I've missed you. The last six weeks seem more like six years."

"Me too. It feels like it has been forever since I've seen you, and I'm so glad you're here." He paused for a minute to check traffic as he turned right onto Milestone road. "Are you ready to meet my parents?"

"As ready as I'll ever be. I have to admit that I'm really nervous about it. What if they don't like me?"

"They're going to love you, hon, trust me. My parents might seem a little intimidating at first but they are pretty down to earth. you're going to knock their socks off."

And she did.

Charlotte found Peter's parents warm and welcoming and thoroughly enjoyed spending time with both of them during the week. And with Peter being an only child, she could also see the very soft spot they had for him. She, of course, had to know what they thought of her and finally screwed up the courage to ask Peter during one of their many walks through Sconset. They were on Ocean Avenue, holding hands and he turned to her. "My parents love you. They think you're sweet, kind and above all a lovely young lady. In fact, the other night, when you were getting ready to go out, my father came over to me and said, 'oh my god, her eyes. I could stare into them for the rest of my life'. So, yes, I think they approve," said Peter with a wink. Charlotte smiled broadly and fought the urge to start skipping as they walked.

She also learned much more about Peter and realized that he was a different person here. At school, he was distracted with classes, making grades, and fraternity life. Here, on Nantucket, he was relaxed, easy-going, and very open to sharing more of his past, including his ongoing sadness with the loss of his close friend the summer before. He had told her about it when they were still just friends, but it was the first time that he truly opened up to her about the impact it had on his life and his deep feelings of sadness and regret. He also shared more about his four years away in boarding school and what it was like to be living away from home at the age of thirteen.

"It certainly made me more independent and resilient, but it was also emotionally tough to be in that environment at such a young age. It definitely made me hesitant to get too close to people and to rely more on myself, and what I know I can control," he had said as they sat on the beach, looking out over the waves breaking on the shore, the gulls flying low and the terns skittering up and down the sand. She didn't know how it was possible but realized she was falling ever deeper in love with Peter.

Peter had made it a point to show Charlotte as much of Nantucket as possible and was happy to be a tourist for the week. They went to the Whaling Museum, where Charlotte learned that this small island had once been a significant economic force in the world. They explored the shops along the cobblestone Main Street, had lunch and milkshakes at the pharmacy, and went for a sunset sail in the harbor. They rode their bikes to town on the bike path and up to Sankaty Head lighthouse. But Charlotte's favorite of all had been the picnic at Great Point, the sandy arm that makes up most of the island's eastern edge and only really accessible by four-wheel drive. The entire experience of driving on the beach and sitting by the water was exhilarating and so

thoroughly opposite her life in the landlocked midwest. She wished she could bottle that day up and carry it with her for the rest of her life.

Despite being from the midwest, Charlotte had fallen in love with Nantucket. She was charmed by the old-world atmosphere, the gray shingled homes, the glorious open spaces, and the lovely beaches. And Siasconset had wholly captured her heart. Originally an old fishing village, over the centuries, it had been transformed into an escape. First, from those from town wanting to distance themselves from the noise and smells of the whaling industry, then actors seeking refuge from the heat and humidity of Broadway in New York and now, well-heeled residents, tourists, and vacationers looking for shelter from modern life. While there were a few elegant old homes, like Fernweh, most were small, simple cottages, many built in the mid to late 1800s. It quickly became Charlotte's favorite place on earth.

When Peter was at work, she explored Sconset walking every street and getting to know this very unique village from the Bluff Walk to the old well. She was charmed with the manicured privets, the profusion of blooming hydrangeas ranging in color from light pink to deep purple, and the ever-present climbing roses, their numerous blossoms in red, pink, and white adorning the trellis-covered walls and roofs of the quaint cottages. She watched through the hedges as they played tennis at the Casino - dressed in all white of course - and was fascinated by the sundial next to the old bike bridge. When Peter returned from work, they would go down to the beach to sit and talk and then head to town for dinner.

It was a wonderful week, and it went by way too quickly. Before she even realized what had happened, she found herself back at the airport and getting ready to board the small commuter plane to start her trip back to the midwest. "I'll see you in a few weeks," said Peter, holding her hand and fighting back tears. She squeezed his hand, sad to be leaving him and Nantucket. "I'll still miss you," she said, sniffing through her tears. He pulled her toward him and hugged her tightly. "I love you," he whispered into her ear. "And I want to spend the rest of my life with you." Charlotte pulled back and smiled. She kissed him on the lips and hugged him harder. "Me too, Peter. Me too."

Her flight was called. They shared one final kiss and slowly pulled away from each other. Charlotte reluctantly turned to follow the handful of other passengers out onto the tarmac. She ascended the steps into the plane and shuffled to her seat directly next to the pilot. The door thumped closed, and the ground crew gave the pilot the thumbs up to start the engines. She watched as the propellers on the right engine started to turn, caught, and then roared with a belch of blue smoke from the exhaust. With the left engine started with the same belch of smoke, the pilot eased the throttles forward and taxied out on the runway.

From her front seat, she had a fantastic view out of the windshield and again thought about the sheer beauty of this little island. The pilot turned onto the runway and immediately started

accelerating, the roar of the engines rumbling through the airframe. She looked past the pilot toward the terminal and could just make out Peter waving and blowing her kisses. She felt a lump in her throat as the plane lifted off the runway, heading north to Boston. Through the windshield and her tears, she watched sadly as Sankaty Head lighthouse, and then Great Point receded past her.