

FIRST CLASS PASSAGE

A Jack Sterling Novel

*The sea is everything. Its breath is pure and healthy.
It is an immense desert, where man is never lonely,
for he feels life stirring on all sides.*

— Jules Verne, *Man of the Sea*

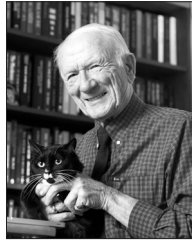
ALSO BY JOHN C. SMITH

The Scarlet Sentinels

ISBN 978-1-897435-76-2 (hardcover book)

ISBN 978-1-897435-80-9 (paperback book)

ISBN 978-1-897435-77-9 (ebook)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John C. Smith is a retired member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and lives in Victoria, British Columbia. Much of his service was served in ‘front line’ policing. He was a lecturer at the Canadian Police College and is a graduate of the University of Waterloo, Ontario.

First Class Passage is his second Jack Sterling novel. His first, *The Scarlet Sentinels*, is a realistic portrayal of life at a large RCMP detachment in British Columbia.

His insight into police work, and his cruise ship journeys, have enabled him to combine the two experiences into an intriguing tale of murder at sea, and the difficulty of investigating this kind of crime.

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A Jack Sterling Novel
by
JOHN C. SMITH



Agió Publishing House

151 Howe Street, Victoria BC Canada V8V 4K5

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First Class Passage

ISBN 978-1-927755-45-7 (hardcover book)

ISBN 978-1-927755-44-0 (paperback book)

ISBN 978-1-927755-46-4 (ebook)

Cataloguing information available from
Library and Archives Canada.

Printed on acid-free paper.

Agió Publishing House is a socially-responsible enterprise
measuring success on a triple-bottom-line basis.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have the following to thank for their assistance:

Prof. Gail Anderson, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC

Hal Mueller, Sailwx, Orlando, FL

Prof. Kate Lewins, Faculty of Law, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia

Charles Mandigo, FBI (retired), Seattle, WA

Dr. Eric Milne, GP, Victoria, BC

Jenny Ray, International Satellite Radio, London, UK

Fernando Romero, ship's pilot, Port Authority, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico

Jeffrey J. Smith, Barrister & Solicitor, Ottawa, ON

Jamie Swan, Pacific Disaster Centre, Victoria, BC

Capt. Roger Williams, BC Coast Pilotage Authority, Victoria, BC.

DEDICATION

To Jean Smith, for her valuable assistance and patience while I wrote the story, and to my three sons, Greg, Jeff and Brad, for their continued support and encouragement. As well, to the many people I have had the good fortune to contact for their advice and guidance.

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2014

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Staff Superintendent Jack Sterling sat behind a large, cleared desk in the Metropolitan Toronto Police Service headquarters building on College Street. It was the last working day of the month, and also his last day to occupy this chair. He'd reached thirty-five years of service and, as the uniformed officers would say, today was his *'End of Watch.'* Tomorrow, Saturday, he would no longer be Chief of Detectives.

As he sat reflecting on his service, there was a knock on his door. Looking up, Jack saw Chief Constable Bill Forsythe enter.

"Got a minute, Jack?"

"Sure, Chief, have a seat."

"Just dropped by to say my unofficial goodbye before your party next Friday evening. How do you feel?"

"Not sure, to be honest. Bit nostalgic, I suppose. No doubt my retirement will hit me in due course, but life goes on, as they say. Some new and different challenges lay ahead for me and I look forward to that."

"Yes. If you take their offer, I wish you well with your new job at Sentinel. Good outfit, I believe. Your depth of experience with Metro should help you make the transition smoothly. Sentinel Corporation is lucky to be getting someone of your calibre. You know, it's too bad about the 35-year mandatory retirement limit. Most people are really at the peak of their knowledge and efficiency when they are forced to leave their job."

“Yeah, Chief, I suppose you’re right but there has to come a time for everyone to go. Maybe it’s just as well. Makes room for promotions up through the ranks and maybe a newer way of looking at the job. Really, I feel I’ve done all I can. I’ve enjoyed my police career and look forward to the next phase of my life.”

“Just left me say privately and sincerely, that I have enjoyed my association with you. You’ve done well with the Detective Division and I hope that Chief Superintendent Elliott can do as good a job. Thank you, Jack, and best of luck. Enjoy your cruise too, wherever you and Jean decide to go,” said the chief, standing and shaking his hand. “See you Friday evening at the Astoria.”

His thirty-five years with the Toronto Police Service had seen him rise from constable in the Patrol Division to the rank of staff (chief) superintendent. It felt a long, long way from his days as a recruit in training, then walking the beat for five years, mostly in the busy downtown area, and his subsequent rise through the ranks, with their various responsibilities in policing. The last fifteen years he’d been a detective, finishing up as the top-ranking detective, in charge of over 500 men and women. Toronto didn’t have anywhere near the number of murders as large U.S. cities—40% of New York City’s per capita rate, one-ninth of Chicago’s—yet he’d personally investigated about seventy-five murder cases, and lately, reviewed many more. If anything made leaving the Service attractive, it was to get away from the sad, tragic and sometimes macabre events that were the *raison d’être* of a big city police detective. Jack Sterling was feeling a bit nostalgic, and relieved at the same time.

FRIDAY, APRIL 7

Toronto

Jack Sterling and his wife Jean got home from his farewell party a few minutes after one a.m. He had been picked up and driven home in his black detective patrol car by his regular driver, Sergeant John Chisholm. On getting out, the man gave his boss a crisp salute. Under the streetlamp light, a glint of a tear was visible in the man's eye.

Jack returned the courtesy, then stepped forward to give the sergeant a brief hug and pat on the back. "Thank you, John, it's been a pleasure," he said. "I'll miss our little chats."

The party had been a memorable affair, the grand old hotel packed with 300 police officers, their spouses and other guests. He couldn't get over the genuinely warm feelings everyone showed toward him and, in his farewell speech, he found it very difficult not to choke up. The standing ovation was loud and long.

He removed his police mess jacket and black bow tie, hanging them over the back of a chair at the kitchen table. As he yawned and stretched his arms above him, Jean snuggled him from behind and murmured, "You wanna know how I feel, sweetheart?"

"Yes, tell me."

"I'll use just one word: *relieved*. No more urgent calls about deaths—no more danger—no more long days and restless nights."

Turning around, he looked at her face for a few seconds and, seeing her moistened eyes, replied softly, "I know you are relieved, and in

spite of some mixed emotions, I feel that way too. It's a helluva way to feel—to be sad at leaving this job and happy about it too. Glad too, that I never had to shoot someone, although that came close to happening on occasion. I'm sure I'll remember this day for the rest of my life—just as I remember my first day as a cadet.

“You know, a civilian at the party asked me this evening how many dead bodies I'd seen in my career. I couldn't tell him. Except to say, 'probably hundreds.' Made me think, that did. If I'd had some comprehension of what I was getting into way back then, when I joined the Force, I might not have been removing my Chief of Detectives uniform tonight.”

They stood, quietly holding each other for a minute before his wife said, “You must be tired.”

MONDAY, APRIL 10

Toronto

Jack sat down in his upstairs, third-bedroom office, and googled 'cruise lines.' When the results came up, he started clicking on the variety of companies and destinations listed. He and his wife had taken two previous cruises, both in the Caribbean where most people from the Toronto area doing boat trips, especially in wintertime, chose to go. It was a relatively short flight to Miami. On both occasions, they'd travelled on large ships, with Carnival and Holland America Lines. While both voyages—10 days each—were enjoyable, each ship carried over 3,000 passengers, and seemed *busy* and too noisy, with many children aboard. He and Jean had discussed this and were determined to avoid a repeat.

Today, he was looking for a smaller vessel, a cruise line that catered to older folk and no screaming kids. He was impressed with the Holland America line but continued scrolling, until he stopped at a company called World Cruise Lines, registered out of the Port of Road Town, the capital city of the British Virgin Islands, in the eastern archipelago of the Caribbean Islands. This company, WCL, seemed to be relatively new, its ships carrying a maximum passenger load of twelve hundred. Just right. Fare prices were comparable with other major companies and included return air fare. The photos showed one of the ships, MV *Seascope*, to be well appointed on eleven decks—six cabin decks, two activity levels and one for meals and snacks, a casino and shopping area, plus crew decks below—instead of

up to 16 decks on the biggest ships. Even the lowest deck cabins appeared were quite acceptable, judging from the photos. Also appealing was the itinerary for a 17-day trip from Barcelona in Spain to Miami that including a nice long interval of crossing the Atlantic, after the last port of call at Santa Cruz de la Palma in the Canary Islands. Eight days of no stops—time to relax.

Jack called Jean over to have a look—he really did rely on her female view of things—and together they read the details.

“What do you think?” he asked.

“Seems good to me, honey. I like fewer people, especially fewer of the smaller variety. I know these cruise lines all glamorize their ships and cuisine but, hey, nothing ventured, nothing gained. What’s the price comparison on the Barcelona–Miami voyage that we’re discussing?”

“Well, I’ve checked four companies offering that cruise and the price differences are narrow—all within two hundred dollars. I’ve been trying to read between the lines about what each has to offer and my intuition tells me that this company will be our best bet. What departure date did we agree on?”

“I wrote it on the wall calendar. Let me check.”

She went downstairs to the large calendar tacked up on a kitchen wall, found ‘Leave for cruise!’ tentatively written in the May 12 week block and called out the planned date range.

“Should be a good time to go,” Jack yelled back. “Let me narrow in on the departure date for a WCL cruise closest to that. I think I’ll book a verandah stateroom. I’m going to look at the Atlantic weather for that time of year too. Don’t want rough seas!”

“Also, I’ll check on the conditions for flying to Barcelona two days early, before joining the ship, and then back to Toronto 3 days after we dock in Miami. I believe there’s a surcharge to go early. Be nice to spend a bit of time in Barcelona at the start and then see the Everglades after we return to Miami. Hope we’re not too late doing this.”

“Alright, sweetheart, dinner’ll be ready in half an hour.”

He found that World Cruise Lines offered a May 16 sailing for the 17-day voyage from Barcelona, with three ports of call en route: Seville and Cadiz, together, in the south of Spain; and Lanzarote and Santa Cruz de la Palma, separate stops on the east and west sides of the Canary Islands in the Atlantic, off the coast of Western Sahara. From there, the ship heads out into the Atlantic for the remaining eight days on the open seas to Miami. ‘Good. No other ports of call. This trip will give me just enough time to think about my new job,’ Jack thought. ‘We’ll have to book right away though. Two full days in Barcelona means we’d fly out on the evening of the 13th.’

Going to the weather site, he’d found that May’s weather was usually good for a trans-Atlantic crossing. The cyclone season generally started around the beginning of June, by which time they’d be in Miami.

On the *Expedia* website, he was glad to see that Air Canada flew to Barcelona, with a quick stop in Montreal and London in the United Kingdom. He hoped that was the air carrier the cruise line would fly people on from Toronto. Other airlines required a change of plane in Madrid and switching to the Spanish airline Iberia Air within Spain.

“So, Mrs. Sterling, are you okay with that cruise?” he asked.

Replying from the kitchen, she agreed. “I’d still like to see their brochure though. Is there an online version or a PDF we can download?”



With his 60th birthday coming up later in the year, Jack Sterling was still fit and healthy. He was a member at a local recreation center, where he went at least five days a week, running on the treadmills for half an hour and swimming lengths in the pool for the same amount of time. He’d been offered a good job with the largest private security company in the city, discussions the chief had been informed about

and cleared. Jack had accepted an offer the day before his retirement party, after carefully reviewing the matter, but was not 100% sure it was right for him. He was not at all sure he wanted to continue with enforcement work, even low-risk stuff. Maybe he really needed a complete change. The pay offered was generous, equal to his recent salary, and not easy to turn down. He could defer starting his pension, making it higher when he would draw from it later. Sentinel wanted him to start as soon as possible, but he'd asked them to wait until mid-June.

TUESDAY, MAY 13

Palm Beach, Florida

“It’s eight a.m. and this is NPR news for Tuesday, May 13, with Dwight Howard. Good morning, everyone. Here’s a roundup of early events making the news today. The president is scheduled to appear at 10 a.m. before the Congressional Committee on the economy....”

A hand appeared from under the blanket, reached over and slapped the button down on the radio/alarm clock. The large red numbers glowed 8:01 in her darkened bedroom. She was just not mentally prepared to hear about whatever the president was going to discuss. Not today.

Rebecca Gessner—née Abramowicz—rubbed her hands over her face in a quick massage, pulled the blanket back, rolled to the side of the bed and put her feet on the floor. She usually rose no earlier than nine, and more often at ten. Today, however, was her last busy day at home prior to departing from Miami International Airport for a seventeen-day cruise vacation from Barcelona, back across the Atlantic. Hannah Goldman, her secretary/companion, would be arriving at 9 a.m. to help with her packing and clear up her business mail.

She pressed Maria’s call-button, said she was up and to put the coffee on. It was the beginning of another hot, sultry day on the Florida east coast, at Palm Beach, with a slight onshore breeze. Rebecca could see a number of early beach strollers as she opened the blinds on her second-floor balcony window. Her house, as she called it, was, by any

other definition, a mansion—six thousand square feet on two levels, Spanish style, painted in two shades of tan and light brown with thick, red-ochre roof tiles, and occupying one acre of prime beach waterfront on South Ocean Boulevard. She and her husband, Solomon, had lived there for ten years before he died suddenly, five years ago at 63, of a heart attack. They'd had no children. He had been president and CEO of the Gessner Insurance Brokerage Corporation, with offices in Los Angeles and Miami. It was a lucrative business and they were multi-multi-millionaires. While she did not assume the CEO position upon his death, she did serve on the company's board of directors. Given her majority share ownership, her word understandably carried a fair degree of authority at the table.

Rebecca had recently turned sixty-five and was in good health. At five feet, six inches, her figure was still quite shapely, due in part to having been 'under the knife' a few times, as only her closest friends knew. She was due to go under the knife one more time. Soon. She worked out daily in the fully-equipped gym on the ground floor and swam in the large backyard pool, in heated water in the winter months, when she was not traveling to L.A. on business, or elsewhere on pleasure. Her Puerto Rican-born maid, Maria, lived in.

Rebecca was sitting in the kitchen bay window, mug of coffee in hand, looking at the Atlantic Ocean, when her thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. She knew it was her secretary.

"Come in, Hannah," she said and called to Maria to bring the young woman a coffee.

Hannah said, "*Hola, Maria,*" to the maid and sat down at the marbled bay window tabletop, facing her employer. "How are you today, Mrs. G.? Sleep well?"

"Okay, until the damned helicopter woke me at 3:30. I thought it might have been the police and was correct in thinking that because Maria told me she'd heard a report on the local radio at eight o'clock. An armed robbery in the downtown area at an all-night deli. The lone employee was shot but is okay, mercifully."

Ordinarily, it was a quiet neighborhood. Few people living in the vicinity had regular day jobs and there was very little traffic noise.

Ms. Hannah Goldman did not like to be ‘familiar’ with her employer and in spite of being asked to use her Christian name, she stuck to the formality of ‘Mrs. Gessner’ or ‘Mrs. G.’ With an undergraduate degree in business administration from the University of Miami, she felt somewhat under-employed in her duties here. Her father, a long-time friend of Solomon Gessner, got her the job, or ‘position’ as he liked to call it, after graduation, and while it was interesting, paid quite well and involved some traveling, it was not challenging. Hannah knew she’d eventually have to find a more demanding career job to fit her personality and academic training.

“Well, you ready for our cruise, Hannah?” Rebecca said lightly as Hannah joined her for a light breakfast of toast and marmalade.

“Yes,” said Hannah, “very much so. I’ve only done one, short, seven-day Caribbean trip, with Carnival. It’ll be interesting to see what this ship is like in comparison, and I’ve never been to Spain. Travel arrangements and documents are all here,” she added, patting her black leather briefcase cum purse. “I’ve confirmed our airline reservations and departure time, on American Airlines with a one-hour stop in Lisbon, a nine-hour flight. No changing planes, thank goodness. Our flight arrives at 11:30 a.m. tomorrow, local time. So, to reiterate, we leave Miami at 6:30 p.m.—1830 hours—tonight. By the way, that will be on the new Boeing 787 Dreamliner plane. Our fare in first-class seating will be \$17,830 total, return, of course.

“Also confirmed is the cruise reservation. You’ll be staying in a so-called Crown Suite on deck seven and I’m on the deck below you. With regard to departure today, we need to check in at Miami airport by no later five o’clock, which means we’ll have to leave here, let’s say, by three-thirty. I hope that’s okay with you?”

Hannah looked up from the itinerary at Mrs. G., who nodded her reply. “I’ve arranged for Clifford to have the limo ready by then. I will need to slip home to pick up my things this afternoon and say

goodbye to Mom and Dad, but I will spend some time with you now, reviewing company correspondence and your mail, if that's okay? May I take it that you've briefed Maria about our trip and she has a copy of the itinerary and my cell phone number?"

"All done," replied Mrs. G. "Maria seems very excited for us. Thanks for your efforts, Hannah."



Seven hours later, Hannah and her employer were sitting in oversized black leather chairs in the VIP Lounge at Miami International Airport, with a vodka martini and a sherry, respectively, in front of them on the low, oval glassed-topped table, watching the news on CNN delivered by Anderson Cooper. They had about an hour until their flight would be called. Cloudless blue sky could be seen through the high, panoramic windows overlooking the runways. They could also watch their gleaming new American Airlines 787 at the gate, being prepared for flight. Hannah hoped it would leave on schedule. They didn't have too much time in Barcelona before leaving on the cruise—and Hannah was keen on seeing the European fashions in the shops.



Same day, Toronto, Ontario

"So, don't forget, Mom and Dad, you can use the skype app on your new Blackberry Passport Z10 that you received at your retirement party. It's a great little gadget and it'll do anything you want it to do in communicating. And, after my superb instruction session, I hope you've got the hang of it! Just to remind you, Barcelona is five hours ahead of us, so don't call me until *at least* after noon local time," lectured the Sterlings' daughter, Avery, as she shepherded her parents into the main concourse at Toronto's Lester B. Pearson International

Airport, two hours ahead of their departure time. It was 6:30 p.m. “I really hope you have a wonderful and memorable cruise. Wish I could go with you.”

“Thanks, sweetheart,” replied Jack Sterling. “We both are really looking forward to this trip. Good of you to drive us here. Don’t hang around on our account. You’ll have to move the car if you do, or risk getting a ticket.”

With hugs and kisses, Avery departed, taking one look back at her parents before exiting through the revolving door. She wasn’t 100% sure they would remember how to use skype, but surely there would be younger passengers or crew members to help.

After getting their boarding passes and checking in their bags, Jack and Jean walked to a nearby Starbucks in the Concourse and ordered two lattes with biscotti biscuits. Jack reviewed their flight itinerary, noticing they were flying on a Boeing 747, an older plane but very reliable and comfortable. He was ready for this trip—overdue in fact—and very much hoped for an interesting and, especially, a relaxing time. He’d booked their seats online weeks ago, reserving spots with the most leg room.

At 8:25 p.m., the announcer called their flight. “Air Canada flight 287 for Montreal, London and Barcelona is now boarding. Please have your boarding pass and passport ready for presentation at the gate. Rows 35 through 45 will be boarding first.”

Sitting in the holding area, Jack said, “Here we go, sweetheart.” They stood and joined the line, each with a maximum-allowable-size carry-on bag. Jack had checked the airline’s website for the dimensions and had measured their suitcases and carry-ons twice. Best to be extra certain. It was the start of a four-thousand-mile trip.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14

Barcelona, Spain

“There it is, Jean, Barcelona spread out below us,” said Jack, sitting in the window seat, leaning back so his wife could get a glimpse through the big oval window. “You know, it has the same size population as Toronto, about five million. I didn’t realize that. Notice the green hills on the north side,” he continued, as the plane circled to land, “and the mid-blue of the Mediterranean Sea to the south. Feeling a bit excited, honey?”

“Sure am,” she replied. “Looking forward to spending our two days in the city. Lots to see and do.”

The plane made a smooth landing, on time, at El Prat airport, eleven miles west of the city center, at 2:35 p.m. Plenty of daylight left. Customs clearance was a breeze and they did not have to wait long at the baggage carousel. Their clean-looking taxi and polite driver, with little proficiency in English and rather distracted style of driving, deposited them at three-thirty, after a forty-minute ride, at their hotel, the Catalunya. It overlooked a beautiful square—more like a circle—of the same name, close to the city center. Barcelona sprawled under a clear-blue sky with a comfortable temperature of 25 degrees celsius—77 Fahrenheit. With a slight onshore breeze, the air was just right for strolling around the square and the old downtown area a bit later, after arranging a day tour for tomorrow.

At five, they left the hotel for a walk around the large plaça, window shopping, looking at the locals and how they were dressed, and

trying to get the feel of being in España. It was warm, the sun still high in the sky, altogether pleasant. They went for dinner at the Restaurant Visual, at the top of the Hotel Torres, with a magnificent 360-degree view of the city. A good start to their vacation, they agreed.



In spite of all her travels, Rebecca ‘Mrs. G.’ Gessner had never been to this city. Their residence for the next two nights was the 19th century Hotel Palace, close to Catalunya Square, one of the most elegant buildings in Barcelona. The high, cupola-style ceiling in the lobby was supported by four huge, flecked-marble columns, standing on a white marble floor. The painting on the ceiling was somewhat reminiscent of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel at the Vatican in Rome. On their way up to their large, two-bedroom, beautifully-appointed suite, renting at \$1,500 a night, Hannah picked up a handful of tourist brochures from the lobby rack. One of them showed a photograph of a stately theatre built in 1847, the *Gran Teatre del Liceu* in the city center. Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Aida* was currently playing, with none other than the talented soprano Cecilia Bartoli. Hannah knew that Mrs. G. dearly loved opera. After securing her enthusiastic consent, Hannah commissioned the concierge to get two of the best seats for tomorrow evening’s performance. “The absolutely best seats possible, you understand,” she told him, making it clear that price was not an issue.

In their suite at 12:30 p.m., Hannah reviewed the rest of the tourist brochures and read out recommendations of what they should visit for their one full-day in the city. When their suitcases were delivered by the porter, they unpacked a few change of clothes items. Mrs. G. placed her jewelry, in its soft grey leather bag, in the lock box in the armoire, using her date of birth as the combination. She then set her watch to the local time—Greenwich Mean Time +1—and the two women retired to their separate bedrooms to nap.

When they got up two hours later, they ordered a light meal:

cheese and avocado on whole-wheat crackers, a bowl of mixed fruit and a pot of camomile tea, served in the room. Reviewing the sight-seeing brochures again, they booked the seven-hour, *Grand Tour of Barcelona* by limousine, for the next day, covering most of the tourist sights. As it was mid-afternoon, with lots of sunny daylight left, both women wore large sun hats as they ventured out onto the busy streets.

Rebecca Gessner noticed it first: how many of the women, young and older, wore some form of black. Jeans or narrow slacks seemed to be the order of dress in daylight, with tops or shawls, and bright silk scarves also worn as a headdress, and shiny black, patent leather high-heel shoes. Pointing this out to Hannah, she wondered if it was the current fashion, or somewhat of a tradition.

Hannah said she thought it was fashion. She'd been glancing at a magazine in the hotel lobby called *Mademoiselle* which showed black to be the prominent color in Europe. Looking at what they were wearing, Mrs. G. said, "I guess we're out of fashion," and her younger companion agreed. They'd simply have to do something to rectify that.

"Elegant women like you and I, Hannah, *must* be in style. Let's do some shopping."

Catalunya Plaça had a high-end fashion mall with Bally, Diane Furstenberg, Louis Vuitton, Tom Ford, Internationale and others, all open until 9 p.m. The square was connected to La Rambla, a long, tree-lined boulevard, very popular for shopping and restaurants. Their day was made.

THURSDAY, MAY 15

Barcelona

At 7:30 a.m., the Sterlings were having breakfast in the *Cuarto de la sol*—the courtyard of the sun—restaurant, part of which extended outside the rear of the hotel onto the pool deck. Sitting under large, green and white striped sun umbrellas—provided by the Canada Dry corporation—with the warmth of the morning sun on their backs, they were enjoying *huevos revueltos*—scrambled eggs with thick, pan-fried potatoes—with a baguette and large cups of strong, black Spanish coffee. While a bit tired from the long flight, they were also feeling good about being in Spain and upbeat about seeing some of the sights of the city.

On their arrival in Barcelona, they had set their watches to the local time, reviewed their proposed itinerary for the next day's activities, and made tentative plans. There was much to see and they couldn't do it all in the day and a half before their ship sailed. "But enough for us to get the feel of the place," they had agreed. Today would be their big day. At 8:30, they would join an eight-hour sightseeing trip around the city, with a quick stop for lunch. Back to the hotel at around four-thirty for a brief rest, followed by a quick dinner, then dress up and off by taxi to the *Gran Teatre Nacional de Catalunya*, in the Plaça de les Arts.

Their bus arrived on time, almost full. One more stop and they'd begin the tour.

"*Buenos dias, mi amigos,*" their female guide said, after the last tourists boarded. "My name is Consuela Barrientos, 'Connie' for short,

and our magnificent driver is called Pedro Mazon. Both of us were born and raised in this beautiful city, so, unlike other non-Spanish, European guides, we can give you the benefit of our personal experience showing, and telling you about, this wonderful city of Barcelona. I hope you have your tour pamphlet which contains a ‘*plan*’ as we call maps, so that you can follow our course of direction. Before we start, let me briefly take a few minutes to describe the tour. Our fabulous, eight-hour journey will include one hour for lunch at the *Casa Tejada*, which has excellent food, specializing in Spanish and Portuguese dishes. I always like to suggest to our guests that they try one of their soups and specialty sandwiches, for two reasons. They are delicious and, of course, we get quick service. You will also note, as we drive around the city, that little bits of modernization have crept in—like Ronald McDonalds, A&W, Starbucks, Subway, etcetera—a must, it seems, in today’s society. All to make our visitors feel at home! I know, I know,” said Connie, “most of you could do without them. It seems the world is becoming homogenized, which I don’t care for. Anyway, to continue....

“This city was originally a Roman village—not surprising as we are part of what we call the ‘Mediterranean complex’, since most of the area was under Roman rule at some time or other. Our city was founded in the third century BC and was called *B-A-R-C-I-N-O*,” she spelled out, “by a man named Hamilcar Barca. If you don’t know this, he was the father of Hannibal the Great of ancient times, on a par with Caesar and Alexander the Great.

“We will explore three main parts of the city....”

A few minutes of description later, Connie said, “Okay, Pedro, start driving! So, sit back and relax and I hope you will enjoy your wonderful time with us today.”

“Sounds like a good tour, Jeannie,” whispered Jack. “I wonder if the guide’s training includes schooling in the use of hyperbole. I have a feeling it’s going to be heaped on us. Not complaining though.”

Jean squeezed his hand and nodded.



By 3 o'clock, they had almost completed the tour and covered much of the greater city area. The last part took them to Guell Park, designed by Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí, one hundred years ago. "Place took fourteen years to build," noted Jack. "I can see why."

"You know, I could easily spend a week here. Barcelona is a beautiful city, with so much to see and so much heritage. How many pictures did we take, do you reckon?"

"I can check that on the new camera. It keeps score of photos taken. I'll check later but at a guess, I'd say well over a hundred. I don't think I have to ask you what your favorite site was. Certainly the iconic Sagrada Família Cathedral would be at the top of my list—it's hard to find the right words to adequately describe its magnificence—and, it's not finished yet! Mr. Gaudí was a very inspired individual. We need to return sometime and stay longer, like you say."

At 5:30 this evening, their second and last in Barcelona, Jack and Jean Sterling sat in the hotel's elegant dining room, with high, narrow, Gothic-style windows framed with red velvet drapes, pulled back in the center by tasseled gold ropes. Their table was covered in a white, starched tablecloth and set formerly with fine Oneida silver flatware and English Waterford crystal stemware. On the mezzanine, a male pianist was playing classical music from a black Steinway Grand. They had decided to 'live it up' by doing dinner and the show in formal attire. One advantage of being on a cruise vacation, was bringing one's fanciest clothes. Jack wore a tux with a cream-colored cummerbund and matching bow tie.

"Lookin' good!" Jean assessed with a wink. Her formal gown was of silver lamé with a deep neckline, worn with a long string of cultured pearls. As they ate dinner and drank champagne, poured into the appropriate fluted glasses, they wondered what delights the evening and tomorrow could bring to top this grand setting.

When they arrived at the theater, it looked a bit like a modern,

scaled-down version of the Parthenon in Athens, with massive faux stone, fluted Doric columns on the outside of the glassed-in building. The big marquee announced, in bold letters, *BOCELLI IN CONCERT*. Jack had reserved their seats before they left home, and had splurged on the best location. Jean and he looked forward to hearing Andrea Bocelli sing his signature song, *Time to Say Goodbye*.

During the performance, Jack turned his head slowly, left and right, and looked at all the people in his row of seats, most eyes fixed on the singer. Judging from the jewelry on display around women's necks and dangling from their ears, some of the audience were very, very wealthy. He thought how fortunate he was to be sitting in this wonderful theater, listening to the beautiful words and music, next to his elegant companion.

Jack also realized that he'd been methodically memorizing faces and other identifying features, a habit from his patrol days that he'd found useful throughout his career. He had looked for clues about income level, deviousness, and anything out of the ordinary. He was also wondering about security to prevent thefts of all that conspicuous wealth. 'How long in retirement before I stop being a detective?' he wondered.

Jean loved opera whereas her husband could 'take it or leave it.' But on this occasion, he thought it prudent that he should 'take it.' Besides, he liked Bocelli. It was a beautiful opera house and he did appreciate magnificent buildings.

When they got back to the hotel, Jean said, "Thank you for arranging that. I'm so glad we were able to see and hear him so clearly."

After a light snack, they retired to bed, tired but very satisfied with the day. Tomorrow, they would 'set sail.'



Earlier the same day, Barcelona

MV *Seascape's* new captain, John William Stuart, was born in

Edinburgh, Scotland at the Western General Hospital on March 28, 1958, the second son of Alexander and Mary. At age 12, he was admitted to Bourne Grammar School, founded in 1638. By virtue of that, he was relatively assured of preparing his brain for admission to a university at age 18. His brother, Gordon, six years older, a Bourne 'old boy' at 18, was about to enter the University of Edinburgh to read classics and archaeology.

In John's infancy, his parents had taken him and his brother on a day trip by boat from Edinburgh toward the North Sea along the estuary of the Firth of Forth, passing under the huge bridge of the same name, built in 1890. The sights, sounds, smells and the feel of sea spray against John's young face, as he was held in his father's arms at the bow of the small, bouncing tour boat, was something that lingered with him and eventually became instrumental in his choice of a profession —sailor.

His apprenticeship to things naval started when he joined the Sea Cadet Corps at age eleven, in seven years rising to the rank of chief petty officer. In 1976, at age eighteen, upon graduating from Bourne and leaving the Cadet Corps, John did not please his father with his decision to skip university and instead enroll at the Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth for their two-year Naval Officer Training Plan. When he graduated, it was off to sea, as an acting sub-lieutenant in the Royal Navy, as an apprentice deck officer aboard a destroyer escort, wearing one thin gold bar on his shoulder board.

In 1982, he was on his way to the Falkland Islands, in the far South Atlantic Ocean, as part of Britain's Naval Task Force, sent to reclaim the islands from the dastardly Argentinians. His ship took part in shelling one of the enemy ships, stopping it in the water, out of action. He also witnessed an Exocet missile strike HMS *Sheffield* in May of that year, causing a great loss of life and its eventual sinking. He'd stayed in the R.N, rising to the rank of commander and captain of his own destroyer escort.

John Stuart retired in 2004 with 28 years navy time and a row

of medals on his chest. He was a big man, tall, weighed 220 pounds ('near 16 stone'), dark wavy hair, ruddy complexion, ice-blue eyes, with a 'command presence'. At the time, the British government was reducing the size of its armed forces and that meant 'marking time' in his present rank for an unknown length of time. He was not prepared to do that. Especially with the lure of commanding grander vessels.

He continued his life at sea by first acquiring a position as a staff captain—a second-in-command position—with World Cruise Lines. The company had actively recruited him, and implied in the interview that he could eventually become a ship's master. WCL operated out of the Port of Miami, the corporate home of many other cruise lines. Because of that, John had to deal with U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services for a work permit and understand the rules governing part-time residence in the U.S.A. He was a U.K. citizen, working for a Florida-based, Delaware-incorporated company whose ships were registered in the British Virgin Islands. Ships are registered under flags of convenience to reduce operating costs or to avoid regulations of the owner's country.

Four years after joining WCL, he'd been promoted to full captain, sporting four gold bars on his epaulettes. The salary level was much higher than his former Royal Navy income and in addition, he was drawing his modest military pension. As with all cruise ship companies' crew positions, he was not a standard employee but instead worked under a contract which required him to be at sea for certain specified periods of time. In his case, this meant four-month stretches, with two months off in between. During his down time, he kept busy writing his memoirs of service in the Royal Navy, especially as it related to the Falklands campaign aboard HMS *Viceroy*. He had tentatively titled them *The Bloody Falklands*—a play on words of sorts since typically 'damned' was inserted before 'Falklands'—to describe that deadly little war.

He did not much care for the short cruises, stopping in a port somewhere almost every day, though he did enjoyed his command

position. He much preferred voyages that included successive days on the ‘*open blue*.’ Nowadays, many cruise lines allowed wives and children of officers to be aboard ship for limited periods of time. Captain Stuart’s wife, Susan, a renowned fiction writer of sea stories, would accompany him on this upcoming trip. Today, they had arrived one day early, from London where they now lived, taking a direct British Airways flight to Barcelona, arriving in the afternoon. He was to take command of the MV *Seascope*, a two-year-old ship, with a capacity population of 1650 passengers and crew, due to dock there at 8 a.m. on the sixteenth—his first time as master of this particular vessel. It was a much larger ship, in every aspect, than his Royal Navy destroyer escort. His spacious cabin and office was directly behind the bridge.

Now in Barcelona, he and Susan checked into the old but nicely appointed Hotel Catalonia Ramblas, where WCL always booked its senior incoming crew members, roughly two kilometres from the Port facility. He and Susan had dinner in the hotel, followed by a beer in the lounge and watching a cricket test match between England and India, in Bombay. Back in their room, he re-read his orders for the next cruise, while Sue watched a bit of telly. They turned in for an early night. Tomorrow was to be a special day for him.



Michael O’Hara Donnelly—the ‘O’Hara’ from his paternal grandfather—was born in Dublin, living on the east side, in the Ringsend District, just off East Wall Road. As a kid, he often rode his bike, alone, to look at the freighters docked along Tolka Quay Road. His young mind imagined becoming the captain of one of those massive ships one day. He’d stand by the open gate to the dockyard and look, thinking how much he’d love to go aboard one of these ships. One day, after checking for a guard, he decided to venture into the dock area. Locking his bike to the chain link fence, he strolled over to a rusty iron bollard and sat down on its wide mushroom top, twenty feet

from the edge of the dock, the nearest ship less than fifty yards away. He took his customary apple out of his pocket and began to munch away. He didn't hear the man come up behind him.

"Hello, son. Admiring the ships, are you?"

Young Mike was startled. He dropped his half-eaten apple and stood up.

The big man wore a dark blue windbreaker jacket with the word 'SECURITY' in large white letters across his chest. "Sorry about the apple," he said kindly. "Didn't mean to startle you. I see you at the fence sometimes. You like ships? My name is Andy—what's yours?"

After Mike told him, Andy said, "Okay, Michael, look, people are not allowed in here by themselves. You need an escort. Would you like to go aboard for a look sometime?"

Mike said, "Oh, yes, sir!"

"Alright. Here's what you need to do. When you get home, ask your mum or dad for permission to do that. Tell them my name. I'll write it down for you. Next time, if I'm here, I'll get you on a ship."

And he did, sealing young Mike's career path.

Right after leaving Glenmore School at 17, Mike found a job as an apprentice deck hand with the Cosco Shipping Line, on a bulk carrier. That was a dirty, dusty job and he managed, after two years, to transfer to a container ship, traveling the world in a somewhat cleaner environment. One ship's captain talked to him about getting his merchant seaman ticket. Mike enrolled in a two-year-long, Coast Guard approved, largely self-study program and had his ticket endorsed with the EDH level—Efficient Deck Hand.

Young Mr. Donnelly eventually found himself on the deck of a Maersk vessel, another container ship, and, over a period of four years, got his AB ticket—Able Seaman—requiring him to perform watch keeping duties. He was a bright and energetic individual and in his off-duty hours, he often spent time on the bridge, observing the ship's operation. The first officer talked to him about upgrading his credentials toward becoming a ship's officer—in this case, a deck

officer. In three years, capably passing his tests, Mike was promoted to a third officer position, requiring him to wear a white uniform and a peaked officer's cap.

At age 29, he married an Irish lass named Moira, with whom they now have two sons: Sean Michael, aged 6, and Ryan Niall, age 4, the latter who, as his wife said, "is the spittin' image of you, Moikle Donnelly," in her broad Kilkenny accent.

They lived in Dublin, though Mike was off at sea for sometimes months at a time. Over the years, he had learned to distillate his thick Irish brogue into more understandable English, as he'd had to converse with people from around the world at sea and in the many ports he visited.

Mike had faithfully read the monthly *Merchant Marine Newsletter* and in one copy noticed an ad for security officer positions with Holland America Line out of Seattle. He'd had a latent interest in police work but did not want to become a police officer as such, at least not in Ireland. Security positions were considered to be part of the deck crew aboard cruise ships. After reading the short job description, he discussed the matter with Moria for her thoughts and, as a result, applied for a position. The *terms & conditions of employment* seemed quite good, the main difference was that he would have to 'contract out' his work, rather than be an employee. It also meant reducing his status to the apprentice level for a year, and taking a two-week course in law enforcement procedures as applied to cruise ships, but he'd had enough of the container ship business and looked forward to a complete change of shipboard life.

Now, seven years later, after transferring to World Cruise Lines, he had risen to the rank of chief security officer. His position was a responsible one, in charge of 12 men and women. They were employed largely in passenger safety which included a multitude of jobs: embarking and disembarking people, patrolling the decks, and tactfully checking unruly behavior by any drunken guests. While they did wear a white uniform, short sleeve shirt and long pants, they were not

blatantly identifiable as security. Security personnel wore a discreet small brass nameplate on the left chest, with the word *SECURITY*. The company did not want an obvious and ominous police-like presence aboard ship.

Luckily, there was little serious crime committed, and life aboard, at sea, was mostly well-ordered and peaceful. After doing this job for seven years though, it had become a bit mundane, repetitious, and Mike felt he needed to upgrade his knowledge and skills again, to get to a higher position with more challenge.

Moira was proud of him, dressed in his pressed whites, two and a half gold bars on his shoulders and a white naval cap with some ‘scrambled egg’ on the peak. Jokingly he told her he could still make captain before he retired.

Sincerely she replied, “I know you can. Go for it.”

Company policy allowed a crew member’s family along once every two years. Mike, of course, had to pay the cost of the family’s transportation to the port of departure, except for himself as a member of the crew. Moira had accompanied him on one cruise, through the Caribbean, two years ago with the two young lads. The four of them had enjoyed the trip immensely, especially his wife and sons.

While Mike was busy in his daily responsibilities and activities, he badly missed the company of his family when they weren’t with him. He was happy then when his wife found employment as a clerk in a prestigious insurance firm in downtown Dublin. She felt better now that she was ‘*contributing to the family coffers*’ and not stuck at home. She had also found a reliable sitter/tutor for the 3-hour period in the afternoons on school days until she got home.

For the most part, the two were contented people. He was due to go to sea again for a three-month term, and that usually meant flying to Miami, where the company and its ships were based, to start. This time, however, he had a short Dublin to Barcelona flight on Ryan Air to join the MV *Seascape* and begin the rotation.

Mike was looking forward to being at sea again, meeting his new

captain tomorrow and, hopefully, another uneventful trip. He called Moira in the evening to let her know he'd arrived okay.

FRIDAY, MAY 16

Muelle de Poniente Dock

Barcelona, Spain

Captain John Stuart and his wife Susan arrived by taxi at 'D' Jetty of Barcelona's Seaport Terminal Dock at 0745 hours, and watched the World Cruise Lines Motor Vessel *Seascope* approach, beginning its docking procedures for an 0800 arrival. The ship had transited overnight from Monte Carlo. It was to start a new, 17-day cruise later today. He'd arrived early so as to spend more time with the ship's captain he was relieving, especially as it was his first time as master of this vessel. The turnaround time from docking to departure was exactly ten hours. While the *Seascope* was very similar in design and handling to other WCL ships he had 'driven', each vessel had its own idiosyncrasies that needed to be reviewed and handled.

There were a great deal of administrative duties to do, going over the ship's log, its recent performance at sea, items requiring to be fixed, provisioning, bunkering (fuel), reviewing weather charts, discussing any crew problems, health issues if any, meeting his 'change of command' bridge crew, the staff captain, chief engineer, the hotel manager and chief of security. Lastly, he'd check the passenger count for this sailing, before getting underway at 1800 hours.

Guests would begin to arrive for boarding starting at mid-morning and the ship would have to be spotless. Passenger lifeboat drill had to be held just before departure.

When the ship's dockside gangway was lowered, Captain Stuart

and Susan walked over with their travel bags and were met and saluted, by the outgoing chief security officer. The ship looked massive from this perspective. A baggage porter took their luggage and together they boarded the ship after being issued boarding passes, called *CruiseCards*, like everyone else, and going directly to the bridge. The two masters exchanged salutes. Captain Samuels greeted Susan cordially and instructed an attendant to escort her to the captain's living quarters.

Today was a complete rotation of the officer ranks. As each relieving officer arrived, he or she was required to review their area of responsibility with their outgoing counterpart.

By 0845, all the bridge officers and other department heads, of both crews, were assembled on the bridge. Captain Samuels thanked his departing crew members for their loyalty and good work and wished them a safe trip home and a relaxing time off, dismissing his people. Captain Stuart introduced himself to his key people and gave a brief description of his seagoing experience, saying that he looked forward to working with them. These officers were then dismissed by the staff captain to continue their discussions with the officers they were relieving. This procedure usually took an hour or two, before the departing crew left the ship.

The two captains retreated to the master's quarters to continue the takeover proceedings. Security Officer Mike Donnelly learned from his opposite that the cruise had been relatively uneventful, with a few minor and not unusual problems, like the odd drunk to escort to his cabin, or loudness in the passageways after midnight, a couple asked to leave the forward deck pool for nude swimming at one a.m., and two people who missed the boat, arriving dockside from a late, private, day excursion after the *Seascape* had sailed.

"Hope your trip goes well, Mike," he said, shook hands and walked down the gangway. "One hopes the guests will behave and not be at each other's throats!"



Same day, Hotel Palace, Barcelona

Hannah Goldman got dressed in her blue and white striped running shirt and blue shorts, and left the hotel at six-thirty a.m., for her usual run, this time, doing five laps around Cataluyna Square. She tried to find time five days a week to do this, regardless of where she was. The sun was just peeking over the old buildings and it was still cool. She felt energized and really looked forward to joining the ship today, planning they would board at eleven.

She helped Mrs. Gessner finish her packing and had the porter take their bags to the hotel luggage room. At breakfast, they talked about their two days in the city and how enjoyable it had all been; shopping, their tour of the sights, and the theatre. “It’s a good thing we dressed up for the opera last night. I didn’t realize it was a black tie affair here,” said Hannah.

“Yes. Bartoli was superb, wasn’t she?” replied Mrs G. “I love that opera. It’s a shame we don’t have more time here. Nowhere near enough time to see the whole place. We’ve *got* to come back again.”

Their white limo picked them up at 10:15 and dropped them off twenty minutes later, at the entrance to the cruise ship wharf. Their ship looked enormous from the forty-five degree angle looking down the jetty. Presenting their credentials, they were allowed through the security gate by Port Authority police, to join the people in the line-up on the quayside, waiting to board, looking like a long line of ants beside the ship.



The Sterlings were about halfway down the dock, having arrived around 10:30. They were waiting in the open but it was a nice, sunny and comfortably warm morning. They entered a long, white marquee to register, deposit their baggage, and get their all-important boarding

card. It had to be guarded like a credit card as it was used on a daily basis aboard ship: entry to their room, purchasing items, reserving for shore trips, boarding and leaving the ship. By the time they got to the registration desk, the line had stretched right up to the entrance gate and they were glad they'd arrived when they did.

While they waited, they spoke with the couple in front of them and behind, from Vancouver and Miami respectively. Jean was more chatty than Jack and he let her do most of the talking. He was more reticent largely because of his background. He'd found that when people learned he was a police officer, they tended to want to talk about nothing else, or sometimes complained about what they thought was an unwarranted ticket they'd received at some time. He'd had enough of that and tried to converse in generalities. The two women behind, a mother and daughter, he thought, were well spoken and not overly inquisitive.



The three largest suites on the ship were at the aft end, on decks 5, 6, and 7. When Rebecca Gessner and Hannah Goldman stepped through the double doors of *Crown Suite 7001*, they were surprised and delighted at its size and elegance.

"Now don't you wish you were staying with me?" asked Mrs G. rhetorically.

Hannah had discussed her cruise sleeping arrangements with her mother, who accepted that her daughter would feel a bit uncomfortable sharing the suite. The mother offered to pay for her stateroom, so as not to impose the cost on Hannah's employer. When the issue of sharing accommodation was raised, Hannah politely declined the offer, saying that she felt that Mrs G. needed her 'space', and that her mother would cover the cost of her cabin.

Mrs. Gessner was adamant about paying for Hannah's cruise, so in order to keep the cost down, Hannah booked a very basic stateroom

for herself, one deck below. While she liked the woman, she did not want to be ‘in her face’, as she told her mother. And besides, Hannah didn’t intend to be in her stateroom except to sleep—“There will be too much to do on board. Maybe I might strike up a romance with a rich young European aristocrat.”

After helping to unpack and hang up her employer’s clothes, Hannah asked to be excused so that she could go and do the same, agreeing to meet back in the suite in an hour. They had heard the announcement about life boat drill, and would need to be back in the suite, Hannah bringing her life jacket with her, well before 4:20 o’clock when they would go to their stations on deck 3. Before then was ample time for a late lunch and a stroll around some of the ship.



In the Security Operations office, Mike Donnelly had ensured that passenger lists had been distributed to the officers in charge of each lifeboat station. Embarkation and debarkation were by far the two busiest events for crew members, especially his security section. Part of his team were new to him and there was little time to get acquainted, but most of them knew their respective jobs thoroughly, having been through this many times before.

All twelve members were on duty. There were always a few passenger stragglers who held up the proceeding, but today, things went quite smoothly, to Mike’s relief. All but two had checked in. He disliked having his crew chase down errant passengers but the personal attention was a hallmark of WCL. An assistant searched through bookings and began phoning the missing passengers’ hotel.

He had much to do before departure at 1800, including checking with the various heads of departments to confirm that they were ready to sail, at least from the security point of view.



The Sterlings checked into their stateroom, on the seventh deck, midships on the starboard side, at 11:30 a.m. It was high up in the ship, nicely appointed, and complete with a balcony. A super king-size bed, with a beautiful dark rosewood headboard and matching night tables, took up much of the floor space not occupied by a dressing table with vanity lights, and a large flat screen TV sitting in the middle of the armoire. The floor was covered with a pale grey rug, and the bathroom fixtures finished in brown-streaked, white, faux marble, and complemented with fluffy white towels and similar dressing gowns.

On the bed were a number of documents. A ‘Welcome Aboard’ message from the captain, a list of the ship’s various amenities, dining room menus, information about the MV *Seascope*, activities slated for tomorrow and information about upcoming land tours. Included in the literature were two notices, the first of which Jack found interesting:

WORLD CRUISE LINES – MV SEASCAPE

SHIP SECURITY

*We are required to provide information to our guests about ship **safety and security**. This is our highest priority. Medical emergencies, unruly behavior, or acts of a criminal nature are taken seriously, and are the responsibility of our ship’s Security Section.*

If anything like this comes to your attention, please report the matter or incident immediately to any member of the ship’s company, or by the emergency telephone number posted on the inside door of your stateroom.

Any criminal activity is reported to law enforcement agencies at the next Port of Call, so they can investigate, and if necessary, and take appropriate action. As well, criminal incidents affecting American citizens are reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and Homeland Security (DHS).

Please respect other persons' rights and privacy. Note that there is a Medical Center, staffed by two doctors and three nurses.

The second notice dealt with hygiene, which he was pleased to see:

PASSENGER CONDUCT

Recent health events aboard a few cruise ships (including outbreaks of Norovirus) have led us to ask passengers to kindly observe a few 'rules' to avoid such occurrences.

Shaking hands – many cultures engage in this form of greeting. Unfortunately, it does tend to spread viruses and we ask you to respectfully avoid this practice. You will notice many hand cleaner stations on every deck.

Coughing and sneezing – with regard to this, we suggest the use of handkerchiefs or paper tissues. If neither of these are readily available, please cough/sneeze into the inside of your bent elbow – to stop cough spray from spreading.

We thank you for your consideration.

“We should remember to comply with this, Jean,” said Jack, giving the sheet to her. “The not-shaking-hands bit might take a day or two getting used to.”

“Yes, sounds like a good idea though.”

They left the unpacking to go for a walk on the upper deck, and some lunch. Jean said, “You know we’re both going to have to watch what we eat. Remember the last cruise and the weight we put on? We need a daily routine of exercise. Having said that, let’s get something to eat! This sea air is making me starving and I could eat a horse.”

At the deli counter, they made their own salads, got one bowl of oxtail soup and one of minestrone, two Montreal smoked meat on rye sandwiches with hot mustard and two black, sugared coffees.

“Delicious,” they both pronounced.

While he was munching on his sandwich, Jack looked at the *Personal Log Book* he had brought with him from the cabin. It contained some stats about the ship, a list of their ports of call, distances between them and on to Miami. After leaving La Palma, they had eight days at sea – ‘Good time to be able to relax,’ he mused. Reading about the ship, he was impressed and wondered about doing a ship tour if that was possible.

Included in the information sheets left on every cabin bed cover, was a description of the *Seascope*, called the *Cruise Log*. The ship was launched two years ago, and was one of World Cruise Lines’ smaller vessels, weighing 66 thousand tons, carrying 1156 passengers and over 450 crew members. For the mechanically minded, it had four diesel generators and one gas turbine engine, and was propelled by two Azipod propulsion units that can rotate 360 degrees for extreme maneuverability, and very quick and short distance stopping capability—within one nautical mile at full speed—comparable to a car leaving skid marks. It seemed a hungry ship for fuel consumption, measured in gallons per mile, not the other way around, guzzling a combined fuel load of 65,000 gallons per day, with a maximum speed of 23 knots. It was able to produce its own potable water and used up about 155,000 gallons daily. Its culinary capabilities were massive and extremely varied, offering plain to exotic meals with fruits and vegetables from around the world, as well as of course, wines and liquor. The bakery department worked two shifts every day.

Finishing their lunch, they took a walk around the upper deck, Jack noticing the flags flying from the upper masthead: the flag of Spain on one side and a pennant with the World Cruise Lines logo—a blue WCL on white background, within an elongated diamond shape, with a dark blue border. There was a flag too, at the stern. He did not know the nationality of it, except that it had the Union Jack in one corner and from that, knew that it was a former British colony, probably where the ship was registered. British Virgin Islands, wasn’t it?

They took the wide, dark blue carpeted stairway down to the next

deck below the promenade. There were three different lounges, one with a small stage big enough for a jazz band—very glitzy. Further along was a well-appointed library and coffee bar with big tan leather armchairs and a huge metallic bronze globe of the world. Off to one side was a closed-in smoking room. No TV present.



In the security office, all of the section were engaged during the day in some aspect of quick disembarkation of departing passengers, and the slower embarkation of a new group. Admitting over eleven hundred passengers in the space of a few hours demanded a strict set of procedures and the production of a lot of paperwork, including passenger lists for each deck corresponding with their lifeboat stations. Nowadays, random checks of baggage were conducted and all of it went through scanners, on the orders of the U.S. Homeland Security agency. Overseeing all this activity kept Mike Donnelly on the run, from 0800 until midnight. He had a new captain to report to and a largely new bridge crew. While his position carried with it some fair degree of responsibility and respect, he had to be circumspect in how he interacted with the senior crew. Having the captain ‘on his side’ would make life a bit easier. He’d be meeting Captain Stuart in his quarters, with others, at 1400 hours, 30 minutes before the lifeboat practice would start.



At 3:45 p.m. (1545 hours), the ship’s loudspeaker system announced, “Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Steve Marks and I am pleased to be your cruise director for the next sixteen wonderful days you have aboard this World Cruise Lines vessel, the *Seascope*. All guests have now arrived.

“As you may not be aware, International Maritime Law requires

that there will be a mandatory life boat drill, on deck three, for *ALL* passengers,” he emphasized, “commencing at exactly 4:30 p.m., or to use nautical time, 1630 hours. I would like all persons to be in their cabins by 1615, thirty minutes from now, to await instructions. As you’ve probably already noticed, your life jackets are stored on the top shelf of your closet. When you leave, please take one with you as you will be instructed how to wear them. As well, an announcement will be made concerning your respective life boat station, which is also posted on the inside door of your cabin. Once again, it is important that *ALL* passengers go to their stations. When you return, I will have further announcements for you about tonight’s activities. Thank you for your attention.”



Back in their cabin at 4 o’clock, the Sterlings got their life jackets out, ready to leave. Jack checked inside the door and noted they were assigned to Station D12 on deck seven. When they left just before 4:30, there was a steady stream of people walking down the inner stairwell—no one could use the elevators—but it was orderly, with directions being given by crew members. At their station, it quickly became crowded and people had to squeeze together. No one could leave until two things had been done: name checks and cabin numbers responded to, and the life jacket demonstration and donning of them, for practice.

After the drill, over at 5 p.m., they shuffled their way back up to their deck, threw their jackets on the bed and finished unpacking. A little later, they headed to the promenade deck, for fresh air, a drink and then over to the starboard rail, to wait for the undocking procedures to begin. From this height, they could see quite a bit of the city of Barcelona, and the top spires of *La Sagrada Família*. Next, they planned to take a quick walk around to check out the facilities available on the upper decks before going to dinner at seven.

At 5:30, Jack, leaning on the guardrail, noticed a man in white navy type uniform arriving and boarding the ship. “I believe the pilot’s just arrived, Jean. Appears we’ll be leaving on time. That’s his flag on the mast, the red and white square one. When he leaves the ship, it will be lowered.” He pointed out the other flags and told Jean about them.

“How’d you know that stuff, Jack?”

“It’s in the information package left on the bed. Do you want to wait and watch the proceedings for leaving the port, or go for a stroll first?”

They elected to do some more walking.



After the lifeboat drills were concluded, the Officer of the Watch was advised that the pilot from the Barcelona Port Pilotage Service was coming aboard ship and when he reached the bridge, his presence was announced: “*Pilot’s on Bridge.*” This was duly recorded in the ship’s log with his name, the time, date and location of the ship. Signal flag ‘H’ was hoisted up the mast. The pilot would review his departure procedures with the captain, after which the undocking orders are given to the helmsman and the ship begins its movement away from the dock.

On the dock, at exactly 1759 hours, two dockworkers would be given the command, “Let go forward, let go aft.” The fore and aft rope hawsers would be let go by unhooking from the bollards—with the words “all gone forward, all gone aft”—and pulled into the ship’s bow and stern. On the pilot’s order, the ship’s engines were slightly advanced to start moving the vessel away from the confines of the dock, at a very slow speed, gradually turning into the direction of travel needed to navigate out of port. At the same time, 1800 hours, three deep and loud blasts from the ship’s horn announced it was underway from the Port of Barcelona. Many of the passengers were crowding

the upper deck rails to look at this maneuver and to wave goodbye to friends.

Jack Sterling said to Jean, back from their short look around the deck, “I wonder how people felt a hundred or two hundred years ago when they were leaving their home country to immigrate to a foreign land, knowing they would never return. Must have been very nostalgic, a mixture of sadness and anticipation.”

“Yes, I remember my grandfather telling me as a little girl much the same thing when he left the U.K. for Canada. I think we were lucky to have been born when we were, Jack, that we can travel like this, knowing we live in a great country and can return to our home, don’t you?”

It was a beautiful May evening. After finishing dinner at seven-thirty, they stood looking over the side of the ship at the south coast of Spain, and the evening sky, a collage of pastel colors worthy of a John Constable canvas. The Sterlings felt very contented, and the ship’s crew and guests settled into their first night at sea.

SATURDAY, MAY 17

At sea, off south coast of Spain

Captain John Stuart was on the bridge and had been, much of the morning.

His intention was two-fold: to get acquainted with the deck department crew, especially the staff captain, Henk (Hank) Bernhard, his second-in-command, and to see how they were operating the ship. While ships today, like passenger aircraft, are largely self-driven by instruments, they still very much require the presence of human beings on deck, to make sure that certain rules and procedures—international and company—are followed and that safety lookouts are alert even though the ship is equipped with ‘over-the-horizon’ radar vision. So far, the master was pleased with what he saw and heard, though he also knew that his presence may have had some influence over that. He noted that the gauge showing the current quantity of fuel and the amount of consumption, indicated a slightly high rate of fuel use per nautical mile, the DPG or distance per gallon. Consumption had been rated during the ship’s trials at sixty feet per gallon at the usual speed of 18 knots. Pointing this out to his second, he wondered about the cause. It was not much perhaps, but over distance, would add up to higher fuel use and cost. “Why do you think this is, Hank?” he asked.

“Yes, I notice that too. It’s not much, a little over one hundred gallons per hour. It could be due to hull resistance, tide conditions, and we’ve had a constant westerly headwind—or that the engineers had

slightly under-calculated fuel usage during trials. I've already made note in the bridge log book, sir."

"Hmmm. Keep an eye on it. What's our ETA passing the Rock tonight?"

"0300 hours, sir."

"Too bad, so late. Passengers won't get to see Gibraltar lit up at night. Who is joining us dockside at Cadiz?"

"Holland America—the *Noordam*. 0830 time of arrival, in from Lauderdale."

"Gonna be a busy place. Pilot transfer time set for 0730?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I'm going for a goodwill stroll, then to an early lunch in the staff section. All yours, Mister Bernhard."

"Aye, aye, Sir. *Captain's off the Bridge.*"



It was their first evening at sea. The Sterlings had spent much of the first full day exploring the various decks, getting to know their way around and, as much as anything, to get to know their way back to the stateroom.

For most passengers, it generally takes a day or so to learn that. During their walkabout, they noticed crew members constantly spraying and cleaning handrails, public area door handles, vacuuming stairwells and the carpeted passageways. A very obvious display of cleanliness.

The main restaurant, on deck ten, called the *Sea Buffet*, was quite big and well laid out, with tables for two, up to ten people. Large windows gave a great view outside. The food, offered at all three meals of the day, was enormous in choice and well presented. "Nice change from having to cook at home," Jean remarked. The two swimming pools and whirl pools were not too busy and they enjoyed some time in them, afterwards lying on chaise lounges in the sun, on the top deck.

There were no kids and it was peaceful. “Not like our first cruise,” Jean reminded Jack. For that one, they had picked the American Thanksgiving long weekend to start a Caribbean cruise. There were 900-plus children on the ship.

Before a planned dinner at seven in the grand dining room, both decided they needed a walk around the upper deck exercise track. Most people seemed to use it for running during the day only. The sun was still relatively high with about two hours left before disappearing over the horizon, under a cloudless sky. It remained warm, with a slight breeze from the west flowing over the bow. Heading west, the south coast of Spain was about thirty miles off the starboard, or right side. In the distance, to the northwest, they could see a ridge of snow-capped mountains. Jean expressed surprise at this, not familiar the geography of the area.

“Let me check my trusty little smart phone,” said Jack. “Surely there is an app for that.” He fished the instrument out of his trouser pocket, tapping on ‘*Google Earth*’ and entered ‘*Spain*’ in the blank space. Earth quickly spun around to Spain and he zeroed in on their present location. “See, Jean, that’s what we’re looking at—the Sierra Nevada range, about 35 or 40 miles inland. The highest peak reaches 3,500 meters or 11,000 feet. Who knew the country was this mountainous this far south?”

“I note that we pass by the Rock of Gibraltar,” she said. “Do you think we’ll see it tonight, Jack?”

“Let me think. I figure we have about 150 miles to go to reach it, or about 8 hours from now at our present speed—say 20 mph—that would be around 3:00 a.m. Unless you want to wait up or get up for a look, I don’t think you’d actually see the rock itself, just the lights on it. Too bad. I’d like to see that historic place. Lot of ancient history attached to that piece of granite. I looked it up yesterday while you were having a snooze. There is evidence that it was occupied thousands of years ago by our ancestors, Neanderthal Man. Today, it’s owned by Great Britain.”

They had stopped and were leaning against the polished mahogany wood rail, other passengers also admiring the view. Both of them were in a reflective mood, saying little and feeling very contented.

“Isn’t this wonderful,” Jean said, putting her arm around Jack’s waist, snuggling in close.

Before he could reply, something made the ex-policeman turn around and he found himself confronted by a tall man in white ship’s officer’s uniform.

“Good evening, sir, ma’am. You have a very keen ear,” he said to Jack. “I didn’t mean to disturb you. My shoes have non-slip rubber soles and are very quiet. I’m Mike Donnelly, ship security officer. Welcome aboard.”

Facing the man, Jack said, “Good evening. This is my wife Jean and I’m Jack Sterling.” He began to extend his hand, but remembering the health notice, withdrew it quickly.

“I trust you folks are enjoying your cruise so far?”

“So far, so good. Nice ship.”

“Yes, it’s the newest in our fleet, launched two years ago. If you are interested in its statistics, our front office has pamphlets for our guests, about its size and operation. You might find it interesting. Have you cruised before?”

“Oh yes, this is our third time at sea.”

“Where’ve you been?”

“One trip in the Eastern Caribbean with Carnival, and the other through the Panama Canal to Cartagena, back to Miami, with Holland America, about four years ago.”

“Did work get in the way since then?”

“I suppose you could say that,” replied Jack.

“May I ask what you do, sir?”

“Well, at the moment, nothing. I just retired, and Jean and I decided to take this trip. We like the idea of being on the open sea for a few days, with no stops.”

“Yes, that’s why this cruise was designed that way, to give a feeling

of being at sea. It's also called *blue water sailing*. What did you retire from?"

"The Metropolitan Toronto Police Force, after 35 years of service."

"Interesting. You must have some stories to tell."

"Oh, yes. Enough to fill a book. Or two."

"Is there anything I can tell you or help you with?"

"Yes, there is one thing. Is it possible to do a tour of the ship?"

"Yes. That will be done after we leave La Palma and head out into the Atlantic. You'll get a news bulletin about it. Just to let you know, there is a charge, I'm afraid. Well, nice talking to you. I'll probably see you around. Enjoy the rest of your evening."

"Thanks, Mr. Donnelly. By the way, what do the weather charts look like for the remainder of our time at sea?"

"Happy to say, generally calm and warm. That's why we do these voyages in May. Good night, sir, ma'am," he said, tipping his cap.

After a grand dinner and a stroll through the *Marine Arcade*, where the shops were located, and past the noisy and crowded casino at one end, they walked up the three flights of stairs to their stateroom, ready for a good night's rest. As was their habit, both of them read before turning off the light.

Jean said, "There's some interesting things in this book, hon."

"Uh hmm," he mumbled.

"Some *really* interesting stuff..."

Her words got through to him. She was reading *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Looking at her, he said, "Oh, right, sweetheart," placed a book-mark in his novel and set it aside.



Both women had had a very pleasant day, settling down into ship's routine, nosing around the various decks—"Checking stuff out," as Rebecca Gessner had said. They strolled through the shopping area on deck 3, noting the high-end name brands of some of the merchandise.

They parted company at two, Mrs. G. going for a rest and Hannah to the promenade deck to take in some sun and read.

At 7 o'clock, Hannah met Mrs. Gessner on the forward promenade. They chatted in the warm evening sun for a few minutes and Mrs. G. could tell that Hannah was a little anxious to leave. She was going to a pop concert in the *Aries Theater*, which had a small stage, for small music productions—very cosy.

Rebecca Gessner had a dinner reservation for 7:30 p.m. alone, but at a table with other guests. The dining room was quite full this evening and two other couples joined her at the six-person table. From the conversation, she could tell they knew each other and felt a bit uncomfortable. The woman sitting next to her realized this after a few minutes had passed and no one had joined her, and she started to include her in the conversation. Rebecca felt obligated to say something about her 'status' and told them she was a widow. She heard the usual regrets but was used to that sentiment now.

After dinner was finished, her new acquaintances asked if she would like to join them in the popular *Polo Lounge*. A new, rising young American classical jazz singer named Tello Williams was performing.

Rebecca said, "Tello. What an unusual name. I haven't heard that before. Where's she from?"

"She's from a small town in southern Idaho, Pocatello. Her mother, Tanya Williams, was an opera singer and sang at the Met. Tello's voice is somewhat similar to that of Diana Krall, the noted Canadian jazz singer, if you know of her."

Rebecca nodded. "I do."

"The difference is that Tello does not play the piano while she performs. She's appeared in concert at the Lincoln Center, so, we're lucky to have her on this trip. Please join us. If you like jazz, you'll love her voice."

She did and was glad she went.

SUNDAY, MAY 18

Cadiz and Seville, Spain

Jack Sterling got up at six o'clock, quietly. After dressing in casual tan slacks and matching shirt and doing his ablutions, he left, going up to the track deck for a twenty-minute fast walk. The rising sun glowed in a clear sky, portending another warm day. The ship was due to dock at the Port of Cadiz at eight this morning. Along this stretch of coastline, the shore looked empty.

When he got back to his stateroom, Jean was up and ready to go for breakfast, taking along her large shoulder bag.

They had decided to take the tour to Seville today, and tomorrow, hang out around the small town of Cadiz, doing a walking tour. During breakfast, they noted the dark blue hull and white superstructure of a Holland America ship tied up ahead of them. Dozens of coaches were lined up on the dock, which was teeming with people.

When they stepped ashore, they found their bus number among about ten similar coaches. Showing their tickets, they climbed aboard. The bus was full by the time it pulled away, heading in a general northerly direction for the one-and-a-half-hour ride to the old, sprawling city. Sitting across from them was the woman and her young companion—her daughter?—they had talked to on the dock in Barcelona, saying, “Hello, nice to see you again.”

Their female tour guide, Esmeralda—“Essie, for short,” she said—gave the passengers the customary greeting, “*Buenos días, mi amigos, bienvenido a Cadiz.*” Continuing, she said, “Make yourselves comfortable.

We have about 115 kilometers or 70 miles to travel to ancient Seville, along the A4 main highway, about one and a half hours from here. When we do get into the city and start our tour, Manuel, our experienced driver, will hand each one of you a hearing device and explain how to wear it. We find this is a good system, to ensure that no one misses what I have to say while we are walking. This way, you don't have to crowd around me so much and we can avoid the problem of stragglers....

...“I will say a few words about this part of Spain, called Andalusia. Except for some factories in Seville, most of this area is agricultural. The land is relatively flat and has a typical Mediterranean climate, which allows for the mass growing of fruit, such as oranges, olives, grapes, as well as sugarcane and even tobacco and cotton. You will also see—you can't miss them—hundreds of huge hothouses producing mostly berries and vegetables: strawberries, raspberries, tomatoes, lettuce, etcetera. Much of these crops are shipped to other parts of Europe and is a big business for the local economy. As you can guess too, all of my country is a tourist destination. We are proud of that. Spain is also a very romanic place, so to the women, watch out for the *hombres*, the men. It is their habit to kiss the back of your hand, so don't be offended, please....”

A few of the female passengers smiled at the prospect, while others had already nodded off.

At the first stop, the guide cautioned, “Another thing to mention: personal security. Unfortunately, even Seville has its pickpockets, so please be aware of your surroundings. Carry shoulder bags across your shoulders, holding on to the strap. With the men, don't put your wallets in your back pocket, and keep some money separate. Side pockets are better and may I recommend you buy clothes with velcro fasteners for extra safety. It is not necessary to bring your passports on these day trips; one thing less to lose. Alright, go and enjoy your walk.”

The first stop was the magnificent Cathedral of Seville where Christopher Columbus is buried. The third largest church in the

world, its construction started in 1401 and finished 127 years later. Inside it was fantastically ornate, with gold being the predominant finish. The huge, stained glass curved windows were outstanding for the color, variety and complexity of the glassware, giving a warm glow to the interior.

Late in the afternoon, leaving the tour bus dockside, the Sterlings said goodbye to Essie, thanked her for a most informative and interesting tour, and slipped a ten dollar bill into her hand and another for Manuel the driver.

Jean said to her husband, “You know, all of this stuff is a bit overwhelming, isn’t it? I mean, what is it with Spain and its huge, old and brand new architecture, pushing the limits it seems on style and scale. Seems to me, Jack, we have a lot to learn about our world. Can we live long enough to see much of it?”

“You’re right. We have a lot of catching up to do.”

The pair from Miami climbed the gangway right behind them, chatting easily about the sights and sensations experienced.



After dinner at seven in the main dining room, buffet style, the Sterlings took a walk around the deck as it was getting dark. Inside again, they stopped to listen to Renée Richelieu, a French-Canadian pianist from Montreal, play a mix of lively jazz, R&B and New Age music on the Steinway in the Lounge. They danced on the small round floor with a few others, while the silver ball above their head filled the ceiling with moving, sparkling, diamond light. Taking his wife’s left hand and kissing the back, Jack said, “*Buenas tardes, señora. Qué hermosa.*”

Jean whispered in his ear, “I know the first part means ‘good evening’—but what does ‘*qué hermosa*’ mean?”

“It means, ‘You are beautiful.’ I saw it on a billboard in Seville

today, advertising lingerie, which reminded me of you. I hope you are not offended, *señora*?”

Jean smiled and replied, “I am not in the least offended, *señor*,” giving him a long, warm kiss on his neck, and dancing close.



Mrs. Gessner and Hannah had enjoyed their day in Seville. The weather and temperature had been pleasant. In the city center, its ancientness was very evident, from thousand-years-old stone buildings, cobblestone streets, church spires everywhere. Yet they could not help notice, in eye-jarring comparison, more recent structures with names like McDonalds, Subway, KFC and Burger King, all garishly prominent and out of place.

“No escape from them wherever we go,” Rebecca Gessner lamented as they walked up the gangway. “Well, at least now we can enjoy a good meal aboard ship in relatively decent surroundings. You know, if cruise ships ever bring these fast food places on board, it’s the last cruise I take.”

It was seven o’clock and they were getting hungry. “Where would you like to go, Hannah?”

“Why don’t we try the *Captain’s Lounge*? It has table service, in a nice room with ocean views and live piano music. The way we are docked, if we get a table on the right hand—starboard—side of the ship, we should get a nice view of the sunset out over the Atlantic. Would you like to go to the casino after?”

Rebecca Gessner nodded in the affirmative.

MONDAY, MAY 19

Cadiz & Seville

As they departed the gangway onto the dock, both women read the following notice on the dockside bulletin board:

SHIP DEPARTURE TODAY at 6 P.M. – 1800 HRS

*Please remember that you must be back on board
no later than 5:30 P.M.*

Thank you. Have a wonderful day.

The smell of the Atlantic Ocean was quite strong, pushed ashore by a steady westerly breeze. It was 8 a.m., another cloudless day and their last day in sunny Spain.

Over breakfast, Rebecca Gessner and Hannah had read brochures about the place. They were going to experience Cadiz, the oldest inhabited city and port in Spain and the longest inhabited town in southwestern Europe, going back to the days of the Phoenicians, over three thousand years ago. “No wonder,” said Mrs. G., “given its location and a natural, protected harbor.”

“Well, let’s get walking, Hannah. I’m anxious to see the place.”

They strolled along the outer edge of the peninsular, most of the way next to the ocean, breathing in its slightly pungent aroma. As they walked along and into the town, they found many of the streets were very narrow and some of them still cobblestoned, with no sidewalks.

Houses and other buildings dated back centuries. Much of the city was made up of a number of small plazas where most of the shops and restaurants were. As they walked, they noticed the first public place they came to, near the end of the peninsular, was the Museum of Cadiz. The two women spent a fascinating two hours there, looking at artifacts going back several millennia. Each exhibit represented the different eras of the life of this ancient city.

By 12:30, they were hungry. Hannah spotted a fairly new restaurant at the end of the dock area called Balandro's. It was clean, with white linen tablecloths and silver place settings. Looking at the menu, Mrs. Gessner spotted a dish called *Tortillitas de Camarones*—shrimp pancake. "Hmm, this sounds good," and she ordered it with a side salad and local bread and butter. Hannah was persuaded to do the same, but preceded it with a bowl of *pescado de sopa*—fish soup.

After a first bite, Mrs. G. exclaimed, "Oh my God, Hannah, this is delicious!" When Hannah's was served, she immediately agreed, "We've got to get the recipe for this. Maybe we can have Maria make it when we get home."

Calling the waiter, she asked to speak to the chef who obligingly wrote it out for her, indicating the cooking time should be about 5 minutes each side, or until golden brown.

"Thank you so much. Would you please sign your name?"

"Jes, I will be 'appy to," he said, writing on a menu:

Gozar! Alejandro Casaolo, Master Chef, Balandro's, Cadiz.

"I think I could spend a few days here, it's so relaxing," said Mrs. G. gaily. "Another place to add to the list, to visit before I die."



Aboard ship, the security section was dealing with a complaint of the loss, or possible theft, of a bracelet consisting of three strands of

freshwater cultured pearls. A female passenger said she had removed it in one of the public restrooms on deck 7 to wash her hands. She got talking to a cleaner and walked out without them. Returning a few minutes later, she could not find them, and the cleaner had left. She reported the loss in person to the purser's office. They were valued at one thousand dollars. She was visibly upset, saying the pearls were a wedding anniversary gift from her husband this year. She'd rather not replace them.

Mike Donnelly was advised and sent one of his female officers to check the washroom, going through the trash bin, checking the stalls and floor. In her check, she noted that the trash can had been emptied. She checked the purser's office to see if the bracelet had been turned in, but response was negative. She went looking for the cleaner but could not find her on that deck. Next, she called Mike by cell and reported her findings.

Mike mulled over the matter in his head: 'There's one of three possibilities; the cleaner still has them and is going to turn them in at the end of her shift, or she's not going to report her find, or a passenger entered the washroom after the cleaner had left, saw them and took them—or, maybe a fourth possibility, that the passenger has not returned them in yet. It's only been a matter of about thirty minutes. Let's deal immediately with the first two possibilities...' Calling her supervisor, he asked her to find the cleaner and report back.

Three minutes later, the cleaner called. "Mr. Donnelly, it's Sophie Lindemann, cleaning staff, deck seven. My phone battery has run down. Before you ask, yes, I have the pearls with me. While I was cleaning, there was a passenger there. She left. I went to wipe off the counter again and noticed paper towels left and on picking them up, saw the pearl strands underneath. I went out to look for her but she was not around. As I was almost finished my shift, I decided to wait to take them to the purser's office. Am I in trouble, sir?"

Technically she was, because the rules clearly stated a found item should be turned in right away, but Mike sensed an honest intention.

“Just to remind you, Sophie, the policy is to take any found item to the purser’s office *immediately*. Would you do that now, please, and I will call the passenger. I expect she will be relieved and thankful you found them. I’ll tell your supervisor that you are not in any trouble with security. Thanks.”

Naturally the passenger was extremely grateful. Another satisfied customer, and more importantly, an honest crew member. Made Mike feel good. ‘With no other major complaints, it’s shaping up to be a good trip,’ he thought. ‘I just hope we don’t have to leave anybody behind when we leave the Canaries.’ The ship did, two years ago, on its maiden voyage. Two people missed the boat in Arrecife, in spite of waiting an extra fifteen minutes for them. They had to take a small inter-island flight to the western end of the islands, La Palma, the next morning, to catch up. ‘Good thing it didn’t happen in La Palma,’ he thought or they’d have had to fly back to Miami. Turns out they had been drinking in a local taverna and forgot the time.



It was 8 p.m. and the ship, after two hours at sea from Cadiz, was traveling south-southwest at a speed of 19 knots, heading for the island of Lanzarote, the easternmost island in the Canary Group, due to arrive the day after tomorrow at 8 in the morning. Jack and Jean Sterling were standing near the bow, gazing into the distance. It was a clear evening with a bit of a breeze and good visibility, with the sun still above the horizon. They had spent the day relaxing, but had gone ashore for a walk into town and have lunch. On their way back to the ship, she said to Jack, “You know, honey, I’ve enjoyed our days in Spain. I like the country and the people. We’ll have to come back.”

In the near distance, off the starboard bow, in line astern, they could see three ships inbound to the Mediterranean. The first two were commercial—a freighter and container ship—and the third, a cruise ship, too far away to see which cruise line it was. On the port

side was another container ship, heading west into the Atlantic. It appeared to be a bit closer. An interesting situation became apparent to Jack. The *Seascope* had to cut between these four ships to head south. Jack pointed this out to his wife, wondering if there was enough space for them to get through. "I thought I detected a slowing down of the outbound ship on our left, which I think means he's going to allow us to continue our course. Also, I haven't noticed a change of pitch with our engines, so we're continuing at the same speed."

"I wonder if there is a law about ship movements at sea?" asked Jean.

"Well, I should think so, otherwise there'd be chaos. There must be nautical conventions going back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. I would think their rules would allow giving the right-of-way to other ships as a courtesy. It all probably comes down to a matter of judgement, based on nearness to each other, weather and sea conditions and maybe even ship size. Undoubtedly some conversation goes on too, waving flags in the early days, and using radios now. That's an interesting question, sweetheart. Let me google it." He did and the information more or less confirmed his thoughts, except that, generally, he found that the ship on the left usually yielded position. It also depended upon location. Commercial shipping has to stay within *sea lanes*, which can vary in width apart, from 12 miles to very narrow channels close to shore.

"In our case," Jack said, "I'm guessing our ship is probably a bit closer to crossing the space between these ships. In any event, we're not slowing down. Hope that helps, honey?"

"Yes, thanks. Now, looking to our left, that's starboard, right?"

"Actually, it's the port side. Let me see, how can I help explain. The forward end of the ship, or bow, determines left and right sides. Here's a simple way of remembering which is port and which is starboard," Jack said. "The word *port* has four letters, the same as *left*. *Starboard* has more than four, as does the word *right*."

"Well, that's easy to remember. Okay, am I right in saying that the

land we see in the distance, on the *port side* of the ship,” she emphasized, “is part of Morocco?”

“Yes, you are. You’re getting good at your geography, Mrs. Sterling. Want to go to dinner now?”



Tonight the casino was packed and very noisy, with the slot machines creating an almost deafening babble of noise from the many different tunes they played, topped with the clanging of shrill bells announcing the next winner, accompanied, of course, with intermittent human screaming. ‘Thank God, they do not allow smoking,’ thought Jean Sterling as she gamely played on, pressing the *play* button and losing again, the twenty dollars she had started with dwindling now toward the last dollar—four, 25-cent plays. Her shoulders were beginning to ache and she was happy to finish. ‘I’ll go find Jack and see how he’s doing.’

She rose from her well-padded seat, only to have it occupied immediately by a very plump young woman, anxious to plug in her cash card and begin playing, certain that Jean’s string of loses would help her own odds.

When Jean found Jack, she asked, “How you doing? Better than I did, I hope!”

“Jeez, that didn’t take you long, sweetheart. Need some more cash? I’m about even.”

“No. I’ll watch you play for a bit.”

Jack liked the twenty-five cent poker machines. He felt that at least a player had a little bit of control over his destiny, by having to make decisions about which cards to get rid of before he pressed the *select* button and got his new card. Not like those stupid machines—*one-armed bandits* most people called them, with good reason—where the barrels just rolled around without a win most of the time it seemed. At one point, he was up forty-two dollars from the

twenty he had deposited. He'd thought about going to a gaming table to play actual poker, but they all seemed crowded this evening. The minimum bet was five dollars a play, and he could easily go through a hundred in no time. 'Better not,' he thought. 'We've got much more time to play aboard this ship. Once we are out to sea past the Canary Islands, I may be looking for something to occupy my time.'

**TUESDAY, MAY 19, and
WEDNESDAY, MAY 20**

At sea

At midnight, the ship was 110 nautical miles south of Cadiz, on a southwesterly course to the eastern Canaries. This was to be a full day at sea. The travel time from Cadiz would be 37 hours, arriving at 0700 on May 21.

A full day like this at sea early in the cruise tended to allow people to get organized and to attend a host of functions put together by the cruise director. The casino opened from 11 a.m. to midnight. The two swimming pools and hot tubs were fairly crowded and the various eating establishments busy. Deck games were popular. Guests were getting more acquainted with the ship's various decks, locations of dining rooms, cafes, ice cream and pizza stands, bars, the two theaters, purser's office, shopping, the two promenade decks and, not the least important, hunting for toilets. Generally it took a couple of days to accomplish all this.

Captain John Stuart took the opportunity in the morning to meet with his heads of departments, other than bridge and engineering staff. These would include the hotel manager and subordinate supervisors of housekeeping, food & beverage, the cruise director and the senior doctor. Captain Stuart knew it wasn't necessary to remind them, but nonetheless he reinforced in everyone's mind the need for absolute cleanliness aboard ship. With so many people in close contact, a viral outbreak could take hold rapidly—with the potential for

sickness and even deaths, not to mention significant impact to WCL's image and profitability. "Our goal is for everyone, passengers and crew, to arrive in Miami alive and healthy," he emphasized.

He liked to hold what he called *informal-formal* gatherings, in his cabin office. Each person gave a brief account of their department's state of affairs, including reference to any problems, needs, suggestions and so on. Mike Donnelly, as chief of security, was always present. All of them knew their jobs well and the captain required little clarification. The heads could tell their new boss was a fair-minded but no-nonsense individual. All felt respect for the man; they knew of his navy background and that they would be allowed to run their departments without undue interference—provided they did their jobs.

Captain Stuart was advised in the late afternoon about two passengers, independent of each other, with a case of diarrhea which could possibly arise from food eaten ashore, or perhaps, a first indication of Norovirus or similar. He asked Dr. William Kent to do a thorough examination of the two people and to kindly ask if they wouldn't mind staying in their staterooms for a full day, just to be sure. Another examination would be done in 24 hours. Medical staff were prepared for this eventuality, and both the cleaning and hotel personnel were asked to maintain the utmost cleanliness. He reminded them that although there hadn't been such an outbreak on any World Cruise Lines ships, he didn't want his watch to be the first.

The rest of his day was occupied with *walking the ship* matters—on the bridge, in the engine room, a walk around a couple of the decks—mainly for two reasons: to be seen and to answer questions, and to eyeball that his *team*, as he liked to call the ship's company, were carrying out their duties. Apart from the niggling little worry in his head about the two sick people, he felt quite confident that things were going well.

“Here’s the tour sheet for tomorrow for Lanzarote, sweetheart. Seems like we have three choices: walk around the city center, do a bus tour of the city and other nearby areas, or a tour around the whole island. We dock a 7 a.m. and leave at 5. I’ll read the descriptions out to you,” said Jack. From the three choices, they selected the walk-about, on their own, with a stop for lunch.

After dinner in the main dining room this evening, they elected to return to their stateroom, talked to Avery via skype, and watched a bit of TV—they turned off CNN after watching a bit about the latest Middle East crisis. Finally they settled on an old re-run of the 1939 movie, *The Third Man*, starring Orson Welles, in grainy black and white. It was quiet in the passageway: no kids running up and down, shrieking and crying. Not a bit like their last trip in the Caribbean.

“And we haven’t been interrupted by a phone call about a murder or some other gruesome business,” Jean noted happily. “I’m so glad you have retired. Someone else can look after Toronto’s crimes now.”

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21
Arrecife, Canary Islands

The *Seascope* docked in the capital city, Arrecife on the island of Lanzarote, right on time at seven. No other cruise ships were there. Although it would be leaving at 5 p.m. this evening, not that many people seemed to want to go ashore. Over an early breakfast, the Sterlings read about this island which was almost nine hundred kilometres south of Spain, but still owned by that country, and just 125 kilometers from the coast of northwest Africa.

With a population of about fifty-five thousand, the town only dates back to the 1400s when it was colonized and became a re-provisioning point for the Spanish navy and commercial sailing ships, very active at that time, exploring their way south and west across the Atlantic. A variety of the Spanish language is now spoken but hard to decipher by mainland Spaniards. Apart from tourism, agriculture was the only other major means of livelihood although now there is an increasing number of so-called '*long-stay*' people, mostly more wealthy retirees from eastern Europe, here to escape the brutal winters. They too helped the local economy.

It was typical Canary Islands weather: brilliant sunshine with brisk westerly winds coming in off the Atlantic. Not cold, but enough for people to carry a light jacket. The Sterlings had elected to take a walk through the small town, along with others, to browse the market and have lunch. A coach service was provided for the short distance there.

The promenade, called Avenue La Marina, was very pleasant. Lots of open-air eating places and small shops and stalls.

“Probably more expensive than in town,” said Jean as she and Jack breathed in the fresh ocean air. Surprisingly little humidity. At one of the stalls, selling Canary Islands manufactured summer clothing—colorful cotton shirts, shorts, hats, scarves—they met up with the two women who’d been on the Seville tour with them.

Rebecca Gessner smiled graciously. “Hello again, nice to see you.”

“Taking a stroll like us, I see,” said Jack. “Very pleasant out here. Enjoying the cruise?”

“Very much so, one of the best I’ve been on. Look, we’re going for lunch a bit later. Do you care to join Hannah and me?”

“That would be nice,” replied Jean.

They walked together for an hour, along the harbor front and a few of the city center streets. At noon, Mrs. G. spotted the *La Puntilla restaurante*. It seemed clean and had a deck facing the water, the wooden tables covered with big, bright, sun umbrellas. Not crowded.

“What do you think?” she asked.

“Seems quite good,” replied Jean. “Let’s try it.”

The menu said *la comidilla* and underneath the title, in brackets, *Light meal and talk. Enjoy!* They chatted while eating a variety of fish and vegetable soups with fresh baked bread and buns, and patties of salty butter, followed by slices of Spanish flan, all served with heavy-duty coffee in demitasse cups, thick cream and brown sugar provided if required.

They talked about the cruise so far, how enjoyable it had been, and looking forward to some lazy time as Jack put it, crossing the Atlantic.

The chat was lightweight, polite, with no one really getting into personal matters, least of all, Jack. Jean Sterling had been a bit slow in agreeing to have lunch together, knowing how Jack felt about sharing information with strangers, but also feeling that they had to be charitable with people, especially with fellow cruisers. Jack, she knew,

could handle himself if the conversation got too personal—especially if asked about his work. And, of course, he was no longer a cop. He could just say ‘*retired civil servant.*’

But Hannah and her employer did not pry and, in fact, Jack thought the two women were very likable and friendly. He enjoyed his lunch with them as the three women talked about their purchases, the weather and coming activities aboard the *Seascope*. Hannah reminded him of Avery with her young person confidence.

They parted after their meal and Jean and Jack continued walking south along the promenade until they came to a golden yellow beach called Playa Reducto (*short beach* in English). Removing their sandals, they walked along it, holding hands, the fine, granular sand comfortably warm beneath their feet, Jean’s large brimmed sun hat flapping in the breeze. “This is so peaceful here, Jack.”

They sat on the low rock wall and watched seagulls circling over the sparkling ocean and a few small sail boats gliding along. Even though they knew the coast of Morocco and Western Sahara was ‘out there’, the land was too far away to be seen. Nevertheless Jean was conjuring up scenes in her mind of endless tracts of wavy sand dunes, camel trains and casbahs. “I want to see that before I get too old,” she said. “Now that you are retired, we can travel more. Certainly that new job will give you lots of time off if you insist.”

“Want to walk back to the ship, or get the coach?” asked Jack.

“Let’s walk,” Jean said with a laugh. “With all the fine meals on board and on shore, the exercise’ll do us good.”



Back aboard ship by 4 p.m., Hannah found a pamphlet on her bed-cover from the ship’s spa, the *OceanSpa Treatment Center*. She read the details describing the aromatherapy. It involved a variety of essential oils like camomile, lavender, sage, rose, rosemary, eucalyptus, and others. Apparently when the oils are applied to the skin and absorbed,

and also smelled by the nostrils, all connected to the brain, this triggers the limbic system, which influences the body's nervous systems and hormone levels. The different oils have effect on heart rate, blood pressure and breathing, while the hand massage treatment is very relaxing, enhancing these reactions. 'Interesting. I didn't know that.' Hannah had paid for one previous spa experience in Miami and enjoyed it.

"What do you think about having an aromatherapy treatment, Mrs. G.?" she asked over the ship's phone system. "You've had them before, I suppose?"

"Yes. Sounds great, Hannah. Do we need to make an appointment?"

"I'll make one now and let you know."

Two hours later, after the treatment they sat in the luxurious spa lounge, sipping cold lemonade and feeling thoroughly refreshed, inside and out.

"What strikes your fancy for this evening?" asked Hannah.

"What's our choices?"

"Well, lots actually." She picked up a daily activities sheet from the coffee table. "Okay. There's a musical review in the *Seascape Theatre*. I think it's music from the sixties and seventies era. A jazz quartet in the *Star Lounge*, a five-string group doing classical stuff in the *King Arthur Room*, and, for something really exciting, bingo in the upper cafe at eight, or the cruise director's usual evening quiz game in the *Polo Lounge*. Of course, if you'd like to spend some money, the casino opens after we get out to sea. Need to think about it?"

"Let me sit here and relax for a bit."

"Would you excuse me now, please? I'd like to go and skype Mom and Dad—see how they are. Be back soon."

Later, standing on the deck in the warm sunshine, the two women watched Lanzarote Island disappear behind them. Hannah had just returned from her skype session.

"Everything okay at home?"

Hannah said her parents were both fine, and send their regards.

“That’s nice of them. How does a nice dinner in the *Blue Sea* dining room sound, Hannah?”

“Yes, I’d like that.”

“Alright, let’s meet there at 7:30. Afterwards I think I’ll pay a visit to the casino. See if I can get lucky. I take it you want to go to the jazz review?”



Captain John Stuart was on the bridge when the ship undocked and left Arrecife Harbor at 1700 hours, no one missing the boat. ‘One more stop and I don’t have to worry about that,’ he thought to himself. So far, he was happy with the ship’s on-time schedules, his crew, and so far again, lack of vexing problems. Dr. Kent had confirmed his diagnosis that it was the big ‘D’ that had upset the two passengers, not the big ‘N’, which was good to know.

The next stop at Santa Cruz de la Palma on the westernmost island of the Canaries, was only a little more than two hundred nautical miles by cutting through the channel between here and Fuerteventura Island just to the south. It was a 12-hour sail. After tomorrow evening, he’d have nine clear days of sailing to Fort Lauderdale. This should enable him to continue writing his memoirs about the Royal Navy, at which he’d now begun crafting the Falklands War chapter. As far as he knew, no other British naval officer had penned what that experience was like. Besides being cathartic, he felt as though he owed it to the memory of those who lost their lives, in what he considered an unnecessary conflict, and would dedicate his book to them.

He planned to stay on the bridge until they cleared the straight between the two islands. Like many big-ship captains today, he couldn’t help but think occasionally of the recent fate of the Italian cruise ship *Costa Concordia* on the Italian coast, and its captain, Francesco Schettino. Best to take extra care sailing near shore.

He took stock of himself for a minute, reflecting about his life as

it was now. He had a very responsible command of a large, new ship, with a lot of people to care for, good pay, and respect for his position. At 55, he did not feel his age—rather, not much different from when he was forty or so. He was fit and kept himself that way, and a nice bonus on this cruise, his lovely wife was with him. Really, what more could a man ask for? Life was good. The first officer noted the slight smile on John's face, thought he knew what that meant, but said nothing.



In a similar vein, Mike Donnelly, in his office in the security section—having successfully boarded all his 'clients', as he often referred to the passengers, once again—was feeling good about himself. It reflected well on him and helped solidify his position in the WCL's security system. Moira had made a comment to him a long time ago, about assuming command of a ship, and he had dismissed that as wishful thinking on her part; just being nice to him. But she did sow that seed in his mind, inadvertently or on purpose, and that is what he was also reflecting on. Did he want to continue with security work until retirement, good as it was, or try to rise further in the ranks, so to speak, and, who knows, make it to the master's position? He knew that would require a lot of work, study, practice, and not the least, to be given the opportunity to advance by the Company. At this moment, it seemed like an uphill battle that he was not sure he wanted to take on, or indeed, could even achieve.

Thinking back to when he'd first joined World Cruise Lines as a lowly, junior security officer, he had done well for himself, and ought to be satisfied. And he was, but only to a point. 'Human beings, we are never satisfied,' he mused with a smile. His phone rang and broke his line of thought. Tucking it back into his mind, he picked up the handset phone and answered, "Security Section, Mike Donnelly."

"Mister Donnelly, it's Karl Goertz, deck eleven patrol. Was there

an announcement after we got underway, about the casino not being open this evening? A passenger just asked, and I did not hear it, although I could have been busy.”

“Let me check with Steve Marks. I’ll call you back.”

The cruise director said that he had called the purser’s office as the ship got underway to ask them to announce the casino would be closed. By now, most passengers likely understood about the 12-mile gambling limit, and in the case of this sailing to La Palma, the ship would steam in a direct line, almost all of it inside that limit. Steve too had been busy and had not heard the announcement.

A check with the purser’s office revealed that it had not been done.

“For some reason, we were swamped with people at the counter and telephone calls and overlooked that message. Sorry about that. We’ll do it right away,” said the desk clerk.

Mike asked the clerk to tell people why, that they were sailing within the 12-mile limit of Spanish territory, and that the casino would re-open tomorrow evening.

Mike called Karl back to tell him: “Just goes to show people can’t wait to lose their money. They’ll have to wait until we clear La Palma. Everything else okay, Karl?”

“Yeah, boss. Not a lot of people on this deck right now. Must be eating.”



The Sterlings had reserved places at a dinner table for eight, although there had been the option to eat by themselves. The other couples were from Ludwigshafen in Germany, Christchurch in New Zealand, and Austin, Texas, all retired. The German couple spoke fluent English. Quite a mixture of accents though. It seemed to Jack that they were a compatible group in spite of their geographical separation.

For ship’s guests, tonight was the first dress-up night. That meant

for the men, black tie or business suit and tie, with white shirt if possible, and if men had them, black patent leather shoes. The notice placed in each stateroom included two extra words for the men: *proper grooming*.

Jack said, “What do you think that means, hon? Do they refer to shaving, or to making sure your zipper is pulled up?”

Jean chuckled. “You missed out *clean fingernails*. No, I think it just means *no stubble*. If you shave, shave; if you have a beard, that’s okay. I’ll check you out before we leave. I would not go out with a scruffy dude.”

For the ladies naturally, it meant a formal dress with jewelry. In Jean’s case, a pale blue just-on-the-shoulder creation.

“I don’t like to be without *some* support” she told Jack, to which he replied, “Well, I can see why, love.”

A medium-length pearl necklace and matching earrings finished her appearance, and she carried a pearls-on-silver lamé clutch purse. Though her jewelry was likely not in the same value range as Mrs. G. from Miami Beach, Jean still kept whatever she wasn’t wearing in the small combination-lock safe in her cabin.

They were a handsome couple.

Formal dinner was in the *Grande Dining Room*, with a string quartet playing classical stuff. Jean and Jack generally enjoyed this kind of table arrangement. It was interesting to hear where people were from and about their backgrounds. Jack never said he was retired from a police force, but that he was a former bureaucrat, and if pressed, doing statistical work. When he said that, people would respond with a bored ‘*Oh*’, and quickly moved on.

After dinner, guests made their way to the *Seascope Grande Theatre* at the aft end of the ship for an eight o’clock concert by the ship’s orchestra, all professionally trained musicians. The guest maestro, Francesco Scallini from Florence, had been trained in Vienna, and at one time, had conducted the VSO. This evening’s repertoire of music included some European classical from the nineteenth century:

Mozart, Bach and Guiseppe Verdi—often referred to as ‘Joe Green’ by the stand-up comics on TV—and from the twentieth century, works by Verdi and Pucinni. The music from *Aida* was especially well-liked. On a lighter vein, music by George Gershwin was also performed.

After the concert was over at ten, Jean and Jack went up to the top deck for some air, a quick stroll around, taking in the smell of the warm ocean breeze as the ship moved along under the bright light from the third-quarter moon. They finished the evening at the little bistro coffee shop with a mug of hot chocolate, small slices of apple pie and Neapolitan ice cream, which Jack thought quite appropriate to finish off their evening. They’d be up early tomorrow to do a tour of La Palma.

THURSDAY, MAY 22

Santa Cruz de la Palma

The *Seascope* tied up at the only dock, close to the center of town, promptly at 7 o'clock, one of two ships in port, the second being a Spanish Navy destroyer escort. Captain Stuart thanked and said goodbye to the pilot. He was pleased to note the bustle of activity near his ship. That indicated that re-supply materiel—fuel (for the long voyage), water, fresh food—were ready to be taken aboard, starting at 0800, after many of the passengers had departed for tours on the awaiting motor coaches. He liked it when things were organized. Later in the morning, he intended to pay his respects to the captain of the navy ship, something he liked to do in ports whenever time permitted. The Spanish Navy had an especially good reputation for hospitality. After all, they'd been at it for centuries, he thought. Tactfully, he wouldn't mention the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

Another warm, bright, sunny day. 'Good for my passengers,' most of whom were taking advantage of walking on land for the last time, for a few days.

Satisfied that all seemed to be going well, he left the bridge and returned to his cabin. Susan was having a coffee at the small dining table and reading the latest world news, transmitted to the ship in early morning by head office, printed in the purser's office and distributed in clear plastic boxes in public areas. One item that was omitted was the news of a cruise ship, of another company, having its generators quit in the middle of the Caribbean. That meant no air conditioning,

no functioning toilets, cold food and having to be towed back to Miami.

“God, Susan, hope that never happens to me!”

He’d learned about this breakdown from his private line source.

She said, “It’ll be nice when we get underway this evening. I’m looking forward to a more relaxing time for you and for me.”

“Yeah, would be good. This is the first time you’ve crossed the Atlantic with me, sweetheart.” He didn’t tell her about the low pressure system building up about a thousand kilometres to the west, bringing the possibility of a bit of stormy weather. But, with luck, it would veer to the south and pass them by.



“Good morning, folks. Steve Marks talking to you again. World Cruise Lines welcomes you to the island of San Miguel de la Palma, the westernmost of the Canary group of islands. That huge chunk of rock that you see on the port side this morning is the remains of a collapsed volcano, called a *caldera*, almost eight thousand feet high as it stands now. That’s roughly 2400 metres. It occupies a lot of ground on this small island. It’s not been active for some time, and our captain assures me it won’t erupt today. Your tour guides will tell you much more.”

It was 7:30 a.m. and most passengers had finished or were having breakfast.

Continuing, Steve announced, “Those of you leaving for shore trips by bus should be prepared to disembark shortly. As usual, go to the theatre with your tickets. This stay here in La Palma is a short one. We will be departing promptly at 5 p.m. If you are taking a walking tour, please keep that time in mind. Also note, this is the last piece of land that you will be walking on for the next 9 days. This evening, we head out into the Atlantic Ocean. I’ll talk to you later today. Have fun and take care.”



The tour bus was almost full: 50 passengers.

“Good morning, everyone. Welcome to my bus and your tour of the island of San Miguel de la Palma. My name is Renata Alvares—‘Rene’ for short—and driving us today, we have the best driver in all of the Canaries: Benedito Costas or call him ‘Ben.’ We shall take a quick drive around town and then head out around the outer ring road, called the Island Road.

“Anyone know why these islands are called the Canaries? No? Good. The early settlers to these islands were thought to be from the Cro-Magnon era, based on skeletal findings, the pre-cursor to Modern Man. In their physical form, they were believed to have had blond or yellowy hair, hence the name *Canarios*, Spanish for the yellow Atlantic canaries. Since none of these people were around more recently, I’d like to know how they know that! But I digress. Obviously, we all speak Spanish, of course, but with our isolated position relative to Spain, we naturally speak with a different accent. Mainland people have a hard time understanding us, so we try to speak more formally with them. They tend to give us that ‘long-lost cousin’ look when they reply.

“This archipelago consists of seven islands, spread out over 270 miles from east to west, with, it may surprise you to know, a combined population today of a little over two million, with Las Palmas, here, the largest city. The mean average daily hours of sunshine is ten, and temperature is seventy Fahrenheit....”



In the security office aboard ship, the large wall clock read 10:30 and most of Mike’s day shift staff were enjoying their coffee break in the staff cafeteria. Things had gone well with the debarking passengers on their day trips, in two different departure times. An automatic

passenger count indicated that almost all had gone ashore, as Mike Donnelly expected they would. He had instructed his officers to remind passengers of the *Seascape's* departure time today, to reinforce the sign at the bottom of the gangway.

The ship's company appreciated the absence of passengers, as the ship was quiet for a change, and there were less demands on their services. They wouldn't get another such break until Miami. When he'd finished his routine paper work, Mike took the opportunity to call Moira, who was on the same time zone, Greenwich Mean Time, also referred to as the Western European Time Zone. She was in her office at work and although she said it was okay to talk for a while, he didn't like to do that. "Just checking up on you, Mrs. Donnelly."

"I suppose you'll be wantin' to hear me say *I love you*, Mr. Donnelly. Well, 'tis true. I do and I'm missin' your presence here. Yes, the boys are fine. Sean got an 'A' on his math test, so he did. I'll tell them you called when I get home. Bring something home for the lads, will you?"

After he hung up, for a few moments he felt lonely. 'This sailor'ing business is hard on a man at times,' he thought. 'Not the best fit with fathering and being a husband...'



Everyone was back aboard ship by 4:15 p.m. Clearly *no one* wanted to miss the boat... a bit of a relief for the captain and the chief of security. If a poll had been taken of these passengers asking two questions: 'Have you ever crossed an ocean before?' and 'What do you think about that?'—most would have replied 'no' to the first and 'I look forward to the experience' to the second, with, maybe, the proviso, 'Hoping we don't hit rough seas.'

At exactly two minutes to five, the gangway was pulled back into the ship's hull and the huge steel door closed. At five o'clock, the ship's horn sounded and the signal 'let go fore and aft' given from

the bridge. This was done smartly by the shore crew. Imperceptibly at first, the huge vessel started inching its way out, parallel from the dock.

The railing along the upper deck's starboard side was crowded with people, and many others were out on their cabin verandahs, all wanting to get a look at their departure from the island and the last piece of land for a while, as the ship glided out past the jetty and did a slow turn to port into deep water. The pilot left the ship after twenty minutes out, climbing down into a small launch that whisked him back to port to await the next incoming ship.

Seascope headed north to clear the top end of the island, before turning west into the Atlantic. Shortly after they were underway, the ship gave a distinct shudder. People on deck began looking at each other, one person asking if that was an earthquake they had felt. After all, the Caldera de Taburiente loomed large in the near distance.

Hannah Goldman and Rebecca Gessner were sitting on Mrs. G.'s expansive balcony, watching La Palma gradually fade off into the distance.

"Well, Hannah, I very much enjoyed today. Our tour guide was a very personable woman, with a good sense of humor and very informative. Although she did tend to use a lot of flowery language in her descriptions. Part of a tour guide's stock-in-trade maybe. Apart from Barcelona and Cadiz, I have enjoyed being here the most. I think I could easily stay for a week or more at that little town we stopped at for lunch—what was its name again?"

"Los Ariadne, I believe," replied Hannah.

"Yes. I really enjoyed our walk on the volcanic beach in our bare feet. The black sand felt very comfortable and the breeze quite bearable. The problem with these shore tours is that they're so darn brief and don't give enough time to take in all that you should see and hear. They try to cram in too much... But not to complain. I'm glad we got off the ship to do that. Do you mind if I sit here alone for a while? I need to do some thinking. Meet you for dinner at seven, okay?"

Hannah knew she wanted to think about her husband and remember him, and respectfully left Mrs. G. to her thoughts.



Tonight, few were on deck, except for the die-hard fitness buffs, some running around the track, and others doing brisk walks. The wind had picked up and it was too cool to sit around or go into the pools.

Activity below decks this evening consisted of several choices. An hour of bingo in the buffet dining room which could seat 300 people comfortably. Cards were one dollar each or five for four dollars. In the three small entertainment lounges, one could take in the string quartet for classical stuff, or a male jazz singer behind a piano, or a female singer accompanied by piano, trumpet and clarinet, doing current popular songs.

The shopping mall on deck four was crowded, including the *Olde English Inn* pub, boasting top British beer, such as John Smith's, various English stouts, India Pale Ale and something called Black Sheep Ale—from Yorkshire—very popular. Plus Guinness, of course. The center of the evening's activities though, was the *Casino*: jammed with people, with some waiting patiently behind a sitting player for the person to leave. It had opened promptly after the ship had been at sea for two hours.

Jack and Jean Sterling, after a buffet dinner, decided to 'walk the ship' and eventually wound up at the dastardly gambling den, as she called it.

Jack felt like playing, but one look at his wife's face suggested it might be better not to, not tonight. Both of them had done a fair amount of walking today on a tour, and, without a word necessary between them, took the elevator to their deck to turn in for the night. As they walked down the passageway to their stateroom, they passed a cabin door with a sign on it that said *Egg Hunting*. After passing by, Jean said, "What does that mean?"

Jack said, "I'll tell you when we get into bed."

It took another second or two before Jean said, "Oh, I get it."



In his Navy commander days, John Stuart had been schooled in *'walking the ship,'* an ancient British Navy tradition. This evening, he was on the bridge to begin his usual evening-at-sea ritual. It was 2300 hours. The officer of the watch signaled him over.

"Just to let you know, sir, we have a low pressure system ahead of us, approximately one thousand kilometres distant, bearing east-northeast. Intensity is 990 millibars, wind velocity 40 knots. With our present speed of 18.3 knots, we can expect, if it continues this direction, that the leading edge will meet us in approximately 18 hours—1700 hours tomorrow."

"Thanks, Mister Moresby. Noted. Let me know of changes, please."

Weather updates, via satellite, from U.S. National Weather Service, were constant. The situation would only become worrisome if the LPS increased in intensity and speed, and maintained its current direction. At this latitude, twenty-eight degrees north, it was not common for tropical systems to be quite this far north, and it may well swing off to the south. 'I certainly hope so,' John said to himself.

Crossing the Atlantic was never a predictable exercise in navigation.

The ship, and its human cargo, were slowly beginning to settle into 'life at sea' routine.

FRIDAY, MAY 23

Atlantic Ocean, West of the Canary Islands

Hannah Goldman decided to be lazy and treat herself to breakfast in her cabin. When it arrived—fresh-squeezed orange juice, medium boiled egg, two slices of whole wheat toast, marmalade and a carafe of coffee—she settled down at the white plastic table and chair on her verandah, with the daily newsletter delivered with the meal, and her laptop. ‘Really,’ she mused, ‘do I really want another job? This sure beats going to an office!’

She had called Mrs. G. who was doing the same thing. They agreed to meet at noon on the eleventh deck for a stroll. The sun was well up in the eastern sky and she could feel its warmth. She removed her bathrobe to absorb the rays on her bare arms and shoulders. From her south-facing position on the port side of the ship, she could see a low line of clouds in the far distance, just above the horizon. ‘Hmm, hope that’s not bad weather we’re heading for.’

Hannah didn’t care for being on a ship that moved around a lot beneath her. In the information sheet left in her cabin, she’d read that this vessel had stabilizers that were supposed to prevent excessive rolling. Checking the term out on *google*, she found that under the waterline were a set of fins, gyroscopically controlled, to counter the kind of movement caused by high wave activity and winds. They were supposed to lessen the effects of seasickness. She hoped so. No telling what kind of weather lay ahead. She decided she would not

point that out to Mrs. Gessner when she met her for a late lunch. Best not to worry about what Fate might bring.



At 7 p.m., a uniformed maid knocked on the double doors to *Crown Suite 7001* and called out, “Housekeeping.” She waited fifteen seconds and did that again. A few more seconds elapsed and the door was opened three inches, showing an older woman’s face.

The eyes regarded her for two or three seconds before the woman opened one of the doors and said, “I’m sorry, I was at the far end of the suite and didn’t hear you knock at first,” letting in the young woman. “You’re here to do my suite for me, I suppose. Is—what’s her name—Teresa, off tonight?” she asked.

“She’s sick and I’m filling in for her, ma’am,” the maid replied. “My name is Vessie,” she added, touching her name tag that read *Vesna G.*

Her duty was to do any tidying up, wash dishes, empty several waste baskets, remove and replace soiled towels, replace toilet paper rolls, turn down the bed covers, leave two small cubes of Cadbury’s chocolates on the pillows and, finally, make an animal out of the fresh towels and face cloths and place it on the bed cover. She decided on a tortoise and finished it by placing two black dots for eyes at the end of its short towel neck. All of this took her just over fifteen minutes.

While engaged in these activities, she noted the occupant was getting ready to go out. Her evening dress was laid out at the bottom of the huge bed and beside it, her jewelry. Vessie couldn’t believe her eyes. The diamond necklace, with a large ruby pendant, was at least twenty inches long. Next to it was a soft, grey cloth jewelry bag with the Tiffany Company logo and name embossed on the side. No doubt there were more treasures in the bag.

Mrs. Gessner saw the maid eyeing the jewelry and removed the necklace and bag to the bathroom where she was applying her makeup.

‘My God!’ the young woman thought. ‘What could that be worth? Well, she must have *lots* of money—this suite must cost an arm and a leg. Probably more than I make in a year.’ For the rest of the evening, she could think of nothing else. ‘That necklace is simply to *die for*.’



After a lazy day, enjoying being at sea, no land in sight, no screaming kids, the Sterlings watched a glowing red sunset while they enjoyed a buffet dinner. The afternoon weather had been somewhat stormy, but nothing unsettling. They went for a promenade walk and then up to the *Lido* to watch an evening movie on the big screen, just as it got dark. It was a new George Clooney film, *Gravity*, released earlier this year, co-starring Sandra Bullock. He was Jean’s most favorite actor, and Jack appreciated Sandra’s perky character.

“Enjoying the cruise so far, Jack?”

“Very much so, honey. Nice to be able to relax like this. Nothing much to do. No housekeeping, no meals to cook. As an Australian police inspector I met at the Canadian Police College would say, ‘*No worries, mate.*’”



Soon after 9:00 p.m., when she was off duty, Vessie met her male friend in the staff dining room on deck two for a late meal and told him about the jewelry.

“How much do you think it’s worth?” he asked.

“Don’t know. Lots. It’s a Tiffany necklace. Tens of thousands, I should think.”

“Gotta be if she can pay over thirty grand for her room. What I could do with that money! Rich bitch would hardly miss it if it was gone....”

SATURDAY, MAY 24

At sea

Yesterday, during the day, human activity aboard ship was minimal. People were just ‘vegetating’. The storm from the west had sideswiped the ship as it passed by yesterday afternoon, producing a bit of slow rolling motion, with stiff breezes and cloudy skies, so that people had to bend forward a little when walking. No one sat outside. Pools were empty. Many spent much of the day resting, or reading magazines and books in the library, or playing chess and other games, or browsing in the *Arcade*. The casino did good business. Some took the opportunity to connect with relatives by skype, phones or email. The *Seascope* had traveled 439 nautical miles further west across the Atlantic in 24 hours.

Today was quite different; cloudless skies, little wind and a steady ship. The upper decks were active, most of the deck chairs and chaise lounges occupied, many tabletops had tall glasses with little colored paper umbrellas stuck in the liquid, the swimming pools were filled with splashing people while others were playing deck shuffleboard or chess, with three feet tall pieces. A noisy, happy group, enjoying their lives at sea.

At 12 noon, Steve Marks’ voice sounded on the PA system. “Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, a gorgeous day. I hope you are enjoying yourselves. According to our weather people, the next six days should be like this one.” He was standing on the pool deck amid some of the passengers. “I have a couple of things to remind you about.

First, it's bingo night! The jackpot so far is unclaimed, and now sits at \$2,500 dollars. Starts at eight in the upper lounge.

“Next, a reminder about our musical event happening this evening. In the *Starlight Theater*, a shorter rendition of none other than the critically acclaimed Broadway musical, *Cabaret!* It's the kind of show that, if you've seen it before, you'd love to go again, and here's your opportunity. There are two presentations—first at 7:30 p.m. and the second at 10. As always, seats are first come, first served. I'll have another announcement in a day or two about our final stage show on the thirty-first.

“Finally, just another gentle reminder, folks, about your health. Use the hand cleaners often, and if you have to, sneeze carefully! Thanks for your attention. By the way, if anyone needs to see me, I'm available in the library lounge for a couple of hours in the afternoons, from two to four. I have a desk with my name on it—Steve Marks. Do come say hello.”



The presentation of *Cabaret* had been reduced in scale and scope to fit the ship's stage and a one-hour time limit. While the *Starlight Theatre* could seat about 1,000 people per show, many guests, arriving less than ten minutes before show time, were turned away. They'd have to see the later show.

The Sterlings had thought about the show's likely popularity and decided to arrive when the doors were opened at 6:45. The best seats were in the center section, halfway back, and that's where they were sitting. Both had seen the 1972 movie, starring Liza Minnelli and Joel Grey, but not the stage version and were really looking forward to a different experience. The production company was from Los Angeles, with professional singers and dancers.

The music was to be provided by the ship's resident orchestra, but, unusually, none of the introductory music was played before the

curtain went up. Jean remarked on this and Jack said, "It's probably for dramatic effect, I would think."

The lights dimmed and went out. The theater became very quiet. There was a feeling of anticipation in the air.

Just as the curtain was rising, the first few bars of the opening number, *Wilkommen*, blasted into the theater from the orchestra pit, as the female singer-dancers appeared, doing a Can-Can dance. Behind them, the set showed the inside of the Kit Kat Klub in Berlin, circa. 1931, with small, round, beer tables occupied by men, a few wearing the red, white and black Nazi swastika armband on their jackets. Sitting at one of the tables was the male lead, Clifford Bradshaw, a young American writer. The first song finished with the chorus girls in line, in a slow tap dance, repeating "*Wilkommen, bienvenue, welcome!*"

The actress playing the lead role as Sally Bowles even looked and sang a bit like Liza Minnelli in the movie, especially the theme song, *Come to the Cabaret*. It was as much as anyone in the audience could do, not to break out in song and join in. The show was a hit, the whole audience giving a standing ovation to the cast, spread out in line across the stage, taking several bows. On their way out of the theater, everyone was humming or singing the songs.

Jean said to her husband, "Let's parade around this deck for a while, in our nice clothes, Jack. We're lookin' good."

"Jean Sterling, you're a bit of a show-off. You should have been in show business," replied Jack, as he took her arm and began to promenade, "Feelin' good, too!"

SUNDAY, MAY 25

At sea

It was a bone lazy day for the Sterlings. “What day is it today, Jack? I’m already losing track of time,” asked Jean as they got up.

“I think it’s a Sunday, May 25.”

After a leisurely breakfast, they did a fast walk round the deck track, followed by a swim and a hot tub soak, which made them feel good, and healthy. Jean found two chaise lounge chairs, and Jack walked down to deck 5 to the purser’s office and picked up a copy of the news sheet, called the *Seascope Daily News*. On the wall behind the long front desk were 6 clocks showing the current times in major world cities, and on a large LED screen, the ship’s current position at sea, in latitude and longitude, miles traveled today, and miles from final destination. For the Europeans, the distances were also shown in kilometres.

Back on deck, Jack covered himself with a high index sun tan lotion, put on his Toronto Blue Jays baseball cap, sunglasses, sat down and stretched out on the deck chair to read the *News*. Jean was wearing a wide-brimmed floppy sun hat and sunglasses. She was halfway through reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* by the British author E.L. James. She could be heard occasionally muttering, or saying ‘Oh, my God!’ to the amusement of Jack.

“Really getting into that story, eh, hon?”

“It leaves little to the imagination. Not sure I need to read the second and third volumes. Wonder if Avery has read this?”

“I’m not sure I want to ask her. By the way, I see in today’s

shipboard bulletin that there is a ship's tour tomorrow and Tuesday—three hours each day—from bottom to top except the engine room area. Sounds interesting. Mind if I go? It's a hundred and fifty."

In the afternoon, Jack spent a couple of hours in the casino, while Jean browsed the shops in the arcade, looking for something for her daughter. When they met later in the *Bistro*, they compared spending notes. She had spent just over one hundred dollars on clothing, and he had spent exactly one hundred dollars—on nothing....



It was 6:30 p.m., and the *Imperial Dining Room*, classy by any world standard, was busy. Still beautiful weather. Hannah Goldman had decided to go to a five-piece violin recital in the *Music Room*, while Mrs. Gessner, dressed up for dinner, arrived in the dining room just after seven, to find most of the eight-person tables almost full. Taking a seat with six other guests, she said, "Hello" and introduced herself.

Abe Shuster found himself in the same situation. Spotting one vacant seat at a table, he politely asked if anyone else was expected. No one was, so he sat down and introduced himself. Looking at Rebecca Gessner, he asked if she was with the other guests and she said, "No, I'm traveling alone. And you?"

"Yes. Me too. I'm sorry, what did you say your name was?"

"Rebecca Gessner."

"Once again, Abe Shuster. Enjoying the cruise so far?" he asked, noticing the gold band and diamond engagement ring on her left hand.

"Yes, I find it very relaxing, especially now that we are at sea. Those shore trips are fine and interesting, but a bit tiring, don't you think?"

"Yes, yes. I agree. And it's nice to get away from the bustle of Miami." He also noticed the expensive jewelry she was wearing around her neck, glittering under the overhead chandelier.

“Oh, I’m from that area, up the coast a bit at Palm Beach,” Mrs. G. replied softly.

“How about that. I live in Coral Way. I noticed you here yesterday evening, with a younger woman. Your daughter?”

“Oh no, that’s my assistant, Hannah. She’s at the jazz thing this evening. That’s not really my kind of music.”

“I take it you’ve cruised before?”

“Yes, a few times, but not on this crossing. You?”

“Likewise. This is my fourth cruise. It’s a nice ship. It’s been a few years since my last one. My wife, Esther, she died five years ago and I’ve been busy with my business since.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. My husband passed about that time too.”

Abe Shuster thoroughly enjoyed dinner with his new-found companion. He found her very personable and quite good looking. While desert was being served, he said, “If I may ask, Mrs. Gessner—”

“—Please, call me Rebecca.”

“Rebecca. Are you doing anything after dinner?”

“No, not much. I usually like to go for a stroll on the upper deck if it’s not too chilly.”

“Would you mind if I accompany you? I like to walk too. Good for the digestion.”

When they were finished their dinner and stroll, he got up the nerve to ask her if he could escort her back to her cabin. When he arrived at *Crown Suite 7001*, he realized he had chosen the wrong noun. *7001* was hardly a cabin.

“Thank you, Rebecca, for a very pleasant evening. So, two o’clock for lunch then?”

“Yes. I’d like that. Give me a call beforehand. You know my suite number. Thank you for a nice evening too, Abe. Goodnight.”

“Ship security,” answered the female operator. The time was 9:55 p.m.

“Hello, this is John Clements, the evening casino manager. Can you send a couple of your people here, right away? We’ve had an assault.”

“Do you need a male and female officer, or two males?”

“There’s a woman involved, so I guess a man and a woman would be better.”

“Okay. Hold on a minute while I dispatch them, then I’ll get more details.” Back on line, she said, “Okay, John, two security officers attending and Mr. Donnelly is also on his way. What happened?”

“We’ve had a fight. Four people, two males and two females. From what I can make out, at least initially, is that one of the men bumped into the female partner of the other guy and swore at her after he spilled his drink on his clothes. The other guy took offense and the fight was on, with lots of shouting and swearing between them. One of the women was knocked down in the melee and banged her head, causing a small cut. She’s being escorted to the infirmary to have the wound sutured. Casino staff have separated the two combatants, but they’re still both very agitated. You can hear the shouting still.”

Ultimately the incident required four male officers to intervene and safely remove the two somewhat inebriated men from the casino to the security office. Both were told that unless they calmed down, they’d be placed in the ship’s brig overnight. As well, there would be the possibility that they would be barred from sailing with World Cruise Lines again, and that one of them could face an assault charge. In any event, the matter would have to be reported to the FBI in Miami.

They were escorted back to their cabins, much subdued and a bit chagrined, and told to remain there for the rest of the night. They were also advised that if they left, security would know by monitoring the CCTV cameras. The injured woman would be returned to her stateroom after treatment.

Mike Donnelly would see the two individuals tomorrow morning

at eight to check their attitudes and meet with Captain Stuart after, to check on what else, if anything, he wished to be done. Obviously the ship could not turn back to La Palma to eject the two miscreants. Hopefully that was the first and last problem on this trip, Mike thought to himself, finishing off the report.



“How was your evening, Mrs. G.?” asked Hannah as she entered the suite for a quick visit, before retiring to her cabin. It was just after ten.

“I had an absolutely wonderful time except for when we walked through the casino. I’ll tell you about that incident in a minute. Hannah, *I met a very charming man!* —at my table,” she replied, telling Hannah about the meeting over dinner. “And he’s from the old part of the city, Coral Way.”

“That’s nice. Tell me more.”

“Well, his name’s Abe Shuster. You just missed him by the way. He saw me to the suite—a real gentleman. He’s about my age, a widower, his wife having died about five years ago, and has one son, who now runs his business, the biggest GM dealership in the city, Miami GM. He still remains active, kind of overseeing the operation.”

“Well, I am pleased for you. Maybe I’ll meet him tomorrow?”

“Yes. We are meeting for a light lunch on the pool deck at 2 o’clock. Would you like to join us?”

“Thank you. I might drop by and say hello. What happened in the casino? Was Abe—Mr. Shuster—with you?” and Mrs. G. told her about witnessing the fight.

On her way down to her cabin, Hannah thought to herself, ‘Well, how about that. I’ll have to check this guy out. Is he genuine, or a gold-digger? At least he’s Jewish.’

She’d do some online research this evening. ‘Miami GM has a huge presence, so maybe this guy is super rich too.’

MONDAY, MAY 26

At sea

Mike Donnelly had discussed the case of the rowdies from the evening before with his staff. He had re-interviewed the culprits earlier this morning, in the security office. This morning the two men were very subdued and apologetic, and obviously a fair bit intimidated by the threat of their actions being reported to the FBI. Mike let that hang over them. When he met with the captain later, he explained they were very apologetic and he did not expect anything but the best of behavior from now on.

No report to the FBI needed, agreed Captain Stuart, just to remain on the ship's daily log. "Let's hope we're trouble-free for the remainder of the cruise."



"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Your cruise director, Steve Marks, again. Another beautiful day for us all. I have a few updates for you. These are in today's daily news sheet. You will notice an announcement about our next and final theatrical presentation for this cruise. It's called *North Atlantic* and will be staged one night only, May thirty-first. More information to follow.

"Today in the *Polo Lounge* at ten-thirty, an interesting talk about the operation of this cruise ship. What moves it—the engine

room—and how we sail, or navigate. Once again, that’s ten-thirty in the *Polo Lounge*. Enjoy yourselves.”



Finishing their breakfast at nine-thirty, the two women went for a brisk walk around the pool deck a couple of times and found two empty deck chairs together, near the salt-water pool. They’d catch a few rays, then move into the shade. Hannah carried a satchel from which she produced her 13-inch MacBookPro laptop, and with her boss’s okay, started tapping away, while Mrs. G. glanced at ship’s bulletin newsletter. It had a bit of world news, U.S. news and, of more interest to her, the stock market quotes from last Friday.

Hannah, meantime, had almost finished her discreet investigation of Abraham Joseph Shuster. She was now reviewing the financial standing of Miami GM and confirming the status of his residential property: registered in his name, with no mortgage. Approximate market value: three million. ‘Hmm, unless he has ulterior motives, sounds like he’s genuine,’ she concluded. ‘Would be nice for Mrs. G. to have a little spice in her life. We’ll see how it goes...’

Sometime later, Rebecca Gessner interrupted their conversation to say, a little excitedly, “Speaking of the man, there he is,” pointing at the person on the other side of the pool. “Shall we say hello?” she asked Hannah.

“Sure, why not?”

Leaving their towels on their chairs, they walked across. After a few minutes of conversation, Hannah was convinced he did not pose a threat to Mrs. G. She would monitor from a distance however.

Abe asked if they would like to join him for lunch later. Mrs. G. said that would be nice, while Hannah graciously declined. She said that, after calling her parents, she’d spend the rest of the day by herself reading, unless Mrs. G. called her.



Mike Donnelly kept the two combatants in suspense until four o'clock before letting them know of his decision. In the late afternoon, he did a walk-around of the decks—his *law and order patrol*, as he referred to it. At times, he had to admit that he felt a bit like the captain walking the ship. 'Hmm, I wonder if one day that could be me with four bars,' he thought to himself. 'Anyway, hope there are no more problems.'

The passengers seemed to be settling down for the long haul. He spotted the retired Canadian police officer, sitting on deck with his wife. Mike thought about saying hello to them again, but they were in conversation, and he did not want to interrupt.



Day three at sea found most everyone had gained their sea legs, now obvious from the lack of staggering from side to side. People were anticipating the slow roll of the deck. The warm sun and cool air kept many passengers top side, and all the deck chairs were occupied. For most people, it just felt good to be lazy.

Rebecca Gessner had had a great day, spending much of it with Abe Shuster, and an even nicer evening. First, an early dinner in the *Grande Dining Room*, and then on to the *Lido Club* for some energetic dancing. She found she thoroughly enjoyed Abe's company.

By 9:30, she felt a bit tired and he escorted her to her suite, reluctantly saying good night to her, outside.

"See you tomorrow?" he asked, hopefully.

She nodded and said she would call. He reached for her hand and kissed the back of it elegantly, smiled, turned and walked to the elevator. It was now 9:45.

After showering, Rebecca towed-off and used the blow drier on her hair. She dressed in her blue silk nightie, brushed her teeth, and opened the door to go to her bedroom, looking forward to

continuing her almost finished new book, *The Scarlet Sentinels*. It was a story about the Canadian Mounties—which she could hardly put down—given to her by her friend, Mrs. Becky Schultz, who had recently returned from a trip to Vancouver. Reading typically helped her to fall asleep. She wouldn't have that opportunity.



The man was dressed in black pants and a continental style, short, cutaway, white waiter's jacket. He carried a tray on the upturned flat of his left hand, held up next to his head, while he knocked on one of the double doors to *Crown Suite 7001*. It was just after 10 p.m. After a few seconds, he knocked again, more firmly. He was wearing white gloves. No response.

'Good,' he thought. 'Still out.' He inserted a pass-key card into the metal slot, withdrew it quickly and pushed open the door, walking in. He expected to be in there for only a couple of minutes or so.

The vast suite appeared empty, but he still called, "Room Service."

No response. As he made his way across the rug, the phone rang. It startled him. He stood still and let it ring, five times, until the ringing stopped. 'Place is definitely empty,' he thought.

As he advanced into the bedroom, the first thing he saw was the diamond necklace and earrings Vessie had told him about, lying on top of the white, brocaded bedspread. 'Bingo!' he silently exclaimed. Picking them up, he stuffed them into the small side pocket of this waiter's jacket. Spotting the Tiffany cloth bag, he was putting it into his trouser pocket, when he heard a woman's loud voice—.

As Rebecca Gessner left the bathroom, turning to enter her bedroom, she stopped in her tracks. There was a man dressed in what looked like either a cleaner's or waiter's uniform, standing by her bed. Very surprised, she said in a loud, demanding voice, "Who are you?! *What are you doing here?!*"

Her sudden appearance startled him and before he could reply,

she quickly walked toward him, noticing part of a chain of diamonds hanging out of the small side pocket of the white jacket. Taking a fleeting glance at her bedcover, she noticed one thing that was obviously missing—her necklace!

She rushed at the man, knocking him on her bed, screaming furiously, “Give me my necklace back!”

The man reached out to the serving tray he’d laid on the bedspread, knocked the metal cover off, pushed the teapot aside and picked up a short-bladed, serrated knife. She was punching and slapping him on the face, and shouting.

Blocking her barrage with one arm, he managed to sit up and then stand up, pushing her hard onto the bed. She fell on her back, partly across the mattress, her legs over the edge, and head resting briefly on one of the six pillows. By now, she was in full-volume screaming mode, ear-piercing sounds of “*Help! Thief! Somebody HELP ME!*”

‘Jesus!’ thought the man. ‘I’ve got to shut her up or I’ll get caught.’

Raising his left arm, he was about to bring the knife down when she reach up with her right hand and grabbed the blade. Pulling his hand and knife back forcibly, he then swung his arm down and plunged the blade fully into the left side of her neck, cutting the carotid artery. Then, with some effort, he pulled the blade around her throat to the right ear. In doing this, his hand slipped down the knife handle a bit, cutting the outer side of his palm, through the glove.

Under the bright light of the elaborate chandelier, a look of sheer terror was locked in her eyes, a sight that would haunt him the rest of his life. Except for a combat situation back home during the war, this was the closest he’d ever been to someone he knew he’d killed. She’d stopped screaming and the only sound in the now almost quiet bedroom was her rasping efforts at trying to breathe, while the dark-red venous blood spurted from the jagged gap in her neck. Her body shuddered for a few more seconds, then all muscles released. Blood had sprayed onto the pillow. With the edge of the mattress depressed by her weight, a voluminous quantity of dark red blood

flowed quickly alongside her buttocks and onto the carpet where the man was standing. He was out of breath and surprised at what he'd just done.

Willing himself out of the shock, the man realized he had to get out of the suite as quickly as possible, without leaving evidence in the suite or being obvious out in the passageway. He noted some blood on the palm of his left glove. 'Hers or mine? I need to clean up.'

Carrying the knife, he went quickly into the bathroom. In the mirror, he saw a spattering of blood on the front of his jacket and white tuxedo shirt. Taking off the gloves, he discovered a small cut on the outer side of the palm on his left hand. 'How the Hell did *that* happen?'

Turning on the faucet, he rinsed the blood off the knife, splashed his hands under the water and dried them and his sweaty face with the folded paper towels on the counter, throwing them in the waste bin. The cut still slowly leaked blood, so he wrapped his palm in a face cloth.

'Alright,' he said to himself, 'how do I hide the blood on my shirt? I know—take the jacket off, reverse it, put it on again and turn the lapels outwards to the front.'

While he did that, seeing the toilet bowl reminded him that he urgently needed a pee, so he quickly relieved himself.

Carrying the gloves, he returned to the bedroom, taking one quick glance at the dead woman, her hands up at her neck. He shuddered, then replaced the knife on the serving tray and put the white gloves under the tray cover. Glancing around, he noticed red footprints on the rug! Shrugging, he thought, 'Nothing I can do about that now. I gotta get outta here *fast*.'

Just as he was about to step through the door into the passageway, he reminded himself, 'Oh yeah, hold the tray up in my right hand.'

As he got off the elevator at his cabin deck, he bent down and placed the meal tray on the floor. Somebody'll take it away and it'll be cleaned, he knew. Any evidence would be washed away.

TUESDAY, MAY 27

At sea

Lying in his single bed in the darkened cabin, he groped for his watch on the small side table and moved the luminous dial close to his face. 0600. He'd last checked at 4 o'clock. No sleep in between. In fact, he'd hardly slept during the night. His mind was reliving the events of the previous evening.

He'd seen death and dying in his young life, but this was different. He wondered if it all wasn't just a bad dream, a throwback to his youth in his home country of Croatia.

Sitting up, he put on the sidetable lamp. As his eyes moved around the small, two-bed room, he saw the dining table with an empty glass and a liquor bottle beside it, remembering the three or four stiff undiluted drinks he'd had on his return, around ten-thirty. He thought they'd help him sleep, but it didn't work. He remembered replaying, over and over in his mind, what happened—what he did.

'Why am I upset? I've killed before.' When he reflected on that though, he believed he'd only killed when his life had been under threat, from rifles or machine guns, at a distance. And he wasn't certain any of his shots had actually killed someone.

Sitting on the side of his bed, head bent forward, he ran his hands through his hair, thinking, 'Shit! Shit! *SHIT!* What am I going to tell Vessie?'

She was back on day shift, after a couple of evening spells relieving someone. That was when she'd seen the jewelry.

He next thought of the necklace and opened the small drawer in the side table and took it out, laying it on the top. He had flushed the small, Tiffany cloth bag down the toilet earlier. Even in the reduced light of the 60-watt bulb, the necklace's many diamonds and rubies gleamed, almost mesmerizing. 'Was it all worth it?' he wondered. 'Better be.'

He was lucky to be assigned a room by himself. He didn't like to share and when he had to, he tried to get a different shift for work, day or evening. He was on days for this cruise, having to be 'on-deck' literally, at 0700 hours to 1500, as a ship's cleaner.

Decks were always the first to be done, as the pools and deck games were often in use until late evening, and sometimes left in a bit of a mess. Decks had to be scrubbed and hosed down, furniture, deck-rails, handrails and glass surfaces cleaned with a strong detergent to ward off the dreaded norovirus that seemed to afflict some cruise ships. Shaking hands among crew members and among passengers was strongly discouraged to try to keep the virus at bay. Cleaning was taken seriously, and supervisors, wearing white gloves, would sometimes follow cleaners to check their work. The pools were continuously 'dipped' for water samples. For Rad, cleaning wasn't a strenuous job but very boring. It was paid work though—and there were the tips to share in at the end of the cruise.

'Alright, let's get myself sorted out. Not a lot of time. First, hide the necklace, but where? If they search the cabin now, they'll probably find it. Hide it on the ship somewhere? Two possible things wrong with that idea. First, what if someone sees me hiding it? Second, it could be found by a crew member doing inspections or cleaning.'

Pondering this for a minute, he decided to put the jewelry in a sock and carry it in his pocket, in his uniform, or in his civvy pants. 'That way, as unlikely as it is, if my room is searched, they won't find it and maybe they won't search me. I'll have to give that a bit more thinking. There aren't no real police on a cruise ship anyway.'

He'd already discarded his waiter's uniform, having changed in

his cabin after he'd returned from the suite, placing the pants and the bloody, white jacket in one plastic bag, and the shirt and serving gloves in another, putting them in two separate waste bins nearby on the crew deck. That reminded him about the one-inch-long cut on his hand. It wasn't deep and he had covered it with a handkerchief before lying down. He did not have a band-aid. By now, the cut had dried. 'Must get a piece of tape from one of the ship's first aid kits and cover it up.'

He remembered leaving the serving tray, tea pot and chinaware in the elevator on the way down. No cameras in there.

'Okay, a quick call to Vess before she leaves.' It was early but he had to tell her.

With the minimum of conversation, Rad made arrangements to go to her cabin when he got off work. He did not want to discuss anything over the phone.



Marie Fortunato got off the elevator at aft-deck 7, pushing her cleaning cart to the large double doors of *Crown Suite 7001*, straight ahead of her. It was 8:35 a.m. and her first stop of the morning. She had been cleaning cabins, of all sizes, passenger and crew accommodation alike, with WCL for the past 3 years. For the most part, she enjoyed her work and found most passengers treated her well. Tips were generally good, although it had been her experience that people in the smaller rooms tipped her better than those in the bigger staterooms, or the 3 big opulent suites. Strange how people with money were so cheap. 'I guess that's one way of staying wealthy, keeping your money.' She didn't like the slobs either, as her friends called them: people leaving their dirty clothes and wet towels on the floor, food on the plates, the TV on, and toilets un-flushed. But this lady in *7001*, the lone occupant, was the opposite; her place was always clean and tidy and she

was very polite to her, almost friendly. Marie was expecting a nice gratuity for once.

She noticed there was no *RESTING* card in the door slot. That meant that the suite was still occupied or the occupant had left, forgetting to put out the *SERVICE REQUIRED* sign.

It was breakfast time. Many guests had vacated their cabins by now, though because the ship was at sea, the lady could be having a late breakfast. As a cleaner, the rule was, knock and wait for a response, twice, and then use her pass-card to enter, standing just inside the door and calling out, "Housekeeping."

Hearing no reply, she entered and pulled her cart into the huge foyer area and left the door open by means of a small, rubber chock: another rule. From here, she could go right, into the bedroom; straight, into the large living room; or left, into a lounge, library, TV room and then into a kitchen area. Behind all of this ran an outside verandah the whole width of the ship. It would take her an hour to clean the place. Her first room would be the bedroom.

Reaching down to the cart's bottom shelf, she removed her cleaning cloths, disinfectant soap and spray polish. The order of cleaning was: make the bed, dust all the furniture and apply polish, wash down the bathroom, toilet and shower, replace the towels and toilet paper, do the marble floor and clean the glass and mirrors. Next, the kitchen and sitting room, and the lounge, followed lastly by vacuuming all the rug-covered area, finishing up at the door.

While she was taking cleaning items off the cart, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed two or three red marks on the tiled floor of the foyer, to her right. Standing up, she noted more, a bit smudgier, and then, taking a pace forward, saw more red, footprint-like marks on the pale blue carpet in the entrance to the bedroom. At first, her brain wouldn't register what they were, until she took four paces into the bedroom, avoiding the marks. Then she saw, and knew.

As she raised her eyes and looked over toward the bed, she saw a pool of reddish goop on the rug beside it and a nighty-clad body on

the edge of the bed nearest her. She tried to scream but was momentarily paralyzed.

“*Oh! My God!*” she finally blurted out, putting her hands up to her face, as if to blot out the vision.

After a moment or two, recovering herself, she backed out of the bedroom and saw the white slim-line telephone on the ebony table beside the doors. Picking it up, she pressed the number for the ship’s operator, who responded, “Front desk. May I help you?”

Marie hadn’t thought about what to say.

The operator repeated, “May I help you?”

“*Yes, it’s me!*” Marie finally shouted. “I’m in *Suite 7001*. Someone’s been hurt. I think the person may be *dead!*”

After getting the cleaner’s name and why she was in the suite, the operator told her to calm down, wait where she was and that she would call her supervisor.

As a result of the frantic call, the supervisor of housekeeping operations, Ellen Sokolofsky, arrived in three minutes. Her first job was to calm Marie down. The woman had taken a chair and placed it beside the doors to sit and wait. She refused to re-enter the bedroom when asked.

The supervisor went in alone and could be heard to gasp at what she saw. Coming out, she said, “I’m going to call the hotel manager, Marie. I’m afraid you’ll have to stay.”

Using her cell phone, Ellen made the call.



The hotel manager has a large responsibility aboard a cruise ship, part of the four main operations: the bridge and deck (which includes security), engine room, technical and hotel. This last designation has by far the largest number of crew and includes catering (food preparation), kitchen, wait staff, ship and cabin cleaning, and entertainment. Managing this operation was an exhausting task and required a high

degree of organization, stamina, patience and long, continuous days at work. Today, however, was not typical.

Now that the death had been officially reported to him, Hotel Manager Fritz Hauptmann thought it prudent to call the chief of security before leaving his office in the administrative area. He asked Mike to meet him at the suite asap, explaining that there may have been a sudden death of the female passenger there.

Mike Donnelly quickly checked the passenger list for that suite, noting only one occupant registered, a Mrs. Rebecca Gessner, from Miami, probably American.

With another security officer, he arrived at the suite six minutes later, meeting Hauptmann and the two women standing just inside the doors.

He entered the bedroom, being careful where he stepped. He stopped short of the bed and looked, observing a late-middle-aged female, dressed in a bloody, pale blue nightgown, lying on her back in a pool of blood, with, from where he could see, her throat cut. He'd never seen a murder victim before and was taken aback by the brutality of what he saw. There was no doubt in his mind she was dead.

"Jesus, just what we need!" he lamented half under his breath.

"Captain's gonna be unhappy," Mike said to the security officer. "Guess I'd better let him know now."

He called the bridge with the details as he saw them.

He was right. The captain swore. "Call Dr. Kent, Mike, and have him attend right away, please. Get back to me as soon as you can. I'd like you here when I call the Head Office. And, Mike... do everything you can to keep this quiet from the crew and passengers."

Mike made the call, asking the physician to attend as soon as possible, which he promised to do.

Returning to the suite's foyer, Mike asked both women for an account of their activity, and told them to make notes about that as soon as possible, telling them not to discuss this with *anyone*, he emphasized.

He asked Marie to take off her shoes and show him the soles.

Seeing what looked like blood on the bottoms, he told her he would need them and would get her another pair before long, asking her supervisor to arrange that.

Before leaving, Fritz Hauptmann asked Mike why he was keeping her shoes and not those of the supervisor and his. Mike explained that the housekeeper was first to find the body. Unlikely as it seems, he said that made her a possible suspect and her shoes, or more particularly the blood on the soles, could be evidence. Seeing that Fritz and Ellen arrived *after* Marie made her call, they were very unlikely suspects, he said, with a slight smile.

‘Gees, where did I get that idea from?’ Mike asked himself. ‘Good thing I watch police shows on the telly, because this goes *way* beyond my training.’



In the suite, absent the female staff, Dr. Kent remarked to Mike about the bloody mess as he examined the body, both men careful to not to step in the rubbery blood patch on the rug beside the bed. Mike asked if he could officially determine the cause of death—which seemed somewhat obvious—and time of death, without moving the body just now. The doctor inserted a thermometer into the victim’s rectum, “Which may be the warmest part of the body, to check her temperature,” he told the officer.

He then asked Mike to check the room temperature, which felt a little warm. With the initial result of this test for rigor mortis, he estimated that death occurred yesterday evening, without giving an exact time, making a note of this on his pad. “I need to come back and do a more thorough examination, probably should work through a full rape kit procedure. I’ll check a few items and call you with any results of this preliminary examination, Mike.”

Rather than use the ship’s communication, Mike thought it better to report the details to the captain in person. It was a five-minute