



In the Water

Thomas McKinley

A weeklong trip in the Caribbean. What could go wrong?

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The ship is gone. Oh my god, the ship is just gone. I woke up to this sound like a whoosh outside in the hallway and a crewman pushing me down and out the door outside onto the deck. Just as we got out the ship shifted to the right then I remember seeing the water as it got closer or really as I fell in with the ship rolling. The water was warm and salty. Something hit my head and went below the waves. A deck chair dropped and nearly took me down with it. All around me, people screamed. A lifeboat broke away from the side and slipped down the hull. The lifeboat pushed away then drifted to me. I slipped into it and grabbed an oar hoping to help others. The ship shifted back and was once again upright in the water. A girl grabbed onto the side of the lifeboat, and I helped her in. The other people in the water swam back to the ship and slowly climbed back on board. A member of the crew wave to us saying come back everything is good. A second later the ship exploded. The deck raised as wood shot out then the hull split in two. Three minutes later the ship was gone, and we were alone.

Most people when they graduate from high school either go to work or take some long soul-searching trip. I decided to take a cruise. This trip was in part because I graduated early, and it was still winter back in Ohio and part because I wanted to see something I never saw before. The blue and emerald green waters of the Caribbean was about as different from the mistake on the lake as I could find. My name is Thomas Alfonse McKinley. I was born in Akron, Ohio and lived all my life there. In the summers the family would go to Cleveland and Lake Erie. My dad would rent a boat for a week, and we would stay out on the water going from island to island. He would say how he always wanted to take us to the Caribbean, but this boat was all he could afford. When I graduated, I had the money from five years of delivering newspapers and flipping burgers. I saved every dollar, and it was more than enough for a new car or this trip. I wish I went with the car.

Mom called a cruise, “*like being in prison with a chance of drowning.*” At first, I could see her point, but then I found the Grande Lady. She and yes, I’m going to call the ship she, was an actual sailing cruise ship with sails and everything. The ship held 170 passengers and was

larger than you would think. Anyone that has been on one of the old sailing ships like the USS Constitution knows that the old ships were very small. I didn't want to sail in a tin can in the ocean, so I did my best google research and found the Grand Lady along with a video and pictures of the staterooms. A week later I booked the cruise and was all set for the trip. When the cruise was over, I would go back to work and prepare for college. I was thinking something far out of the state until dad said he would help with college if I attended The University of Akron, but that place is just way too close to home, so I went to mom, and she said if I went to Kent State, she would make sure dad helped. But I'm off topic and let's face it, right now I need water, not a college. My last day of school was the last day in Ohio. I left that night for a flight out of Canton-Akron airport bound for Key West, Florida and all points south.

Using an oar, I pushed the lifeboat around looking for people and just maybe some pants. When I was pushed out of my room, I was in my boxers. The woman I thought was a girl shifted a little showing she was in a uniform. She was a member of the crew. She lay in the bow of the boat in the bow shivering. The sun was coming up, and the damage slowly came into view with wreckage spread across the water. I pushed through some wood and chunks of something when I found the first body, well most of a body with the left arm and most of the head gone. He was just another passenger in a Hawaiian shirt. A chunk of the sail was next. I pulled it into the boat and using three of the five oars and a long piece of some sort of handrail I made a cover to block the sun. About twenty feet from the boat was a rolling food cart along with a suitcase. I tried to push the boat to the cart, but I just kept going in circles. Out of the blue, a voice said, "*you need to paddle on both sides.*" I looked down at her, but she was still in a ball. Going back and forth I pushed switched and pushed until I was about three feet away.

I tried to pull the cart to the boat, but I couldn't get a hold of it. I slid back from the side and came face to face with the woman. She took the oar and pulled a cap off the small end to reveal a hook which she used to pull in the cart as well as the suitcase. Together we pulled the cart into the boat then the case, but she put the case behind her saying, "*this belongs to one of the passengers.*" She looked me up and down and said, "*you're naked.*" I checked, and while I still had my boxers, they were wet and leaving little to the imagination. I said, "*I was asleep when*

someone came into my cabin and pushed me out of the boat.” She stood and looked around then down into the water and asked, *“where’s the ship and all the people?”* I replied, *“the ship sank, and I think we are all that is left.”* She looked back at my boxers making me feel uncomfortable then she pulled the suitcase around and opened it with a laugh. Inside were several very small bikinis, suntan lotions, sunglasses and a pair of men’s boxers, white with red hearts. Once again, she looked down at my crotch then she said, *“my name is Emma.”*

The tag on her jacket said, Hanna. Emma looked down at the tag and said, *“Hanna is my sister.”* I started to ask when she took off her jacket and handed it to me saying, *“could you cover that, it’s making it hard to look at you.”* I put the jacket over my lap. Together we looked through the cart finding twenty bottles of water, along with potato chips, peanuts, and other simple snacks. As the sun moved across the sky the day warmed up, and the bodies started to float to the surface. Emma said, *“there were over one-hundred and thirty on the ship counting the crew.”*

The wind shifted catching my makeshift cover turning it into a sail of sorts pushing the boat away from the wreck. Emma pointed into the distance then lowering one of the oars slightly turned the ship to what looked like an island. She looked back at me then once again to my crotch. She said, *“please don’t read too much into what I’m about to do.”* She turned her back to me then took her shirt off then her bra. I turned my back to her as she slid her pants down. After what was the longest second or two, she said, *“it’s ok to turn around.”* She put on one of the bikinis. It was a pair of white bottoms with a sort of halter-top colored in shades of red and yellow. She looked younger out of her uniform with brown shoulder length curly hair, olive skin, and just a few freckles. Yes, it could easily be said she was the most beautiful girl I had ever shared a lifeboat with. I tried not to stare at her. I got up and turned around dropping my boxers and putting on the white boxers with hearts. I turned back around to find her sitting there watching me change.

Using the last oar, Emma steered us about until we came closer to the island. She said, *“I was raised on the water. My dad works on a ship as does my mom and sister.”* I wasn’t sure if I

should ask, but it came out anyway, “*were any of them back there?*” She shook her head and said, “*no, this was a last-minute change. I barely knew any of them.*” The boat was picked up by a large wave heading for shore. Emma jumped up and pulled the sail down while pulling the oar out of the water. She said, “*hold on.*” There was a crashing sound along with a dragging sound. We stood up to find we were on the sand. Together we pulled the boat up the shore as much as we could and tied it off to a tree. That damn thing was heavy. She looked back to me and yes, down at my crotch then she almost seemed to turn red and turned her back to me. I looked down to see my new boxers were wet and now quite see-through. I think that this was the idea behind the shorts. I went back to the boat and grabbed my old boxers changing back into them, and yes, she was once again watching me.

We looked around and saw nothing but trees and the beach. I collected some dry wood and made a place to start a fire. Emma said, “*I hope you know how to start a fire because I have no idea.*” I said, “*well you just take these two sticks and rub them together..... And make sure one of them is a match.*” I lit the match and set some paper on fire, and soon we had a large fire on the beach. Emma said we should stay near the fire on the beach in case someone sees it, so we went into the boat using the sail to sleep on. She put her pants and jacket back on and together we huddled in the boat next to each other. She ran her hand across my chest and whispered, “*thank you.*” Then she leaned down looking at my crotch again. I felt cold and insanely hot at the same time. I was half naked on a tropical beach with a beautiful girl lying next to me, and all I could think about was home, the falling snow and would I ever see my family again.

I woke up the next morning to a strange feeling at my side and holy shit she’s still there. That whole ship sinking happened and wasn’t just a bad dream. She that is Emma because I got to get used to calling her by her name woke up and looked me in the eyes. Then down to my crotch as her usual trend. She looked back into my eyes and said, “*could you put that thing away.*” I checked and yes what most would call morning wood was forcing an appearance of little Tommy right out of my boxers. I did my best to tuck him away, and she gave side glances before getting out of the boat and saying she needed to find a place to water the ground. I got out and went in the opposite direction until I was alone to write my name in the sand.

We met back at the boat and counted out our supplies, seventeen water bottles, twenty small bags of peanuts, ten bags of potato chips, five bags of pretzels, nine bags of some sort of trail mix and twenty protein bars. I said we should check the island, “*we could be just on the wrong side of a populated island, or I don’t know there could be something.*” Emma asked, “*how?*” That’s a good question, and I wish I had an answer she would like, but I said, “*we could I don’t know, push the boat out and paddle around?*” She shook her head. I said, “*start walking along the sand until we find something or meet in the middle.*” She shook her head saying, “*there is no way I’m going by myself I mean really? Have you ever watched a horror movie?*” I said, “*OK we go together.*” She told me to stay on the boat while she changed. Five minutes later, I got out, and she was in a very small bikini with what YouTube would call cheeky bottoms. Good god, how am I not going to stare at that all day?

Emma put her jacket on and put a water bottle in one pocket and two packs of nuts and protein bars in the other. I started to ask about the water when she said, “*I think we can share.*” With no pockets in my boxers, I wasn’t in a place where I could complain, and the jacket covered her ass which was both good and bad. Now at least I could keep an eye on the island and water and not her tinny tiny bikini bottoms. I know this isn’t the right time to start something. It has never been a good time for me. I started work when I was ten-years-old delivering the Akron Beacon Journal around my neighborhood. Every day all year long I would wake up at three in the morning to meet with my distributor, fold and pack the papers then deliver them before 4am. I did this as I said before every single day for five years. This was my job. My dad told me, “*the first time I have to deliver your papers will be the day you give them two weeks’ notice.*” He wanted me to take responsibility for my life and work.

Two years ago, I went to my usual place and waited for my papers. It was in the summer and warm. 3am came and went and no papers. Then 4am and 5am. About 6am I got my first call from a customer asking where her paper was and was there anything wrong. I called my distributor, and he told me they were going in a different direction, and I wasn’t a part of their

operation anymore. Or in other words, they fired me without telling me. Over the next couple of days, I received angry as well as worried calls from my neighbors asking about the paper. On the third day, the new delivery man showed up in a car tossing the papers at the end of the driveway. I was raised to believe that you give people what they paid for and most of all show your customers respect. The last thing I heard about the new guy was how many of my customers dropped the paper.

We walked for about ten minutes until the beach turned rocky turning us around and back the other way. We passed our boat and walked for thirty minutes until we found the rocks again. Before we left the other rocky shore, we left a marker, and on the other side, we could see the marker. No signs of anyone on the shore. The interior of the island was thick in greenery and seemingly untouched. I was in a pair of boxers with no shoes. I managed to keep an eye on the interior of the island and not on her ass as we walked back to the boat. Halfway back she gave me the bottle, and I took a drink giving it back to her. Emma opened the bottle and took a slow drink and put the bottle back in her jacket. She smiled at me then started to walk, and yes, she looked down, and I watched her ass all the way back. Sue me.

Back at the boat, Emma said we need to talk about what's happening. She said, *"I think we need to focus on getting some help so all this sexual tension should be put aside for now."* I remember saying, *"what"* and thinking about her chest when she said something about sex, but I didn't follow her. She said, *"we can't get together."* Now she was saying this in a tiny bikini sitting back with her chest out and glancing at my crotch yet again. I said for some unknown reason, *"I don't know what you're talking about."* She seemed to get mad saying, *"I can feel you staring at me when we walk as well as that."* She pointed at my crotch, and the traitor was trying to work himself out of my boxers. I said how I had no control over that and if I had pants this wouldn't be an issue. I wanted to say, *"if it offends you then stop looking,"* but I knew better than to start something with the only other person on the island. She got up and out of the boat. A minute later she was screaming.

I jumped out of the boat and ran to Emma on the shore. Coming out of the water was another passenger from the boat. That is the body of a passenger. The currents pushed the body to shore. Emma pointed to the water and in the distance were other forms slowly making their way to the shore. Over the next four hours, more bodies washed up. A total of forty-three of the one-hundred and thirty people aboard the boat.

Along with the whole bodies, there were chunks of people from arms to torsos. Two days in the water didn't do the bodies any favors, and by the time we were done moving them all talk of sexual tension was gone. I did something I'm not proud of, but several of the men had shorts and shirts while I was in a pair of boxers. I kept the clothing that didn't smell like death, and the rest went into a whole we dug out of the sand. All we could do was bury the bodies and hope the authorities can straighten it all out when they come for us. That night in the boat Emma laid close to me crying and I think just maybe I was doing the same. Nothing feels real anymore.

The next morning, I woke up to more wood. Emma asked me not to sleep in what she called, "the dead man's clothes" returning me to just my boxers. I felt something different about her. She did as her usual looked down at my crotch, but she said nothing. I noticed she was now topless and oh my god. I want to not think about her that way. We could end up living like this for a while and if things went wrong that time could be hell but oh my god, she is just so beautiful. She got up and put on a shirt we took off one of the bodies. She leaned back over to me and kissed me on the cheek. Glorious mixed signals. I had to stay there for a moment letting things tame down. When junior was back in his place, I got out of the boat and thank god there were no more bodies. Some wreckage came ashore but no chunks of people. One of the men had shoes just a little too big for me but with some stuffing worked well enough. That morning we ate a little, rationing out our supplies while we searched the debris on the beach. Most of it was wood from the deck along with other items that could float. A case had fifty emergency rations. Emma said how the case was designed to float so a crew could attach it to a lifeboat. The rations were American MREs Meals Ready to Eat. Together we moved the food packs to a place just off the sand and away from the bugs. That is, we moved the stuff away from the bugs in the sand. I

tied up my oversized shoes, pulled up the two sizes too big shorts and said, “*I think it’s time we looked around in there.*”

I climbed a palm tree with a bright yellow shirt and tied it as high as I could in the tree. While I was making a marker for us to follow, Emma wrote a note just in case someone sees our boat and comes ashore. Under a seat in the boat, we found a field kit with windproof matches, flares, and a machete. There was also a trenching tool that would have come in handy for digging the mass grave but what can you do. I slit and tied the end of what had to be the ugliest shirt I had ever seen and made it into one ugly bag. We packed a couple of the MREs as well as two bottles of water and some of the snacks and walked to the edge of the sand. I tried not to do too much damage as we made our way into the island because who knows this could be some sort of nature preserve or something. I could see it now, “*young woman and teenage delinquent jailed after destroying nature.*” The trip was slow going with no signs of people or any animals other than birds.

About a third of the way in we found a sign reading “radio shack,” and I don’t think they mean the ancient electronic store. Another thirty feet and we found a metal Quonset hut. Over the door was the sign, “Radio Room.” The door was frozen in place, but I was able to use the machete to open it. The smell of seventy years of neglect hit us first then nothing. The building was empty. We needed to stay close to the beach, so this place was useless to us and worst of all we haven’t found any water yet. We passed several fruit trees, but I didn’t know what kind of fruit they were. There were also coconuts in some of the trees, and I think I saw bananas but how could that be? Near the hut were signs of some sort of camp but not much else. We turned to the north and made our way to the rocky shore.

In a small overgrown clearing, we found the ruins of a hut along with a noose hanging from a tree. Just below the noose was the skeleton of what might have been a man. The skull was off to one side as if the body broke up after years of hanging around. We searched around until we found a note saying, “God forgive this cursed soul.” He dated it June 5th, 1965. No name or

why he was there just the simple note and his skeleton. We found some simple cookware as well as some containers but no sign of fresh water around the hut. The sun was moving west, and we decided to go back. On the way we picked fruit. Emma called one of the larger fruits breadfruit and said how this wasn't usual for the area. I recognized the ugly fruit which is like a cross between a grapefruit and an orange. We tossed some rocks at a few coconuts but nothing then four of them fell as if on their own.

Back on the beach, I started the fire again, and we ate the first of the MREs sharing this strange taco pasta thing with bread, peanut butter, jelly, and sour Skittles. We sat by the fire not speaking just watching the wood burn. Emma turned to me and asked, "*have you ever kissed a girl before?*" I didn't know how to answer, so I just said, "yes." She moved closer and asked, "*girlfriend?*" I shrugged then told the truth, "*I never had a girlfriend, I mean I had a few friends that are girls but no dating or anything like that.....stuff.*" Emma smirked. How nice I'm so entertaining. She asked, "*virgin?*"

I asked, "*why do you want to know any of this?*" She looked into the fire and said, "*I should tell you something..... I was using my sister's ID because I was too young to work on a ship without my parent's permission. I ran away from home to get away from a boy.*" I don't know why this was my first question, but I asked, "*how old are you,*" while I thought oh my god please don't be a tween. She said, "*I'm sixteen. They boy..... my boyfriend, was always in trouble, and I wanted out and away from him.*" She leaned over and kissed me and said, "*oh yeah he was also in his thirties.*" I don't know why she told me all this. Afterward, we spent the night staring at the fire then we went to sleep in the boat..... And I do mean sleep.

The next morning, we decided to try and build something to live in with a roof. It started to rain in the afternoons, and the sail became heavy enough to fall on us. Using every bag and container we had, we saved as much of the rainwater as we could. We salvaged as much as we could from the hut and the radio shack and built something that promptly fell over on the first gust of wind. Our second try didn't even make it halfway up before it came completely down. By

the end of the day, we had a simple platform that was off the ground connected to some trees. We shared this beef and rice dish with M&Ms along with a protein drink made from the rainwater.

I tried not to think about how much food we had and how long it could last. We went to the boat and slept on a bed we made from woven palm fronds that were comfortable or at least better than a wet sail. I stripped down to my boxers as usual and laid down. Emma slipped in next to me and from what I could tell she was naked. I thought about how she was sixteen, and I'm seventeen so could this be wrong? She kissed me, and I kissed back, but nothing happened after that. Not that I didn't want it to happen. Let's just say there was no sleeping on my stomach for me that night. I dreamed of Emma with a man in a leather jacket and a bad combover. Then it changed from that to her and me on the ship. I was staring up at the sails as she was asking me something, but I couldn't hear her.

The next day I found myself alone in the boat. I got out and saw her coming out of the water naked with something in her hands. She was holding a severed arm with a wristwatch saying, "*look at the time.*" I woke up to find her next to me still lying there still naked. She kissed me, and I kissed back then her hand went down and touched me. She whispered, "*not yet,*" and got up and out of the boat. I sat up and looked out watching her put on a small pair of shorts she found in the wreckage along with bikini top and an oversized shirt. I don't know why watching her get dressed didn't feel like some sort of invasion. I did think that later in the day but right there and then I was in the moment. We built the walls and used the part of the sail we were sleeping on as a roof liner covering it in palm fronds layering it hoping it would keep the rain out. The tree hut was about fifteen-foot-long by ten-foot-wide with a tallish roof and enough room for the bed and all the supplies. That night we slept in our new home. I got in the bed, and she joined me again, and yes, she was naked. She kissed me, and I kissed back, and soon we were making out touching places I never touched before only stopping before we went all the way.

Outside a storm rolled across the water bashing against the hut, but our home held. When it was gone, we got out to survey the damage, and we lost something important. The boat was gone. The lifeboat was pulled out into the water. We spotted it down the beach as it made its way around the island then we watched as it was smashed against the rocks and sunk. She hugged me from behind, and I could feel her almost hyperventilating. I think the boat represented something to her like an anchor to the real world or just maybe hope. That night we didn't do more than sleep, or she slept. I lay there thinking about what would have happened if we were on the boat when it went out and into the rocks. The sounds of the wood breaking against the rocks and the sounds of the waves wouldn't let me sleep or let go of my thoughts and fear.

The trap had a large fish of some kind trapped inside. This trap seems to work better than the three prior traps allowing smaller fish to swim out while holding together for the bigger fish. It had been about a month since we landed on the beach and lost the boat. About two weeks into our stay we decided we needed to find some additional food. We tried to do some spearfishing and speared a few fish until Emma saw a shark. Being by ourselves we would have no way to deal with an injury such as being bitten. The fish Emma can recognize we eat and the ones she can't become bait or if alive are set free. The rocky shore along the northern part of the island seems to be the best place to trap fish big enough to eat. I came back with the fish, and while Emma didn't know the type, she did remember seeing her father catch and cook a fish that looked just like it, so it was dinner tonight.

Emma spent most of the days in either just a pair of the bikini bottoms, shorts or one of the button-down shirts. We expanded the size of our little hut adding enough room for all our supplies. Earlier on we came to an understanding about privacy and how we would have to live together sharing everything. Part of the agreement was centered around our relationship and just how far we would go. That is how we won't go all the way. Much like the chance of being bitten, we wouldn't take the chance of her getting pregnant so no intercourse. We would make out and do other things but not that. We do sleep together every night. I've gotten used to being naked with her and seeing her naked. I don't know how I feel about her. I never felt this way

about another, but just maybe this could be because of our circumstances and not anything real. Just maybe this is why she really doesn't want to go further. Oh god, I just sound so bad.

The fish tasted like fish, and I know what a surprise. We cooked the fish with some coconut and washed it down with some of the homemade hooch Emma made from a mix of fruit in a container and fermented. I won't say it was good because it wasn't. Her father makes wine from fruit, and she tried to remember how, and she came up with something tasting like a foot. I started to feel warm and something else. Her hand working up my leg. We let the fire go on the beach and went to bed. I took off everything except my boxers, and she got naked. We made a vow that if we were to sleep together and other things, then one of us would remain covered to prevent an accidental anything down there. Emma slipped in next to me and started to kiss me, and I returned the favor. She whispered into my ear, "*don't overreact to what I'm about to do.*" She slipped her hand down to my boxers, and at first, I didn't feel anything to overreact too. This was nothing new, then she pulled my boxers down and got on top. Before I knew what was happening, I had this feeling I never had before. I knew I was inside her. Emma made a gasping sound and started to move up and down. I put my hands on her hips then up to her breasts. I looked into her eyes as she made a face that was part pain and part something else. I said, "*we shouldn't be doing this.*" Emma whispered back, "*stop thinking so much and just let go.*" Bad turn of phrase to say right then and then because I did just that, I let go.

The next morning, I woke up alone. Emma was building what had to be the largest pile of wood since we landed on the beach. What surprised me more was she was dressed. She had on her uniform complete with her jacket and hat. I slipped on my oversized shorts and this blue shirt with parrots on it and walked down to her. She turned to me then turned red. Before I could make it all the way to the fire, she came to me and said, "*I had this crazy dream that told me to build this fire. It said we would be rescued if I did.*" I didn't know what to say, and I also didn't want to argue, so I just started to help. I checked the traps and no fish, so we ate one of the few remaining MREs as we waited for the sun to set. I didn't know just how much doing nothing could feel like doing something. We set the fire and waited..... and waited and waited. Emma

took her jacket off then her shirt and pants. She slipped off her bra, leaned over and kissed me, and I returned the kiss. Not thinking about anything but how good we felt to each other we made love again. This time on a piece of the sail on the beach next to a large signal fire signaling no one.

We kept the fire going throughout the night and into the morning until Emma said to stop wasting the wood. She was back to wearing the small bikini. I checked the traps and found two fish. Emma said one of the fishes was something she didn't know so it had to go but the other fish was something we had before, and it went well with the coconut. I cut up the other fish, it was already dead, and cleaned the one for dinner. A glimmer came off the water, and I looked up to see a thirty-foot or larger sailboat. The boat was sailing by with two people on deck waving. I waved back screaming, and soon Emma joined me screaming and waving as the sailboat sailed away. Emma asked, "*do you think they saw us?*" I replied, "*they were waving back.*" We stayed up that night with the fire watching the water. The sun came up then went overhead and set with no sign of the boat. The next night we cut the amount of wood in half. We built a fire every night for the next couple of weeks but no boat. At first, we returned to our usual night time activities as if it had never happened but then about a month after Emma came into the hut slipped onto the bed and said, "*I'm tired of worrying about what could happen.*"

The next morning, I got up and checked the traps but no fish. I walked back down the beach past a man next to an inflatable raft. I made it about ten steps when I turned back and just stared at the man. He looked at me then to the hut and back to the boat where a woman was sitting. She looked a lot like Emma. The man asked, "*who are you? Are you from the Grand Lady?*" I couldn't say anything. I just couldn't see the words. Then I heard Emma, and my next thought was, "*I hope she put on some clothes.*" She jumped out of the hut in a pair of white shorts, a bikini top with a button-down shirt on top and tied on the bottom. In other words, dressed. She made it about ten steps when she saw the man and woman standing there. The man asked, "*Emma?*" She looked at him and said, "*Papa.*" She ran to him as the woman jumped out of the boat and met with the two with Emma saying, "*momma.*"

An hour later and I found myself on the water again. Emma's father told us about the search and the bodies that turned up about fifty miles away. He said how they never gave up their search. The cruise ship's parent company was sent a warning about a possible bomb on board one of their boats, but they had ignored it. He quit when he found out and made sure everyone knew what they had done. Her mother thanked me for helping Emma, but her father gave me the evil eye all the way back to shore. Back in Florida, I went to a storage locker I rented and thank god they used a key code and not a key because most of my stuff went down with the ship. I had to pay for six months which worked out for me. Inside I found my stuff including some cash. Emma's father helped me get a bus ticket and stopped me before I got on and said, "*my name is Frank Marcus and if you need anything just call. We owe you our daughter.*" I saw Emma in the back seat of their car, but I couldn't say goodbye. I thought I would never see her again.

I wanted to surprise my parents so Emma's parents Frank and Irena said they would give me two days to get back and tell them before they went public. The bus took all night and most of the day to get me back to Ohio then Akron. I got home about midnight to a driveway full of cars. The house was quiet, but there was a light on in the back. I had no key, and I didn't want to wake everyone, so I walked around and found the back door unlocked. Sitting at the kitchen table was my father. He had a glass of some sort of dark amber liquid in his hand. Dad has been sober for twenty years. The whole house smelt like flowers. He looked up at me then back to the glass and said, "*I should have never let you go on that boat.*" Out of some smartass reflex, I said, "*ship.*" I walked over to him and took the glass. From what I could tell this wasn't his first and was in no condition to recognize anything right now. I found my older brother Calvin and yes, he was named for the comic strip on the couch. He woke up and said to me, "*you're late. We had your funeral about ten hours ago.*" He rolled over and went back to sleep.

To understand the next part, I should tell you that I have an adversarial relationship with my thirteen-year-old little sister Mary. She thought I was working all the fun out of my life and I

would die young. She was right. I worked all my childhood, and it took being shipwrecked to show me I needed some fun in my life. She wanted me to buy a car instead of going on the boat, and when I didn't, she said, "*I hope the boat sinks and the sharks get you.*" I replied, "*and I will haunt you every night for the rest of your life.*" I found her asleep in my room. She was the only one that would go into the room, so she gave her bed to one of the cousins that came for the funeral. My funeral. Not wanting an opportunity to go to waste I snuck over to her and whispered, "Mary..... Mary." Her eyes opened then slowly closed. I whispered, "*Mary..... I've come back to haunt you just like I said.*" Her eyes opened again about as wide as they could. She sat up in bed and in the eerie light of her nightlight she saw me, and her screams woke up the house. Maybe I pushed it just a bit too far.

The first person through the door was my mother. She turned on the light and saw me standing next to Mary as she screamed her lungs out. Mom stared at me for a full second then she came over and hugged me so tight that I almost fell over. Mary stopped screaming and said, "*you asshole.*" I said, "*love you too sis.*" The other people in the house except for my passed-out father came into the room and were shocked to see I wasn't dead. My mom's brother uncle Mike actually seemed disappointed I wasn't dead, but he was always an asshole. We stayed up the rest of the night as I explained what happened glossing over Emma and what we did together. In the morning my dad was hungover and sober again. He as also sorry about disappointing all of us but mom said how this was a moment that would drive anyone to drink. Emma's parents broke the news, and soon I was inundated with requests for interviews. I almost passed on the Akron Beacon Journal after they fired me without telling me, but I eventually relented and set up an interview for the next day along with several on-camera interviews with news shows across the country.

That night I slipped into my bed for the first time in months. I closed my eyes and nothing. I couldn't sleep. A call came through on the house phone, and it was Emma. She said, "*I can't sleep.*" I replied, "*I know what you mean.*" The call went silent then she said, "*no I mean I can't sleep without you here next to me.*" I replied, "*yes I know exactly what you mean I can't*

sleep without you here either.” After a moment of silence, I said, “*I love you.*” One minute passed then an hour then a year. Twenty years went by, and I found myself on an island with a noose around my neck asking God to forgive me for what I’ve done. Ten of the longest seconds later she said, “*I love you too.*”