

THE MAJESTY

John Boston

Karen Hinkle hated her last name. It reminded her of the word *TINKLE* and no one in their right mind uses that word in daily conversation unless you're speaking to a five-year-old. She loved her husband and the last name kind of went with him, so, there wasn't a whole lot she could do about it.

His name was Peter. He worked for a big corporation. She was an accountant for another big corporation. They made lots of money, which is how they were able to afford this fabulous vacation. They also worked lots of hours. Seventy or more in a week was not uncommon. She hadn't cooked a meal in months. If they did manage to get a day off together, all they did was take it easy. She got a ten thousand dollar bonus last month for simply doing her job correctly. Everyone bitching about how terrible corporate America is can only see it from the outside, looking in. When you're on top of the pyramid, you are fighting to keep everyone else off of it.

They chartered a private yacht from Miami to Nassau town in the Bahamas. They would spend a few days island hopping, then back to Miami. Just the two of them and a few other guests. They would be fed and pampered. Peter would spend every waking moment fishing. She would spend every moment enjoying the fact that she was not at her job. It sounded like the dream vacation they've always wanted.

What the hell could possibly go wrong?

They were the first guests onboard the yacht. It was a custom-built yacht in Japan in 1965 and was totally overhauled in 2006. As in, every nut and bolt was replaced on her. She was most definitely seaworthy and had even survived two hurricanes and managed to transport medical personnel the next day.

The captain was a very professional-looking type. His name was Avery Wisemar. Had an accent, she didn't ask where he was from. The first mate was a German, named Lukas. There were two very wholesome-looking stewards, she just called them Ken and Barbie. Two engineers who were also deckhands and a cook, who would be arriving later. It was a crew of seven. At the moment, it was only a crew of six. They were given a tour of the vessel and shown their rooms. Practical, nothing extraordinary. It reminded her of a motel room at sea.

"Baby, can you believe we're here?" said Peter unpacking.

"I know. It's crazy," she replied.

"Do we have sex now, or later?"

"Maybe we should wait until everyone is on board," she replied.

"Right. Good idea."

The next two guests to arrive were a Southern California power couple, Jennifer and Rion Heart. He was six feet tall and well built. She was small, blonde, and had curves that must have cost a fortune. They did real estate or had an online business. She didn't really pay attention. They were *selfie-takers*. Those kinds of people. High maintenance and high drama.

She was almost mesmerized by Jennifer. It was both awe and jealousy. Karen knew she would have to take a backseat to this lovely young woman. She was going to command all the attention in the room, whether she wanted it or not.

The next couple to step on board was an Indian couple. Sanjay and Anita. She was a doctor, or maybe he was a doctor. Maybe they were both doctors. She would put them in their mid-sixties. Very polite, shaking hands with everyone.

She noticed the jewelry and watches the couple were wearing. No doubt, these two were certainly accustomed to the good life. *Frugal* was not a word in their vocabulary.

The last couple was late. Not just a few minutes late, like over an hour late. They were a twenty-something couple that was well known online for making sex videos. Their names were Jay and Nora. They never arrived and the Captain waited as long as they could. So much for their dream vacation. Don't be late for your departure.

People actually paid money to watch them have sex. Karen just couldn't figure it out. They were making over ten thousand dollars a month doing what she and her husband did, along with just about every other married couple on the planet. Maybe she and Peter should make sex videos. It would have to be more fun than forensic accounting and making slideshows about profit margins.

Karen was no spring chicken, but she could still sizzle in the bedroom, at least that's what she told herself.

She was glad they never arrived. Two fewer sharks in the tank.

They left an hour later than their scheduled departure time. The captain was less than thrilled. He had a schedule to keep. Drinks and cocktails were served by Ken and Barbie. They mingled. Everyone seemed to be having a good time. They were a total of 184 nautical miles from Miami. At roughly 20 knots, it would take them 8 hours to arrive. They would wake up and be there. She had never even left the country before. She could speak French fluently, but had never been to France. Maybe that would be on the docket for next year. France and Italy. Paris and the Alps. Maybe Germany as well. Who knows?

Dinner was served. Fancy, but nothing that blew her mind. The chef could cook and maybe even impress someone who knew nothing about fine cuisine, but it was going to take more than just average to wow her. Peter was blown away and asked for seconds, then thirds. It was just swordfish. Nobody should ask for seconds on swordfish.

"Captain, we're in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle, right now?" asked Rion.

"Yes, yes we are." he replied, finishing his swordfish.

"Have you ever seen anything strange and unusual out here?"

"No, not really."

"Nothing? Nothing at all?"

"Rion, storms and freak waves can appear very quickly out here in the ocean. There's little to no warning, even with today's technology. I know there have been quite a few mysterious disappearances out here over the years, but that's all they are, disappearances. We don't have enough information in most cases to make a determination as to what happened."

"What about that coal ship that disappeared after WW1?" asked Rion

"You're referring to the CYCLOPS?"

"Yeah, that's the one. I mean the ship had a crew of like two hundred and nothing was ever heard from them. Nothing at all. No survivors, no wreckage. Doesn't it seem unusual that no one was found? Not a single survivor?"

"Well, the CYCLOPS were carrying coal. Very dangerous. That's what caused the USS Maine to blow up in Havana and began the US and Spanish War in 1898. The most likely scenario is that the coal caused a massive explosion and the ship sank within minutes. There were very few safety features and bulkheads built into ships back in those days. If there were survivors, they would have only minutes to lower the lifeboats, if they were able to. Most of them just ended up in the water and looked for anything they could grab onto."

"So, you don't think there's anything mysterious about the Triangle? No hidden portals or UFOs or anything like that?"

"It's a massive area. There's bound to be disappearances out here. That doesn't mean there's anything mysterious about them."

"Maybe.....I just think there are too many disappearances with no survivors. That's what really raises a red flag for me. These people just vanish." said Rion.

The captain was talking to the Indian couple and ignoring Rion, which was probably for the best. Why he just didn't spell his name like every other Ryan in the world, she had no idea. He made sure to tell everyone it was spelled R-I-O-N.....like anyone cared. How this dude managed to wrangle in a lady like Jennifer was beyond her understanding. Maybe he has money? Maybe she's just like him? Maybe two halves sometimes add up to more than a whole.

Lukas seemed like an interesting individual. She overheard him and Peter earlier. He had been in the French Foreign Legion and decided to become a *yachtie* one day. Had to be better than sleeping in mud and getting shot at. Probably paid better as well.

She and Peter retired to their quarters for the evening after dinner. Peter declined the captain's offer for brandys. It had been a very long day for both of them.

Karen was vanquished. Done for. She had never been so tired in her life.

The tired stick had just beaten her within inches of her life.

When she woke up the next morning, Peter was already fishing with Rion. They were like two ten-year-olds left alone for the weekend. She heard some type of commotion last night but was too tired to investigate. She went up on deck and looked for Ken and Barbie to get some coffee.

"Babe, I just caught a Marlin.....a freakin Marlin!" he said enthusiastically.

Karen kissed him and went back downstairs to look for caffeine. She had her vape pen with her for a quick nicotine hit after her coffee. She really didn't do mornings without them.

"What was all that noise last night?" she asked Jennifer at the table

"I don't know. It came from the Captain's room. All the crew were there as well. Very strange."

"Do you do your own hair?"

"Of course. I have my own salon. Stop by later and we can work on yours." she said and walked away.

"Sure Bitch." said Karen underneath her breath.

She ran into Ken and Barbie who weren't even in their correct uniforms. She knew something had happened last night that was not expected. Ken looked like he hadn't slept at all. Barbie wasn't even wearing a bra. Not exactly five-star service, then again, she hadn't paid five-star prices for the charter.

You get exactly what you pay for, Karen. She thought to herself as she made an espresso.

"So, is anyone going to tell us what's going on?" she asked

"What do you mean?" asked Barbie

"Come on kids, what the hell happened last night?"

The two stewards looked uncomfortably at one another.

"The Captain is sick. Lukas had to take over his duties," said Ken

"Is Lukas able to do that?"

"I guess we'll find out," said Barbie.

"You don't sound too confident in his abilities," said Karen.

"He's got a Captain's license. He must have some idea what he's doing. I know he's been a Captain before." said Ken.

"Well, I'm sure we'll be fine," she said.

She spent the afternoon on the deck with her husband and the boys. They seemed to be having the time of their lives. She sat awkwardly across from Jennifer, who seemed none too pleased to have another female her own around. That was fine.

Bitches gonna bitch.

She watches Peter reel in another fish. He seemed disappointed.

"Another sunfish. I should use them for bait."

"Has anyone seen the Captain or Lukas?"

"Yeah, they were having some kind of issue in the engine room earlier."

"Oh. Is it serious?"

"I'll say. The two deckhands just quit and walked off last night," said Rion.

"Walked off? How?"

"They took the Tender back to Freeport."

"Doesn't it belong to the ship?"

"Nope. They wrecked theirs last year in a hurricane. It belonged to the deckhands. Guess they had enough and just quit without notice."

"So, we don't have any way to get off the yacht?"

"Guess not. Well, there's the man of the hour," said Peter.

Lukas came up on deck. He seemed fine as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

"Should we call you Captain, now?" joked Peter.

"Oh no. I'm just filling in until the Captain feels better. He was passing a kidney stone last night. Very painful. Hopefully, he passes it soon."

"I had one of those a few years back. The worst pain I've ever felt. I hear we lost our deckhands last night?"

"Yes, I caught them smoking marijuana."

"So, everyone smokes marijuana nowadays," said Sanjay reeling in his line.

"Not in the Bahamas. It's still illegal. If we ever got stopped by the Bahamas Defense Force for a drug search, I'd lose my Captain's license and so would the Captain. The laws down here are very strict. They knew the rules, they chose to break them. I had to let them go."

"You're the boss," said Peter.

"Dinner will be ready in two hours."

"You didn't fire the chef, did you?" asked Peter.

"I am the chef, at least temporarily," replied Lukas.

"Really? Funny, that we never did meet him when we got onboard. I hope we aren't having hot dogs and beer."

"I think you will like it. I graduated from La Cuisine Paris. I also attended a culinary college in Hamburg. No one has ever returned one of my dishes."

"I'm sure you'll kill it. Just tell us you haven't run out of booze."

"Gentlemen.....this boat will never run out of booze. Not on my watch." said Lukas with a heavy German accent.

Lukas had everyone in attendance. He had a big announcement to make. Whatever it was, it was important, at least as far as Lukas was concerned.

"If you would all agree. I may suggest a change to our itinerary," he said, holding up his wine glass in a grand gesture.

"What kind of change?" asked Karen.

"I know a cove not too far from Nassau Town. It's about three hours. It's near Rock Sound. Very private, very secluded. I've seen fish there that are just unbelievable. Several of the record holders from the islands got their fish there. If you would all agree. We can skip Nassau and go straight there. I think we can catch some amazing fish there."

"How come the Captain doesn't go there?"

"The two days you are in Nassau, the Captain leaves as well, to go and see his girlfriend. That's why."

"Hell, I'm in. If the fishing is as good as you say it is, we'd be crazy not to go and give it a try," said Peter.

"If it's a problem, I can always drop you off in Nassau. You can stay at my condo if you want while we fish."

"Lukas, how are we going to do this without a tender?" asked Anita.

"We have another one in Nassau. I'll be picking it up tomorrow. Once we have that, we're good to go."

"Sounds good to me," said Jennifer.

"Can the ladies spend some time on the beach?"

"Absolutely. Whatever you like. I am a certified SCUBA instructor as well. We have three tanks and three wetsuits."

"You can count us in," said Rion.

"Karen?"

One look at her husband and she knew she had no choice. She wanted to tell all of them that she had this very unsettling feeling that all is not right and that they would be much better off staying the two days in Nassau. Something about the missing Captain just wasn't right. Kidney stone or not, he should at least make an appearance. Let everyone know he was still alive. Then again, she didn't want to disappoint her husband."

"Sounds like fun."

"Great. Why don't you all get some sleep and we'll be in port by the morning. Anyone wanting to watch football can meet me in the main lounge."

"Football!" shouted Peter.

Karen tried to make friends with Anita, but the two had little in common with one another. They made polite small talk for a few minutes, then went back to their cabins. She went into the lounge and found the four men glued to the television. She said nothing and just kissed her husband good night. She walked up on deck and looked out at the stars. The weather was beginning to change, even down here. She needed a jacket. She wanted to take a few hits off her vape pen, but vaping in the wind was always a hassle. She sipped her wine and looked down at the ocean. She noticed something on the handrail below, something unmistakable.

She saw a bloodstain on the handrail.

It was dark. It could have been something else, but it certainly did look like a bloodstain. It could have been from the charter before theirs. That was possible. She would just feel a whole lot better if she could at least see the Captain. She didn't know anything about yachting protocol, but the Captain is always the head honcho, the shot caller, the big cheese. Maybe he just didn't want the crew to see him in his condition. That was certainly possible. It was time for her to turn in.

She just couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't right on this boat. The feeling wasn't going away, it only seemed to be getting stronger. The clock was getting louder. The tic-tic-ticking was beginning to drive her insane. Maybe she was just over reacting. That happens during menopause. Then again, maybe she wasn't.

Sanjay and Anita were dropped off in Nassau town. Lukas arranged a cab to take them to his condo.

"We'll be back in a few days."

"Take your time. My wife has wanted to see Nassau town for ages. Don't rush back for us," he said as they departed.

"Sanjay was a good guy, but he didn't know shit about fishing," said Peter.

"Just wait. I've wanted to fish that cove for years. We're about to be into something good," said Lukas.

"We're dropping like flies. Where is our cook?" she asked.

"He never made it," said Lukas looking away.

They made their way out to the cove, past one island after another. Some were inhabited, some were not. Some had lush trees and beaches, others were just rocks sticking out of the water. No fresh water was a problem. Desalination kits were too expensive for most of the locals.

Karen tried to remain positive, but she was unable to shake the feeling of impending doom. Lukas seemed like a nice guy. Her guy before Peter seemed like a nice guy too, until he tried to strangle her one night when he got drunk.

You just never know what is lurking underneath the skin. Underneath the human costume is a vast expanse, just waiting to be discovered. Many times, it's not worth discovering.

They arrived at their magic fishing hole several hours later. Karen could see two beautiful islands in the distance.

"That island has wild horses on it. I've seen them," said Lukas

"So, it must have fresh water?"

"Definitely. No one lives there from what I understand. It's a paradise waiting to be discovered."

"Indeed."

Peter set out his lines. They had three poles going. Lukas cut the bait and put it on the hook.

"Fish love people's food," he said.

"Honey, Hemingway used to fish out here. Hemingway!" said Peter gleefully.

"It's true."

Lukas went back down to the cabins and Rion came up to join him.

"Sorry, I'm late. Had the strangest dream last night. For a second, I thought I....never mind. Which one's mine?" he asked.

Two hours later, Peter reeled in a monster bluefish. Rion wasn't too far behind, Rion reeled in a White Seas Bass weighing almost sixty pounds. It took the three of them over two hours to reel it in. Peter was exhausted by the time they were done."

"Captain Luke wasn't kidding. I'm just getting warmed up."

"Lukas made sure to get several photos of Rion holding his fish.

Karen watched what appeared to be several children on the beach of the nearby island watching them. Their faces were almost emotionless.....almost empty of any feeling at all. Like she was being watched by a painting.

"I thought you said this island didn't have any people on it?" she asked Lukas.

By the time they turned and climbed up on deck, the children were gone.

"What children?"

"I swear I saw kids on the beach, just inside the tree line."

"I don't see any kids," he replied.

By the end of the day. Peter and Rion had both caught two more fish. Jack Crevalles. An entire school of them had run underneath the boat.

"Ishmael is out there. I know he's out there. I just got to be patient. I'm going to land my dream fish."

"Peter, don't you think we should head back tomorrow?"

"Honey, you don't quit when you're hot and right now.....*I'm on fire.*"

"*That's great dear.....it won't matter if we're dead.*" she thought to herself.

Rion and Jennifer were both at dinner after the sun went down. Jennifer seemed off-kilter. Her hair and makeup weren't done. She had this whole *I've officially stopped giving a shit look on her face.*

"I've seen Blue marlin out here. They're unmistakable," said Lukas.

"Are you serious?"

"I've got a feeling. I've only had it a few times in my life out here. I think there's one out there. We just have to be patient. The record catch is over 1400 pounds. Our lines are only tested to a thousand pounds."

"A Blue Marlin.....man, that's a dream fish," said Peter.

"Just give me a few days boys.....just a few days," said Lukas, serving dinner. He made stuffed crab with a wine sauce. The man could cook. She had to give him that.

After dinner, she approached her husband to talk about the current state of things.

"Do you want to go and explore these islands? They're so beautiful and mysterious."

"I've got fish to catch, babe. There's a Blue Marlin out there with my name on it. Take Lukas. He knows these islands pretty well."

"That guy creeps me out."

"Huh? He's a great guy. what's wrong with you?"

"I just don't like him."

"Babe, you don't want to sit here and watch me catch fish all day. This is your vacation, too. Go on, have fun." said Peter.

"He just gives me the creeps. By the way.....did anyone see the Captain being taken off the boat a few nights ago?"

"I don't know. It was late at night."

"We haven't seen him in days. that's kind of strange."

"They took him to the hospital. He's got bigger things on his mind."

"Maybe."

"Honey, we paid a lot of money to be here. The show must go on. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." said Peter climbing into bed.

"Did you see Ken and Barbie tonight?" she asked

"No."

"Don't you think all of this is just a little odd?"

"People have emergencies. Who cares? We're having a great time. I'm sure Lukas won't let us down. That guy's on it."

"Yeah, that's what worries me." she said

Peter was out fishing at sunrise. It occurred to her that she hadn't seen Ken or Barbie since yesterday. They weren't at dinner last night. That was odd?

"Lukas, where are the Stews?" she asked.

"I'm sorry. I should have told you earlier. They had a death in the family. They had to take a flight back to Miami."

"Yes, you definitely should have told us. How did they leave?"

"They took the tender to a nearby town and called for a boat to take them to Nassau."

"So, we don't have a tender?"

"No, we have a large raft with a motor. Not to worry, it's very seaworthy. We used it last month."

"Lukas, I know you're trying, but you can't do this without a crew."

Lukas seemed to know exactly where this was going and made certain to change direction.

"I'm told you wanted to see the islands? I'd be happy to show you. We can explore, we just can't leave any trash or start a fire."

She did want to go and explore, but she was also very nervous about going anywhere with him. Especially, without Peter.

"I don't know. If Peter catches his dream fish and I'm not there."

"The fish will get exhausted and he'll be able to reel it in by himself. We can go whenever you want. there's something I'd like to show you."

"Well....ok. When would you like to go?"

"How about after breakfast?" he asked

An hour later, they had the raft lowered and were on their way towards the beaches.

"This one is called SPARROW ISLAND. I guess there's a lot of sparrows on it."

Lukas killed the motor and pulled the raft onshore. He helped her out of the boat. She had her camera and a small bag with some waters in it. She would have felt a lot better if she had her little pistol with her.

He led her through some brush until they found an old footpath and walked for nearly half an hour. The island was much larger than she first realized. It was as if she was in a dream. The island was filled with rocks and trees. The temperature was perfect. Everything about this day was perfect, except for the fact that she was on this island with Lukas. she was just waiting for him to make his move.

The sun made everything stand out to her. She could see some kind of a building off in the distance. As they approached, she could see more buildings. They came to the end of the footpath and were staring at a small church and several dilapidated buildings in need of repair. It had streets and a courtyard. Karen got a very bad feeling about all of this. In the middle of the courtyard was an old well. Peter walked over to it and pulled up a bucket of fresh water and took a drink.

"Delicious," he said.

"What is this place?"

"I wasn't lying to you when I said it was deserted."

"I saw children on this beach. I know people are living here. No more lies. What's going on here?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why did you bring me here?"

"This place is very unique. There's quite a story behind it. I thought you might like to hear it."

"A story?"

"Yes.....it's a very unusual story. Kind of like.....a ghost story."

Many years ago, this island was an orphanage. It was run by the Catholic Church. Had quite a few boys and girls living on it. Something happened one day. No one is really sure what, but the priest stopped making deliveries to the island. The nuns had no way of leaving the island. Food ran out, then a hurricane hit, and.....well, it was very hard for everyone. The nuns seemed to have suffered a complete nervous breakdown. They killed some of the children. By the time the police arrived, there were only a few children left. No one knows what happened to the others. They were never found. Not a trace of them. Rumor is a crazy old witch was living on the island that took some of them in. She was obviously insane. She taught them black magic and the black arts. She made the children pledge their lives to Satan.

Of course, all of this comes from one survivor. The other girl was too young to be of much help. She told them all a horrible, nightmarish story about what happened on this island. Turns out the priest was killed getting a hooker in Freeport. He never told anyone else about his little secret on the island. No one else knew there was anyone here. One of the kids made a raft and sailed to a nearby island for help. The one survivor. I just wonder who that one survivor is? Whatever happened to him? I wonder what he's doing today? Must have been a horrible thing for a child to go through. It would scar them forever.

"Are you the survivor, Lukas?"

"Me, no. This happened several years before I was even born. I brought you here because, in some way, I think you have a connection to this island. You said you saw children here. You saw the ghosts of the dead children."

"That's ridiculous. There have to be people living here."

"I assure you, no people are living on this island. No one wants to come here. They say the island is cursed."

"Lukas.....what did you do the Captain and the stewards?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean. Knock off the bullshit. You brought me here to kill me!"

"Karen, what are you talking about? The Captain is in the hospital and the kids are back in Miami. You can call the Captain if you want." he said, very surprised by what she had said.

Surprised.....and also very hurt.

"None of this adds up. Just tell me the truth."

"The truth is you have some connection to this island. I don't know how, but you do. I think it's time you told me the truth."

"Lukas, get me out of here and back to the boat."

"Fine.....maybe this will help. The nuns, the ones who kept order here on the island, had a very horrible way of keeping the children in line. I can't even imagine, but that's what they did."

"What did they do?"

"They burned them. Burnt these weird religious symbols into their skin using a hot iron. Come here, I'll show you." he said.

He led her up a small path to the church. Karen had a very bad feeling now. She felt as if she was going to throw up.

"Look. He pointed to the Chi-Rho, the Greek symbol for our savior. Karen knelt down and started weeping.

"What's wrong?"

"I know someone who has this tattoo."

"Who?"

"Peter," she said with tears running down her cheeks.

By the time they got back to the beach and the water, Peter was gone, along with the boat. They had no choice but to go back to the island.

"I'll light a fire on the beach. It won't take long for someone to see it and call the police. We aren't even supposed to be here." said Lukas looking for firewood.

"What's your connection to this place?"

"I don't have any connection to this place."

"This is all just a little too random to be.....*random*."

"Your husband paid me five thousand dollars to bring you here. He was the one who suggested it after the Captain left. He thought it would sound more believable if it came from me."

"Why did he do that?"

"I don't know, but he said it had to be this exact spot and nowhere else. I couldn't turn down the offer." he said

"What about Rion and Jennifer?"

"I don't know. I don't know what he is going to do with them."

"I didn't know it gets so chilly out here at night," she said, starting to shiver.

"What does he want?" she asked.

"I think I know what he wants. How long have you and your husband been married?"

"I don't know, not very long, just about a year."

"I doubt we're the first ones he's left here. Tell me, do you have a life insurance policy?"

"Yes. He's the beneficiary. I added him right after we got married, why?"

"Because.....I think he's going to be able to collect, very shortly."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

Lukas pointed to the tree line and she could see many children, black and white, staring at them.

"Oh, Jesus."

"I don't think Jesus is going to be able to help us now," said Lukas very softly as the children began to slowly walk towards them. Some held knives, while others held tools. They all have the

same unmistakable look in their eye. The raft was almost out of fuel. They wouldn't be able to make it to the next island.

Grown ups need to be punished for what they have done to their children.

"Who are they?" she asked running towards the beach.

"The children.....the goddamn children! They're still here!" he screamed.