

## A Stolen Yacht

As requested, later that day, Maggie waits on the jetty with a pile of bags loaded with tinned food and loaves of bread. In the distance, the volcano continues to pour ash into the air, and the whole sky is tinged orange.

A sleek sailing yacht pulls up to the jetty under motor power, and Maggie is surprised to see Perrin behind the wheel, expertly guiding the vessel alongside. It is a 40-foot single master, a wooden boat with classical lines. It has a white painted hull and varnished wood paneling on the coach-house. The decking is pale gray with neat lines of black caulk between the planks.

Perrin throws the propeller into reverse, and the vessel comes to a halt alongside the jetty. “Quick, jump aboard.”

“What a great boat,” Maggie says as she hands over the first of the bags.

“Where did you get it from?”

“Stole it. Come on. Come on.”

“You stole the boat?” Maggie asks, astonished.

“Quick! Quick! You can discipline me once we’re underway.”

Maggie hands over the rest of the bags and steps over the stanchion rail. She stands on the deck, watching Perrin as he returns to the wheel and maneuvers the boat away from the jetty.

“Stow that shit down below, Cabin Girl,” he snaps.

“Bugger you!” says Maggie, defiantly, pushing her knuckles onto her hips. She wants to do exactly the opposite, but can’t figure out how to do that without looking stupid. So instead, she throws some scorn in Perrin’s direction. “I can’t believe you stole a boat,” she says with the haughtiest voice she can muster.

“And I can’t believe you are arguing with the Captain. Come on. Snap. Snap. Let’s get ship-shape.”

Maggie swears under her breath and then collects the bags and carries them down the companionway. Below decks, she is pleased to see that the boat is as well presented as above. In the low light, the surfaces have the sheen of polished wood. There are brass fittings where they ought to be, and even the fabrics on the seat covers and curtains meet her approval. Everything is clean and in working order.

“Hmm,” she says to herself as she looks around the galley for somewhere to stow the bags. The boat has come as a bit of a surprise. She lifts a hatch on one of the surfaces as sees a fridge packed with ice, wine and beer.

Once out of the harbor, Perrin turns the yacht in the direction of the distant smudge on the horizon that is the US warship. Then he lashes a piece of sheet rope to the wheel and steps expertly forward and hauls the main sail

up.

Maggie comes back on deck and looks around. "How long until we get there?"

"That's about twelve miles away," Perrin says, stepping down from the deck into the cockpit.

"So. How long?"

Perrin adjusts the main sail. "Well, we're doing about five knots in this breeze, and the Moogh is swimming about three knots away from us. Then there's tidal currents to consider. And we don't know whether this wind will hold, increase, decrease or change direction."

Maggie looks perplexed, "So how long till we get there?" she repeats.

"F\*\*ck knows. It's unknowable, and it's a boat trip. So relax, drink some wine. You're on a yacht now. And a damn nice yacht, too, if you ask me."

"Yes," says Maggie, "you have stolen a nice yacht. You'll have fond memories of her when you serve out your term in a prison cell."

"Not like that hasn't happened once already," Perrin chortles. "That would cheer you right up, wouldn't it?"

"Momentarily."

"Hey, you want to get me a beer?"

"No." Maggie says this as if it were obvious.

"Let me ask that another way."

"Why don't you try that?"

"Paprika, would you be so kind as to grab me a beer as I am a bit tied up right now, what with steering the boat and all."

"You know what, Perrin, I am feeling quite generous right now."

When Maggie returns to the cockpit with the drinks, she sees that Perrin has set out some cushions on the lee side of the cockpit. He directs Maggie to sit there, and she makes herself comfortable and pours a glass of wine.

"This is quite nice," she says, surprised at what the motion of a sailing boat trip can do to one's sensibilities.

"You look good on a yacht," says Perrin, grinning.

"So what do I do," Maggie asks.

"Just relax. We'll have you to the Moogh in due course."

Maggie nestles back against the lovely fabric and closes her eyes, enjoying the warmth of the sun on her face.

She seems to slumber for some time before she speaks. "Perrin," she asks without opening her eyes.

"Yes, Ma'am."

“Why do you call me Paprika?”

“Didn’t you used to write under a pen name?”

“How do you know that?”

“I looked up all your stories.”

“I used to write under the name Marequa Taard.”

Perrin starts chuckling. “Where did that name come from?”

“She was like my alter-ego when I was younger.”

“And what happened?”

“I figured that if I were going to be successful I’d be better off using my real name. Even though it is Maggie Tarp.”

“So there you have it,” Perrin says. “Marequa, Paprika.”

“And what about Tart?”

“Hmmm.” Perrin thinks it through, wary that whatever he says could come back to bite him.

“You’re working really hard on that aren’t you?” Maggie grins like she were having a happy dream.

Perrin holds his tongue and waits patiently. After a little while, he sees the signs of her nodding off to sleep. Maggie’s head lolls slightly to one side, and her fingers uncurl from around the stem of the wine glass.

“Its just wishful thinking, really,” Perrin says quietly to himself. He leans over and takes the glass away from her, careful not to wake her. He flicks the glass empty over the side and places it where it in a safe spot.

As Maggie slumbers, she looks like a portrait by a master painter. Her mousy brown curls tangle around her shoulders and her delicate fabrics are crisp and bright. Her petite, desirous face seems to glow as it is warmed by the sun.

From his steering position, Perrin glances down at her periodically, feeling sense of pride that he has the privilege of watching over Maggie Tarp as she sleeps. He is also conscious that this is the first time that he has been able to enjoy her presence without the accompaniment of her prickly critique of his way of being.