

Chapter 2 Moveable Feast

Charles stuck his head out of the hatch to hand Kari a local chart. Shading his eyes he looked back past Hussey and Kari, out the racer's open stern to the Annapolis YC and the pre-race activity. Dozens of boats were alive with crews. Some were at club moorings. These were serviced by launches ferrying crew, sail bags, cases of drinks, ice, cartons of food and gear. Men, women, girls and boys on sleek racers walked over open wide decks laying out lines and sheets, running them through turning blocks shackled to the deck. A few boats had crew high up the main mast, perhaps seven stories up, secured in climbers harnesses swinging in the wind – prowess.

A Bermuda ketch with two masts, each shorter and thicker than a racing sloop's single tall mast, bobbed in their wake as they passed - her bright woodwork sparkling in the sun. At her bow, an old salt in yellow foul weather gear and "So'wester hat" waved to Movable Feast. He was warmly dressed more to Hussey's liking. Hussey knew the retired couple who cruised her from the Islands to Maine and back following the seasons. Throttling back, he yelled, "See you at the finish." The old man grinned, responding, "We'll wait for you." Kari laughed at his friendly bravado. MF would beat the old cruiser by a day – they were in the non-spinnaker division starting 2 hours before MF's fast spinnaker group – simply using the race as a social way to bring their boat north.

Charles was annoyed with the chit-chat. This Annapolis to New York harbor race was just a “going North for the new season race” timed around the annual seasonal migration of pleasure boats.

He had bigger fish to fry. Ransom was using the race to bring a “cop”, Hussey, on board – at Princeton chaos theory was his field and he felt his life was on a fault line.

He spotted "Revenge" also heading towards the starting area off Sycamore Point. A grin stretched on his small mouth. Thin lines and scar-like skin radiating back from his lips, like a fish, as he spoke to Hussey at the helm.

He pointed Revenge out to Hussey. "He's in our race division. Last month, in the final Southern Circuit race, I had him protested out of the standings, The man's a fool. He showed up at the awards dinner. He hadn't seen the Race Committee posting - had to sit through the whole evening." He wagged a finger at his son sitting on the dog-house just forward of the main hatchway. "Dougie, you went over to their table at the dinner. Why? Do you remember?"

Doug almost lost his new found reserve. He looked away from his father. He walked forward and sat on the doghouse with Dawn and Dudley.

"Please don't start on "Revenge", Charles." Kari smiled at Hussey. Her eyebrows and smile said "let's talk about something else".

Hussey picked up her cue. "I'll drive by the starting line. Give you a Chance to put it into the GPS, Charles." Ransom retreated down below.

You could play all day with the GPS – the new satellite positioning system just being opened to non-military users. Like most well-equipped boats, MF had two independent navigation systems and a computer . Old Loran used radio broadcast for position fixes but the newer GPS used more accurate satellite transmissions. These instruments not only told where you were but could be programmed to show (or even steer) the course to your destination. Charts were just being digitized and Ransom played with his new 16-bit COMPAQ.

"I already heard a version of the "Revenge"/Southern Circuit episode from PJ." With the reference to PJ, Hussey was assuring Kari that he knew the worst. PJ Lipsky was regular crew on Moveable Feast. He had crewed most of the past winter's Southern Circuit for the Ransoms. Flew back to NY after Antigua Race Week. "I met PJ at Port Washington Yacht Club after Charles signed me up", Hussey told Kari.

At Port YC, PJ hadn't painted a gracious picture of Charles' behavior before the Protest Committee in Fort Lauderdale. Moveable Feast was first in division at the end of the series. "Revenge" was at the bottom of the standings, last in MF's division of 12 boats. A right-of-way protest. "MF was forced to slightly alter course" ,to quote PJ, "a couple feet".

"So up went the red flag." PJ said that Ransom protested "Revenge" out of the last race in the series knowing she had already missed the second race of the series. With two scratches she didn't even get listed in the final standings.

Hussey throttled back and yelled down to Ransom. "Charles, the starboard pin in twenty seconds...OK?" Traffic was busy around the starting line. A beautiful black wood yacht, "Aphrodite" was anchored at one end of the starting line – a proud committee boat. The other end of the starting line was an anchored large orange ball – the size of a VW Beetle – about 100 yards from the committee boat.

Everyone from Port Washington knew Aphrodite. She was build during the Great Depression by Jock Whitney as a "commuter boat". He would ride to work mornings from his Long Island estate to Wall Street – 15 miles in a half hour. Art deco ebony curves to her reverse stern reflected bright sun. "I wouldn't use my ebony yacht as one end of a starting line", Hussey commented.

They were joining other boats passing near the starting area. "Beautiful day," he said to no one in particular. Charles from below answered he was ready for the countdown. Hussey waited, then shouted, "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, MARK!" as they passed the committee boat.

He continued to ponder Lipsky's personality and Charles relationship with him. Having met him at the Port YC for drinks after he flew home, PJ talked a lot about Charles, especially after a few drinks. Hussey wondered why Ransom kept him on the crew. He had recently asked PJ the opposite question - why he still crewed for Charles? Never got an answer. "Charles' bastard", he thought – races for an owner he badmouths. PJ would join them in Newport for the Azores race.

They had motored about six hundred yards out of Spa Creek inlet past South Anchorage. Hussey kept MF well behind the starting area . A few land-bound well-wishers could be seen gathering near Triton Point on the Naval Academy fields to the north. Kari, holding the chart, pointed to the depth gauge. "In the twenties near the starting pin," she said. "Plenty of depth all around the start."

Moveable Feast drew nine feet - great for beating up into the wind. Almost fifty feet long, brilliant white, flat like a knife at the bow she widen quickly after the mast. Aft of her mast, she came at you like a fat flattened torpedo. That torpedo curve in her hull gave you a sense of how flat her bottom was. She skipped across the top of the water like a good smooth skimming stone. The keel was a thin wing - six tons of lead wing stabbing down into the ocean to keep her from flipping over. She was now waiting to be dressed in her sails.

The Doug, Dudley, Dev and Dawn had pretty much rigged her for spinnaker work. Half-inch diameter dacron guy lines paired with thinner spinnaker sheet-lines now ran from the bow back to the stern. When turning the boat, these heavy lines whip around the forward deck. Dangerous situations quickly develop when these lines tangle on cleats, so Dougie, the consummate bowman, was liberally applying tape over the stainless steel fittings to allow the flailing lines to pass around the bow harmlessly.

More boats were joining them. "What head-sail do you want for the start?" Hussey asked asked as he came up out of the cabin – who forgot to duck under the ever present boom. "Crack!" He staggered to a seat in front of the wheel. " Oh... ow ! "

What a bang! Doug came running back from the bow. "God - you OK?"

Charles waved him off, trying to ignore the blood. "So let's discuss head sails." Blood showed through his willowy blond hair. "A bloody down-wind start." He laughed; his

fingers pressed over his temples exploring his scalp. He had trouble continuing. "I'm getting true wind speeds around 15." He held his head -

Ransom continued discussing the starting tactics. "Some gusting, not much. Start with the heavy genny then up with the half-ounce spinnaker after the start. Then I'd jump right in with the blooper."

Charles looked up at Doug agreeing, "the light spinnaker". He wasn't afraid to blowup a new spinnaker. "The wind is likely to funnel right down the Chesapeake. Bang into high gear," Dougie said. Bang with spin and blooper. Dead down wind. Sounds good to me," concurred Dougie.

And that was just what Charles wanted to hear. He hadn't gotten his winning record in Atlantic racing by being conservative and safe. "Don't bring the blooper up. Keep the blooper bag below," he added. A drop of blood teared down his cheek as he summed it up. "Let's not show all our cards."