

cH 6 The finish of the feeder Race

"Everyone who can do it, does it", Dawn insisted . Her athletic body shook off the cold; her eyes, fixed on the genoa tell-tails, teared from the cold wind; her mouth was open, slack from concentrating as she finished adjusting the genoa to get the tell-tails flying.

It had started like most discussions on an early morning watch. Philosophy, personalities, growing up, music. Dawn arguing with her step-brother. It helped keep them awake.

Dougie paused, yawned, rotated his tired shoulders - he had been at the wheel for almost an hour. The consummate optimist, he looked out over the Atlantic for the first color of dawn. Almost half way home, they were beating up the coast of Maryland, almost off Ocean City – about 150 miles to the finish.

Now too far offshore to see the dim lights of sleeping towns. Kari rested in the cockpit on the low side tucked into the doghouse for warmth - MF was heeled way over with the strong wind blowing from the northwest. Dawn, very tired, rode the main's traveler through the puffs. Beating upwind since they rounded DelMarVa. The spinnaker had been dropped a long time ago when they left the Chesapeake and turned north into the wind.

But now, their conversation was making Dougie uncomfortable. Dawn had laughed at his thesis. "You're not capable of breaking social conventions, " she insisted. "Most people can't take from life what they really want. If it's a sin. they pass it by and in the end have skim milk. The strong get the cream."

"No" , he had argued, "corruption itself most often leads to dissatisfaction. It is the abomination itself that prevents you from fulfillment, Not your inability to cross over the line. I still believe that good is naturally more attractive than evil."

Early on in their discussion, he had guessed that Dostoevsky was what she was gnawing on and he was sentimentally intrigued. He said he remembered how, in college, he had tested Raskolnikov's arguments by shoplifting a pair of children's sneakers. Not a big commitment to intellectual seeking – or perhaps, he wondered if he had just read about stealing sneakers in a Salinger novel. Doug prided himself on limiting his commitment to the past.

Dawn's thoughts, however, were more perverse than those gotten from Russian literature. Doug sensed Dawn had let her guard down. It was 5 a.m., she was tired, the Atlantic was infinite. He didn't want to deal with a young teenage girl's problems.

"No, you' re wrong," she said, becoming animated. "Most people fail to get what they dream of, what they crave, and so they, society, eh... , invent sin.

Dougie continued in a quieter, conspiratorial voice. "Let me tell you a story that happened to me when I was in high school." Kari was having trouble staying awake, with the cold and the uncivilized hour. Now she sat up, interested. He rubbed her neck, stretched and moved to the high side. Contributing to the watch's racing performance, she took over playing the main traveler.

Dougie continued. "I worked at a stable outside Princeton on weekends and sometimes after school. The stable was way out past all the splendid Princeton neighborhoods. It was almost in Philly. Big farms, rolling hills, rusting cars and this stable. Just to be around horses, I mucked out the stalls and did whatever else I was told."

"The owners got their horses tended cheap. Princeton has indoor polo. That's another story – have you ever watched indoor polo? It is too weird. The prof that I worked for kept three ponies there. You wouldn't know him. He's long since gone."

“He taught me to use a twitch. A twitch is a light chain they put around the ponies upper lip. A loop of chain coming out of a stick. You tighten it and the pony stays absolutely still. Then I could braid the tail. Very showy.”

The sun broke thru their thoughts. Now wide awake. Dawn was making accurate sail adjustments as they entered each new wave.

“Endorphins,” Kari quickly added, “they say the tightening limits blood to the animals brain.” She turned away, “I’ll make cocoa”, she went below.

Dawn visibly relaxed as Dougie's story took her away from her dark thoughts. His palm stroked her neck.

"No," she pushed his hand away.

Dudley came up, “Ransom's knocked out.... Beautiful morning, close your legs – that's not your nose dripping.

“Dream on,” Dawn laughed.

“Your mom sent me up,” Dudley laughed.

“Come sit here,” Dawn invited. Dudley put his feet up on the bench and pushed his back against her. She reached around his waist and hugged him.

They started to laugh. “Mr. Hussey has strong hands,” Dougie whispered to them.

Dawn laughed and wiped her nose with her hand. And realizing what she had done, she then laughed more.

Devin came up the hatch steps. “7 o'clock. I was told we're all on 'till the finish.”

“You're allowed up here Dev. We're just waking each other up,” Dawn laughed at Devin's embarrassed moment.”

And Dudley laughed. He along with Dougie were Dev's sailing instructors. Not quite sure what Dev understood. He reached over to Dev and pulled him closer, saying, "It's gonna be a long race." They all continued to laugh.

Down in the cabin, Hussey's watch beeped a new hour's arrival. "Eight o'clock finally!" he said from his bunk to Kari in the cooking area. He had been watching her – she had taken her one-piece off – nice shorts.

She looked across and said, "GPS puts us about 20 miles off Delaware Bay – about 140 to the finish.

"Hot Drost chocolate", she brought a cup with a lid over to his bunk. "A good stimulant."

Hussey opened a small silver flask and added a touch into the cup. "Lars schooled me on morning aquavit." He put his hand on her knee as he pushed off out of the bunk. With Charles in the aft cabin and the crew - he knew she controlled the race course – she touched his arm as he stood, "So, I'm glad Charles brought you onboard. We'll let him sleep. He took a pounding yesterday."

They took breakfast up top.

Their racing situation was, as penned by Ransom in the log at the 9 a.m. when he made his way to the nav table: twenty-two miles out off Cape May; Distance to finish - approximately one hundred and fifty miles; should be covered in perhaps fifteen hours if nothing exciting occurs; position in fleet - perhaps third, can see two sails inshore of us; racing conditions - wind from the north-west at twenty knots, pushing us off shore, regular rolling waves, about fifteen feet high. He logged that he hoped for the wind to swing south to the west so they could work their way back towards the coast; the question was to tack towards the coast or not to tack.

Into the warming afternoon the wind moderated. Moveable Feast's speed diminished. Doug and Dudley took turns at the helm guiding her thru each wave trough, over each crest. The big genoa didn't need tending. Dawn and Dev took turns manning the main traveler – easing it in the puffs at each wave crest.

"To tack or not to tack" – always the question for upwind racers. If the wind backed to the west there was no need to tack.

Hussey told Ransom of two experiences with thunderheads below NY Harbor. "On Fishera's 40 footer - we could see the thunderhead pass north of us. Mario was sicker than sick hanging off the stern - just two of us still "alive" on deck - Me and Dev - the only two with scopolamine patches. We didn't have enough crew to douse the spinnaker. With the thunderhead passing to the north we got the wind blast - it blew us back towards Ambrose. Very funny - the fastest his boat went during that race was west - the wrong direction."

So Ransom had decided against tacking - they were slowly getting further from the coast - but he knew the evening thunderstorms were a factor.

The first warnings had been generic radio warnings for possible thunder storms and accompanying high winds off the Jersey Coast. The thunderstorm hit an hour after the sunset. MF was 25 miles offshore, off New York Harbor - Ambrose Light - the Finish.

Massive anvil shaped black clouds were reported sweeping across the Hudson Valley. "Doug", Ransom barked, "check all hatches. Close off the forward and aft bulkheads. Dawn, get the storm spinnaker."

"Dawn, hand up the storm spinnaker." Dawn disappeared below to fetch the rarely used sail.

All the crew were on deck when the stars disappeared. Hussey was at the helm. The night sky in front of them subtly changed. The dim star he was steering to winked out as did all those in the quadrant they were heading towards. Frank and Charles immediately sensed the thunderhead.

Ransom was a good captain when it blew stink. Crew always felt safe on one of his boats.

"Do you wanna win?" Ransom asked a rhetorical question. An owner like Charles Ransom only raced to win.

They had seen several boats in their division earlier. Ransom knew he probably wasn't winning. He needed an aggressive strategy. "Do it!", he shouted over the wind. "Doug, Devin, keep harnessed when you go forward. "Kari, I'll do the halyards, you do the main. Frank!", Ransom held up three fingers, "reef the main," he shouted.

A triple-reefed main. A storm spinnaker. Kari loved it. The absurd beauty of off-shore storms. The wind whipped up her hair as she moved to her position at the main. She loved the obvious contradiction of the juxtaposed words. "Storm spinnaker," she repeated. Her words were lost to the rising wind as they lowered the main sail about half way. The triple-reef made the sail manageable in chaos.

Hussey, steering, shouted to Kari at the main and Charles in the pit, working the halyards, "I'm reading forty knots of wind."

Doug raised the spinnaker pole and attached the bag Dawn had fetched to the lifelines. Charles stood like an orchestra leader and seeing Dawn positioned at the sheet, gestured to Doug to jump the spinnaker. It was a mad sight. Absolute blackness had engulfed them with the storm. Hussey steered by the wind indicator. His only concern, to keep the wind in back of Moveable Feast as the spinnaker opened full.

"It's full!," Charles yelled. His thin hair was plastered forward by the spume filled wind showing his lumps from yesterday. MF took off like a rocket. The bow wave became a curtain of water rising ten feet around the boat. The noise was immense. Movable Feast shook as she pounded through the water. She leaped over the waves, surfing.

Charles signaled Devin back from the mast. "Devin, stay on the boom vang!" Devin's job was to release the vang when MF broached. Dawn had the similar job on the spinnaker pole.

"Sixteen knots," Charles yelled. "Keep those kids tied onto the boat!"

Doug and Frank took short turns at the wheel. A couple of quick knock downs showed them they would recover after broaches. They drove up a wall of water at 14 knots and accelerated at the top of the wave.

"Eighteen knots," Frank yelled. Doug, standing next to him didn't hear. No one heard. He could see Devin operating the hydraulics for the vang ten feet in front of the wheel. He couldn't see the bow. He turned to see a rooster tail of water in back of them - their wake like a Cigarette boat's. They leaped off the top of the wave. In it's trough, the wind dropped to thirty. He could look over the curtain of water surrounding Moveable Feast and see the waves only when they were in a trough. As they accelerated again to the top of the next wave the curtain rose higher. Now he could only sense things within ten feet of the wheel. He could only steer by the wind indicator.

"Keep the wind about twenty degrees off to port," Dougie yelled in his ear. "We wanna go left." He pointed to the apparent wind indicator, tapping it's glass face on the bottom, left of dead downwind. Hussey nodded. The GPS Dougie held allowed them to navigate these last miles from the cockpit.

Charles appeared, on hands and knees, unclipping his harness tether from the steel jackline. He smiled at Kari and gave her a thumbs-up. "The mains holding up!", he shouted. She laughed and licked at the water streaming down her face. What could she about the main if it wasn't holding up?

"Where is Dawn?", he asked, his face inches from hers.

Kari pointed below. "getting sandwiches," she shouted back, spitting water out as she spoke.

"You're having a great time, aren't you?", he shouted, smiling.

Dawn pulled back the companionway hatch and climbed out with a bag full of sandwiches. After handing one baggie to Kari, she tossed one towards Devin. It flew by him and disappeared into the spume near where she knew the mast was. Her second attempt was successful. Sandwiches disappearing into the night renewed Kari's laughing. Mother and daughter hugged in the din and pounding of the storm. Then Dawn followed Ransom as he walked back towards the wheel. Hussey, at the wheel, refused a sandwich; Dougie yelled his thanks and took two - said he was starving.

"The lightening seems to be clocking past us," Charles said to him. "Perhaps were getting out of the worst of it?"

"We're about four miles from the finish," Dougie replied. "The GPS shows us here." He pointed on the tattered chart he had spread out on the cockpit seat next to Hussey. He punched the GPS to get an immediate update of their course and speed made good towards Ambrose Light. "Three miles," he pointed at the numbers displayed on the small screen and smiled. "We're flying. The winds clocking put the storm center north of Ambrose Light. We might be carried to the finish."

Charles put his hand on his son's shoulder. "I can't hold you responsible for the storm," he shouted, smiling to his son.

At that moment they broached hard to starboard. The boom dug into a wave as Moveable Feast pivoted on it almost one hundred and eighty degrees, swooping like a diving kingfisher. Frank was thrown from the wheel onto Dawn and Ransom - all a heap on the cockpit seat. What seemed like slow motion took perhaps five seconds. Dev released the vang and the boom rose from the water as MF righted herself, shedding what seemed like a ton of water. Dougie grabbed the wheel and MF was turned back towards the finish. The storm spinnaker filled with a crack and they were off again down the wind.

Minutes later, just as the storm died, they crossed the finish line at the Ambrose light tower. The committee shot off a white flare and they confirmed their finish over the VHF radio.

"Ambrose Tower, Ambrose Tower, this is the Moveable Feast. Do you read me? Over." Charles Ransom said into the mike.

"Moveable Feast, this is Ambrose Tower. Congratulations. You've got division line honors."

Ch 7... Ch 7... Ch 7 4a.m. Sunday

They motored through the sloppy waves left over from the storm. Passing Sandy Hook - the lights of New York City - finally quiet reigned.

Dev fell asleep in the cockpit. Doug and Dawn with Dudley dropped the small spinnaker and the dropped the reefed main. On their left, Sandy Hook, long low spit of sand reaching out at them from the Highlands of Jersey. So low and featureless, it was hard to see. The Hook threatened them with its shoals - fingers reaching into the entrance channel.

But there was no wind left and Frank Hussey just kept to the well marked shipping lane. Far off to the right, a silhouette in the city's corona, was Coney Island's towering parachute jump. The putt-putting of their small diesel, steam rising from the water, and the black-blue bowwave running out forever.

Freighters, standing in the seaway, bathed themselves from stem to stem in floodlights. A container ship, thickly colored in yellow light, steamed towards them from under the Varrenzzano Bridge. The purples and blacks of the water and the rich yellows of these lights weren't easy for Hussey's tired eyes. Like sitting first row at a movie, flat on a large screen, the ships seemed closer than they were. Frank was so tired; but he had been here before and knew not to feel threatened by the Avalon-like eeriness of it all.

"Dev, wake up, go below," Hussey said .

"You all did fine," Ransom said. "We have a floating dock at Sheepshead Bay Pier. Just aim for Coney Island," he said pointing.

"I know it well," Hussey said. Ransom was happy to wake Devin and helped him below leaving Kari for Hussey' s company. "I'll hand up drinks."

Ransom handed up a mag of Pommery & plastic flutes and a local chart.

He asked, "Well, can I get a drink?" Kari stood and stretched, holding onto the boom.

Dawn hugged her mom, "we'll put out fenders".

"Sure, Love," Kari said as a warm shiver ran between her shoulders. She yawned and stretched a moment longer. She unzipped her one-piece and pulled and ooched to get out of it. Kari turned her back to Hussey saying , "Lend a hand."

"Here's two, " he replied, pulling the shoulders down to her hips. She shook her uncombed hair and turning to him, she hugged him, burying a yawn in his shoulder . "Thanks much and thanks for getting us to the finish. "

He smiled big, "How about my short one?" She smiled, arched back and lifted her thin arms to rub her neck. She closed her eyes and ran her fingers through her hair.

"Brave man," she said. Hussey didn't know how to retreat. He reached over to the controls and turned on the automatic steering.

"... I mean a tumbler of Armagnac."

Happy to be stretching against him, she asked, "Oh, wow.. Is this your poison?"

Caught between the rocking boat and a soft place, Frank reached under Kari's sweater and scratched her back. "Friendly-like", he thought. Kari was on to him like his Sophomore year girlfriend. She loosened her shorts in one heartbeat and pulled his hand down to her lace panties in the next. And like his Sophomore year girlfriend she threw herself into it; her hands, her bites, her deep breaths and sighs. Kari started laughing, "just joking." And in the same moment put the mag of champagne to her lips.

Frank thought he had bit into more than he could chew. He also started laughing. "Visions of Ann flashed," he said to her.

They both drank. "Get your flask, Professor," she said. He thought of his wife's smiling but serious admonition. She had, repeatedly over the years, enumerated the items, his prize possessions, she would destroy if he strayed. She repeated the list as a joke between them, but a grim joke, whenever he introduced her to an attractive grad student – they always ended up sailing with him. The list ended with his old violin. At this moment, when the bell she had so smartly planted interrupted his adolescent emotions, his only consolation was the stupid thought, the secret knowledge that the French bow, not the German violin, was his treasure.

This dialogue with his absent wife was more than he could handle and he started to laugh at himself.

Kari laughed with him. "I sense the moment has passed," she chuckled and, with a last kiss, went below. She dragged her one-piece Henry Lloyd behind her. "Like a kid not picked in a sand lot game," he thought and then with deep waning feeling, he realized, much more like an alley cat in heat, a trail of fur and blood after a quick mating.

After a while, Kari returned. He welcomed his brandy with a long pull. It sped thru him, his only intake for hours and seemed to

replace his spinal fluid . Booze on an empty stomach and their honest friendship allowed him to ask that last thought. Without thinking, he said, " Why 'The Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' script?... The passion of the race? The long night?"

Immediately, he felt stupid. He never asked questions that didn't have answers. Kari drank slowly, and looked at him with a soft grin - like a cat. She studied him with the same intensity she took in the harbor scene. He realized she had more wits about her than he had. That everything was ok.

She poured Armagnac into a flute of champagne and dipped her middle finger in it. Tasting it, she dipped it again and flicked it towards him. "Since we're good friends, I'll ask, how did you lose your eye?"

Ch 7 Ch 7 eoc ch 7 eoc

Chapter 8 Next Morning - Coney Island

Devin woke up his dad the first time he tried, saying, "Da... ad".

Hussey felt warm and healthy. "Dev... vin," he answered, automatically. Their responsive chant professed their relationship. Responding "Dev. ..vin" to "Da... ad" always made him pause to reflect on the love in their family centered around their one child. He was happy to be home. Kari had covered him with his old cotton sleeping bag. He was dry and rested. Hussey knew it would be a great day. He did ache from the beating they had all experienced but they were safe; they were in familiar territory.

Charles came down into the main cabin. "A limo's here with Bob Jr." His fingers clutching several cut-glass tumblers. He placed them up onto the nav table and pulled a bottle of Armagnac from his jacket pocket. He poured out a third of a glass for Frank which Hussey happily took and then he drank deeply from his own glass. "You did it, you bastard."

"Yes, we did it," Hussey said toasting Charles.

"Bob is getting MF ready - Kari and I will drop you two off. You're right off the Grand Central. The kids will get MF back to Long Island with the current.

Kari came down the ladder. On her head, balanced with the help of one hand, she bore a tray of bread, sliced bagels, smoked fish. She was dressed in a tank top and brief shorts. The Henry Lloyd one-piece wasn't called for now. "Look what the driver brought with Bob."

"Dawn is not rising," she said and smiled to the men, taking a bow for her joke. "She was with Dudley all night in the cockpit. After the finish, while you slept, Charles." She smiled - the loving wife.

Charles winked to Hussey and asked, "Where did you sleep?" Another long pull on his brandy and another exaggerated wink.

Kari adjusted her tube top and rolled her eyes to Hussey communicating her ennui with Ransom's drink induced ebullience. Dougie came out of the kitchen area with orange juice, Perrier and more tumblers.

"Charles Ransom," she drawled, still playing the party hostess, "you keep sucking on that bottle and you're gonna' fall asleep on me."

"I'm ready" Hussey walked over to the food. "How about some OJ, " he asked Dougie. Through sleepy eyes, he watched the family scene play out. Frank wondered how soon he could get off the boat and go home to Ann.

"Did we win?", Frank asked, making small talk. He knew the answer.

Charles hugged him and handed him a glass. "Yes! Yes! A big victory for us! I'll put together our victory dinner. See if I can get the Commodore's Lounge for Monday night."

Hussey said,"PWYC's closed Monday nights. Charles, I've an in with Cooky – thru the Egans. Let me deal with Cooky – otherwise we can have the dinner at Louies."

"You're a good watch captain, Frank," Charles added. "So 4 of my clan, 3 of you, the Lynns perhaps 4."

Frank said, "I'm counting."

"And PJ and Kim and Dudley and guests"

"17 or 18," Frank said. "Captain, I can probably deal with Cooky - otherwise I'll call you – Monday night 7:30 – OK?"

"Yes, let's move outside," Ransom said.

They ate dark smoked tuna and orange salmon. "Gravlox," Kari pointed it out on the platter. "My father, old bastard - may he rest in peace- ", they raised their glasses and all had a deep drink, "To Alex Harvey. Yes... Dad," she continued, "Dad used to make his own Gravlox. Fresh salmon, a lot of fresh dill, a bit of salt - I forget what else. Then let it sit, pressed by a plate on top of the layers, for a few days in the fridge. No smoking, no cooking. Very different from regular lox."

Swans gathered near the open stern, begging for scraps which they got.

Sunday morning," Hussey commented. "A perfect day for feeling good about life."

"All the real people are at church," Kari pointed out. "Would you like a beer?" She said to the driver who was standing on the dock next to Moveable Feast's big letters on the hull.

Hussey handed the driver a bottle of water from the Igloo.

"Let's go," Kari suggested. "Quick trip home. We're settled up at the marina."

The Armagnac and the sun. So Hussey allowed an Irish madness. He took this moment to toast their victory. "Loch hiem", he said. Big friendly grin as he swung his glass to meet Charles'. Bam! Their tumblers exploding as they met. "Time to go home."

They followed the driver to the limo.

“Eldridge says the currents are good – might as well leave – we'll motor – no sails,” Doug said, “Bob and Dawn cast off .”

Out to the channel. Doug would use AutoPilot for the trip up the East River: they lined up with the Varranzano; a quiet Sunday ride.; then leave Governors Island on the left.

Bob, Dawn and Dudley took cushions and went up to the bow with with a bottle of champagne. In front of the mast, the white deck opened up to the bow – a perfect sun warmed sloped deck to cuddle on – Dawn in the middle.

Dawn had waited for this private moment. The three of them, now college seniors, had been together since childhood. Since junior sailing – the boys starting at age 7 – both their parents were members – and when Kari married Ransom, Dawn joined the summer program – she was 12.

And the three became junior sailing instructors at age 15 – Doug was 20 and headed the program at PWYC – a hundred children with a dozen instructors.

All Dawn wanted to know, “did you hear Doug yesterday talking about chain twitches?”

The strange word needed no explanation. They could picture the looped chain and the handle: cutting off breathing. Dudley reminded her, “I didn't hear - I wasn't on watch with you.”

They looked over the sloped doghouse towards Dougie. “You're sure - “twitches”,” Bob whispered. He added in a whisper, “God bless Marilyn.”

Five years before, Marilyn, also a junior instructor at the PWYC summer sailing day camp was found dead – at the club - strangled with a pony twitch.

The three of them who lived through that had something to ponder as they approached Port Washington.

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