

When Cowboys Fall

It's never too late to change the road you're on.

by Real Laplaine

(Chapters 1-3 – sampling, not for publication)

1

The surf slammed me, like a mere stick, onto the shore with a painful crunch.

I felt my forehead pressed into the sand and a grating pain, like my face was being dragged across coarse sandpaper.

The agony, however, was a welcomed change to the exhaustion and numbness which had consumed me for countless hours now, suddenly reminding me that there was hope, that if I could feel pain, I might also survive the nightmare.

For a mere nanosecond, I realized I was lying on dry land, and though every bone and muscle in my body screamed in torment, I knew I had to get up and off that slope.

Even before I could finish the thought, the next wave, like a tsunami, crashed onto me, its powerful undertow raking at my body like some voracious creature savoring its next meal, towing me back down the steep slope as I desperately clawed at the sand in vain.

Consumed with a visceral drive to survive, I knew that another bout with Old Man Sea would not be my victory – but his.

As the undertow carried me back to the sea, my fingers, bloody and bruised, instinctively gripped a large stone protruding from the sand, and clutched it with all my might – waiting as the swell was sucked back to the sea.

With what little strength I could muster, I started pulling myself up, using that singular rock as my only tether between life and death – and then it came again, a monstrous swell which crushed me beneath a tonnage of water, knocking the air from my lungs, and nearly knocking me senseless too.

I gasped for my next breath as the water retreated, and with it, like the tentacles of a giant squid, it wrapped around my body, broke my grip with that singular rock, and took me with it.

Blackness consumed me – the precursor, it seemed, to imminent death.

2

When my eyes opened, I was staring at the sky.

My first thought was that I should be dead, not that I wanted to be, but my last vision of the world was being consumed by the sea – so it seemed inevitable.

The sudden throbbing which monopolized my entire body, as pain so benevolently does, announced quite the opposite – I was alive!

“Hi there,” a voice broke the solitude.

I twisted my head to see the vague outline of a woman standing next to me.

I struggled to focus on her, but I couldn't.

"Where am I?" my voice wheezed.

My throat was so dry that I could barely utter a sound.

"Take it easy. You've had a rough bout."

"I can hardly see," I said as a terrified thought suddenly struck me – was I blind?

"It's probably just excess exposure to sun and sea water. Relax," she said in a calming voice as she knelt down next to me.

Again, the spasms of agony from every muscle in my body, to the pounding in my head, reminded me that I had somehow survived the ordeal.

She eased a pillow behind me and then handed me a glass.

"It has electrolytes – drink up."

When I had finished with that glass, she topped it up and told me to drink it all.

"How do you feel?"

"Better, thank you," my voice sounded distant, as if I wasn't quite residing inside my own head.

"You're burned up pretty good, but I think you'll survive it."

"Where am I?"

"You're on Luna, my boat. I fished you out of the sea nearby."

Her words connected me back to the episode, "I thought for sure I was a goner."

"To be honest, when I saw you floating in the water, I thought you were dead. Had you been face down that would have been true."

"You saved my life, thank you."

"I'm Andi – who are you?"

"Trent."

"Got a last name, Trent?"

"McCallister."

"Well, Trent, while you were lying semi-conscious on the deck of my boat, I searched for ID in the hopes of contacting family to notify them about your situation but found nothing on you."

I shook my head as the mental fog began to slowly dissipate, and as my vision started to clear.

"All my ID was on the boat."

"So, what... you fell overboard?"

"Honestly, I'm still a little fuzzy about what happened."

"You've got a decent sized lump on your forehead which might explain your minor amnesia."

I reached up and touched the spot confirming her statement as a spasm of intense pain responded.

3

It took several hours since my rescuer had unceremoniously dragged me from the drink, for my body to stop shaking and for my vision to come back.

The hydration, the food, and more than anything, the realization that I was actually alive, was helping speed my recovery.

The painful burns on my arms, legs and back were a constant reminder of the battle I waged while floating in the sea wearing nothing more than swimming trunks.

Andi applied something called Donkey Milk, a local product containing Aloe Vera, and yes, donkey milk, which helped soothe the sunburn.

Instead of machine-gunning questions my way, she simply left me alone – time I needed to restore some sense of balance to my life, moreover, to assess what exactly had happened to me.

For a long time, I stood at the rail, looking out over the Aegean Sea while my mind meandered through the miasma of recent events.

It finally all came back to me, and with it, a pang of embarrassment too.

Andi appeared next to me with Ninja-like silence.

Up until now, I had been so preoccupied with my near-death-incident, not to mention my fuzzy vision, that I had failed to notice just how attractive she was.

Standing next to me, I saw that her eyes were as blue as the Aegean Sea.

Her chestnut hair lightly flagged in the breeze.

And her skin, smooth and tanned to a golden leathery brown.

She handed me a cold bottle.

“Mythos, one of Greek’s finest beers, a medicinal cure for everything that ails you,” she said with a smile.

“What, no Budweiser?”

“American, are we?”

“No, I am Canadian.”

“What the hell is a Canadian doing floating in the Aegean Sea?”

“I work at the Canadian Embassy in Athens. Took a reprieve and came to Rhodes for a getaway.”

“You almost made it a permanent one,” she said. Her flippant attitude added to a certain mystique and appeal about her.

I turned to look out over the sea – a beautiful sight under normal circumstances, but one which now summoned demons from the darkest corners of my mind.

“What is that island over there?” I pointed.

“Seskli. It’s a tiny place, uninhabited, right next to Simi.” In fact, “Rhodes is there,” she pointed to an outcropping in the distance.”

“Did you find me near that island?”

She nodded.

I shook my head. “I can remember being tossed onto a steep slope and then being dragged back into the sea by the surf.”

“The undertows in this region can be brutal.”

“You seem familiar with it,” I said.

“I’ve been sailing the Med and the Aegean, as well as the west coast of Africa for nearly two years – landing at nearly every major port along the way – I know my way around.”

“Impressive lifestyle.”

She dismissed it with a shrug, “So, Trent, what happened to you?”

I cringed. “Frankly, it’s embarrassing.”

“Ooh,” she lightly squealed with obvious delight. “The more mortifying the story, the more entertaining it is. Besides, you are the first person I’ve dragged from the sea, so, do tell,” she waited with anticipation.

“I rented a small skiff from the marina in Rhodes. Took it out for a spin around the tip of the island and got caught in a strong wind.”

“I know the area, gets very windy on that part of coast. I presume you know how to sail?” she asked with a questioning look and a raised brow.

“I’d say the jury is debating that about now.”

I drew a breath and exhaled.

“Anyhow, I was struggling against the wind to get the boat on a course back to Rhodes and I didn’t duck in time and...” she cut me off.

“The boom hit you in the head,” she suddenly interjected.

“Sadly, yes,” I touched the painful lump on my forehead. “And I guess this is my trophy.” Andi chortled.

“Is that funny?”

“Frankly, I haven’t met a real sail buff yet who hasn’t taken one in the head at one time or another.”

“All I remember is blacking out and hitting the water in a complete daze. When the world stopped spinning, I looked around for the skiff, but the wind had already blown it well beyond my reach, leaving me floating out there.”

“When did this happen?”

I paused to connect the dots, “I left Rhodes about one in the afternoon, so, probably around four or so.”

Her eyes grew wide. “You survived all that time until this morning when I found you.”

“When did you drag me from the water?”

“It was around 6:30 this morning,” she answered.

I felt a rush of surrealism.

“So, I was floating out there for almost fifteen hours.”

She measured me up with a firm look. “How old are you?”

“Fifty-three.”

“Well, Trent McCallister, you’re either the luckiest man in the world, or the Universe has other plans for you.”
