

Chapter 11

“Stand by to hoist the spinnaker,” Chris yelled at the top of his lungs.

The cherry red Chesapeake 43 sloop surged forward through the heavy swell. With twenty knots of wind, the *Courageous* was in her element. She crashed through the waves, sending white water flying.

Candace Hardwick, Chris’s step-mom danced along the bow of the boat in her red foul weather gear. She had her long black hair pulled back in a pony tail and secured inside her sou’wester.

“Stand by to hoist the spinnaker,” she yelled.

After all the time Chris had spent hating Candace, they eventually reconciled when they went to law school together. Now Candace was his extremely accomplished deck ape. It seems that whatever she did, she did well.

September usually brought ideal sailing weather to Puget Sound. At least as ideal as it got in the Pacific Northwest. Gray skies with occasional rain were the penalty one paid for strong steady winds. During the lovely summer months, there was rarely a good sailing wind.

Oh well, if you’re gonna sail in the Northwest, you’re gonna get wet. Chris shrugged his shoulders and concentrated on the big orange buoy coming up on their port side.

The buoy seemed to be flying towards them. Chris looked down at his GPS read out. They were skipping along at over eight knots. The *Courageous* was a thoroughbred. She took to the Northwest weather like she was bred for it.

Chris glanced back over his shoulder. *All the King’s Men* and *Fanta-Sea* were maybe a boat length behind. Chris eased the wheel a little to port. No way was he going to let them get between him and buoy.

"I'm thinking the Number One spinnaker," Harry Hardwick, Chris's dad, said in a conversational tone. Harry, while retired from racing himself, served as Chris's tactical advisor on the *Courageous*.

With the boat charging hard to windward, it was noisy in the cockpit, but not so loud that conversation was difficult. With the boat heeled hard to port, Chris stood at the starboard wheel with a foot up on the navigator's seat to steady himself.

"Me too," Chris said. "Candace," he shouted, "make ready to hoist Number One."

"Aye, aye, captain," Candace shouted back at the top of her lungs. "Make ready to hoist Number One."

Candace was a tall woman and extremely strong. She was easily the most beautiful woman Chris had ever met. With long black hair and emerald green eyes, she still managed to stuff her hair in her cap, don long Johns and foul weather gear and be one of the guys. Growing up in rural Idaho, she had spent her summers hunting and fishing with her father. She was still a tomboy even though she was approaching forty.

"Hand up Number One," she shouted down the foredeck hatch.

"Number One coming up," Alan shouted. Alan, Candace's assistant deck ape was one of Harry's rising stars at Hardwick, Bernstein & Johnson.

Harry liked to call his young associates "his piranhas." He wanted ambitious, hungry young lawyers who would sell their mother's souls for a chance to grill a hostile witness on the stand.

Alan, a burly young man who had played football for Harry's beloved Huskies was one of those piranhas. There was a long line at HB&J of young associates fighting for the chance to crew on Chris's boat. They knew that Harry would be on board for every race.

Chris knew it was blatant brown-nosing, but he needed crew and his dad's piranhas were young, smart, strong and physically fit.

The orange buoy was getting closer.

“Stand by with chute.” Chris yelled.

“Making ready with kite,” Candace yelled back.

She and Alan unhooked the spinnaker pole from the foredeck. While Alan raised one end and clipped it unto the attachment on the mast, Candace ran the guy wire through the other end and attached it to the leeward clew on the big sail.

She moved the bright orange “turtle,” the bag in which the gigantic sail was stowed, to the center of the foredeck, then attached the spinnaker sheet to the other corner of the sail.

“Sheets clear?” she shouted back to the cockpit.

Ted pulled on the red nylon line to make sure it was free.

“Running free,” he shouted up to Candace.

Chris chuckled to himself as he watched Ted move clumsily about the cockpit. While willing to try anything, Ted was about as nautical as a cement truck. He never got the knack of moving about a tossing boat, but he was incredibly strong and just the right guy to crank on the big sheet winches.

Candace unclipped the spinnaker halyard from the mast and took it to the turtle. She clipped the halyard to the top of the sail.

“Ready with the kite,” she yelled back to Chris.

“Rounding the mark,” Chris yelled. “Helm down!”

The big red sailboat surged past the orange buoy and leaned into a sharp turn.

“You’re awfully close,” Harry advised his son as the boat skimmed past the inflated nylon buoy with inches to spare.

“Sheet out the main,” Chris yelled.

Timothy complied instantly and eased out on the main sheet until the boom was nearly perpendicular to the boat’s center line. Maybe Ben Johnson’s son wasn’t such a bad hand after all.

The sloop made the turn and plunged forward on the downwind course.

“Raise the kite!” Chris shouted.

“Aye, aye. Raise the kite,” Candace echoed.

Alan grabbed the halyard and hauled it in hand over hand. The big sail flew up the mast. Candace fed it out of the turtle as it climbed.

The red, white and blue Captain American themed parachute shaped sail caught the wind. It billowed out with an explosive crack. Alan grabbed a winch handle and took a couple more turns on the winch. The sail inched to the top of the mast.

“Sheet in,” Candace yelled.

Ted inserted the stainless steel handle on the big self-tailing winch and turned for all he was worth. His biceps bulged with the strain. The red spinnaker sheet wound around the winch and dropped onto the cockpit floor.

“Vast hauling,” Chris shouted. He was satisfied with the sail’s position. “Close only counts in horse shoes and hand grenades,” he grinned at his dad. “And atomic bombs.”

He made minor adjustments with the big stainless steel wheel and the *Courageous* settled onto a downwind course. Her bow lifted from the waves and white water surged past her quarters as she surfed down the backside of the waves.

“Everyone aft,” Chris shouted. He really didn’t need to. His crew was superbly trained. They already raced towards the rear of the boat.

“Woo-hoo!” Chris shouted. The readout on his GPS screen crept up. Ten, twelve, thirteen, thirteen point five, fourteen. “Fifteen.! We’re hitting fifteen knots.”

This was damned near as fast as the old clipper ships sailed on their best days.

The roar of the wind and water died down as they settled on their new course. They were traveling with the wind. It became very still and quiet in the cockpit. Suddenly everyone got very hot in their slickers. One after another, crew members pulled off their jackets.

“Seventeen.” The *Courageous* was flying. “Woo-hoo, seventeen! That’s the fastest she’s ever gone!”

The crew huddled in the back of the cockpit. Their fate was in Chris’s hands. As the *Courageous* flew downwind with the force of a freight train, one wrong move could spell disaster. If the boat broached, turned across the wind and rolled onto her side, the big sail would fill with water and they would all be scrambling for their lives.

Chris remembered what one of Dad’s old sailing buddies taught him. *Sailing is riding the edge between exhilaration and sheer terror.*

“Anyone need coffee?” Maria poked her head out of the main hatchway. “I’ve got a fresh pot.”

Chris was pleased at how Maria had integrated into his crew. She had grown up on boats in the Sea of Cortez, so she had no problems being on the water, but they were mostly fishing boats. She didn’t have any real sailing experience. She was great in the galley though.

She had Kayla, Candace and Harry’s adopted ten-year old daughter for a helper. Kayla’s mom was killed by Mexican drug dealers and her dad was serving a long prison term for dealing.

“I have hot chocolate ready, Candy,” Kayla shouted over the roar of the boat.

She seemed to fit right in.

Candace had taken on Mom’s old job of feeding the crew and always having a hot drink ready to fight the frigid weather.

Chris sighed. He still missed his Mom. Cancer had robbed him of her when he was still in high school. His Dad was so wrapped up in his own sorrow and guilt that Chris and his sister, Sara, had been left to raise themselves.

Speaking of sisters, what was wrong with Hope? He felt a little tug at his heart string. She was afraid of water and boats. He hadn’t been able to get her on board the *Courageous* yet at all. This was something that would have to be fixed if they were to have a future together.

Chris heard a chirping in his inside pocket. *What the hell?* Who would be bothering him on race day? Everyone at the office knew that they were off-limits unless al-Qaeda flew into the twin towers again, and then only if one of the senior partners were involved.

He pulled his cell phone from his inside pocket.

“Holly shit!” He read the text message.

“What is it?” Harry asked.

“Clayton Johnson-White, Ben’s nephew. He’s escaped from juvie.”

“Mr. Randall to see you, sir,” Ruth said, standing in Abe Weinstein’s office door. She had a particularly sour expression on her face. She saved that expression for some of Weinstein’s more unsavory clients.

“Show him in.” Weinstein put down his pen and sat back in his chair. He had several contract drafts, complete with little yellow tabs and red marking on them, spread out over his desk. He liked to look busy when a client walked into his office.

“Mr. Randall,” Ruth said. She waved the young man into the office, hesitated a moment for Weinstein to offer refreshment, then when he didn’t, she closed the door behind her.

Richard Randall Jr., Dickie to his associates, they couldn’t really be called friends, looked like he just rolled out of bed.

The thirtyish man wore baggy jeans and a T-shirt with a death’s head printed on the front under an unzipped red hoody. A John Deere baseball cap covered his shaggy brown hair and he had at least three days worth of beard on his cheeks.

“Richard, it’s good to see you again.” Weinstein rose from his chair and extended his hand.

“Please sit.” He gestured to a chair in front of his desk. “I’m really sorry about your father. I knew him quite well.”

Dickie didn’t respond to Weinstein’s comment about his father. He didn’t seem to be that shook up.

“Mr. Weinstein,” Dickie said, “I need for you to represent me.”

“I see.” Weinstein sat back in his chair and steepled his fingers.

“I was runnin’ my dad’s businesses anyway, now that he’s gone, I’m still runnin’ ‘em. But Karen has shown up in Seattle. She’s moved into the house. Now she’s tryin’ to run the business. She’s going to the coffee huts and tellin’ ‘em that she’s in charge.”

“I’m not sure what I can do for you, Richard. She is your father’s wife. She has a legal right to take over his business. You’re his son, but you don’t have any legal standing. Without a power of attorney, she is responsible for his businesses.”

Dickie’s right knee jerked up and down uncontrollably as he sat in the chair. “Look, Mr. Weinstein, she killed him. I know it. She’s a ravin’ mega-bitch from hell. She killed him and now she’s takin’ over his businesses. There must be some way to get her out.”

“As far as I know, she has the legal right to take over. She was in here the other day with a notarized power of attorney for your father. . . .”

“It’s forged. She done it before. When my dad adopted my son, Bobby, she forged my signature on the paper giving my release.”

“Can you prove this?”

“I don’t know. I was in the Air Force, in Thailand, when they did it. I didn’t know anything about it until I got back. Then Bobby was livin’ with my Dad, which wasn’t so bad, and he said he had legal custody. I really didn’t have any place to live yet, didn’t have a job, so I just let it go.”

Weinstein leaned forward in his chair. "Look, Richard, I know that there have been questions about Karen in the past, but why do you think she killed your dad?"

"For one thing, they're always fightin'. For another, she wants to run his businesses. She's always tellin' him what a shitty job he's doin'. She thinks she can do better."

"But is that a reason to kill someone?"

"Dad has a girl friend. Down in LA. Karen's jealous. They had a big fight over it and she said she was gonna divorce him. If they divorced, she'd only get half of his estate. This way she gets everything."

"I see. Well, I can look into it. I owe your father that much." Weinstein looked out his window for a moment. The light rain settled onto Fifth Avenue. Shoppers moved around under umbrellas. Soon it would be the holiday season. Weinstein loved the city during the holidays.

"Richard, I might as well clue you in on the status of the cases against your employees, or your father's employees."

"Yeah. How'd that come out?"

"I negotiated a deal for them. Two of your baristas will get delayed prosecution. If they don't get into trouble for two years, the charges against them will be dropped."

"Cool."

"Miss Johnson-White will get twenty days of home detention on a reduced charge of working without an adult entertainment license. It will go on her record, but she won't have to do any jail time."

"She's a minor, why didn't they just give her juvie?"

"The prosecutor wanted to scare her straight. It's a good deal. No one serves any time."

"What about the other two?"

"That's the good news. I got the charges dropped on them. All-in-all, I think we did pretty well here."

The Wilsons closed up their vacation home on Camano Island right after Labor Day. They wouldn't be back until Thanksgiving. Clayton knew their habits and patterns. He had lived down the road from them for all of his life.

He couldn't go home. His mom's house would be the first place the cops looked. He didn't want to see her anyway. She and that lawyer conspired to get him thrown in the clink. He didn't need her. He didn't need anybody.

There was one good thing that came out of his time in juvie though. He used his new-found knowledge to pick the lock on the back door. Previously, he would have had to break a window. Then the cops might spot the broken glass and investigate.

No alarm. What idiots! How trusting could these Wilson fools get?

He moved slowly, cautiously, into the kitchen. He stopped and listened. No sound. No one at home. Just as it should be.

The first thing he did was check the fridge. It was mostly empty, but there was a six pack of Bud. Jeeze, Old Man Wilson drank Bud? Didn't he have any class?

The freezer produced better results. There was a package of New York Steaks, some hamburger and a couple of frozen pizzas. The cabinets yielded a variety of good stuff, not the least of which was an unopened package of Oreos. The box of Cocoa Puffs was great, but he didn't have any milk. Oh well, he could pop them in his mouth dry.

Clayton made his way to the living room. Cool, the Wilson's had added a big screen TV since he was here last. And a cable box. Would it still be hooked up? Cool. A Microsoft X-box sat on the shelf under the TV.

He carried the box of cereal with him and tossed a handful in his mouth every few minutes. In the bathroom he found tooth paste and deodorant as well as a heavy coat and a fleece vest that fit him in the bedroom.

Easy livin'. He should be safe here for a while. The house was far enough back from the road that no one would notice lights on at night. There was a Honda generator in the garage that he could sell for a little pocket change. And there was a computer on the desk in the bedroom, a nice tower job with a high-speed Internet connection.

Hmmm . . . Old Man Wilson was a pilot. The book shelves in the living room were full of books about flying. Clayton picked up a copy of *Stick and Rudder* and began to leaf through it. It was a primer on flying.

Then he had a thought. *The X-box*. He turned on the TV set and fired up the game console. Sure enough, there it was, Microsoft's *Flight Simulator*. His favorite game. Time flew by as he played for a couple of hours.

Oh, the freedom of flight.

It was getting late and Clayton was a little hungry. He turned on the oven and popped in a pizza. He cracked open a beer, shut down the X-box and turned on the TV.

"This young man is a threat to the community," a thin faced gray haired deputy was saying on the TV news. "We ask the public for assistance in apprehending him." The picture on the TV changed to a picture of Clayton.

How about that? I'm famous.

"Clayton Johnson-White has been known to break into vacant vacation homes and steal food and blankets. We ask the public to keep an eye on any vacant homes near them and report any unusual activity."

The bastards. Did they really think that they could catch him?

"The Sherriff has made it a high priority to apprehend this young man."

High priority, my ass.

Clayton threw his beer bottle across the room. "Come on, you bastards, come get me," he yelled.

Then he had a more lucent thought. *The police scanner!* There was a police scanner above the desk in the bedroom. He could keep track of what they're up to.

He pulled his pizza from the oven, grabbed another beer, and headed to the bedroom. He turned on the scanner and listened for calls.

While he ate his pizza, he perused the stack of DVD's next to the bed.

Hey, this is cool. He held a copy of *Catch me if You Can* with Leonardo DiCaprio.

He took the DVD to the living room and put it in the player. *Come Fly With Me* got stuck in his head. Over and over he heard Sinatra. "Come fly with me, let's fly, let's fly away." *Yeah, that was it.*

Catch me if You Can became his motto. *Yeah, stupid cops, think you can out smart me? Hah!*

Catch me if you can.

Most of his second day as a guest of the Wilsons was spent on the computer. Clayton surfed the 'net and dabbled on Facebook. He built a Facebook page but quickly realized it didn't have much pizzazz. He needed pictures.

There was a digital camera in the china cabinet. He dug that out and started experimenting. Soon he was downloading photographs to the computer and uploading them to his web site. Selfies in a stranger's home was just what the doctor ordered.

On day three he heard the call. The dispatcher on the police scanner told a deputy to check out the Wilson's house. A neighbor reported something suspicious.

"Christ," he muttered. "I have to get out of here."

He quickly gathered a few things. The police scanner was going with him. Without it, he would have been caught.

Those smug bastards. He wanted to show them that he was onto them, that he had outsmarted them.

He unzipped his fly and hosed down the couch.

Take that!

Then a thought struck him. He rummaged around in the kids room until he found a box with colored chalk. He returned to the living room and drew a Dr. Seussian bird flying away on the white wall. Underneath he wrote the inscription "Catch Me If You Can." He tucked the box of chalk in his pocket.

But how to get away?

There was an ATV in the garage. He found the spare keys on the back of the kitchen door and headed out off road.

Camano Island was getting a little too hot for him. He knew just the thing. He crossed the Island to a marina and waited until dark.

There was no sign of activity in the marina when Clayton tip toed down the dock. He chose a fast looking boat, a twenty-eight foot fiberglass cruiser with a big Mercury V-8 with inboard/outboard drive. Once again, his time in juvie paid off.

Growing up on an island, boating came naturally to him. He had nothing better to do than to hang around on the docks. He sure as hell didn't want to hang around at home. He wasted so much of his time watching rich people playing with their boats. Now it was his turn.

He broke the lock on the cabin door and rummaged around until he found a flash light. No sense in turning on the boat's lights in the marina.

It didn't take long to figure out how to hotwire the boat. He loaded his few possessions on board, cast off and crept out of the marina with his lights off

As soon as he was clear of the break water, he opened her up. The swift cruiser leapt forward and came unto the plane. White water frothed in his wake. He made a small turn to get the feel for the boat. Then he came back the other way. It was exhilarating. Soon he was doing a series of S-turns in the water at top speed.

He felt a sharp electrical charge pass through his body. He was free. This was it. The start of a new life.