

*Spike & Ama, retired actors and former lovers, meet again at a friend's wake. Their old flame re-ignites and they decide to forge a new life together in a foolhardy venture to restore an abandoned theatre, drawing on their lifetime's theatre experience. And a lot of help from their friends old and new. They succeed but not in the way they imagined.*

# Ample Make This Bed

By Terry Oliver

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# AMPLE MAKE THIS BED

*A novel for the over-60s*



**TERRY OLIVER**

AUTHOR OF THE 3RD AGE TRILOGY

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## CHAPTER ONE

‘Spike? Over here! Spike!’  
At first, Porter Drummond didn’t recognise his nickname above the din of mourners talking at the top of their voices as they spilled over into the front hall, clutching drinks to their chests or holding them high above their heads. He was almost pushed back out the front door. He wedged himself against a door jamb to gain some forward leverage and side-slipped past a beefy man with his tie askew, holding a drink in each hand.

‘Take it easy, mate. There’s lots more where this came from.’ The man jerked his perspiring head to one side. ‘The bar’s right in there – but it’s a free-for-all.’ He pressed his steaming face closer to shout in Porter’s ear. ‘Head for the kitchen, the stock’s in there.’

Porter pushed past him and slid along the wall into the crush of the living room and glanced about for a familiar face.

‘Spike – here, behind you!’ came a woman’s voice again.

He half turned and saw her. ‘Ama?’

They struggled to get closer but the crowd took no notice and they swayed back and forth out of reach, smiling helplessly at each other.

‘It’s no use, I’m stuck!’ she called, holding out one arm for him to grab. Their fingers touched but were pulled apart.

‘Ama – stay there, I’m coming.’ He dropped to his hands and knees, forcing himself through the forest of legs, which parted slightly at the unexpected pressure and he squeezed between them towards where she stood. He stopped at a pair of women’s legs, made a decision and ran his hand up her calf. The leg twitched, the woman gave a startled scream and the crowd fell back enough for him to stand, face to face with her.

‘Amarylis Waterstone,’ he grinned. ‘I’d recognise those legs anywhere.’

‘Porter Drummond,’ she smiled back at him. ‘You haven’t lost your touch.’

They hugged and stood swaying as the crowd closed in on them and the volume resumed its previous level.

‘Dance?’ he said into her ear.

She laughed, holding his hand, ‘Why not?’

‘Like old times. We haven’t been this close for decades.’

‘Not since London.’

‘Not since The Old Vic,’ he nodded. ‘What was the production?’

‘“Tis Pity She’s A Whore”.’

‘How could I forget? All those thrusting bosoms...’

‘And all those bulging cod-pieces,’ she grinned. ‘Speaking of which...’

‘Sorry – it’s this heaving crowd,’ he apologised.

‘Not just the crowd, perhaps,’ she said, into his ear.

‘Perhaps not. What we need is a drink, Ama. To celebrate our reunion.’

‘Hopeless - the bar’s mobbed. It is a wake, remember?’

‘Some guy said the kitchen is where they store the booze...when was the last time you did a stage faint, Ama?’

‘Faint? Right here?’

‘Yeah, swoon – and I’ll carry you out.’

‘Ooohhh! Aaahhh!’

‘That’s it – louder... and slump!’

‘Oohh God...I can’t breathe!’ She sagged against him and he grabbed her under the arms.

‘Make room, make room!’ Porter shouted. ‘Somebody help her!’

‘Okay – I’ll take her feet!’ said a tall man peering over the others at Ama slumped in Porter’s arms, her head flung dramatically to one side. The two men carried her out through the crush of mourners, suddenly hushed and clearing a path for them, as Porter steered down the hall for the kitchen. As they arrived, he spoke to her.

‘Okay, SnowWhite, you can wake up. Thanks, pal. She’ll be alright now. What she needs is a good stiff drink.’

The tall young man lowered her feet and found a chair for her to sit on. He watched Ama’s miraculous recovery, then glanced at Porter pouring out large drinks.

‘Join us?’ Porter offered him one of the drinks. ‘Pretty convincing actress, isn’t she?’

‘Oh, I knew she was acting,’ the man said, taking the drink.

‘You did? I thought she had everyone fooled, except me, of course. How did you know?’

‘Halfway down the hall, she winked at me,’ he said, laughing and toasting Ama, who raised her glass to him and winked again. ‘My name’s Sy.’

Porter turned to stare at him. ‘My god... you’re not...

The young man nodded. ‘Simon, junior. This is my father’s wake. Cheers!’ he added, holding up his glass again.

‘I thought your dad was a tall man but I think you’ve got him beat. He was a good head taller than me.’ Porter held out

his hand, 'I'm Porter Drummond, one of your dad's oldest friends. But I haven't seen him for a long time.'

'Are you related to Spike Drummond?' asked Sy. 'I haven't seen you since I was a kid.'

'Quite closely,' said Ama. 'Spike is Porter's nickname. And he and I haven't met since I was your age. My name's Amarylis Waterstone, better known as Ama, because nobody can pronounce it or spell it. Your mother invited me to come today although I only knew your dad for a short while. But I've known your mom through her work in the theatre – she's a brilliant scholar.'

'That's how she and Dad met – they both did medieval studies at Dartmouth College.'

'Where is she, Sy? I haven't seen anyone I know in this crowd,' said Porter.

'She's here somewhere. I'll go and look for her and tell her you're here.'

'How is she coping with all this?' Porter waved his arm around at the crowd of noisy mourners.

'Well, it wasn't unexpected. She and Dad planned this wake together when he knew he was dying,' Sy finished his drink with one long swallow. 'I think I know where she might be. There's another crowd downstairs in the TV room. You stay here and catch up with the rest of us – we're about ten drinks ahead of you. I'll see if I can find her and bring her back'. He loped off down the hall.

'So, Amarylis, where shall we begin? We've got off to a rather unusual start.'

'Well, perhaps we can start with our names. It feels odd calling you Porter after thinking of you all these years as Spike. And not many people even know my name is Amarylis. You never called me anything but Ama, so how about just Spike and Ama again?'

‘Suits me. Porter Drummond was only my acting name when I trod the boards. My agent always insisted nobody would take me seriously with a name like Spike. But now as nobody takes me seriously anymore, Spike is fine with me – Ama.’

‘I’ll drink to that,’ she said holding out her glass for him to top up. ‘To Spike and Ama.’

‘To Ama and Spike – cheers!’

‘Well, now that we’ve got the star billing sorted, we can start the first act replay,’ she said. ‘The last I heard of you, you were going on tour to Australia with that comedy where you jumped through a plate glass window.’

‘The Front Page. Yeah, that was a great play. You and I had just split up so I decided to go with the touring company to Sidney and Melbourne for eight weeks.’

‘Is that all? I thought you were away for years – you never wrote once,’ she accused him.

‘You left me, remember? For that northern actor – I forgot his name. Blanked it out of my mind.’

Ama smiled. ‘Tim Hockney. That lasted for about three weeks. He was a notorious womaniser. Having a northern boyfriend was becoming quite fashionable back then. He taught me the Geordie accent – very useful, I got lots of TV and radio parts because of it. I wrote you, afterwards – twice, but you never replied. Sent them via The Old Vic stage door.’

‘I never got them. The tour was so successful, they kept extending it – New Zealand, Hong Kong, South Africa. They must have got lost along the way. What did you say – come back? Beg my forgiveness?’ He grinned, watching her reaction.

‘I don’t remember – more likely, the other way around. You were sleeping with that Scottish girl behind my back, as I recall.’



‘Fiona. That was just a fling. We didn’t do much sleeping. You were too busy with your first leading role in rep – in that Alan Ayckbourn play.’

‘That’s right, my new northern accent got me that part – Watford Rep, a tryout for a West End transfer. ‘Absurd Person Singular.’ The play transferred but I didn’t – dropped for a bigger name and a worse accent.’

‘Sour grapes?’

‘Very. And I came limping home from Watford, seeking comfort – and find you in bed with the fiery redhead, Fiona.’

‘It was just excess testosterone combined with opportunism – and she piqued my curiosity with her hairy orange legs. Made me wonder if... you know,’ he trailed off.

‘A boy’s natural curiosity,’ she nodded. ‘And was she? No, I don’t want to know.’

‘Everywhere – armpits, too. Didn’t believe in shaving – unnatural, she said.’

‘Just a wild Highland lass. Must have been exciting, I’m sure, compared to me, your ordinary North London consort.’

‘She was from Perth Rep. Not exactly the Highlands. Just down to the Big Smoke for a ‘dirty weekend’, as she called it.

Ama raised her hand to stop him, ‘I think I’ve heard all I want of the fiery Fiona. Perhaps, more to the point – what is your current status, if I may be so bold? - single, married, divorced, co-habiting... all of these, none of these?’

‘All of those, but none of those at the moment. You?’

‘Similar, I guess – sort of mix and repeat a few times.’

‘A few times? Which – all of those or...?’

‘Married, divorced three times.’

‘That’s an impressive record, Ama.’

‘Is it? A three-time loser. Depressing, I’d call it. However, I do have one daughter, as a consolation.’

‘Does she live with you, or flown the nest?’

‘Off and on. She’s away at present. I’m afraid she might break my record.’

‘Sounds like my son, Patrick – a chip off the old block is the term, I think.’ He picked up an open bottle of rye and poured them both another drink. ‘A toast to our offspring – may they not repeat the error of our ways.’

She drank, then raised her glass again. ‘To our renewed acquaintance.’

They drank, silently toasting each other, smiling and nodding beneath the steady buzz of the mourners. Spike looked around the swelling crowd that moved in and out of the kitchen.

‘Do you suppose there’s any food left or has this horde scoffed it all, Ama?’

‘Try the fridge,’ she suggested.

Spike opened it. ‘Aha! The mother lode. Look at this, Ama.’

She peered over his shoulder and shook her head. ‘It’s all still wrapped in clingfilm, Spike. I don’t think we should open it until Esther comes back – she may be saving it for later on.’

‘Where is she, anyway? Sy must have found her by now.’

As if on cue, he saw Sy’s head bobbing above the black clad guests, leading his mother by the elbow. She spotted Spike and waved her wineglass – spilling some of its contents over her guests like a blessing.

‘Spike! - you made it.’ She embraced him, pouring the rest of her wine down his back. She was more than a little tipsy. She turned to Ama. ‘Sy told me how you were rescued by him from near suffocation, Ama.’

‘My hero.’ Ama smiled.

‘Esther – sorry, sorry, sorry. Sorry I was too late for Simon and too late to be here for you at the end.’ He hugged

her again and held her close for a minute or so. She pulled free to gaze up into his face, tears welling into her reddened eyes and streaking her makeup.

‘This wake is supposed to be a celebration and I can’t stop crying. Every time I see another old friend here...’ she stopped, dabbing at her eyes with a sodden handkerchief clutched in her hand. ‘But you missed the reading of the will. Simon wanted you to be here for the surprise, didn’t he Sy?’

Her son nodded, ‘Shall I tell him or do you want to, Mom?’

‘You tell him, Sy. I’ll just start crying again,’ said Esther.

‘Dad left you the Mongoose,’ he said, handing Spike the keys. ‘It’s still waiting for the dry dock, I’m afraid. Dad was too weak to begin painting her. But he was happy to think you would finish the restoration job you’ve both worked on for so long.’

‘The Mongoose belongs to you and Esther, Sy. I only have a part share in her. You both know that,’ said Spike, trying to hand the keys back to Simon.

‘My only interest in the boat was to help Dad realise his dream, Spike. I’m like Mom, I don’t like the sea or boats, except as scenery. Besides, I’m going to New York in a few days – be gone indefinitely.’

‘Sy’s right,’ said Esther, ‘I get seasick crossing the harbour on the Dartmouth ferry. We all agreed you were the one to finish the Mongoose. It’s what Simon hoped for. Don’t let us down, Spike.’

‘It would be an honour and a pleasure to complete the project,’ said Spike. ‘It’s true, the Mongoose was a shared dream – I just never expected it to end like this. I’ll happily finish her, but I can only accept part ownership. Esther.’

Esther looked at her son and nodded agreement. ‘Okay, Spike, we’ll remain silent partners but you take responsibility for it.’

Sy shook Spike’s hand and held out the boat keys. ‘And if you ever decide to sell the Mongoose, we’ll be there with our hands out for our share – agreed?’

‘Congratulations, Captain,’ said Ama. ‘How about some champagne to break over your bow?’

‘I’m afraid this bunch have demolished the champagne hours ago,’ said Esther, ‘but there’s lots of wine – everybody brought some.’

‘Not me,’ said Ama. ‘I brought some bubbly and hid it under the back-porch steps – for our surprise meeting, Spike. Do you think you can break through that crowd by the door, Sy, and find it?’

‘Be right back,’ he said and inserted his long bony frame into the solid wall of guests blocking the back door.

‘Surprise meeting?’ said Spike. ‘You knew about it?’

‘I told Ama I’d been in contact with all Simon’s oldest friends and when I mentioned your name she almost fell over. Told me she had lost touch with you years ago and thought you were in Europe or Australia,’ said Esther.

‘So, when Esther said you lived in BC and were coming here for the wake, she invited me, too, at the last minute, to meet you again.’

‘I was going to produce her as a surprise,’ explained Esther, ‘but we both got waylaid in the pandemonium. I forgot how popular Simon was and all his old graduates and colleagues and sailing pals just kept pouring in from all over. God knows where they’ll all stay tonight. This is a big old house but there’s only room for a few of them, unless they can sleep standing up.’

‘I bet they’ll stay right here as long as the booze lasts,’ said Spike, staring at the revellers, ‘probably still be here in the morning.’

Sy reappeared with two plastic shopping bags in his hands. He handed one bag to Spike and stuck the other one in a high cupboard over the fridge. ‘For later,’ he said to Ama.

Spike popped the champagne cork and filled all their glasses, keeping hold of the bottle.

‘To Dad’ said Sy, raising his glass.

‘To Simon,’ the others all said and drained their glasses.

‘To the Mongoose,’ said Spike, pouring out more bubbly.

‘To Captain Drummond,’ Ama toasted.

‘To surprise reunions,’ Esther proposed.

. She turned to Spike. ‘When Simon got ill, I took over the department, to carry on Simon’s modern English Shakespeare project.’

‘That’s a mammoth task from what Simon told me of it,’ said Spike, ‘and he was just nicely getting started, too.’

She nodded agreement. ‘Yes, we’d only done a handful of the easier plays before he learned of his disease. He was going great guns until then, wasn’t he, Sy?’

‘Never saw him so happy,’ he said. ‘And then it all came to a halt, almost.’

‘Why, what happened? He never really talked much about it to me,’ said Spike. ‘His illness, I mean.’

‘That’s Dad all over, I couldn’t get him to tell me for the longest time. And he swore Mom to silence.’

‘She never spoke of it to me until quite near the end,’ said Ama, ‘although I knew something was up.’ She turned to Esther, ‘You used to start crying for no apparent reason. I couldn’t figure it out – thought it was marital problems but you wouldn’t tell me.’

‘Oh, I’m an expert crier now – been at it almost non-stop today. After Simon told me he was diagnosed with early Alzheimer’s, he knew he would never finish the project. I tried to persuade him to continue but he refused. Said he would just mess it up and I should just go on with it myself. Made me promise not to tell anyone or we might lose our project funding.’

‘But surely he knew they would find out if he stopped working on it,’ said Spike.

‘He’d figured it all out,’ said Esther. ‘Gave up all his classes and only kept his graduate seminars so he could focus more on the project – that’s what he told the Dean. I drove him into his department office and he pretended to work on the plays.’

‘Didn’t his graduate students realise what was happening to him?’ asked Ama.

‘Not for awhile, but by the end of the term it was obvious to him he couldn’t continue, so he asked for a sabbatical leave to do some research in London.’

‘That’s when Dad told me what was wrong with him and asked me to help. He said he wanted to end his life before it became obvious to everyone, and the Shakespeare project would be in jeopardy – that’s all he cared about. So I agreed,’ said Sy.

Esther took his arm. ‘We can talk more later. Sy and I should be circulating – we haven’t spoken to half the people here yet and they’ll think it’s strange.’

‘Would you like me to help put out some of the food, Esther, while you see to your guests?’ asked Ama.

‘The buffet!... oh my god! It’s gone straight out of my mind. No wonder everybody seems smashed – all this drinking on an empty stomach. Now, there’s a ton of stuff in

the pantry and plates and plates of aperitifs in the fridge here and more in the one downstairs...’

‘Why don’t you and Sy go down and deal with that, while Spike and I spread out the buffet in the kitchen.’

‘Yes,’ said Esther, ‘I know it’s a wake but it still wouldn’t do for the hostess to end up flat on the floor. I’m already feeling giddy and there’s hours to go yet with the buffet and the musicians arriving for the evening.’ She handed her empty wineglass to Ama. ‘I better start pacing myself, Sy. I can’t drink like I used to. When your dad gave those parties for his grad students – I could keep up with the best of them.’

Ama opened the fridge door and began passing out the loaded plates to Spike to unwrap.

‘I suppose it’s alright for me to sample these now we’ve had the official signal to start,’ he said, trying out items from each plate as it came out of the fridge.

For the next couple of hours Spike and Ama did the rounds of the friendly mourners and guests, while everyone talked at their loudest to be heard above the clamour. They managed to catch up on each other’s past lives, in between meeting people, but they barely scratched the surface of almost forty years apart.

‘I can’t face anymore new people, Ama. Couldn’t we find a corner to sit and talk to each other, instead of to total strangers?’

She looked dubious. ‘That might not be too easy, Spike. We could try upstairs, I guess.’

They wormed their way past people perched all the way up the old oak staircase, eating from plates balanced on their knees and clutching at wine glasses as they passed.

‘It’s just as crowded up here as downstairs,’ said Spike. ‘Even the bathroom’s full.’

‘Let’s try the bedrooms,’ she said, opening one of the doors and then closing it quickly, but not before Spike glimpsed a couple spread-eagled on the bed, naked from the waist down. ‘I hope that’s a spare bedroom and not Esther’s, Ama.’

‘From what she’s told me, she’s used to wild parties when Simon was alive.’

They tried another bedroom with a locked door. ‘That’s probably Esther’s room, Spike. Let’s find Sy’s – he won’t mind, I don’t suppose.’

At the end of the hall, a door stood ajar with several people sitting on the floor in a circle at one side of the bed, drinking and arguing. They looked up briefly at Spike and Ama, before returning to their heated conversation. Spike and Ama commandeered the floor on the opposite side of the bed and pulled a couple of pillows down to sit on while they leaned back against the wall. Spike had lifted a bottle of red wine from a side table in the hall which someone had abandoned. He filled their glasses and they drank silently.

‘God, my throat’s hoarse from shouting at people,’ said Ama, ‘and my feet are killing me.’

Spike reached down to pull off her sandals for her. ‘That better?’

She wriggled her bare toes. ‘Much. Now, what did you want to talk about?’

He slumped back against the wall and closed his eyes. ‘Nothing. I’m talked out. For the moment, anyway – maybe in a while. Let’s just sit and rest. I’ve forgotten how exhausting big parties can be.’

‘Depends,’ said Ama.

‘On what?’



‘Lots of things,’ she said. ‘I love them or hate them – depends on who you meet’.

‘What about this one – love or hate?’

‘I love it – except for my sore feet.’

‘Would you like me to massage them for you? I used to be good at that, remember?’

‘So you were, I hadn’t forgotten.’

‘I see – just hinting?’ He lifted one foot on to his lap and rubbed the sole. ‘How’s that?’

‘Bliss – don’t stop.’ She closed her eyes while Spike kneaded her foot from the heel up to her toes.

‘You used to tell me folk tales – I remember that, too.’

‘That’s right, I did – to relax you. And massaged your feet till you fell asleep.’

‘From Oscar Wilde...’ she prompted.

‘The Giant’s Garden,’ said Spike.

‘I didn’t always fall asleep.’

He slid his hand slowly up her calf. ‘I remember that, too.’

She sat up and pulled him towards her so their faces almost touched. Before either of them quite realised what they were doing they were locked in an old embrace – a kissing match that covered their faces and necks in turn. It lasted for several minutes till they took a breather.

‘God, I wanted to do that since the moment you came through the door,’ said Ama. ‘I’ve been fantasizing about it all morning, waiting for you to show up.’ She kissed him again, more slowly this time, pausing to decide where to place the next one.

‘Took you long enough to get around to it,’ he said. ‘I thought maybe I’d lost the old charm. Made me feel quite insecure.’ He turned his cheek towards her. ‘You missed a spot.’

‘Did I? I’m out of practice – here?’ She kissed the proffered cheek.

‘Down a bit – no – over a bit,’ he moved under her lips. ‘Yes.’ Their mouths met and they were off again, covering each other’s face.

Ama pulled back. ‘Stop. We’re being silly.’

‘I know.’ He continued caressing her, his hands now starting to move down her body, his head following them, brushing his face against her clothing and then her bare knees.

‘Spike,’ she hissed, ‘those people will hear us...’

He lifted his head from her bare leg to look at her. ‘I won’t say a word, I promise.’

‘But they might see you – they’re right there!’

‘I’ll hide.’ He lifted her filmy summer skirt and put his head under it, kissing his way up her thigh.

She gave herself up to the sensation for a brief moment, then wriggled free, pulling her knees up and her skirt down and drawing his head back up to face her. ‘Spike – not here.’

‘Where, then?’ He looked around. ‘Under the bed?’

‘You’re being silly again.’

‘I’m deadly serious, Ama. I want to kiss you all over.’

‘Not under the bed, you’re not.’

‘On top of the bed -’

‘In plain view?’

‘Under the covers -’

‘Spike – be serious, I want this as much as you – but not in front of an audience.’

‘Ask them to leave,’ he said.

‘You ask them – besides they were here first.’

‘You’re making excuses – this is not the Amarylis Waterstone I knew of yore.’

‘It certainly isn’t – that was forty years ago. I’m an old respectable lady now.’

‘Impossible.’ He fondled the hem of her skirt. ‘I remember these legs as if it were yesterday -’

‘And they will remain a memory as long as we stay here,’ she said. ‘I’m leaving before I do something I will regret in the morning.’

‘There’s nowhere else to go, Ama, the house is crammed to the eaves with drunken mourners, all with the same idea as we have.’

‘Not all, surely. This is a wake, not an orgy.’

‘Give them time – wait till the music starts and they get their second wind.’

‘Well in that case, we might as well go back downstairs and join the mourners,’ said Ama, rising to her feet and slipping her sandals back on. She stood over him, waiting.

He ran his hands up the inside of her long legs.

She laughed and pulled him to his feet. ‘What was that line from O’Casey you loved to quote? - about having your mind on higher things than a girl’s garters.’ She took his hand and they tiptoed out the door, unnoticed by the seated figures still deep in discussion.

Spike clutched the half empty bottle of red wine and he stopped on the landing to fill their glasses. Somewhere below them some fiddlers were scraping their bows as they tuned up, adding to the cacophony of noise from the revellers who were gathering around an upright piano. Ama leaned against him on the landing and they looked out over the heads below, sipping their wine and waiting for the musicians to begin.

‘How long are you staying before you head home?’

‘I have to be back for rehearsals starting in two days. I shouldn’t have left at all but I promised Esther and she’s done me so many favours. She and Simon knew everybody in the

theatre throughout the Maritimes and they gave me tons of support with my project – God knows how I’ll survive without them.’

‘But you can’t up and leave when I’ve only just found you after all this time, Ama – it’s not fair!’

‘Well come and join me down in Arcadia – you said yourself you were at a loose end.’

‘That was before Simon left me the Mongoose. You heard me promise Esther I would finish it off.’

‘Couldn’t you sail it down to the south shore and meet me there, Spike? It could be your maiden voyage in it.’

‘I haven’t even seen it for ages, I’ve no idea what shape it’s in. Sy tells me it’s just been sitting on the mooring for over a year because Simon was too ill to work on it.’

‘Perhaps we could go and have a look at it tomorrow – it might be fine. It’s not that far to Arcadia and you could work on it down there – when you’re not helping me, that is.’

‘Okay,’ said Spike. ‘Let’s make this a night to remember.’

They surged down the stairwell, scattering mourners as they headed for the music coming from the living room. Three fiddlers sawed away around the piano, joined by two penny-whistle players and an old man in a battered fedora playing an ancient squeezebox. The tune was an unrecognizable jig but the revellers bobbed up and down, clutching at each other, barely able to move as even more mourners pushed and elbowed their way into the room to hear the musicians.

Ama hopped up and down trying to see. Spike bent down and boosted her up to look around, then lowered her back down.

He grinned at her, puffing slightly. ‘You’re not the sylph-like girl I remember, Ama.’

‘That’s what forty years will do to a girl,’ she patted his belly. ‘I don’t recall this paunch, either.’ She put her arm round his neck. ‘Lift me up, once more, Spike. I want to see if Esther’s around.’

Spike laced his fingers together to make a cup. ‘Okay, put your foot in here.’

She eased off one sandal, holding it in her hand while she stepped up to look over his head. ‘I’m facing the wrong way, Spike, turn around.’

He swivelled about, his face pressed into her stomach. ‘Can you see her?’

‘Yes, she’s with the old accordion man... they’re kissing.’

‘Aww, how sweet,’ he said, lowering her down. ‘I’m envious.’

She pulled his ear. ‘Of that old man?’

‘I mean if they’re not inhibited, why us?’

She gave him a peck on the cheek. ‘With everybody watching?’

‘Everybody, or nobody – this is a wake, remember? Anything goes.’

‘Not for me, it doesn’t, not in public.’

‘For someone who used to act in bawdy restoration comedies, you’ve become strangely modest, Ama.’

She smiled at him, ‘Yes – “I have by degrees dwindled into a wife.” Only I’m not even a wife anymore.’

‘Well, that’s something to be grateful for, anyway. It just so happens, that I too, am unattached.’

‘In that case, follow me.’ She took his hand and led him back into the hall to the stairs going down to the rec room.

‘Where are we going?’

‘You’ll see. Someplace I only just thought of.’

The guests in the basement rec room crowded around the temporary bar and a piano keyboard that a grad student thumped away at. Ama squeezed past a group blocking a panel door and pulled Spike after her, closing the door. He leaned against it, adjusting his eyes to the darkened room.

‘Where are we?’

‘The laundry room. It’s not very big but at least it’s private. See if you can find the light switch, Spike.’

He ran his hand over the wall by the door until he found it and flicked it up and down. Nothing happened. ‘Probably the bulb’s blown. Never mind, it’s more romantic this way.’ He pulled her to him. ‘Now, my proud beauty...’

They leaned against the washing machine and clung to each other for a few moments in the gloom. She put her hand up to his face to trace his mouth before they kissed long and hard. They paused to touch each other’s features in the dark. The only light came from a narrow gap at the bottom of the door, barely enough to discern their body outlines. He touched her lips with his fingers.

‘You’re smiling,’ he said.

She brushed his mouth again with the back of her hand. ‘So are you.’

They proceeded to explore each other in between bouts of embracing and kissing, their hands moving up and down their bodies, over and under their clothing, pressing themselves together in the dark.

‘Talk to me, Spike – I need to hear your voice.’

‘I’m right here,’ he breathed in her ear. ‘I’m not going anywhere.’

‘I never realised how much I missed you all these years,’ she said. ‘Where have you been all my life?’

‘Lost, waylaid, flotsam and jetsam, abandoned by you.’ He lowered his head to her breast.

‘Forty years,’ she said, clasping his ears. ‘Do you think that’s significant, Spike?’

‘Definitely symbolic – forty years wandering in the wilderness, searching.’ He truffled his face about in her clothing.

‘For what?’

He stopped, his face looming up in front of her. ‘For you, obviously.’

‘And now?’ She resumed kissing him, feeling the dent in his stubbled chin with her index finger.

‘A lot of catching up to do, Ama. Can’t afford to waste anymore time.’ He pressed himself against her and she felt him stiffen beneath his trousers.

‘Spike?’

‘Hmm?’

‘Before we go any further, I think I ought to tell you something.’

‘What?’

‘The knobs on this washing machine are jabbing me in the back.’

He eased himself upright. ‘There’s always the floor, I suppose.’

‘It’s bare concrete, not even a bit of carpet,’ she objected.

They stood swaying, arms about each other, considering.

‘We only have one option,’ he said. ‘A knee-trembler. Are you game?’

‘I’ve been waiting forty years for you to ask. But are you up to it? You have to do the heavy lifting – and you’ve already told me I’m too fat,’ she said.

‘I may need some encouragement to be up for it – the heavy lifting is not a problem.’

She lifted her light summer skirt with one hand and led his hand to her waist. ‘Then help me out of my knickers,’ she

said, tugging down on his arm. He pulled them down and she stepped out of them. ‘Now you,’ she began unzipping his fly, searching for him, inside his pants. With her other hand she loosened his belt and his trousers dropped to the floor.

He stood stock still, relishing her touch on his bare skin. ‘You’ve done this before, I see.’

‘Not for a long time,’ she said slipping down his boxer shorts and gripping him in her hand. ‘Not like this.’

They fondled each other in the dark until she felt he was ready, then put her free arm round his neck while she steered him into her body. ‘Now?’ she whispered in his ear and he placed one hand on each cool buttock and lifted her onto him as she wrapped her legs about him. ‘Gently, I’m not used to this, Spike.’

‘I have only a folk memory of it myself,’ he said, raising and lowering her with his hands while she clung about his neck and blew in his ear. They bobbed up and down for a few minutes and he attempted to lower his face to her breast. She loosened her grasp on his neck to undo her top, while he took one hand off her bottom, to raise her breast to his lips. Even as he did so, he felt himself going soft inside her with the exertion. She slipped off him, the two of them nearly falling to the floor.

‘Oh Spike, I’m sorry – I am too heavy for you,’ said Ama, panting.

Breathing heavily, he stood in front of her, feeling his knees turn to water. ‘My fault – too ambitious.’

‘It was nice while it lasted though,’ said Ama, consoling, as she slipped her underwear back on. ‘I guess I wasn’t thinking too clearly when I suggested this place.’ She extended her hand to take his, ‘Are you feeling okay, Spike?’

He squeezed her hand. ‘No damage, except to my wounded pride.’



They stood contemplating their next move, listening to the din from the revellers in the next room.

‘I don’t think we should leave together, Spike – it will look too obvious, especially as I probably look pretty rumpled,’ said Ama, adjusting her skirt and patting her hair.

‘You go first – they’ll think you’re the laundry maid,’ said Spike. ‘I’ll follow you in five minutes. Meet you in the kitchen.’

‘No, I’m heading for the nearest bathroom and hope nobody I know sees me before I get tidied up. Do you think my clothes are straight?’

‘Turn around and let me feel your skirt,’ he said, running his hands over her bottom and pulling down a bit of her skirt caught up in her underwear. ‘There. Now the front...’ he turned her round and checked her blouse buttons with his fingers, lingering on her breasts. ‘This one doesn’t feel quite right...let me see,’ he attempted to slip his hand inside her bra before she pulled away.

‘And perhaps I’d better check your fly is done up, too,’ said Ama, stroking his pants. ‘Hmm- can’t tell without a closer feel...’ She leaned up against him and slipped her hand down inside the front of his pants, cupping him in her palm. ‘Everything seems in order.’

‘Just shows how wrong you can be. We have all sorts of unfinished business,’ said Spike.

She wriggled her fingers experimentally again. ‘Yes, I see what you mean – but not here.’ She withdrew her hand, smoothing the lump in his trousers. ‘Perhaps you’d better wait here – till you calm down a little. I’ll see you upstairs.’ She kissed his cheek and cautiously opened the door. A wall of noise enveloped her as she slipped into the crowd.

Spike waited the obligatory five minutes then sidled out, with hardly a glance from anyone and worked his way up the stairs. There was no sign of Ama in the kitchen. He popped a chocolate ball into his mouth from a heap on a platter. ‘Profiteroles – my specialty,’ said Esther, coming out of the pantry with more loaded plates. ‘There’s someone you should meet. I think he’s by the piano.’

They sidled through the dancing mourners until she pointed to the old squeeze-box player, standing with the other musicians. His battered fedora tipped to one side, reminded Spike of Leonard Cohen’s last concert appearances. He had set off a minor craze for fedoras and now every folk rocker was wearing one. But this one seemed to pre-date Cohen’s with its battered brim and crushed top.

She stopped to listen. ‘We’ll wait till he finishes this song.’

‘Who is he - a friend of Simon’s?’

Esther only nodded, doing a little shuffle to the music and watching the old man play. ‘Tried to get him to teach me the button accordion but he said he didn’t know how to teach – only play by ear.’

The song finished and they launched into another, but Esther moved in to tap his shoulder and nodded towards Spike. The old man listened for a moment, then followed her as they moved out into the hall, away from the heaving bodies near the musicians. Spike joined them in the front hall.

‘Spike, this is Fergus, an old friend of Simon’s. He’s a boat-builder.’

‘And a mean squeeze-box player, too,’ said Spike, shaking hands.

‘Was a boat-builder,’ corrected Fergus. ‘Been retired a long time. Now I just mess about doin’ the odd repair job. I like to keep me hand in. That’s how me and Simon met.’

‘Pay no attention, Spike. He’s a master shipwright. He worked on the Bluenose and the Bounty in Lunenburg – very choosy about who he works for these days.’

Fergus acknowledged the compliment with a slight wave of his hand. ‘Only the replica ships,’ he said. ‘I been playin’ this thing about as long as I been messin’ about with boats. Don’t know which I likes best - probably the squeeze-box, but I’m better at boats’.

Spike laughed. ‘You sound like Ratty in *Wind in the Willows*, doesn’t he?’

“‘There is nothing,” said Esther, “half so enjoyable, as simply messing about in boats.””

Fergus nodded and grinned at them. ‘That about sums me up, alright. I should have that carved over my workbench. To remind me why I keep goin’. I’ll be 85 come the fall,’ he added, almost to himself.

‘Fergus, the reason I wanted to introduce you is so you could meet the new owner of Simon’s boat. He left the Mongoose to Spike in his will.’

‘I been wonderin’ to myself what you was goin’ to do with it now Simon’s gone.’ He shook Spike’s hand again. ‘Congratulations. That’s a fine old boat – just needs a few more bits ‘n pieces doin to it – an’ a lick or two of paint...’

‘She’ll need more than a lick of paint, I’m afraid, Spike. But Fergus is right, the Mongoose is a classic old boat.’

The old man nodded. ‘Built down the south shore in Mahone Bay, before the war. Simon told me she even did some time with the navy as a shore patrol boat. Still got the original engine in her, last time I looked,’ Fergus said.

‘I thought you might be able to share some of your expertise with Spike – help him get the Mongoose finished like Simon intended.’

Fergus eyed Spike for a minute. ‘You know anythin’ ‘bout boats? You don’t sound like you’re from around here.’

Spike shook his head, ‘I’m not in your league, Fergus – more like Ratty. I just enjoy messing about with boats. Small boats,’ he added. ‘I haven’t seen the Mongoose for quite awhile but from what Simon’s son has been telling me, I’m going to need your help. Are you free to have a look at her tomorrow?’

‘Be glad to. Hate to see a fine old boat like her bein’ neglected.’ He cocked an ear to the music. ‘Sounds like they need my steadyin’ hand on the tiller in there – I better get back.’

‘See you tomorrow at the dock,’ said Spike as the old man headed back through the dancers to the piano.

‘Good,’ said Esther. ‘I was pretty sure he’d say yes. He worked on it with Simon, but they stopped when Simon got too ill. He may be 85 but there isn’t much he doesn’t know about fixing up these old lobster boats.’

They worked their way back through the throng to the kitchen.

‘Where have you been?’ said Ama. ‘I met an old friend of Simon’s and got talking about Shakespeare.’

‘You planning to do any Shakespeare in your new theatrical enterprise, Ama?’ asked Spike. ‘We’ve barely mentioned it, except that you’re in rehearsal. What for?’

‘An Edwardian Music Hall show to start off with, cabaret style, followed by Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night.’

‘You mean, like they do in England, for the summer tourists, end of the pier stuff?’

She made a face. ‘You make it sound awful. I’m aiming for a tongue in cheek approach. More of a send-up, but mixed in with lots of nostalgia turns as well as some topical items.’

‘So why Edwardian?’

‘Simple. It’s an old Edwardian era theatre with a break-arch proscenium, so we thought let’s do it in Edwardian dress.’

‘How about coming with me to see the Mongoose, Ama? I’m going down there now. I’ll sleep there tonight.’

‘I want to come with you. Wait a minute.’ She picked up a plastic container with a few sandwiches left in it and quickly filled it with food from nearby plates. ‘Okay, let’s go.’

Spike reached up above the fridge to open the cupboard and remove a plastic bag. ‘We might need this later.’ He showed her the spare bottle of champagne they had hidden earlier in the day.

They edged their way to the back porch and went down the steps into the late summer evening. Spike looked at his watch. ‘It’s half past ten already and it’s still light. Do you have a car, Ama, or shall we look for a taxi?’

‘I left it in the neighbour’s driveway.’ She manoeuvred the little car through a patch of orange daisies, leaving two tracks across the lawn, onto the street. Spike climbed in beside her, grinning.

‘Somebody’s going to have some explaining to do tomorrow.’

‘I’m blaming you – it was your idea,’ she said. ‘Where away, Captain?’

## CHAPTER TWO

Spike steered her through the quiet streets of the University area, down to the docklands until he saw the old fishing boat masts and outriggers between the warehouses. ‘Down here,’ he directed, and Ama drove slowly down a narrow lane with only an occasional streetlight, to an old wooden wharf and parked her car facing the harbour.

‘Sy told me it’s down near the end of the dock. Watch your step and hang on to me – there could be missing planks on this old wharf.’

They made their cautious way along the dock. Spike stopped suddenly.

‘What – what is it?’ Ama asked him, looking nervously around.

‘The Mongoose. There it is.’ He played Ama’s flashlight over the decks of the old fishing boat and stopped on the stencilled name flowing beneath the bow. He walked alongside, found the gap in the mahogany handrail and stepped aboard. The tide was in and the boat was almost level with the dock. He put down the parcels and held out his hand to her. ‘Welcome aboard.’ She stepped straight into his arms and they stood gently rocking with the boat while they held a long embrace.

‘Is this a traditional sailor’s greeting, Captain Drummond?’

‘Start as you mean to go on,’ said Spike. ‘Nelson always said, “Hang strategy – just go straight for ‘em”.’

‘I see – so this is how I can expect to be treated in future?’

‘Damn right. Let’s go below.’

‘Aye, aye, sir.’

‘There’s a shoreline here for power,’ he said, following the cable with his hand down the steps into the cabin area. ‘Ah, here’s the switch.’ Dim yellow light lit the unpainted wooden interior and they sank down onto the shabby seat cushions covering the bunk type cabin seating.

Ama eyed the narrow benches. ‘Is this where we sleep?’

‘Never fear,’ he said, rising and opening a narrow door leading forward. ‘Have a look at this.’

She stuck her head under his arm to view the forward cabin with its vee-berth double bed, spread with two sleeping bags over a thick slab of foam, cut to fit the vee shape. ‘This looks promising. A definite improvement over the laundry room, Spike.’ She crawled up onto the berth. ‘Is there any light in here?’

‘Nope, only that extension cord in the main cabin. But we’re used to the dark after the laundry room, aren’t we?’

‘Maybe there’s some candles in the kitchen we could use,’ she said. ‘Much more romantic anyway than bare light bulbs.’

‘There’s no kitchen on a boat – it’s called a galley.’

‘Pardon me.’

‘Honest mistake, don’t let it happen again. Come out here and I’ll show it to you.’

Ama backed out into the cabin and followed him towards a long counter at the rear of the open plan main cabin space, to one side of the steps they had come down. A temporary

camp kitchen had been set up with a two-burner propane stove, kettle and a few basics of crockery, cutlery and pots.

‘Voila... La cuisine!’ He lifted a frying pan, encrusted with dried fat. ‘Here is where I shall prepare sumptuous repasts for you.’

‘But not in that, I hope.’ She poked about the dusty collection of jars and cans, and unearthed some stumps of twisted wax candles. ‘Now if we had some matches...’

Spike picked up a long-handled gas lighter beside the propane stove and clicked the spark a few times before it ignited. ‘Pass me one of those candles.’

She handed him a drooping one, smiling. ‘Remind you of anything?’

‘I’m hoping you’ll be able to fix that,’ he said, lighting it and sticking it on a dirty saucer.

‘I’m afraid the candle is too far gone, but as for you...’ she carried the light towards the bed. ‘If you’ll follow me, I will attempt a resurrection.’

‘All in good time,’ he said. ‘First let me show you a couple of things.’ He led her around the other side of the stairs and opened what looked like a cupboard door and stepped aside to show her.

‘Ah, the bathroom – I was wondering if we had to use a porta-potty, like camping.’

‘The head’, he corrected. ‘Shall I demonstrate? No, best if you do it yourself while I explain.’

‘Make it quick, then, because I’ve been holding back for ages – all that wine...’

‘Right. First you drop your drawers – shall I lend a hand...?’

‘No, that I can manage.’

‘Now, are you seated comfortably? Then you can begin.’ He stood with his arms folded, watching.



‘I can’t do anything with you staring – you’ll have to leave the room.’

‘I’m not in the room, it’s too small for both of us. I’m in the doorway.’

‘Well, close it then, till I’m finished.’ She made shooing motions with her hands and he pulled the door shut and waited. After a couple of minutes, she called, ‘Where’s the teepee?’

‘In the drawer, behind you.’ He heard some scrabbling sounds. ‘Find it?’

‘Yes, what’s next?’

‘I re-enter, and continue the lesson,’ he said, pushing the door open and leaning in through it. ‘Please remain seated and pay strict attention. One false move and you may sink the ship.’

‘Good god! Maybe you’d better take over...’

‘Nonsense, you’re a grown woman. If you’re going to sail the seven seas with me, you’ll need to learn how to operate a head. You can’t expect me to wipe your bottom like a two-year old, if we’re in the middle of a Force Nine gale.’

‘Heaven forfend I should ever be in any such situation. Come on, then, get on with it. I feel like an idiot, sitting on the throne being lectured to.’

‘On your left is a long wooden handle for flushing. Between your legs on the floor is a small lever. You lift the lever and it allows the sea water to enter. That’s it. On your right is a red tap. You open that first to allow the bowl to be emptied. Right. Simple, but ingenious. Now you pump out the contents till the bowl is empty and you only see clean seawater in it. Go ahead, keep pumping. Now push the lever between your legs back down to stop the sea from entering. Good. And finally, you shut the red tap to prevent any back-

flow. Pull your drawers back up and you're done. You may now consider yourself an able seaman.'

'That was the most complicated pee I've had in my life. And believe me I've been in some strange places. Where's the tap for this sink? Don't tell me there's a whole rigamarole for that, too, Spike.'

'Nope, it's just a pedal by your foot there – pump it up and down, that's it, nice and steady.' He carried the candle back out to the counter. 'I'll leave this here by the stove and the gas lighter, in case you need it in the middle of the night.'

'If I do, I'm going upstairs and pee over the side,' said Ama, sitting down behind the table and attempting to push it away from her legs.

'It's bolted to the floor,' said Spike. 'So you'll have something to hang onto in those Force Nine gales I mentioned earlier. Well, what do you think of the Mongoose, so far?'

'Not exactly luxurious, is it – a bit rough and ready, I'd say. What do you think – is it how you remembered it?' She drew him down beside her on the bench seat and leaned her head on his shoulder.

'It's a bit musty from being closed up for so long but she's pretty comfortable compared to how it was before. Simon and Fergus have done a lot to her.' He looked around the cabin. 'Look at all that new panelling on the walls. That must be Fergus' handiwork.' He pointed at the steps. 'And the companionway was just a stepladder when I left. Solid mahogany staircase and handrail now. I'd say that's fairly luxurious, wouldn't you?'

She nodded in agreement. 'Is that slidey roof the companionway?'

'It's the sliding hatch cover – mahogany as well. The whole entrance and stairs is the companionway.'

‘A lot of terms for an old lady like me to learn,’ said Ama. ‘A bit like being in the theatre with its whole set of terminology to get used to. Took me ages to remember ‘prompt side’ and ‘O-P’ were just terms for stage left and stage right.’

‘Bit like port and starboard on boats for left and right,’ said Spike.

‘Probably all designed just to add to the mystique of the theatre and sailing so you can impress the public.’

‘Like POSH.’

‘And “deus ex machina.”’

‘By and large,’ said Spike.

‘Fly loft,’ said Ama.

‘Swinging the lead.’

‘Break a leg.’

‘Let the cat out of the bag,’ said Spike.

‘That’s not a sailing expression,’ objected Ama.

‘Yes it is – google it.’

‘I can’t, there’s no computer here – if you’re going to cheat, I’m not playing anymore... besides I can’t think of another stage term at the moment.’

‘Let’s change the subject,’ Spike said.

‘Okay. This may be thirsty work. Shall we open the champagne?’ She passed him the plastic bag and he took out the bottle.

‘It’s not quite chilled to the right temperature,’ he said, holding it out to her.

‘It actually feels warm, Spike. I’ve never drunk warm champagne.’

‘Another new experience for you to add to your seafaring lore,’ he said, peeling off the foil and the wire cage. ‘The champagne flutes are in the galley, no doubt. Will you get them while I ease the cork? I can’t just pop it or the bouncing

around in the car and the warmth will end with half of it on the floor.’

Ama pawed through the assortment of crockery on the counter and returned with two thick tumblers. ‘We seem to be right out of champagne flutes.’ She plunked the heavy glasses on the table.

‘Tut, tut. These will have to do – unless perhaps we used your slipper...?’ He pulled the cork slowly and it only made a soft thump.

‘My open-toed sandals aren’t up to it, I’m afraid,’ she said, dangling one off her foot to show him.

Spike carefully half-filled the two thick glasses, letting the foam reach to the brim. ‘To the Mongoose,’ he toasted, clinking her glass.

‘– and all who sail in her,’ she said, tipping the warm frothy wine up high to get through the foam to the liquid. ‘Mmmn...unusual,’ she nodded, licking her white moustache.

Spike twirled his glass and drank it all off in one swallow, leaving a wide foam moustache on his upper lip, too. “‘An unassuming little wine, but I think you’ll be amused by its presumption.’”

‘Highly amusing,’ she said leaning over to lick off his frothy lip.

He reciprocated and they amused each other, licking and kissing for a few minutes. Spike paused to refill their glasses and they had another round of foamy kissing. ‘I think this warm champagne may catch on – in certain quarters.’

‘Close quarters,’ said Ama, licking his lip. ‘Amongst the crew.’

‘That sort of thing. Propinquity,’ he said, undoing her blouse.

‘Is that what they call it? Another sailing term, I suppose.’  
She undid the buttons on his shirt.

They stopped to pour out the last of the warm champagne.

‘Any last toasts?’ he asked.

‘After you.’

‘I propose we splice the main brace and then go to bed.’

‘To propinquity,’ said Ama, draining her glass.

‘To the coming resurrection,’ he said, emptying the last drops from the bottle.

‘Let’s just have the candle, Spike.’ She brought the drooping candle over from the counter, then stopped and went back to search for a different one. She returned carrying a thick straight one. She lit it with the gas lighter and Spike switched off the bare bulb hanging over a beam. Holding the candle high for him to see, Ama perched on the end of the vee-berth.

“‘How bright this little candle sheds its beam.

So shines a good deed in a naughty world.’”

‘Amen to that,’ said Spike, taking the candle from her to put in a niche at one side of the bed. They helped each other out of their clothes, grateful for the forgiving light of the candle, and crawled into the vee-berth, unzipping the sleeping bags to make a top and bottom blanket.

True to her word, Ama performed the resurrection and Spike rose rigid above her.

‘For what you are about to receive, may the lord make us truly thankful.’

‘And amen to that,’ she said, wrapping her legs around his back and pulling him into her.

For what seemed a long while, neither of them spoke, concentrating their attention on their goal. When at last, they

achieved it to their mutual satisfaction, they lay wrapped only in the candle glow.

‘Amarylis Waterstone,’ he said at last.

‘Porter Drummond,’ she echoed his tone.

‘I feel you ought to know,’ he said, ‘that you have succeeded in turning my carefully crafted plans tits up. I have been quietly ploughing my own furrow all these years and now here you are, wreaking havoc,’ he said, turning her in his arms to face him. ‘What have you to say for yourself?’

‘I might say the same thing to you, only more so. At least you admitted that you have just been drifting, while I have been patiently sorting through the remnants of my former life, trying to make head or tail of what is left. Just when I began to feel it was starting to gel into shape, you reappear and I fall to pieces. Have you no shame?’ She propped herself up on one elbow to study his face in the candlelight. ‘No, I can see you haven’t.’

‘I am unrepentant. And you?’

‘Ditto.’

‘In that case, there is only one course of action,’ said Spike. ‘We must heed Churchill’s advice – when you’re going through hell, keep going.’

And they fell on each other again until they were finally sated. He rolled onto his back, conceding defeat. She sat astride him, panting and waiting to see if he was really finished lovemaking. But there was not a flicker of movement from him. She slid off him.

‘Now what happens?’ he asked.

‘We talk, of course.’

‘I thought that’s what we had been doing.’

‘No, mostly we’ve been avoiding talking. Playing games -

‘This is the serious bit then – the rest was just foreplay?’

She nodded.

‘Okay, you start,’ he said.

‘Alright. I’d like to know if you’re trifling with my affections or if your intentions are honourable.’

‘Which would you prefer, Ama?’

‘Right now – I really don’t know. I’d like some clarification.’

‘And I already told you, I feel completely confused. How do we clarify things?’

‘Well,’ Ama said. ‘Do you want to see me again or do I disappear back down to Arcadia like this never happened. That’s one possibility.’

‘No, it’s not. No more disappearing acts – let’s make that rule number one.’

‘How do we make that work, Spike. I told you I have to go back. I should be in rehearsal. I’m only here to help Esther with the wake.’

‘Can’t somebody else stand in for you, Ama? Now that I have the Mongoose, we could live on it together – get to know each other again. See if there’s a second chance for us.’

‘I can’t, Spike. I’m committed. Until this theatre project is up and running, my life will be Arcadia based. Why not bring the boat down to Arcadia? We could live on it there. I could help you – and you could help me. God knows I’m going to need it. That second chance for us might be waiting right there in that old theatre.’

‘My acting days are over, Ama. I’ve put that behind me. I can’t remember lines anymore.’

‘Neither can I, most of the time. I just do bit parts. And direct instead. Not so big a thrill, but more satisfying.’

‘I’ve tried it a few times – mostly with short fringe plays. Hard to start over again at my age and anyway, nobody wants to risk a full production on an unknown beginner.’

‘If you came down to Arcadia, you could work for me, Spike. Direct a full-length play.’

‘Work for you?’ he said. ‘You mean you call the shots down there?’

She pulled back from his shoulder to see his face in the light from the candle. ‘Didn’t I mention that I’m the artistic director? Probably why I was only a mediocre actress – too modest.’

‘Amarylis Waterstone, A.D.,’ said Spike. ‘I must learn to treat you with more respect in future.’

‘You can start right now by taking my offer seriously. And I could really use your help, too. Being the A.D. with a community theatre is more like being a general dogsbody than a big cheese. Maybe that’s why I don’t brag about it more – the title doesn’t fool anybody in the world of local theatre. If anything, they probably think I’m a bit touched in the head to take on the job,’ said Ama.

‘You don’t make it sound very appealing,’ said Spike. ‘I’m more interested in us getting back together, than me starting out again from square one, in the theatre. Not at my age.’

‘Think of it as a way for us to get to know each other again,’ she coaxed. ‘You come down and help me launch my theatre – and I help you launch your boat. Does that sound more appealing?’

‘Depends on which comes first – your theatre or my boat, I guess.’

‘It doesn’t have to be an either/or, Spike,’ she urged. ‘It could be a both/and.’

He considered for a moment or two, idly tracing the outline of her body in the candlelight. ‘Do you know anything about boats, Ama?’



‘Mostly what you’ve taught me – galley, head, companionway, port and starboard...’

‘It’s a start, I suppose.’

‘And that’s not all – I just remembered POSH, by and large, and letting the cat out of the bag – but I haven’t checked that one out yet – still sounds more like a farming expression. You can see how fast I learn stuff,’ she said, taking his hand and putting it on her upper arm. ‘And I’m strong too,’ she flexed her bicep. ‘Feel my muscle.’

He moved his hand from her arm onto her breast. ‘Very impressive – a powerful body.’ He leaned over to kiss her nipple, then asked, ‘I don’t suppose you can cook, too?’

‘My Achilles’ heel,’ she admitted. ‘Does that mean I don’t get the job?’

‘Fortunately, I am a competent, if limited cook, if you don’t mind vegetarian food,’ said Spike. ‘You can do something else instead while I’m preparing your dinner. You can’t just lie about looking decorative, you know. You might get away with that on land but not aboard ship.’

‘I could swab the decks,’ she offered. ‘Would that be useful? And you could show me how to tie knots.’ She slipped her fingers down his body. ‘I’m very good with my hands.’

He lay on his back for a few minutes, letting her demonstrate her manual dexterity before conceding, ‘I can’t deny you would be a useful asset to have aboard. I have to warn you, though, the wages are abysmal. Far worse than in the theatre. You’d be working for bed and board.’

‘I accept,’ said Ama. ‘If this is what I can expect as an apprentice sailor on your boat.’ She stopped fondling him for a moment and sat up. ‘Now what about my offer? If I’m going to be your galley slave, I expect something in return.’

‘How can I refuse – turn about’s fair play,’ said Spike. ‘It will be turn and turn about, won’t it? Not simply the occasional night aboard.’

‘Nights aboard ship and days in the theatre,’ she said, ‘at least until we open, then it might be reversed. Is it a deal?’ She stuck out her hand. He took it and pulled her back down beside him.

‘You can be very persuasive, Ama. I hope you won’t regret it. It’s been a long time since I worked in the theatre.’

‘They say it’s like riding a bicycle, you never forget.’

‘Except for the lines,’ he reminded her.

‘You won’t have to worry about those anymore, not when you’re directing.’

They lay quiet for awhile, each absorbing the implications of what they had just committed themselves to, waiting for the other one to speak first.

Spike broke the silence finally. ‘I’ve arranged with Fergus, the old shipbuilder Esther introduced me to at the party, to come by tomorrow to give the Mongoose the once over – see what needs doing to make her seaworthy. I wouldn’t want to take her anywhere until he gives me the all-clear.’

‘I’ll be going back to help Esther clear up after the wake,’ said Ama. ‘It’s bound to be an all-day job. You could join us after you’re done inspecting the boat.’

Ama reached across him to blow out the candle. ‘I must get some sleep or I’ll be useless tomorrow.’ She burrowed down beside him and he began kissing her again. After a few moments she held him off. ‘It’s no use Spike, I haven’t the energy for anything more tonight. I’m way too old for our former marathon lovemaking sessions.’

‘You go to sleep, I’ll lie here and imagine how it’s going to be for us,’ he said, stroking her thigh under the cover. ‘You don’t mind if I keep holding you, Ama? I need reassurance.’

She took his hand and placed it on her breast. ‘I do, too.’

They both slept so soundly he was only awakened much later by Ama sitting up and attempting to dress in bed.

‘What time is it?’

She found her watch among the bedclothes and strapped it on her wrist. ‘Nine-thirty. I better get up or Esther will be clearing up the mess on her own.’

He tried to pull her back down but she resisted. ‘You said Fergus will be arriving and Esther is waiting. And besides I’m starving. All this energy we burned off, I need some breakfast.’

‘There’s nothing on the boat to eat except some canned beans and soup.’

‘Yes there is, I brought all those leftovers, remember. Will you make some coffee on that stove? I don’t know how to work it.’

‘Only if you lie down here again for five minutes.’

She relented and lay back in his arms. ‘Five minutes. I’m timing it.’ She lay still, waiting. ‘Well?’

‘Be realistic, Ama. Five minutes. It will take me a few minutes to warm up.’

She consulted her watch. ‘Four and a half minutes...’

‘Ama. I can’t do this on my own. I’m not a performing seal -’

‘Four minutes – you’re wasting time,’ she said, not looking at him.

‘Goddamit, Ama...’ He threw off the covers and started undoing her blouse but she had put her bra back on and he couldn’t undo it with her lying on her back. He abandoned

this effort and began to slip her underwear down but she pressed her bottom into the mattress, foiling his attempt. He stopped and moved up beside her.

‘Two minutes,’ she said.

‘A lot can happen in two minutes, Ama.’

‘I’m waiting.’

‘Okay.’

He swung his leg over and straddled her and began to tickle her around the waist, then moved his hands up to her armpits and tickled her hard. She bucked and tried to throw him off but he hung on.

‘Stop, stop, ahh...ahh – that’s not fair!’

‘Do you give in?’

‘Thirty seconds...’

He renewed his frenzied tickling and she squirmed, pulling at his hands, ‘I’ll scream, I’m warning you...’

‘Do you give in? Give in and I’ll stop.’ He paused, waiting.

‘Time’s up. Get off.’

He fell back on his side and they lay apart, panting. After a few moments he said, ‘What was that all about?’

‘I don’t know. Old stuff, maybe. Both of us wanting to have our own way.’

‘I’m sorry,’ said Spike. ‘I was out of order. Going too far too fast – we barely know each other.’

‘It was pretty childish of both of us, trying too hard for an old intimacy. I’m sorry, too.’

He took her hand and kissed the palm. ‘Old days, old ways. I was suddenly back in London, when we shared that tiny bed-sitter behind Camden Town tube station, with no money to go anywhere. So we spent most of our time in bed.’

‘Playing endless games, under the covers, like naughty children.’ She stroked his stubbled chin.

‘Or acting out scenes for rehearsals and auditions. Funny how I can still remember the lines for some of those parts, but give me something new and my mind goes blank.’ He smiled at her, recalling their time together back then. ‘Tickling was a kind of foreplay we resorted to, if one of us got cross.’

‘I was much more ticklish than you and you took advantage,’ she said.

He nodded, ‘Just like now. But you had your underhand methods, too. Groping me suddenly and squeezing hard.’

‘I remember – instant surrender.’ She glanced at her watch. ‘Let’s get up, like proper grownups and make some coffee and then I really must go, Spike.’ She leaned over and kissed him, then slid out of the vee-berth and opened the cabin door, re-buttoning her blouse and straightening her wrinkled summer skirt.

He pulled on his clothes and followed her out to the galley. They made coffee and carried the box of leftovers up to the deck. Spike slid open the hatch and was almost blinded by the morning sunlight pouring down the companionway. He led the way forward and they sat on the hatch cover over the vee-berth.

Ama looked around her. ‘This is a big boat, Spike. Are you sure you can handle it?’

‘Not on my own, maybe – but with a seasoned first mate.’ He picked through the carton of food, eating the savoury items first.

‘You can give me another lesson over breakfast,’ said Ama, pointing. ‘What’s inside that big box?’

‘The winch – for hauling up the anchor chain.’

‘It looks kind of rusty. I hope it works.’

‘Fergus will check it all over when he comes. God, this coffee is strong with no milk.’

‘I’ll bring some back for later. Can we stay here again tonight, Spike?’

‘Sure, why not, if you don’t mind the primitive conditions.’

‘I love it – specially the candle-light.’

She munched a sandwich and sat contentedly beside him. ‘I’m sorry I won’t be able to meet Fergus and hear what his verdict is. I hope he thinks the Mongoose is seaworthy. So you can bring it down to Arcadia soon.’

‘Yes, it’s too bad. You’d learn a hell of a lot more from Fergus than I could ever teach you.’

‘Why? Are boat-builders good sailors too?’

‘Not necessarily, but lots of them are. I suspect Fergus is one of them.’

‘I doubt I’d even understand what he was saying – probably all sailing terms like ‘avast’ and ‘belaying pins’ and ‘keel haul.’

‘And three sheets to the wind,’ said Spike. ‘Like us, last night. That’s a useful sailing euphemism.’

‘What for?’

‘For being drunk.’

‘Yes, I guess we were – although I don’t feel hungover this morning, do you?’

‘A bit,’ Spike admitted. ‘I’m not much of a drinker anymore. Can’t drink, can’t act, can’t even make love very well. I’m not the man you knew forty odd years ago, Ama, as you’re beginning to discover.’

‘I’m not complaining. It’s me that should be confessing, not you. I expect I’m a big disappointment to you from what you remember.’

‘A little more... substantial, perhaps, but I always thought you were too skinny. Now, you’re perfection.’

‘I think that’s a left-handed compliment, but I accept it anyway. And you’re a changed man too, Spike. I don’t ever remember you being so quick to apologise in the past. That’s a very disarming side of you I’ve noticed.’ She glanced at her wristwatch. ‘I’m going now – no more sweet-talking me or I’ll be here all day.’ She stood and pulled him to his feet to kiss him goodbye. ‘Save it for tonight.’

He helped her off the boat onto the wharf and watched her drive away, then walked up and down alongside the boat admiring his inheritance. From what both Esther and Sy had said at the wake, they were happy to have the Mongoose off their hands, so he had *carte blanche* to make whatever changes he liked. His first consideration was to make her seaworthy, all the rest could wait until he joined Ama down in Arcadia. If he was going to make it a live-aboard that she would seriously consider, he’d have to make it less utilitarian – more creature comforts to attract her.

He closed the hatch behind him and walked around on deck doing a survey. He saw sections of the hand rail that had been spliced in and only primed; some new planking on the deck near the stern and the whole of the aft cabin above deck, which had been added only roughly with no finish work done. The windows and cabin roof were sealed and waterproof but the door had only a padlock and hasp and no handle. He checked the wheelhouse locker for a key to the padlock and found several. It was while he was trying them out that Fergus appeared on the dock.

‘Permission to come aboard, Captain,’ he called down to Spike, who was several feet below him as the tide was now out.

‘Hang on a sec, Fergus while I fetch a ladder for you.’

‘It’s right above you on the cabin roof,’ Fergus pointed and waited for Spike to brace it against the dock for him. He lowered himself to the deck with practised ease and shook hands. ‘I see you’ve started without me.’ He looked at the bunch of keys in Spike’s hand and pointed. ‘That one.’

‘You and Simon have done a lot of work since I saw the Mongoose last time. I was about to check out the deck cabin.’ He unlocked the padlock and pulled open the door for them to enter. The room was empty except for some timber lying on the floor and a pair of sawhorses with a few hand tools on them.

Fergus looked around. ‘Been near on a year since we done any work to her. We was only gettin’ goin’ on this cabin when Simon took sick.’

‘What was he planning to use it for, Fergus? I know he mentioned it could be a saloon at one point.’

‘That’s what he wanted,’ said Fergus. ‘Somewhere comfortable on deck for Esther to use. She didn’t like to go below when they was out of the harbour, he told me. She got sick as a parrot in any kind of weather.’

Spike looked around, peering out the windows on both sides. ‘It will make a good day cabin alright. And could double as spare sleeping quarters, too. You’ve done a nice job on it so far, Fergus. I like the way you curved the roof-line to match the wheelhouse. I hate these square boxy things made out of plywood you see on so many Cape Islanders. They look like garden sheds. Spoils the look of these old boats.’

‘I stopped work because I didn’t want to do any interior finishin’ without Simon’s approval and he got too sick to even visit after a while. Didn’t seem right to go ahead without him.’ He took off his battered felt hat to scratch his bare dome. ‘What was it you wanted me to do exactly, Spike?’



‘I hoped you would give her the once-over and tell me if she’s okay to use as is, or what needs to be done.’

‘Well for starters, we need to charge the batteries and try to get the diesel runnin’ so’s we have some power.’

The old man connected the charger to the battery bank below deck and examined the engine oil. ‘Look at this, clean as a whistle.’ He showed Spike the dipstick and pointed to the clear golden oil on it. ‘I reckon she should be fine once we get some juice to her. Simon had this old motor fully overhauled and has barely used it since. If we can get her runnin’, we can take a tour round the harbour and get a feel for her.’ He climbed out of the engine well and wiped his hands on a rag.

‘Perhaps you can have a look at everything on deck before we go below, Fergus. Tell me what you think needs doing before I go anywhere.’

‘Where you plan on goin’, Spike – just local trips?’

‘That was my intention, sort of get re-acquainted with her. But my plans have changed. I met a lady-friend at the wake who I haven’t seen in years and she wants me to join her down in Arcadia. Says I could live aboard there while I’m finishing the work on it.’

‘Women and boats. Like oil and water, some people say,’ Fergus grinned at him. ‘Course I don’t put any stock in them old stories, but fishermen are powerful superstitious.’

‘Oh, Ama has no intention of sailing down with me. She has to leave tomorrow and drive back for work.’

‘Probably just as well, if she ain’t used to bein’ at sea. Could be seasick the whole way. Not much good to you if you met some weather. Things can blow up fast on this south coast. You’d be better to find someone with experience for your first trip.’

‘It’s for sure I don’t want to take her on my own. But right now, with this hangover, I can’t think of who to ask. That was some wake they organised.’

‘I heard some talk last night that Simon took a drug overdose,’ said Fergus. ‘Wouldn’t surprise me, he often told me he wouldn’t hang around when the time came. Said he wasn’t the type to sit about starin’ at the wall in some old folks’ home.’

‘You and Simon discussed the possibility of him taking his own life, did you?’ he said, choosing his words carefully. ‘Have you thought what you would do, Fergus?’

‘Think about it every day at some point. Course, I’m a lot older than Simon – at 85, I’m runnin’ outta time.’

‘What have you decided?’

‘Well, I couldn’t take a drug overdose like Simon – if that’s what he did. Wouldn’t know where to get any drugs for a start. Problem is, I still enjoy my life, or some of it, anyways. Long as I can keep doin’ a bit of work, I guess I’ll keep goin’. I’m sort of takin’ it a day at a time.’

‘No plans for doing anything drastic then, Fergus?’

‘Kinda hopin’ I’ll just keel over, one of these days. Meantime...’

‘- you’ll go on ‘simply messing about in boats’,’ said Spike. ‘Speakin’ of which, shall we have a look below?’ asked Fergus. ‘Check the stopcocks, see if there’s any leaks anywhere.’ He led the way, inspecting the sink outlet in the galley and then moving on to the toilet.

‘The head works fine – tested it last night a few times,’ said Spike.

Fergus nodded, looking for leaks around the rubber seals and then raising the hatches to expose the bilges in the main cabin floor. ‘Bone dry,’ he nodded with satisfaction. He got up from his knees with some difficulty and grinned at Spike.

‘I’d say the Mongoose is in a lot better shape than I am – of course she’s quite a bit younger’n me.’

The old man took his time, poking into lockers, checking ropes and tackle, digging into deck and wheelhouse woodwork with the tip of his Swiss army knife blade.

‘Simon give me this last Christmas, said my old penknife was a disgrace to any shipwright.’ He chuckled to himself, remembering. ‘Told me if I ever got shipwrecked, I’d be glad of all the gadgets on it. I said the chances of me gettiin’ shipwrecked anymore was almost zero – once was enough.’

They went in the wheelhouse and Spike handed the keys to him. Fergus gave the starter a quick two or three short bursts. The batteries were still weak but the engine caught on the third try. ‘She’ll soon charge up now the alternator’s kicked in,’ he said, pointing to the gauge. He let the motor run for a few minutes, then with the lines still secured he eased first into forward and then into reverse. The boat strained against the moorings in both directions.

‘Guess we’re ready to cast off, Spike. That’s about all we can check, tied up to the dock.’

Spike climbed up on the wharf and let go the ropes, stowed the ladder back on the cabin roof and gave Fergus the all clear. The old man eased the Mongoose away from the dock and slowly steered her through the motley collection of empty fishing boats and other small craft tied along the wharf. Spike stood beside him in the wheelhouse, watching how Fergus guided his new acquisition into the open water of Dartmouth harbour.

‘Steerin’s good and tight, she handles real well. Can’t test the autopilot until we get more open water.’ He stepped back from the helm. ‘Here, see what you think, Spike. Aim for the

point – we'll go out past the lighthouse and you can open her up.'

Spike took the wheel and steered in the direction Fergus indicated. He looked at the old man smiling and nodding, and caught himself grinning with pleasure. Fergus winked and shoved the throttle forward, as they cleared the lighthouse point and entered the outer harbour. The Mongoose surged forward and the thrum of the engine increased, the tachometer showing 1100 rpms.

'She'll cruise nicely at 1300 revs,' said Fergus. 'See how she feels out here with a bit of a chop.' The brisk wind had stirred up the waves but there was no swell in the sheltered long outer harbour, as Spike edged the throttle forward till the tach read 1300rpms.

'Just puttin' her through her paces,' said Fergus, easing back on the throttle. 'I think we can take her back in, Spike. Turn her around, head for the lighthouse and we'll switch on the auto-pilot. See if she holds her course.'

The two of them watched the compass heading, Fergus nodding his satisfaction with the way the equipment responded to the steep chop of the outer harbour.

'Sometimes these auto-pilots gets confused in a followin' sea and start over-steerin' but she's keepin' her heading nice and steady.'

Fergus monitored the behaviour of the auto-pilot and Spike watched the wheel turning back and forth to the sawing noise of the automated equipment.

Back at the wharf, they moored the Mongoose and Fergus drove off in his battered old pickup. Spike locked up and went ashore to find a local bus to Esther's.

Ama was in the kitchen, still clearing up from the mayhem of the night before.

‘Where’s Esther?’ he asked, looking into the living room. None of the furniture had been put back and the carpets were still rolled up behind the piano.

‘She was up the entire night and she finally conked out an hour ago so I packed her off to bed.’

They spent the next few hours restoring the house to order while Esther slept.

‘What was the verdict from Fergus this morning? Will the Mongoose sink if you take her out to sea?’

‘Already have – well, the outer harbour anyway. Fergus and I roared up and down full speed for over an hour, playing with my new toy.’

‘What did he say?’

‘Oh, he had lots of advice. He said in his opinion, you were the best-looking woman at the wake.’

‘Obviously a man of keen discernment. What else did he say – about the boat, I mean.’

‘Well, he said women and boats were like oil and water.’

‘Another old misogynist – I was wrong about him apparently – not so discerning, after all,’ said Ama.

‘To be fair, he said that was only an old fisherman’s superstition, he didn’t hold with it, himself.’

‘Good old Fergus – anyway what did he say about the Mongoose?’

‘After we eliminated you and Sy as possible crew for the trip down to Arcadia, he hinted he might come with me. He and Simon did a lot of sailing together over the years in his old sailboat.’

‘Good idea. I think the Mongoose is too big for you to handle on your own. I don’t want to lose you after I’ve only just found you again.’

‘He left me a list of minor repairs to do and he’s coming back in a couple of days to check on me.’

‘I’ve put as much of this leftover food as I can into the freezer for Esther,’ said Ama. ‘She won’t need to think about meals for a month.’

‘I hope you saved something good for us for tonight on the Mongoose. I’ve collected half a dozen opened bottles of wine we can polish off onboard, too.’

They loaded their bags and the food and wine into Ama’s old red Toyota and drove slowly down to the docks area. She parked on the wharf near the Mongoose to unload the parcels onto the fore deck. Spike stowed everything below and came back up with the two tumblers and one of the opened wine bottles. He searched in a couple of deck lockers till he found some faded canvas boat cushions. They sprawled on the vee-berth hatch cover to drink and watch the last of the sunset across the harbour.

‘I think we done good,’ said Spike, kissing her. ‘We earned this drink.’

‘We did,’ she agreed, kissing him back. ‘I’m glad Esther won’t have to face that mess, at least.’

They went below to make some supper from the leftovers Ama had packed up. Spike lit the propane stove and she heated up a spicy black bean and rice casserole in a copper pan. He lit the collection of candle stubs and set them around the cabin interior. Ama switched off the hanging bare bulb and took the glass of red wine he handed her. They sat waiting for the casserole to heat through and nibbled on a few

of the remaining aperitifs from the food box, sharing bites of ones they liked.

‘I wish I didn’t have to leave tomorrow,’ she said, leaning into the crook of his arm. ‘We could make a little nest here and hole up together. Illegal live-aboard.’

‘Help Esther eat up all that food in her freezer.’

‘Let’s fill our plates and go up on deck for awhile longer and watch the boats go by,’ said Ama, testing the casserole.

Spike nodded, refilled their glasses and they went back topside to sit on the boat cushions to eat their food. A tugboat crept by pulling a string of barges heaped high with gravel. It still hadn’t disappeared by the time they’d finished eating.

‘I hope the Mongoose can go faster than that, Spike or it will take forever for you to get to Arcadia. I want to get started learning how to live aboard.’

He poured out the last of the wine bottle into their glasses and held his tumbler up towards the sky, which had revealed clusters of stars to their eyes, as they became accustomed to the dark.

“‘The moon shines bright’”, he declaimed. “‘On such a night as this,

When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees  
And they did make no noise, in such a night  
Troilus methinks mounted the Trojan walls  
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents  
Where Cressid lay that night....”

Ama paused for a moment to recall the lines –

“‘In such a night  
Did Thisbe fearfully o’ertrip the dew  
And saw the lion’s shadow ere himself  
And ran dismay’d away.”

She continued, “‘In such a night

Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,  
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith  
And ne'er a true one.”

“In such a night,” said Spike,  
“Did pretty Jessica, like a little shrew,  
Slander her love, and he forgave it her.”

“I would out-night you, did no body come;” said Ama,  
“But, hark, I hear the footing of a man.”

They laughed, pleased with themselves for remembering parts from that long-forgotten Merchant of Venice production. Animated now, Ama got up to pace about the deck. She turned to face him, ‘You told me you stopped acting because you couldn’t remember lines, Spike.’

‘I can’t. That was ancient history – no problem remembering that stuff, but anything recent disappears overnight. I can reel off Shakespeare by the yard, provided I learned it when I was young.’

‘Well, when you come to direct for my theatre, I promise you won’t have to learn a single line. Just teach them to act like that and I’ll be happy.’ She returned to sit on his lap and stroke his cheek in the darkness, which now enveloped them on the deck.

‘On such a night as this, did the scheming Amarylis, flatter her love...and he did fall for it,’ said Spike, standing up. He led her by the hand below to the cabin, still lit by the few remaining candle ends. He gave her one to put on the little bookshelf at the head of the vee-berth. They undressed in the semi-dark and stood feeling the press of their warm skin against each other. ‘You want to try to raise the main or just heave-to?’ he asked.

‘I’m too tired to try raising anything tonight,’ said Ama, crawling under the blanket. ‘Let’s just heave-to, it sounds



nice and relaxing. Maybe in the morning...?’ She curved her back to his body and pulled his arm over her like a cover.

In the morning, Spike was awakened by the sound of water running and the smell of coffee. He lay back and gazed at the square of blue from the skylight above the vee-berth. He swivelled round when he heard the shower stop and waited for Ama to emerge from the tiny washroom cubicle. She wore two towels, one on her head and another wrapped round her body, as she left a trail of damp footprints over to where he lay sprawled on the bed. She stood in front of him drying her hair and gave him an enquiring look.

‘How is my amorous Lorenzo this morning? You want to push the boat out again?’

For answer, he tugged at the big towel and it fell away. She stood watching him looking at her for a moment, then lay down on top of him, pushing her still damp breasts against him and straddling him as she sat up in the confined space. They jockeyed for position, tussling to see who would end on top. For awhile they fossicked about, taking turns on the bottom, pleasuring each other. Finally, they lay still, panting and exhausted, content to lie together, touching but not moving, with her leg across his body.

‘If we were at sea, we could let the waves provide all the motion. We’d simply hold on to each other,’ said Spike, stroking her bottom as she lay on him.

‘But who would steer the boat?’

‘We’d put it on autopilot.’

‘Can it see other boats coming? I wouldn’t want to be run down by some big Chinese container ship,’ said Ama. ‘Maybe we should save our love-making for when we’re in harbour.’ She slipped her hand down between his legs. ‘You want to go around again or shall we have some coffee?’

‘What do you think – do I have what it takes?’

She waggled her fingers for a moment, then shook her head. ‘Afraid not, you’ve given me your all. Never mind, let’s have some coffee, instead.’

Spike joined her on the bunk bench by the table. They sat, naked, drinking their coffee and eating slices of carrot cake. She brushed some crumbs from his chest and he licked some off her breasts. Neither of them had commented on the ravages time had visited on their bodies, perhaps each waiting for the other to mention it first.

‘Does it put you off me, seeing me stark naked in the daylight, Spike?’

‘Did it seem like I was put off?’ he said, kissing her shoulder and neck. ‘How about you? I’m not the blonde Adonis of your youthful memories anymore.’ He looked down and patted his paunch. ‘At least women don’t go bald and have pot-bellies.’

‘It’s rather nice to wander around our little den in the nude,’ said Ama. ‘I think I’m a secret exhibitionist. Are you sure you don’t mind me like this - ‘au naturel’?’

‘I love it – I can’t get enough of looking at you naked. When we’re at sea you can go nude all day long, sunbathing on the deck,’ said Spike. ‘Of course, there is a downside. I won’t be able to keep my hands off you.’

‘You could always put the autopilot on. I wouldn’t mind if we were on deck and I could see everything.’ She moved about the galley, putting things away. ‘This is fun. I feel like I’m playing house.’

‘As long as you don’t get carried away and go on deck in the noddly while we’re at the dock.’

‘I don’t remember you as a jealous person, Spike. Have you changed?’

‘No, I’m not jealous and yes, I have changed. Everyone has. Everything changes, according to the Buddha, nothing stays the same, remember?’

‘God, I haven’t done any meditation practice for years,’ said Ama. ‘Do you still meditate?’

‘Nothing you could dignify with the word ‘practice’. But I think about it off and on, and I’ve kept all my old Buddhist book collection. Occasionally I read bits and vow to start practising properly again.’

‘Maybe we could practise together when we go sailing,’ said Ama. ‘Encourage each other.’

Spike put his arms round her bare body and pulled her closer to him. ‘You don’t have to encourage me,’ he said. ‘This is the only practice I want.’

She kissed him. ‘Me, too. But perhaps in between times.’ She glanced down at his lap. ‘You know – while we’re waiting.’

‘You’re not suggesting we could meditate in the nude, Ama? I doubt if even the Buddha tried that. My powers of concentration would be severely tested.’

She stood up and crossed to the bed to collect their clothes and bring them back to him. ‘Too much over-stimulation is the problem. Time to get dressed and face the world.’

Reluctantly, they put on their clothes, with Spike insisting on kissing each breast before they disappeared from view. Ama buttoned his shirt and tucked it deep in his trousers. He opened the hatch cover and climbed up on deck into the heat of the August mid-morning sun and waited for her to join him. They drove across town slowly, aware of their imminent separation.

Ama parked her old red Toyota in front of Esther's garage and they knocked gently on the back-porch door before trying it. The door opened, so they assumed Esther was stirring and entered the kitchen.

'Hello – hello... Esther?' called Ama, going down the hall to the living room. There was no reply so she went upstairs to check the bedrooms, knocking on each door and calling Esther's name before she entered.

'Maybe she's gone out,' she said. 'Did you check downstairs, Spike?'

'I was waiting for you.' He rose from the stool and they descended the stairs to the basement. The rec room was empty but a light was on in Simon's cluttered study.

'Esther?' said Ama, pushing the door open till it bumped against an old leather armchair. Esther sat on the floor with her legs spread and a pile of old photo albums on her lap.

A soft bubbling snore came from the sleeping Esther and a glass slipped from her fingers onto the carpet. At one side of her a near-empty rye whisky bottle lay on the floor. Ama gave her arm a slight nudge and tried to wake her but Esther only breathed heavily in her sleep.

'She's drunk, Ama,' said Spike, picking up the whisky bottle and glass. 'Let her sleep it off.'

He urged her out of the study and pulled the door partly closed, turning off the lamp on the desk.

Outside again, they stood hugging each other before she finally opened her car door and got in. She kissed him several more times through the open window, then backed slowly down the drive. 'I'll talk to you tonight to see how she is,' she said. 'Keep checking on her, Spike – promise?'

He nodded and waved as her old red Toyota turned the corner, then wandered around the huge well-tended garden for awhile before going back into the house. He entered the

den and saw Esther sitting in Simon's old swivel chair and went over to give her a hug. 'You finally surfaced. Ama had to leave but she'll call you later from Arcadia, she said.'

'I was just going to make some strong coffee,' said Esther. 'Shall we go upstairs?'

'I was hoping I could stay on here for a few days while I get the Mongoose ready, Esther. Ama has persuaded me to sail down to Arcadia and help her with her theatre project.'

'Please – stay as long as you like,' said Esther, 'the house is empty now – only me left.'

'Fergus was telling me how he and Simon did a lot of sailing together.'

'Mostly in Halifax harbour,' she said, 'nothing too adventurous. Although occasionally they went further afield – St Margaret's Bay or Mahone Bay.'

'Not Peggy's Cove?'

'Not very often – Simon said the approach is tricky if the wind's blowing hard.'

'Ama wants me to bring the Mongoose down to Arcadia so I can work on it there – and assist her with getting her theatre up and running. I told her I wasn't going anywhere until Fergus gave it his approval. He and Ama don't think it's a good idea for me to sail the Mongoose down to Arcadia alone. I've never handled a boat that size on my own before.'

'Well, it's not a sailboat, so you'd be under power the whole way. All the same, a strange boat in strange water – Fergus is right, someone who's familiar with the south coast to go with you is a good idea.'

'Are you still teaching medieval studies, Esther?'

'Only part-time nowadays. We do a lot of revivals of the old mystery plays and pageant wagon morality plays.'

'Is there any audience for that sort of thing today?'

'Only university audiences.'

‘Ama told me she hopes to do modern dress classic revivals in her new theatre – maybe you can tour one of your productions down there.’

‘It would only be a one-night stand, if we did,’ she said. ‘In a small town like Arcadia you’d be lucky to get more than a handful of people turn out to see it. Those old plays were more street theatre than formal theatre in the medieval period. Lots of slapstick and knockabout farce to keep the crowd’s attention.’

‘When Ama and I were in drama school they sometimes did a mystery play as part of the course work. I played the back end of a pantomime horse in a student production of Noyye’s Flodde. Plenty of clowning and improvising stuff, the cruder the better, as I recall.’ Spike grinned, remembering. ‘Lots of toilet humour for old Noah to cope with. I think Ama played the dove in that show, flapping around the stage with a pair of old angel’s wings from the Christmas panto.’

‘Pantomimes and the Nativity play is all we have left from the old morality and mystery plays,’ said Esther.

‘What about the Canterbury Tales? That ran in the West End for years. It was my first job in professional theatre. I was a dresser for the chorus – helping the girls in and out of their medieval bodices in the quick-change area in the wings,’ said Spike. ‘Best job I ever had.’

‘A wonderful musical, I loved it,’ she said, ‘but not strictly Chaucer. About as close as West Side Story is to Romeo and Juliet.’

‘I still think it would be a great way for Ama to draw in the tourists for her new theatre. She says Arcadia is swamped with tourists looking for something to do in the long summer evenings. I’m going to suggest it to her. Maybe she can persuade you to bring a show down there.’

‘It could be fun,’ Esther conceded, ‘and good experience for the students, to see how ordinary crowds respond, instead of elite university audiences.’

‘If you came down to Arcadia, we could talk to her about it. And also discuss staging one of Simon’s modern English Shakespeare plays.’

‘Love to go, but not by boat. I prefer to drive.’

For the next few days, Spike alternated between working on the Mongoose with Fergus and helping Esther and some students sift through Simon’s papers. Spike bought new mooring ropes with scuff protectors under instruction from Fergus and did the provision shopping for the trip. The old man advised Spike to empty the stale water tanks and refill them with fresh water, after he tasted the tea the first time.

Two days before they intended to depart for Arcadia, Spike received a brief email from Ama. *‘Ocean disappeared, gone to look for her. Not sure when I’ll be back. More later, love, Ama xxx.’*

After talking it over with Fergus, they decided to delay their sailing date until he heard more news from her and he returned to helping Esther and Fergus with the house and boat.

**AMPLE MAKE THIS BED** is the latest novel after the  
**THIRD AGE TRILOGY.**

The first book of the trilogy is **IN HOT PURSUIT**, set in Vancouver and London. It charts the beginnings of Barney Roper's search for some meaning to this third age of his life, post-60. As empty nesters, he and his wife Alice, decide to go their separate ways and explore what life still has to offer. He goes back to discover his roots in Canada. She goes back to university to pursue an old dream. They both realise it is not going to be as easy as they thought to create a new life, as family ties pursue them.

Whatever else they expected their third age to be, it is a demanding challenge and they both rise to meet it head-on. With at times amusing but always unpredictable results, they enter the undiscovered country of the 'sixty-somethings.'

**THE BLUE-EYED BOY**, the second book of the 3rd Age Trilogy, follows Barney Roper and his wife, Alice as each plunges deeper into their new separate lives. He travels to China, Nepal and Tibet in search of answers to his dilemma of 'how shall a man live?' at this stage of life, pursuing the elusive wisdom of the East. Alice and her new-found partner, Heck, try to escape the constraints of academia, as they move from Oxford to London and Rome, with disastrous results. But Barney and Alice seem unable to extricate themselves from their past lives, that have them clutching each other for support. Living fully in the 3rd age makes heavy demands on them in unexpected ways.

**A SINGLE STEP** is the final book of the trilogy. Barney's search for a meaningful existence takes him from volunteering in an English county hospice, where he becomes



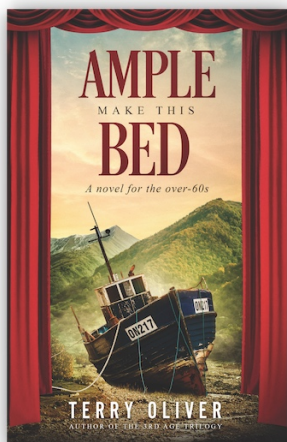
deeply involved with the dying inmates, to the aftermath of the civil wars in West Africa, to search for his missing daughter working with child refugees. Alice finds her life in turmoil, as her health breaks down along with her new relationship. Both Barney and Alice struggle with what it means to be an older person in today's fragmented society, where the old rules and *mores* fail them, as they pursue a new understanding of their lives in the 3rd age.

If you would like to explore more of the **3RD AGE TRILOGY** as either paperbacks or e-books you can find out more at my website: ***3rdageworld.com*** as well as ***amazon.com***, ***booklocker.com***, or any good bookstore.

Your comments and reviews will be welcomed on my website and blog.

3rd Age World Publishing, Victoria, B.C., Canada  
2019

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*Spike & Ama, retired actors and former lovers, meet again at a friend's wake. Their old flame re-ignites and they decide to forge a new life together in a foolhardy venture to restore an abandoned theatre, drawing on their lifetime's theatre experience. And a lot of help from their friends old and new. They succeed but not in the way they imagined.*

# Ample Make This Bed

By Terry Oliver

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