

Jane, an adolescent firebrand escapes by sea, when a misogynist autocrat declares World War III. She plunges into an ocean of heartache and danger, but overcomes all odds. Animals have a special affinity for her, and aid in her adventures.

Realisation

The Revocation Series

Book 1

by G A Bigg

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BOOK 1 OF THE REVOCATION SERIES

REALISATION

G A BIGG

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Chapter 1

Jane, like all unaccompanied minors, sat in the back row of a suborbital jet, ready to depart from Manchester, England, to Hawaii, USA. It was a dream come true. Every seat was full; what was strange, there were no other children or women aboard.

“Are you ready for the flight?”

“Yes, sir.”

Even all the flight attendants were men.

“Let me fasten your harness. Hold on tight sweetie, it is going to be one hell of a ride. Have a lovely flight.”

“I will sir, I can’t wait.”

She beamed, the buzz of excitement in her voice was infectious. The surrounding passengers smiled at the beautiful young woman’s enthusiasm.

The atmosphere was electric as the scream of the engines rapidly rose like an acoustic tidal wave; the noise became so intense Jane covered her ears. The vibration had her entire body shaking. The captain’s voice came over the speakers: ‘3 2 1 Lift Off!’ Jane gripped the armrests tightly. As the jet accelerated, the powerful g-force pushed her back into her seat. Soon, the roar of the engine stopped. She looked through the porthole at the blackness, the tiny sparkling diamonds scattered across the swathe of the universe. Jane felt weightless and a little light-headed. The cosmos was on her doorstep. She could not believe her eyes.

The captain made an announcement. “To mark the 50th anniversary of the first commercial suborbital flight in 2021, we’re offering complimentary pouches of 2021 vintage champagne. Have a wonderful flight.” The passengers cheered. He continued, “for your safety, do not take off your harness.”

That was like a red rag to a bull to Jane. The attendant was too late to catch her. She released the catch and soon Jane was floating over the cabin. She felt as free as a bird and waved gleefully to all the passengers below, never wanting the moment to end. Even the attendants smiled back at her.

Suddenly Jane felt someone grab her ankle; she assumed it was her attendant and did not struggle. When she landed, it was too late; her assailant snapped his seat belt over her arms. His partner in the next seat quickly clamped his hand over her mouth. “You disgusting little hussy,” he whispered. Jane did not hesitate; she swiftly jerked her head left, releasing her mouth enough to bite him as hard as she could. As she tasted blood, he cursed and snatched his hand away. Jane had just enough time to scream, “HELP ME,” before another hand came to silence her. She continued to fight to get away. Her attendant came quickly to the rescue. The man unsnapped the seatbelt and Jane floated back up. A second attendant arrived with handcuffs.

“You useless Brits, you let your women dress like whores; what do you expect?” he shouted.

Most of the passengers booed him loudly to shut him up.

Jane was glad to return to her seat; she was in a state of shock and mortified at what had just happened.

“Oh dear, I didn’t notice until now. Didn’t you get the memo about the recommended clothing for the flight?” the attendant asked.

“No sir, I just wore my favourite dress. What’s wrong with it?”

“Nothing at all, but the USA insists on a strict dress code for women entering their country. Here, take this blanket for when you arrive.”

Her excitement had turned to embarrassment. She was quiet for the rest of the journey. Even her fellow passengers and the attendants could not comfort her.

The incident marred the rest of Jane’s trip, but she was determined not to let it destroy her holiday in Hawaii with her parents.

The descent felt like being on an extremely fast roller coaster. Jane was in free fall, shuddering as the jet re-entered the earth’s atmosphere. She heard a whirr and saw the wings extend from the fuselage as it entered glide mode. The feeling was sensational.

When it was time to disembark, her legs were wobbly; a few passengers in front of her stumbled as they left the jet. The captain smiled at Jane on the way out. She felt a little better and smiled back.

Jane followed her attendant, who took her to meet her escort for the flight to Maui. Unfortunately, no one was there to greet her; the attendant left her alone while he went to find someone.

“I’ll be right back,” he said.

She was interested in her surroundings, accidentally dropping the blanket given to her on the jet, and bent over to retrieve it. Suddenly, someone grabbed her from behind; she felt something hard and angular pushing firmly into her back, then heard a click. “Oh My God, he’s got a gun” Jane tried to break free, but her attempt failed. He grabbed her arm painfully and forced her into another terminal. Once she entered the building, the atmosphere changed. It smelt rank, the air foetid, it was filthy.

“Let go of me, you oaf.”

“No way, kid, I found you; finders keepers.”

He held her tighter as she tried to escape. She screamed for help, but it fell on deaf ears. Instead, a crowd of men came to watch the spectacle. Her captor pulled her toward him. The crowd hooted rudely as he ripped her dress open.

“Take the wench.”

“She’s a feisty one,” laughed another.

“Good luck with that one,” another said.

“Go for it, man.”

Jane was distraught. Who were these people? She glanced at her captor’s sour face and filthy look. She stamped on his foot, kned him between his legs, and eluded his grasp as he shouted out in pain. The men looked on in surprise.

Jane was quite an athlete and outran him. Other men tried to stop her, but she swerved nimbly out of the way. Soon, the crowd gave up. Jane kept running. She approached a woman for help and noticed her battered face. Then, out of the corner

of her eye, she saw her abductor heading toward her. Once out of sight, she ran into the ladies, locked herself in a toilet cubicle, and waited for what seemed an eternity. She heard the door open, and a man came in screaming obscenities. She heard muffled sobbing from a woman. Jane was frightened and froze in place.

She stayed standing on the toilet seat for another two hours. When the room was quiet, she looked under the cubicle. It was empty. Relieved but cautious, she assessed her situation.

“Damn, where’s my carry on? That stinks, no ticket, passport, or communication pen. Sorry Mum, no way to get in touch with you now.” She turned her dress, so the rip was at the back, took some money out of her money pouch and went shopping.

Jane took no notice of the derisive looks from the men in the terminal and soon found a shop. She bought a baseball bat, a cap, a boy’s t-shirt, sneakers and shorts. Back in the ladies, she transformed from a girl to a boy. She fed her mass of auburn hair under the hat. It was not perfect, but better than before. Hopefully, her aggressor might not even notice her now. She also had a weapon and felt safer.

She went into a self-service cafe, bought a hamburger and water, then sat down in the corner to observe this weird country. “I don’t suppose the jet was a time machine. That’s too silly even for me.” She noticed the women dressed in burkas and the men in crisp white linen suits. “Maybe it’s the wrong country, but the flight monitor’s right there.” Jane noticed her plane was boarding.

She ran to the international terminal, but the security personnel denied her entry as she did not have a ticket. Jane tried to explain what had happened to her and they just laughed. Eventually, she found the ticket office but did not have enough money to pay for the flight.

Realising her predicament, even after such turmoil, her adventurous spirit got the better of her. The pungent smell of rotting food made her exit the airport. She looked around and saw a flying-bus station. On a whim, she noted the terminal number, jumped on the first bus, then paid to go to the end of the line. The aerobus flew low, giving her a good view of the surroundings. As it continued to its destination, Jane studied a passing group of people. Were the men whipping the heavily laden women to go faster? It certainly looked that way. Had she landed in a parallel universe?

At the end of the line, Jane, well aware she should know better, stepped off the bus and looked around. The streets were littered and dirty, not at all how she imagined America would be, maybe she inadvertently ended up in the slums. She gripped the bat tighter and walked on. Her disguise was holding up, but it would be disastrous if her hat came off during a fight. Jane found a chemist, bought a pair of scissors, then went to the ladies at the back of the shop. A dishevelled girl about her age came running out. Her face was blotchy red and bruised, her eyes were swollen from crying; she looked scared. Jane thought of helping her, but this was not the time.

All the toilets overflowed with faeces and urine. The place stank. She quickly cut off her hair and dropped it into the toilet, and used the bat to push it down. The room was still empty, so she finished the cut in front of a smeared, cracked mirror.

When she was about to leave, the same girl ran in, a rank, burly man followed.

“Bend over, slut, I’ll show you who’s boss.”

He threw the girl at the wall and lifted her flimsy dress.

Jane could not believe what she was seeing. The girl was sobbing uncontrollably.

“What the fuck are you looking at, boy? You can have some after me, if you have dough to pay.”

“Oh shit, what do I do now?” she thought.

The man turned back to his prey, ripped off the girl’s clothes, and pinned her to the wall. In a moment of madness, Jane swung the baseball bat twice in quick succession. The ugly brute collapsed to the floor, his head gushing with blood. The girl screamed and ran out. For a moment, Jane stood over the body, stunned at what she had done. She tried to move him, but he was too heavy.

“Shit, shit, shit,”

She rinsed the bat, left the shop, and entered the street. “I’d better get back to the airport. Running would draw attention,” she thought. Instead, she nonchalantly walked to the aerobus terminal. A couple of buses were waiting. “Phew, that’s the one back to the airport.” She jumped on board, paid, and sat down at the back of the bus. Then the horror of what she had done hit her. She felt nauseated, then vomited, looked around, and threw up several times more. Jane moved to another seat, and was relieved no other passengers were on board.

Back at the airport, she tried again to get into the international terminal without success. Jane was getting tired when she heard some British voices. She followed them into the men's and approached them as they were zipping up,

“Can I talk to you, please?”

“What do you want? We're in a hurry?”

“I'm meant to meet my parents in Maui. Can you help?”

“We've got to run, lad, we're late as it is. Try at the desk.”

She was bewildered, now what? Blood spotted her clothes, and she looked terrible. It was a relief when the airport closed and the lights dimmed. She went to find a more comfortable place to sleep. On the way past the international terminal entrance, she wondered if it was possible to break the door mechanism. Jane made a futile attempt with the scissors and the clip; neither worked. She sharpened both scissors and clip on a piece of broken tile she had found in the ladies and started over, ever persistent. She felt movement, but it still did not shift. Out of ideas, she stuck the scissors in and moved them violently in every direction. As she was about to give up, she heard a click. Suddenly it opened, miraculously it clicked shut behind her. “YES”. Experiencing overwhelming joy, she skipped down the terminal, inhaling the exotic scents from the perfumes in the duty-free shops. She found a water fountain, guzzled down at least a half a litre and felt better. Jane then saw a ‘check in sign’ for overnight passengers. Luckily, the attendant was asleep. She crept into an empty cubicle and locked the door; it had an en-suite bathroom. The bed was comfortable, exhausted, she fell into a deep undisturbed sleep.

Noises outside the cubicle woke her. She showered, washed the blood out of her clothes and dressed. They were still wet, but she did not care. She put the baseball bat in a dustbin, grabbed some free doughnuts and tea, left a tip and went on her way.

Jane laughed at a group of workers puzzling over how to open the gate that she had broken the night before. At last, she found yesterday's arrival gate and asked a British employee for help.

When she told him her name, he looked surprised. "You must be the missing girl they were talking about. No wonder they didn't find you, you look like a boy in those clothes."

"I thought it better to look like a boy, especially after my abductor ripped my dress and kidnapped me. Last night, I slept in the overnight guest quarters. The attendant was asleep, so I didn't want to disturb him. I'm sorry I forgot to pay on my way out."

"Don't worry about that, you poor thing. I'll find a supervisor and get you on your way."

Jane hid in a corner with her back to the wall while she waited. Most of what she told him was the truth. That would have to do.

A group of people arrived, including a police officer.

"Show me your passport," the police officer ordered.

"Sorry sir, I left it on the jet."

"It's okay. We found it yesterday. She is Jane Robertson." the supervisor said.

“You need to answer a few questions,” the officer snapped.

“Oh no,” she thought, “I’d better not mess this up.”

Jane pretended to cry, “do I have to? I was so scared. I still am. I just want to see my mum.”

“Don’t worry, honey, we’ll check the cameras.”

“Thank you,” she snivelled. “Can I have a hanky, please?”

“Bollocks,” she thought, “what if they find out?”

When the officer left, a British escort took her to the gate, as the plane was boarding.

Jane overheard the police officer talking to some other coppers nearby. “The snivelling little bitch, I would have done the same. I pretended to be sad, and at the same time, I was thinking how nice it would be to have my way with her.” They all laughed.

Another one said, “are you going to report it?”

“Hell no, it’s probably one of our own.”

Chapter 2

Jane was safely aboard the flight to Maui. She would never forget the trauma she had endured in Honolulu and was relieved to escape the hellhole. She continued to brood over what had happened. “The brute would have killed us both had I aimed at his legs instead of his head.” She worried about the girl; she was alone and defenceless, Jane wished she could have done more to help her.

If the authorities found out, they might jail her for life, especially in this country. Jane decided it was better not to let anyone know.

It was a quick flight. The terminal in Maui was pleasant. When she spotted her parents, she ran toward them. Jane hugged her mother tightly, so happy to be finally together.

“Hello Dad, I can’t believe what a journey it was.”

“Thank goodness you’re safe,” he said. “Let’s get to the hotel and get you settled.”

“Nice car, Dad. Only three seats? They must have thought you had a lot of luggage.”

Her mother laughed, “a black van, not your father’s style.”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” her father said grumpily.

In the safety of the hotel room, Jane told her parents the story she told the police. She deliberately omitted killing the scumbag or leaving the airport terminal.

“I felt so alone, Mum. After he abducted me in the airport, I managed to escape and change my look. As you see, it’s quite effective.”

“You poor thing, you must have been terrified.”

“Yes, Mum, I was scared stiff.”

Her father was uncomfortable talking about Jane’s experience and changed the subject. “Want to go for lunch Jane, the food is excellent.”

“No thanks, Dad, I’m not hungry. I’m not feeling like meeting people right now.”

“I’ve run you a bubble bath, go and have a nice soak.”

“Thanks, Mum.”

She heard her father say, “I’m worried about her. She’s normally so bubbly and funny. Maybe it was worse than we thought.”

“Are you mental, Jack? She was molested at gunpoint and sexually abused. She’s only twelve. It’s perfectly normal for her to react this way. In fact, she’s taken it in true Jane stride, very matter-of-factly. We need to give her some space. Hopefully she will open up in time, but we shouldn’t force it. You go back to the conference; us girls need to chat.”

“Well, I’m going to complain to the authorities. This sort of thing is completely outrageous. I’ll see you later. Give her a hug from me.”

Jane came out of her bathroom wearing a hotel dressing gown. “Mum, did my suitcase arrive? I only have my boy clothes and they need cleaning.”

“No Jane, they probably got them mixed up because of the delay. Let’s go shopping.”

A few minutes later, they were in the shopping arcade. The staff directed them to the back of the shop, where there was a separate room for women’s clothes. There was very little choice and Jane ended up with an ugly, long, green dress. It was not a pleasant experience and as soon as they could; they returned to their suite.

“Mum, did you notice how nicely the shop assistant treated me when I dressed as a boy, then how he mocked me as soon as I changed into girls’ clothes?”

“Yes Jane, this is not the USA I remember. Whatever happened to you in Honolulu is not your fault.”

“I know, Mum, these men are evil through and through.” She burst into tears.

Her mother went to give her daughter a hug, but Jane ran to her room sobbing. Since Jane was a small child, she was best left alone, her mother knew not to follow.

“I can’t tell anyone the whole story. Her mother would tell father and then all hell would break loose. I’m sure her father would insist on taking me to the police.”

After a few hours, Jane was ready to go with her parents to dinner. Both parents looked like film stars. Her mother’s dark wavy hair, green eyes and long legs were stunning. Her father, with his beautiful grey eyes, fair hair, tall, muscular build, and charming demeanour was a true James Bond. She did not take after either of them. “Plain Jane,” she thought, “there couldn’t be a more apt name for me. And this dress is the worst. All I

need is a Mennonite cap to complete the outfit.” She wished she could disappear into the woodwork. Still, she did her best to be cordial.

Next day she felt better and joined her parents for breakfast. It was a lovely change from boarding school. This 5-star hotel was pleasant, but essentially a mirror image of all other 5-star hotels in cities around the world. Luxurious, but without charm. Oddly, the staff were all men, doing jobs from management to menial duties.

Her mother, Ann, was the keynote speaker at the conference. She was a superstar in her field of genetics. Her work was getting worldwide attention. The scientific community expected her to win the Nobel prize for medicine for her cutting-edge discoveries. She was very much in demand and the organisers had to keep enlarging the venue to accommodate the numbers of people she was attracting. Jane was very proud of her and was determined not to ruin her mother’s moment in the spotlight.

Jane was not in the mood to make friends, instead she went for a long walk on the beach. She ripped her dress and tucked what was left into her knickers so she could go for a swim. On the way back, the boys taunted her, using disgusting slurs to embarrass her. Jane gave them the middle finger and walked on, determined not to jump at the bait. Her only demerits at school happened when she lost her temper. Her academics were stellar. Jane’s instinct was always to fight back, but her father always discouraged it.

“It is not a ladylike thing to do.”

The phrase always sickened her, especially at times like this. “So, I have to conform, and let the boys get away with it?”

Jane rolled her eyes.

She made friends with a few girls who were in the same boat as her. Their parents were busy with their careers and had little time for the children. This would be the longest time the children interacted with their parents, except for Christmas, when they got to see all the family.

Her parents enrolled Jane in an all-girl’s state boarding school at six, and now she was nearly thirteen. It was part of her life and she was fine with it, unlike other kids who were constantly griping about it. Most holidays were similar, going all over the world wherever a medical conference took her parents. They were well off, but by no means rich; this was just a perk of their jobs. Usually, the trips were a lot of fun, with many activities and outings.

Not this time, the boys had all the best activities and outings, but not the girls. Their activities were cooking, knitting, sewing and scripture, all taught by men. It was excruciating. They were even prohibited from swimming. The American men treated the male guests with the utmost respect, but were especially insulting to the females. Jane had seen the real America and was not as surprised at the bizarre treatment. In the past, the boys had been fun to be around, but this time, they were nasty. All the girls were relieved when each day was over.

“I’ll bring it up with my parents to see how I should react to their insults,” she thought.

It was easy to find her parents at dinner. All she needed to do was follow the admiring glances from the other guests.

“Hi love,” her father pulled out the chair for her. “Since you are such a lovely young lady, you should be treated like one.”

“Thanks Dad, please don’t,” Jane hated anyone noticing her. “Hiya Mum, how did your speech go?”

“It went well. I was nervous, but the audience loved it. When I finished, I got a standing ovation,” she laughed. “How about that? How did your day go, love?”

“The usual. I’ve made some girlfriends, but the boys are obnoxiously crude, calling the girls sluts and bitches. It didn’t go down well with me, so don’t be surprised if any of their parents give you a call.”

“It will soon change Jane; us lads are mean to girls at your age. It will be different in a few years, still that sort of language is not acceptable.”

“What are you talking about, Dad? Haven’t you noticed anything? The staff treat us girls like shit, and the boys like fucking princes.”

For once, her mother did not rise to her swearing.

“We women have noticed, but the men seem oblivious to it. The treatment has appalled us so much, forcing a few of us to go and complain. The staff had the temerity to turn their backs on us and say, ‘when will their men grow balls and stand up to these euro bitches?’ We pushed through them, and I replied, ‘Anatomically children, you are way off, it’s a brain you are sadly lacking. The bigger the balls, the easier the target.’

Come on, girls.’ We then went and kneed them all in the crotches. All the men ended up on the floor incapacitated. ‘And so much for those balls. If you want land, you can have a couple of achers,’ I told them.”

“Oh Mum, that was wonderful, I wish I’d been there. That’s the best comeback ever. That joke would go way over their heads, on acres versus achers. I can’t wait to tell my friends. You are my hero.”

“What if they call the police?”

“Jack, don’t be silly, everyone would laugh them out of the hotel. You know how males hate being ridiculed.”

“Dad, how could you men ignore this? It has to be screamingly obvious.”

“I noticed when someone shoved your mum to the side. I was going to do something, but she beat me to it and pushed the manager to the ground. Not surprisingly, he cursed at her.”

“And you still did nothing? Are you men in a different universe or something?”

“It’s alright Jane, he was just slow,” her mother said. “The asshole tried to grab my leg, but I got to him first with a good kick to his face. At least he left with a bloody nose.”

Jane sighed. “Good for you Mum, I’ll do the same next time they push me.”

It did not happen again. Everyone treated Jane well when she dressed in her boy clothes the next day. Her friends decided to do the same. They followed Jane to her room, and all left with short hair. Next stop was the shop where they all bought

boy's clothes. Their fathers were livid, but their mothers smiled. The ones that did the transformation were having the time of their lives. They enjoyed all the sports that were forbidden for females. Jane made sure the boys knew not to rat on them. They had seen her berserker rage after she humiliated some of the older boys in a fight.

After dinner, the family went for their usual cocktail and mock-tail overlooking the beach to watch another stunning sunset.

“This will be my last trip to this country. It's abhorrent, never again. When I was here with your father eleven years ago, it was the opposite. Everyone couldn't have been more polite.”

Once the sunset was over, Jane decided to go back to her room.

“Night, parents, enjoy your evening.”

“Night love, see you at breakfast.”

The organisers of the conference planned a special night for her mother. Jane was invited, but always found them boring. Instead, she preferred a quiet evening reading or playing a game on her computer. She entered her room and switched on the telly; as usual, it was full of crap. Every station carried either religious, manic preachers ranting on about Sodom and Gomorrah, or political stations with disgusting politicians parroting more hate and lies.

On the last station, President Schmidt was facing the camera, speaking in front of the United States flag and fascist militia pennants, and talking about how God loves their nation

and how he, President Schmidt, would lead the world to salvation. Jane did not follow American politics and did not understand the significance of this. Religious or military games did not interest her in the slightest. They had replaced Jane's favourite games on the internet. She switched off the telly and went back to reading.

The next morning, she decided to relax before meeting her friends to go parasailing. Her father came storming in. When she saw his sunken look, she knew immediately something was wrong. Her father ignored her, switched on the TV for the weather forecast, instead; in capitals it said, THE HALLOWED NATION IS AT WAR WITH EUROPE.

"Jane, get everyone's clothes packed, make sure you have everything," he said firmly. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

She started immediately and went to get trolleys for the luggage. Jane finished packing as her mother walked in.

"What's going on?" Her mother seemed alarmed.

"America, I mean The Hallowed Nation, is at war with Europe."

"Oh My God, that misogynist asshole, we have to leave this instant."

Jane said, "wear Dad's clothes and your trainers. I've packed and we're ready to go. Try to look like a man."

"Good idea Jane, the last thing we need right now is freaky men getting in the way."

They moved fast and caught her father as he entered the hotel.

“Let’s go. Good job. I’ve been to the bank and got all the money out. We are going on a shopping spree. What’s the best store to get everything in one place?”

“I think it’s an Xmart, it’s huge and close. Go left and then right, straight for three kilometres,” her mother said, “and get a move on.”

“Mum, here are some scissors, cut your hair and put this baseball cap on.”

Jane had never seen her parents in such a state. It was insane.

“Jane, I’ve made a quick list for you to get at the store. You’ll need to be fast at delivering your trolley to the till. One of us will meet you there.”

Her father dropped her and her mother off at the front entrance. They grabbed a couple of trolleys each, while her father went to park the van.

She read the list. “Oh my,” Jane thought, “this is going to take me ages.”

Easy to cook nutritious food, flour of all sorts. Dried milk. Dried everything, it looked inedible and sounded awful. The list went on and on. She was to gather as much as she could and meet at the cash register.

“Fill the baskets, James, and hurry.”

She loved to eat, but this stuff? Jane added her own list of essential things, including snacks from chocolates to sodas. When finished, she pushed both the overloaded and heavy

trolleys towards the cash register. She saw her mother checking out.

“More to come!”

In a short time, she delivered all of them to her mother.

When her mother saw the pile of stuff, she could not help but smile. Her father had already checked out their early purchases and had taken them to the van to load. Her mother ran all the new items through the register. Twelve carts later, Jane was still ready for more.

Her mother said, “that’s enough, James!”

“Okay uncle Anthony,” she winked, “just a few more sweets and chocolates.”

Her mother continued checking out. When she saw the herbs and spices, she thought, “when I asked Jane to get a lot, I didn’t mean all of them.”

Her father was now glad of the van. They filled it to capacity. Jane needed to sit on her mother’s knee to fit in.

Her parents hoped they had remembered all the necessary items because the charter boat was going to be their home until it was safe to go back to England. Simultaneously Jane thought, “this is madness. Don’t they know how much luggage we can take on the aeroplane?”

Her father had been in charge of all the charts, fishing supplies, solar powered tools and everything else he saw that might be useful. He had grabbed all the books he could find about the islands.

Her mother had taken care of all the medical supplies, clothes, water gear, lotions, anything she could think of. There was so much, but it was all necessary. She just kept throwing things in the carts, not thinking whether they would fit on the boat they had chartered as a surprise for Jane.

“Mum, have you thought about how we are going to get all this stuff on the plane?”

Her mother laughed and shouted, “SURPRISE,” as they arrived at a marina just as it was about to close.

Her father looked at the good sized live-aboard yacht he had chartered and frowned. “We need a bigger one. I’ll see if we can trade up.”

Her parents had chartered it for a post conference family holiday. It was an early surprise birthday present for Jane.

“I’m going mental, Mum; are we really going sailing?”

“Yes, we booked it for two weeks. Your birthday is during school term, so this year we thought we’d celebrate it earlier sailing the Pacific Islands.”

Jane could not believe it. The excitement was more than she could bear. She could not stop jumping up and down.

Her mother laughed, “I take it you like the idea?” What a difference. Jane was back to her old self.

“What! You’re killing me. It’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

Her father returned fifteen minutes later and smiled.

“Success! We are now officially chartering that 30-metre catamaran over there. That should take care of business, and

better yet, it's new and fully solar, with a huge freezer and refrigerator. I paid cash for the upgrade, so it wasn't a problem changing the charter."

"It's huge Jack, we must be broke."

"Not really, it's only for two weeks."

The family surreptitiously packed everything onto the boat, quickly filling all the nooks and crannies.

"We should have chartered a cruise ship. We're one hell of a shopping crew, especially young Jane," her father said.

"I was just doing as I was told," Jane gave him a smile, "at least we won't run out anytime soon."

"Yes, we have enough sweets and chocolates to last us a lifetime," her mother laughed. "We should've grabbed a dentist to take with us."

"We were lucky there was only one fella at the marina. Seeing I was paying cash, he didn't ask questions. He was in such a hurry to get home, probably because of the war."

"We have two weeks before we were going to fly home, so hopefully we will be well away in uncharted waters by then."

"I wonder about the people at the conference and if they could leave," her mother said.

"Doubt it. They cancelled flights out of the USA when the war started."

"Ouch, that means prison camps, and maybe even gas chambers. We dodged a bullet there. The way the Americans treated us females, it's going to be very harsh on them."

“Yes, I believe you’re right.”

“Let’s just keep it to ourselves for the time being. We don’t want Jane to be scared.”

“On a brighter note, just have a look at this, Ann. We have automatic furling and steering. It means we can go to sleep, put a sea anchor out, set it on autopilot, and will be taken safely to the location of our choice.”

“I know, it’s amazing. Let’s get some miles in and then put the anchor down tonight. We’ll both read the manual tomorrow.”

Jane excitedly told her parents, “did you notice we have a tender on board?” She was running round the boat, checking everything.

“You’ll make me dizzy,” her mother laughed, “calm down.”

It was not that difficult to balance the weight. With it being a catamaran, there was so much extra space. This was the biggest boat they had ever sailed. They kept two of the prime cabins as sleeping quarters; They filled the rest with the supplies from the big shop. There was still loads of room for more.

As they left the harbour on a beautiful, calm sea, the family felt like pioneers heading out into the unknown.

Chapter 3

The weather could not have been better, the ocean was a millpond, and the breeze pushed them south. Once out of the harbour and a safe distance from land, her father unfurled the sails, and the yacht picked up speed.

They were on the open seas, her mother called, “Jane, let’s get unpacking and make dinner.”

“Please Mum, can I stay and help Dad?”

“Okay, I’ll make the meal and leave you to do your unpacking later.”

They enjoyed a cocktail on board watching the sunset, then sailed until dark. Her father buttoned down the boat for the night and set out a couple of sea anchors.

They had a wonderful dinner, then retired for the evening.

Her mother tucked Jane in and kissed her on the forehead. The next minute, she was asleep.

“I’m sure they’ve put tracking devices on the yacht. Did you think to buy any detectors, perchance?” her mother said.

“Yes, I did Ann.”

“God, we’re good.”

“Look at this berth, Jack, luxury to die for, Egyptian cotton and down duvets.” Her mother slumped onto their comfortable bed. They, too, were soon sound asleep.

Jane was up first to cook breakfast so she could surprise her parents. She tried to scramble dried eggs.

“Hmm, at least we have tomatoes and fresh bread,” she thought. She boiled the kettle for tea, “AMERICANS! Where is the teapot?”

Her parents joined her and ate the breakfast she prepared. “That was fantastic Jane, where did you learn to cook?”

“Cookery class, of course, but I hadn’t seen dried eggs until yesterday, I didn’t even know they existed. Your list said everything dried. Do you actually know how much dried food they have in that store?”

Her parents laughed.

“I didn’t know you were sailors. You’ll have to teach me everything.”

“With the original sailboat we chartered, we could certainly go from the basics up. With this magnificent specimen, it’s all automatic, we can even leave her to sail while we sleep.” Her father said. “It’s short of nothing, we can relax without a care in the world.”

“Nice but boring,” Jane said. “I’ll still learn everything, anyway.”

Her mother laughed, “you can start with this enormous instruction manual.” She gave it to Jane, expecting her to moan. Jane took the book to the upper deck of the yacht, settled on a lounge chair, and started reading.

“I wonder how long she’ll read it before she throws it up in the air,” her father said. Her parents were used to Jane’s hair-

trigger temper; it went with the territory, auburn hair and freckles.

“I’ll make sure Jane has suntan lotion and ice water, then leave her to it.”

Everyone had a relaxing day. Jane was still reading the manual. She showed her father how to set the autopilot; he set it to head south. The manual engrossed Jane for two more days.

“Finished. When you have a question about the boat, I’m your girl. I’ve read it twice now and will be your captain until you know as much as I do.”

“Yes, Captain Jane.”

Both parents stood to attention and saluted.

“Where do you want to go, Jack, South Pacific? I’ve always wanted to go, but expense and time have been a problem.”

“Excuse me, Mother, the captain should be the one to decide. I’ll at least join you in the discussion.”

“Of course, Captain.”

“We’ll spend the next two weeks enjoying life, then try to find a way back to England,” her father said.

They looked at the charts and decided on the direction.

“Off to the South Seas we go. Huzza.”

“Huzza,” her parents shouted.

Her parents cooked dinner, while Jane manned the yacht. She was determined everything would run smoothly, even though all the systems were automatic.

“It’s marvellous. We’ve all the time in the world. It will be great to get to know our daughter.”

“Yes,” Jack replied. “I’m pretty impressed with her already.”

Then all hell broke loose. The yacht took an abrupt turn to starboard.

“What the hell was that?” her father shouted.

“No worries, Dad, just trying out all the buttons. We’ll need to know everything there is when the weather worsens. Be ready for a fire drill. It’s my duty to keep my crew safe.”

They muffled their giggles. It was second nature. Anything could spark their little live wire. This little twelve-year-old captain was a hoot.

“Just let us know before you touch another button, otherwise we could have a fire in the galley.”

“Will do.”

Jane was back with her buttons; her father went to finish dinner.

Apart from a few very hard manoeuvres as Jane experimented, it had been a glorious day.

“Since we have Captain Jane in charge, I’ll put out the fishing rods tomorrow and get us some fresh fish. What about you Ann, what’s your plan?”

“Boring stuff, we have to find the transponders. I’ll feel much happier once we do.”

The next day, everyone searched the yacht. After three hours, they found four transponders and destroyed them all. Now they would be on their own. The Robertson family sailing the high seas.

The family had a spectacular time finding exotic uninhabited islands where they could camp. Spending days snorkelling on pristine reefs; to Jane, this was an idyllic lifestyle. Spending so much time with her parents was fantastic. Her mother was adamant that Jane would stay current in her studies. Learning was fun with her parents, they were both polymaths, and interesting. Her mother was a fount of knowledge, an excellent scientist and teacher. Her father took care of her physical education. Surfing, fishing, deep diving for shellfish and spear fishing were all on the curriculum. Jane was in heaven.

Their food was far from bland. They took turns in the galley, each of them having a distinct style. Most meals were delicious, thanks to all the fresh fish and crustaceans they caught, as well as the fruits and vegetables they foraged. There was a long running joke about the very varied spice and herb collection. It meant for a very interesting menu.

The storms were frequent and sometimes rough. This was the arena where Jane learnt and honed her skills; she was certainly in her element, learning about the sea, weather and the stars. Her mother had bought an expensive hand-held telescope. They could see the constellations in exquisite detail. The family would sometimes sleep on deck, spending hours viewing and admiring the stars. The sunsets and sunrises were exquisite, nothing was boring.

There were a couple of serious scares when they thought they might lose the boat. Jane saved the day with her photographic memory and encyclopaedic knowledge of the boat.

The weather was unpredictable because of global warming, causing troubling weather patterns worldwide. Her mother would slavishly check the weather forecast at least twice daily. She was on top of events one frightening day.

“Turn the boat around Jack, we have to find land quickly. This storm is going to be a whopper.”

Her father nodded and reversed course, with Jane helping it did not take long. They settled on the new heading and went back to an island they had passed that morning. There were several volcanic atolls in this part of the Pacific. That was good, as they needed high ground to locate their camp. Her mother went below deck to start packing. It was obvious that this storm was going to be a big one. Jane had never seen her mother so serious. The look on her face was grave.

Thankfully, the wind was with them and they flew through the water at speeds Jane had not seen before. It was exhilarating. She manned the yacht with her father as back-up crew. They took about an hour to get back to the island. Jane spotted what looked like a natural harbour.

“There Dad, look.”

“Good eyes, Jane,”

In moments, they changed course. Unfortunately, they had now lost the wind and for the first time during their adventure; they needed their solar powered engine. They quickly furled

the sails. The engine helped them cut through the fast-flowing current running across their course. It took forever to get the boat inside the harbour. When they finally arrived, they saw it was small but very protected. They got as close as they could to the black sand beach, made possible by the catamaran's shallow draught, but they could not beach it because of rocks in the shallows.

"Let's get the supplies to the beach," her mother said, "sorry, there's so much, but if we lose the yacht, we'll be glad of it."

"Jump in the boat Jane, I'll hand you all the stuff."

They soon filled the tender to the gunwales.

"Okay, that's enough. Go with her, Jack."

They did this multiple times until all the essentials her mother had packed were on the beach. Jane ran the tender back so her mother could get herself to the shore.

"Remember Mum, it has two anchors."

"Yes Jane, I know."

Jane swam to shore.

"That's a lot of stuff," her father said, looking annoyed. "Let's split up and try to find a sheltered spot. We need to go up at least fifteen metres. It's a protected harbour, so we should be alright at that height. We have little time. Let's go."

Jane went looking. Ten minutes later, she heard her father shout, "I've got one!"

Jane ran down the steep hill in a flash, then laboured up, carrying as much as she could to join him.

“You stay here. The lee side is that way. Make sure that’s where you put the entrance.”

She started the tent set up. It was now very overcast, and the wind was starting to gust.

“I hope we get the camp finished before it gets worse.”

“Good, you prepare while I run down and bring more stuff.”

“It should be safe, hopefully high enough to withstand a tsunami or storm surge. Thankfully, there are no high trees to attract lightning.”

The tent opening faced east, away from the high wind. The wind strengthened and blew the tent all over the place. More supplies arrived as her parents toiled up the hill.

“Mum, we’ll need a ground sheet and pegs to secure the supplies. I’ve found a sheltered spot for them.”

“Good.” her mother said.

Her mother stayed to help Jane get the camp ready, while her father kept bringing up the rest of the provisions.

“Staying for a month of Sundays, eh?” he smiled. “Everything but the kitchen sink!” He was out of breath.

“I have that as well,” she smiled back, pointing to the plastic bowl. Now everything was in place, her father cheered up.

Their efforts accelerated as the first drops of rain hit them; they secured the tent in minutes. The three of them struggled to ensure things would not fly away. Soon, they had stored the

supplies in sealed tarpaulins and pegged them all down. They went into the tent, had a drink of water, and tried to relax.

“Please Mother Earth, help us survive this one.”

“Starting to pray now, are we Mum?”

She laughed. All of them were atheists.

Jane felt excitement rather than fear. “This is going to be great,” she thought. Jane could not understand why any of the girls at school hid under blankets at the merest sight of lightning and screamed at a thunderclap. She had always loved powerful storms.

Her mother, who had seen the forecast, had not yet told them the details. She brought them up to date. “This is a category 5 cyclone and we are directly in its path. The winds are going to be disastrous. This could be one for the ages.”

They had done everything they could. If they slept, it would be advantageous. The full brunt of the storm would be horrendous. They wanted to be awake and alert when it happened. They all tried to sleep.

“How on earth can we sleep now?”

With that, Jane went out like a light. She woke to a violent thunderclap immediately above them, the intense lightning caused an unearthly glare in the tent. They were spread out on the bottom of the tent to stop it lifting and blowing away.

“Damn, we should have had the heavy bags in here with us,” her father said.

The rain pounded on the structure and the wind felt as though it would rip the tent to shreds. Her father, sensing the

unease, said, “don’t worry ladies, I chose the tent carefully. It’s made with a newly developed fabric invented by a German woman, a new immigrant to England. I remember it going through rigorous testing in Britain. The long, serrated tent pegs were another of her brilliant ideas. Just hope a tornado doesn’t throw us into the air.”

“Hmm or have a mudslide with all that rain,” her mother commented. “Oh, sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.”

“Thanks, parental units, a great way to keep me calm,” she laughed nervously. The storm cranked up its fury. It was getting harder to stop the wind from lifting them into the air.

Another bubble from the bottom of the tent elevated them. Every time it happened, they screamed, “bumps-a-daisy,” and laughed. The Robertson family was brave, funny, and knowledgeable. Jane felt in good hands.

“Let’s change the subject,” her mother said, “jokes anyone?”

They thought of a lot of juvenile knock-knock jokes. Then her father told an extremely long, drawn-out joke, for which neither Jane nor her mother could understand the punchline.

“Well, that store was good,” Jane said, “remember when I chose all the herbs and spices? The look on your face, Mum, as you scanned them, was to die for,” Jane laughed.

“Some of the spices were ones I hadn’t even heard of, anardana, dried pomegranate seeds and amchur powder, a fruity spice from dried unripe mangoes, are both good ones. It was great Jane, you definitely pushed us out of our comfort zone. We’ve had very interesting meals because of it.”

They continued to talk and laugh nervously about lots of the meals they had eaten, some fantastic and others awful.

After what seemed like an eternity, they realised the storm was tapering off. A sigh of relief filled the tent as the thunder and lightning diminished, strikes were no longer overhead, and eventually, the rain stopped. They looked at each other and cheered. The tent performed admirably, without a single leak.

The ground was soaking. Her father was the first out of the tent, accidentally slipping down the hill. The ladies heard a howl of pain when he stopped abruptly with a branch stuck between his legs. Ann went down to help her husband out of his predicament while Jane assessed the damage. The position of the tent on the lee-side of the island had been a good move. From what she could see from her vantage point, their mountain was stable. Luckily, all the supplies were still secure under the groundsheet.

Starting a fire was difficult as all the wood was wet. Jane broke off some dead branches and discovered dry wood and grass underneath the supply tarpaulin, which could be used as kindling. A fire pit and a small barbecue chimney would do the trick.

Once her mother got the fire started, it did not take her long to start a pea and lentil stew. While it was cooking, they went carefully down the hill: her father was especially cautious. Still, they all landed on their bottoms and tripped a few times on the debris before they finally got to the bottom. The black volcanic sand was littered with fallen branches and uprooted coconut trees, there was an abundance of coconuts and a few bananas.

Jane was first down and had already run across the beach. She stared out seaward to look for the yacht.

“Parents,” Jane shouted, “the boat’s gone!”

Her father felt a stab in his chest. “Damn” her father shouted multiple times out loud. He then said in a quiet voice, “Let’s hope we can find her,” facing the loves of his life in dismay. “It was great that you made us take all those supplies, Ann.”

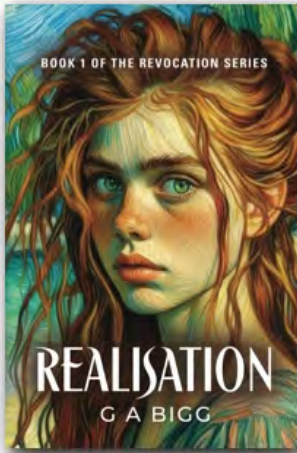
They carried up some coconuts and bananas and her father made a mocktail before dinner. The stew was waiting for them when they got back. It was substantial and filling; the three scoffed it down.

“We survived, and that in itself is a miracle. I was the only one to know it was a category 6 cyclone, I didn’t want to worry you. Let’s look on the bright side. We are safe and together on this beautiful island.”

“Wonderful, just wonderful,” Jane sighed. “This is a spectacular adventure,” then went to hug her mother.

Her parents decided to keep the camp on the mountainside for the time being. As the Ring of Fire surrounded them, active volcanoes were always possible and a tsunami might occur at any time. Her mother went to open up the rest of the groundsheets. Jane started arranging the cooking supplies.

They put in a long day’s work and made their tent more comfortable with blankets and pillows. The women fell into a deep sleep. Her father lay awake worrying about losing the boat, and was concerned they would never get back to England.



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