

*PART 1*

*SURVIVAL*

CHAPTER 1

They were leaving. I didn't wave. They didn't wave. They didn't even look back! I guess you don't if you've just killed someone. Especially if that someone is your brother-in-law.

I got all this information as I momentarily crested a wave and chanced a quick look through half opened eyes. Even opening the eyes for just a slit and quickly closing them made my head throb.

I just tried to relax and float but my clothes were getting heavy – especially my shoes. I mentally kicked myself for wearing sneakers and not boat shoes or sandals. But how was I do know that Howard was going to kill me – okay, make that “try to kill me.”

I felt the next wave carry me to its crest and snuck another peek. The boat was definitely moving away and I could hear the throb of its twin Yamaha 150s that suddenly turned into a roar as Quentin must have pushed the throttles full bore. I just hoped that they wouldn't come round

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and try to run me over to be certain that the job was done. I didn't think Howard had it in him but maybe Keith did. I didn't know much about Keith - or Quentin for that matter.

Trying to relax, I thought of what had happened to get me into this predicament.

*My wife Elise and I were on a Caribbean cruise and headed for Aruba for a week in the sun – a second honeymoon so to speak. Several weeks before at the suggestion of my wife, I had used the web (a favorite tool of mine) to find a charter captain on St. Nantes. He had picked up Howard, Keith and I at the pier after we were dropped off from the first tender ashore from our ship, the Caribbean Isle, flagship of Caribbean Cruise Line. Howard is my brother-in-law – rephrase that – my no good brother-in-law. Keith is a guy to whom Howard had introduced me on the ship and I asked him if he wanted to join my little excursion. He had immediately jumped on board – looking back on it, too quickly.*

*We had headed out for deep-sea fishing for mahi mahi and anything else that came along in Quentin's thirty-six foot boat. A fast run of forty-five minutes south through two to three foot emerald blue swells had brought us into the area that Quentin had selected. "Zere are a lot of fish here," he had said as he baited both lines and set them out as the boat slowly got up to trolling speed.*

*We had been offered water, beer, or coke and all of us had selected beer – Heineken in 250 ml bottles bearing no regional brewery notation, which I had found strange. Quentin had expertly used his knife pulled from the sheaf in one of the rod holders to remove the caps. Even at 11:00 in the morning, the first draught was welcome. The three of us had touched bottles and wished each other "Taut Lines" and settled in to wait for the first strike that we had decided would be mine as I had organized the excursion.*

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*The sun was high in an azure blue sky; infrequent seabirds crossed our vision as we questioned Quentin about the island and his life. He was a seventh generation island resident and had been fishing all his life, twenty years taking out charters for either inshore (barracuda and an occasional mahi mahi) or deep sea. I had chosen the latter even knowing that its five hour length would push the envelope getting us back for the last tender to the ship but that was chance we were all willing to take. We knew that the Caribbean Isle would not wait for us if we were late as it was not a ship sponsored excursion. You pay your money and take your chance.*

*Suddenly the reel to my immediate left began to whine and the rod rattled heavily in its holder. Before any of the three of us could shout "Fish on" Quentin had throttled back and was halfway to the rod holder. I stood up from my seat in the stern moving starboard to get out of his way, clutching the fighting belt and frantically searching for the snap buckle. "Don't put et on until we have a fish," he had said in his heavy French accent as he explained the technique, "et's bad luck!" Little did he know! Or, on second thought, maybe he did.*

*I settled back against the rod rack (no fighting chair on this boat) and Quentin brought the rod and snapped it into the holder. I griped the rod above the reel with my left hand, moved my thumb against the line and starting winding, pushing the line to the right as I did so. Pulling the rod up and cranking it down to keep the line tight, thumb moving left or right guiding the line. Well, at least that is what I tried to do but the fish (mahि mahi hopefully) had other ideas. The line went out and there was no way to stop it. Then I started reeling line and I worked at it, pumping the rod and keeping the line going from side to side. I remember thinking that it would make more sense if these huge Penn reels had a line guide like my freshwater reels did.*

*The fish was huge and kept taking the line out erasing what little progress I seemed to make. However little by little the battle was won and at last, after what seemed like hours but*

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*was mere minutes because of the adrenaline pumping through my veins, Quentin told me to stop. That was an easy request to obey. Quentin wrapped the line around his hand and started pulling the fish up.*

*“Get over by the fish for a good picture,” Keith had shouted as he had volunteered to be the cameraman on the first fish and I had given him my camera.*

*I moved a few feet toward the port side where Quentin was at work.*

*There was a flash of green ...*