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My War Love The Twin Rivers Deception

PART ONE The Sweet Easy Life

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(May 2009)

The night was as still as a pacemaker with its circuits broken, switched off. And here on the schooner's deck there was no rocking movement at all. No sound...no whisper of wave action. No ringing rigging. Wind? Not a breath—this yacht was floating so motionless its reflection in the water seemed as solid as itself.

And your colleague, Paula Ramirez? Picture her sitting slumped against the mainmast, her knees under her chin—in an attitude of extreme disgust.

"Jimmy," she says, "we mostly work for the government, right?"

"Sort of," you admit, "at least indirectly."

"But there are almost a million Americans with Top Secret clearance. Am I right, Jimmy?"

"Okay, Paula. Yeah. I guess."

"And about a third are free lances, like us. So why can't we find some'n excitin' to do?" she asks.

She's joking about how dull your new assignment will probably be—a routine interdiction test...in dense fog off the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay.

But, yeah, that's how it'll all begin, this wild and reckless summer—starting out all right, almost righteous...dreamy days that'll spiral into greed, political intrigue, haunted love.

You're at a small yacht club south of Washington, D.C.—where, let's assume, you sometimes keep this fifty-foot schooner. (Actually sixty-four-feet overall—gaff-rigged originally for the South China Sea. Sleeping five comfortably.)

And well to the east of the club, across a broad cove, there's a long sandy beach. It extends

out into a point...over in the distance, across the water in Maryland.

And it's easy to imagine yourself on this night in the late spring of 2009, hanging out on deck with the stars above you in your eyes...

As you look out across the dark water...towards the far-off-glimmering lights of those beach condos...

Shining like lanterns in the minarets of an unknown kingdom.

"I mean, why don't we sign up for something real for a change, Jimmy? Like Somali pirates," Paula's saying.

That's probably a reference to recent headlines, describing three encounters in the course of four days:

ITALIAN CRUISE SHIP REPELS SOMALI PIRATES
YEMENI FORCES KILL/CAPTURE SOMALI PIRATES
RUSSIANS SEIZE 29 SOMALI PIRATES

Your other colleague, Johnny, is in love with her. So he's guilty of what could be called Agism—teasing her about her excessive youth. Amazingly, she doesn't seem to mind it, the youth or the teasing.

"You've got to understand, brilliant teenager," Johnny's saying, "that this project's just technical. Detecting a boat in zero visibility. Plus simulated interception. Only a standard drill.

"It's just virtual, my precocious child. Not real-life. Not a vicious mission like we're sure you're longing for."

Paula's not a teenager, let alone a child. She's a dark-haired beauty in her early twenties—a street graduate with no knowledge of her birth parents.

And, of course, she's never been on any vicious missions. She's hardly out of high school, having dropped out two or three times. It's her I.Q. of above 150 that warrants her employment in this minuscule security service.

"I'm an orphan," she'd told you when she first applied. "I've always been an orphan. I don't know my birthday. I don't know my real name."

"Sounds perfect for a spook career," you said.

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(May 2009, continued)

Humpty Was Shoved.

War mongrels dumped Humpty Dumpty.

In this summer of 2009, this team of one woman and two men (all twenty-something) will trip over evidence of a war-funding scandal. Traditional "war mongrels" had dumped the "Humpty Dumpty Balance" in hopes of making an umpteen-billion-dollar "warmelette", so to speak.

Then, joining these three investigators, another young man and woman will rocket the plot into wild friendship, romance and adventure. Days of enigma, joy, action and heartbreak. Dining, partying, sailing and beach-going.

And the political revelations that will open a nation's eyes and break that nation's heart will spin these five young lives into a spiral of mutual dependency, rivalry and disaster.

And it's all too true. The truth of how the greatest nation that has ever existed became entangled in the brain-damaging machinery of the death business, yet discovered moments of beauty and agony.

So it's the same night, the opening night. And now Paula's intensifying her objections about this new job. But from a different angle:

"All right guys," she says, "now hear this. That briefing package we got for this gig—right? Roger Gentry's got a copy too, since we're subcontracting through him. Obviously."

Johnny seems amused. "You still datin' Roger?"

"I'm not *datin'* him, genius man. He's a friend."

"A very rich friend, too," Johnny says.

Paula smiles. "And so are you, Johnny, in your way. Anyhow, guys, I found this memorandum clipped to his briefing packet."

Johnny's laughing outright. "You're stealing Roger's memos now? You two must really be close."

"I didn't steal it. I copied it."

"Oh."

Romantic, irrepressible Paula—a super-sleuth wannabe. And as she passes a copy of the memo to you and one to Johnny, she takes a flashlight from one of the cockpit lockers and tosses it to you...while Johnny, who's right in the cockpit, turns on the compass binnacle light.

You glance at the document cursorily:

...Twin Rivers deception...national disaster...hundreds of billions in war contracts...

...Herodian dynasty...the one counterbalance to Zealot expansion...

...Kleptocracy...more amenable to our interests than Zealotry...

What in the world...? You have to admit it, Paula's got a point. Why these bizarre phrases tacked onto a humdrum exercise?

"What's it mean, Jimmy?" Paula's asking.

"I don't know."

"But this note—all about invasions and billion-dollar contracts. What does that have to do with our upcoming exercise?"

"I don't know that either. Paula, listen. Forget it. Let's just get through this. Aren't you being well paid for this drill?"

"But, Jimmy, if there's maybe something weird...even sinister...about this new assignment, so why're we doing it, Jimmy?"

"All right, Paula. Roger's been more than a father to me. You know that. And you know we get most of our business through him. And he wants this done. We're just subcontracting. If anything goes wrong, our hearts are clean."

"Our hearts may be clean, Jimmy. But what about our hands?"

"No offense, Paula. And I'm sorry. But do you want to quit?"

Now she reacts strongly—as if that harsh remark has hit her hard...hurt her a lot.

"No," she says in a soft voice, "I don't want to quit."

"Good, Paula. This business unfortunately involves gray areas. And maybe it's not a good business. But it's *my* business."

"It's my business too, Jimmy—as long as it can be."

"That's great, Paula. Because you're the best."

“Thank you, Jimmy.”

You’re smiling now—to reassure her. “You’re young, Paula. So you like to play these exercises out as the real thing. So if details seem a little unrealistic—even ridiculous—you become Jay Leno.”

She’s grinning. “I’m young? And that makes you old, Jimmy? You’re still in your twenties.” You smile. “Yeah, I suppose so.”

Twenty-eight, to be exact. Somewhat taller than average? Light brown hair? Greenish-gray eyes? So what? Neutral details that scarcely make a difference.

And your bio’s brief:

Boarding school...college...then five years as one of Roger Gentry’s security specialists...now with your own small team, contracting out to corporations and government agencies.

And perhaps most important of all—you’re in love with someone you haven’t seen for eight years.

Johnny’s a little stockier than you—and a little older. He’s about thirty.

“Paula,” you say now, “let’s switch the subject off this assignment.”

She laughs. “How about Ariadne? You’re thinking about her at this very minute, aren’t you, Jimmy? About your college passion, sweet magical Ariadne.

“You’ll never get over her, will you, Jimmy? You’ll never be free. Never, never. Will you?” Paula says.

Ariadne. And is it true that you’re thinking of her now as this night passes into past time? Time dwindling away out here on this schooner’s deck? As you let your eyes drown in the peace of dark water—talking on with Paula and Johnny, experiencing what it means to live this sweet, easy life?

No need to go south for the new exercise until tomorrow. So tonight just lounge here all night—under a cloudy tent of mosquito-netting, if necessary. Or probably, if there’s no land breeze, under the naked sky.

And sip wine...doze off...sleep till morning...out here under the universe—out here on deck. And try not to think about her—that girl who crowned and ruined the end of your academic life.

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A Rainy Night in Dixie (March 2001)

She was Senator Archer’s daughter. Wild, unpredictable, uncontrollable. You met her those eight years ago, on a stormy night in college. It’s possible she’d been egged on to flirt with you by your oldest friend, Carl Gentry—the son of Roger Gentry, the most important man in your life.

Roger’s a large man. Above middle height. Stocky.

He was a West Point graduate with an impressive war record. After attaining the rank of brigadier general, he retired and started a private military service.

He'd known your mother before you were born, and he was the only father you'd ever known. Would *ever* know. After your parents' deaths, he saw to it that you were admitted to an exclusive boarding school.

"Jimmy," he told you, "in a large city high school, you might not make, for example, some sports teams. But this school is so small, and it's so academically selective, that if you can yo-yo and chew gum at the same time, you won't make the team. The team will make you play—so to speak."

Of course, Roger covered all expenses—including the school's tuition, which was cruel and unusual.

And his son, Carl Gentry? He was your closest friend, and continued to be so all through boarding school and later on in college.

America is where you hung...

...and fell in love when you were young.

So those years of one's youth passed fast: Windows 3.1 (1992). Windows '95. Windows '98. Windows 2000. Until it was your last semester of college.

And in that springtime of 2001, on a wet night, there was this attractive weird girl working in the university cafeteria. Weird because you'd just been told that she was the daughter of U.S. Senator Samuel Archer.

And you were doing nothing special that night. Just sitting...half soaked from the stormy evening outside—tasting a crab cake sandwich. Which was wet with the rain dripping from your hair...veiling your view of that redhead cleaning tables.

What is she? you wondered. Some student rebel? Working just to prove her proletarian credentials? Her independence from her father?

Now she was cleaning the table next to yours. Which didn't need cleaning. And as she came closer, you still hadn't caught on—that she was about to turn towards you. And so enter the universe of your existence. Or rather, annex your existence to the universe of her existence.

But now your eye-beams were crossing. Your mutual stares were stalling out in a standing-wave pattern. And she was standing right in front of you...tilting that strangely glorious head of hers. Hair the color of sea grass under Windward Islands water.

Her eyes were the water.

And then boldly dropping into a chair across from you...smiling, but waiting quietly until you finally said:

"That hair drives me stark raving nuts."

"Redheads go gray fast, Jimmy."

(Your first words from her lips.)

"I guess we'll have to live fast, then."

"I like fast," she said.

Everything around was just college cafeteria things. Everything was normal. Everything was like every day. Everything was still everything.

But it was about to happen. One girl's simple flesh and soul would haunt your days and derail your destiny for a long time. Maybe forever.

It was six months before the infamous 9/11 attacks—an Age of Innocence before the Fall. So you were still politically ingenuous as this girl sitting across from you whispered the words:

“America is where we hung...

...and fell in love when we were young.”

“Who wrote that?” you asked.

“Maybe you did,” she said. No smile. No expression of irony or amusement. Is she all there?

Who is this girl?

“You wrote it yourself,” you told her.

“Maybe we’ll write it together,” she said.

Now a smile—but that of a lost creature. Distracted. Mind floating somewhere a long way off.

But it was actually *her*. *Herself*. This was the girl you’d been waiting your whole life to date. Wild, mystifying, irresistible. And *she* was the one who was coming on to *you*.

Approaching you this rainy night in the spring of your senior year at college.

Some girl whose last name was Archer. Senator Archer’s daughter.

“You’re staring so hard, Jimmy. What’s wrong with me?” she asked.

You didn’t know what to say. You just said, “Anyone as bad-looking as you should be wearing an iron mask.”

She laughed. “Oh, you’re such a poet! Do you want to see me again?”

“I don’t know. Anything as tempting as you has got to be illegal.”

“Keep it up, Jimmy. I love it.”

“How do you know my name?”

“That’s my secret. But you’re an *aikidoka*, right? Black-belt *dan*?”

“That’s a vicious rumor.”

“So you’re modest too.”

“My achievements were modest.”

“Are you like that about everything, Jimmy? You shrug everything off?”

“I wouldn’t shrug you off. What’s your first name?”

“That’s my secret too. But if you buy me an outrageously expensive dinner tomorrow, I might tell you.”

“I’ll marry you tomorrow if you tell me. Or whether you tell me or not.”

“Mmm...sounds like a plan.”

That first day of your new life was March 21st, 2001—the vernal equinox, beginning of the Eastern New Year... eighty-five years after Cole Younger died in his home town of Lee’s Summit, Missouri.

And he’s buried there in the Historical Cemetery.

This girl’s advantage? Knowing your name. How? From Carl probably. But you must have failed to ask her then. And her? You’d definitely never seen her before that night. You would have remembered. Yeah, you’d remember.

But if this was Carl’s joke, how come she fell for you? Opposites attract? Because you were poor? Athletic? Straight? Sober? The antithesis of your best friend Carl. Her pendulum swung from him to you?

Or was it just inscrutable fate? Karma Kryptic.

