

*For the adventure of
our life in all of us.*

To my wife Linda, brothers, Fred & Dave
Special Thanks Dawn Bonner
www.livinglifeboomerstyle.com
Mr. Bruce Clark who introduced possibilities.

CHAPTER 1

July 1995 Off the Bahamas Islands, Southeast of Crooked
Island Passage, on board the Viking Shipping Company
cruise ship the Viking Mistress.

It was a moment of sheer bliss. It was turning out better than anything she possibly could have dreamed. Well, that would be fundamentally true, if you factored out her moody husband. Aside from that, everything was about as perfect as it could be.

She arrived at the sun deck several hours earlier and situated herself in a lounge chair next to the Maiden Pool, along with other women of the “morning sun worship” crowd who were doing the same. She’d been resting and reading for about half an hour after enjoying a swim of twelve short laps in the pool. Laying down a copy of *Fabulous*, she turned and got up to adjust the oversized deck chair to its full horizontal position. She took the time to realign the deck chair towel, and once satisfied, she lay back down. She had carefully selected the deck chair, being one that suited her desire to be near the end of a row of identical chairs lined up uniformly on the sunny side of the pool. Her hair, still wet from the recent swim, was lightly wrapped in a bath towel she brought with her from her cabin. Her exposed, evenly tanned skin was

lightly covered with SPF 30 sun block. A pair of trendy sunglasses shielded her grayish-green eyes from the sun. In other words, she blended in perfectly with the dozen or so beautiful women nearby who were also working on their perfect tans.

She allowed a slight grin to form across her face. The grin represented her total satisfaction and contentment at that moment. In her serene state, she was mildly aware that it was getting hot and that she had been sunning herself long enough for tiny beads of perspiration to form along her forehead and in the cleavage of her breasts. In her relaxed mood, she didn't mind.

The ship was beautiful, "A floating BMW," she heard one passenger whisper to another. I bet my friends would die to be here right now, she imagined.

With this in mind, she rested and practiced recalling features of the ship that she would convey in conversation to her friends once she returned home. She would explain that she tried to no avail to sway her husband in obtaining an upper deck stateroom, hoping to garner some sympathy. A few "that jerk" or "typical tightwad" comments from her friends would elevate her status as a poor suffering wife.

"Still," she would explain, "I did get to stroll on the promenades and spend hours in the beautiful spas on Aaron's Visa." "They should get a kick out of that remark," she chuckled to herself.

Eventually, she'd be more serious and explain that more impressive than anything were the passengers. Nightly, a throng of handsome and elegantly dressed men escorted their wives, girlfriends, or whatever, to their tables. The women dressed as if they were going to a nightly gala celebration. They wore bracelets and necklaces from the likes of Cartier, and gold rings with beautiful gems of every color imaginable. And the diamonds, oh the diamonds.

But, she would tell them in a haughty voice, all of that nightly glitter was just a prelude to the Captain's Ball. On that night, her night, the dining rooms and showroom dance floors would be ablaze with the sparkle of sequins and diamonds worn by women intent on outdoing one

another for the unofficial crown of being the most glamorous woman in the room.

She could almost hear her friends gasp in envy as she described how the women dressed that night. In her circle, she was the fairest, and in that capacity, it was her responsibility to provide the right amount of detail and information so that they might also experience the romance and excitement of her adventure.

Once again, her thoughts brought out an uncontrollable grin to her face, but now she was aware that she wasn't alone. Without opening her eyes or moving, she said in a pleasant voice, "Isn't this just wonderful?"

"What's wonderful?" her husband replied, surprised that she had noticed him arrive without stirring.

"This trip, everything," she said. "Imagine, here we are caught between the caressing waters of the Caribbean Sea and that beautiful sun playing peek-a-boo behind that smokestack thingy."

The man pondered the thought for a moment. He had just arrived at his wife's side on the pool deck after showering in the cabin that he hated, which the cruise brochure called a stateroom. He likened the room to a cell at Attica State Prison. His tenuous trip from their cabin to the pool deck meandered through an endless maze of corridors and passageways that were eerily illuminated in an orange hue. A grayish-blue motif made him nauseous. Its metallic trim and laminated walls were disgusting. He noted with distain, that they were cheap—thinner than the laminated sheet metal panels of trailer homes. And, despite the outward appearance of substance, the cabin fabrication provided little in the way of acoustic privacy, a fact that annoyed him to no end.

The sudden explosion of sunlight and heat as he stepped out onto the pool deck made him wince in pain, souring his mood even more. The knot he sustained on his forehead while encountering one of the treacherous watertight doors on his first day out didn't help. The swelling was only just now receding.

He spent several thousand dollars bringing his wife on a seven-day cruise to the Caribbean as a ten-year anniversary gift. He hoped that this

trip would cease her nagging, complaining, and whining about him being cheap and never taking her anywhere. If anything, in retrospect, it only made her demands more insistent.

Yet, he had to admit to himself, that as an owner of a lucrative men's tailor shop in a cubbyhole in the Lower East Side of New York, he could afford this excursion if it obtained the results he wanted.

To date, it had not. To date, he perceived that he was being ripped off. And, as much as he tried to relax and appreciate this time with his beautiful wife, he couldn't. He couldn't believe how expensive the excursions to the tourist stops—okay, traps, as that phrase still rang true, were going to be, or how hot and muggy the tropical days on shore were. Taxi rides to and from various parts of towns they visited were four times the cost of similar rides in Manhattan. Gratuity and tips were expected at every turn, or so it seemed, and the cost for tacky souvenirs and knick-knacks was outrageous. On top of all of this, his beautiful wife wanted everything she could lay her hands on. The shipping cost alone for half of what she had bought would set him back several hundred dollars. At least this was the last day. Tomorrow they would dock in Miami and stay with some of his friends for a day or two, and then fly back to New York. He could hardly wait.

He hovered over his lovely vain wife, as she lay against the deck chair in her metallic blue bathing suit. She was only slightly sweating while he, on the other hand, could feel sweat trickling down his back. "Damn the humidity," he cursed softly to himself. "When will this misery end?"

Offering, as more a plea than a request, he said, "Honey, it's getting hot. Let's go for a walk and find some shade."

"Oh, all right, but I ordered a drink," replied the wife. "We'll leave after it arrives." His apparent lack of appreciation of her preening annoyed his wife. By all accounts, she was beautiful, though not in her prime. She was almost 36, trim and shapely, with a wrinkle-free face and firm breasts that she flaunted whenever it suited her. She especially liked to pose and sidle up to younger, less endowed women at cocktail parties. Her often revealing clothing accented her cleavage and her figure, and

occasionally breaking into conversations of a mixed group and capturing the leering gazes from the men made her feel good.

Annoyed by a stingy husband fifteen years her senior, she barked back, “By the way, when did you lose your sense of adventure?”

“Honey, I’m surrounded by adventure,” came the hostile reply. “We’re buried down below in this boat’s cheap seats, in a room so small that we have to move sideways to get to the bathroom. There’s no window, no place to sit, and I’m sleeping in a bunk bed with rails, for Christ sake. Look at my knees, they’re black and blue from the unending bobbing and weaving of this ship. Hell, every time this ship rolls, I instinctively reach out to grab something in my sleep, damn it. There’s got to be some rule that this Captain’s breaking about purposely sailing into rough seas. I’m about ready to sue him, the ship’s owners, and your travel agent.”

“Don’t be silly,” replied the wife. “It’s simply beautiful here, you’re just exaggerating.” Sitting up on her deck chair, she could see the waiter approaching with her drink from behind her husband’s scrawny legs. She swung her legs around to face the young Caribbean boy approaching her, decked out in a heavily starch white shirt and similarly pressed white walking shorts, holding her drink shoulder high on a small round platter. She slapped at her husband’s legs in an effort to get him to move out of the way as the young man approached.

“Hey, that hurt. Whatdido that for?” scolded the husband.

“My drink’s coming, and you’re in the way,” answered the wife. “Be a dear and pay the waiter—for me,” cooed the wife, whose eyes remained fixated on the smartly dressed waiter as he approached. She fantasized for just a moment of having an encounter with the tall, skinny, and deeply tanned boy with an incredible set of gleaming white teeth. But the modest imaginary fling quickly faded to nothingness as she waited. Lovers, affairs, and shipboard romances were not her style, but having fun being seductive was her tradeoff for being a faithful wife. She lived well, came and went as she pleased, and with some cajoling, got most of what she wanted. She was a spoiled bitch, and she loved it! Aaron was okay. Better to remember that then piss everything away with a romp in the sack with

a plaything, she thought. Now, if she could just get him to loosen up for the Captain's Ball this evening...

The waiter arrived smiling, with his eyes fixed upon the wife's bosom. He paused briefly and handed the blue-colored tropical drink to the brazenly flirting woman. "Here's your drink, madam."

"Thank you," she replied, "You can put it over there," casting a smile in return.

"That will be seven dollars," said the waiter.

At that news, the husband could feel his anger begin to well up, but he had been through this before. He quickly regained his composure and dug deep into the pocket of his shorts and pulled out a small roll of cash. "Here, keep the change," he blurted out, as he gave the waiter a ten-dollar bill.

"Thank you, your lordship. Will there be anything else I can get for you?" The question was asked in a very proper British accent.

"No," the husband shouted, as he quickly turned his back and summarily dismissed the boy.

The wife returned to her coy demeanor. Satisfied that she still retained command of her mate, she resumed their conversation about his lack of adventure by cajoling him.

"Sure, go ahead and sue the travel agent, but answer me this, what are you going to say when they ask you about the food?"

"Okay, the food's—been great, but look at me," replied the husband, grabbing a fold of skin around his waist. "I don't know if I can fit into my trousers for that ball tonight."

"You've been looking for an excuse to miss that ball all week," responded the wife. "Well don't you even try. Hell, you're a tailor. Fix your own pants. That's what you do anyway. I've got \$10,000 worth of diamonds and blue sapphires all laid out to match my new evening gown, so there. It's so gorgeous, I'll be the envy of everyone at the ball, and, pausing in mid-thought added, its kind of risqué."

In a softer, seductive tone, the wife continued, "I can't wait to show you, the dress is gorgeous. It's a strapless dress. Actually, that's not true.

There's one spaghetti strap that runs across the front of the gown going from left to right. The rest of the dress is form fitting, with rows and rows of medium-sized white sequins and lots of glitter."

As she described the dress, the wife rose and faced her husband. She observed his facial reactions as she outlined the dress's bodice over her bathing suit top with her hands. She took pains to describe how it wrapped around her breast, and then she shimmied her hips as she pantomimed herself slipping on the form-fitting gown down and around her hips and legs.

"Oh, wait till you see it," she said. "It accents my hips perfectly, and is cut just low enough to reveal the tops of my breasts. For safety, I know you don't want me popping out of this thing," she cooed. "It has this single strap, like I said before, that runs diagonally across my chest and then goes back around my back again." Looking at him with an expression of child-like glee, the kind children express opening presents on Christmas morning, she excitedly exclaimed, "Oh, I'm sure you'll like it!"

The husband, hopelessly enthralled with the beauty of his wife, became transfixed with the physical display and description of the dress. Standing less than a yard from her near naked body, the husband noted her perfectly suntanned body gleaming from the mixture of beads of perspiration and suntan lotion that covered her skin. She was utterly gorgeous. Her long auburn hair that she had just released from her towel gracefully reached down midway along her back, and in a moment it would be held in place by a colorful red and orange scarf. An instant later, free from his fixation, he once again interrupted her.

"Okay, okay, I can hardly wait to see you in that dress. In the meantime, how about that walk?" As he was speaking, he leaned over to retrieve his wife's wrap. He placed the wrap on her shoulders as she stooped to put down her drink. A few moments later, he led her to a stairway that brought them up to the ship's compass deck. From there, they made their way to the stern and stopped astride the tall white symmetrical smokestack perched atop the cabin housing above them.

"That smokestack thing looks like a playground slide," remarked the

wife. “Wouldn’t it be fun to slide down the smokestack?” She said with a quizzical smile on her face.

Her husband just smiled, turned, and paused to lean over the railing. Sliding up next to him, his wife exclaimed, “Now tell me this isn’t beautiful.”

For a moment the husband had to agree. The gently rolling ship effortlessly sliced through the undulating swells and the normally stifling humidity was lessened by the light breeze that felt cool to the skin. Yes, for a moment he had to concur, this was wonderful.

Together in silence, the husband and wife looked out across the ocean, each transfixed by the tranquility of the sea. Abruptly, the wife spoke while tugging at her husband’s shirtsleeve. She pointed to an object in the water.

“Aaron, what is that over there?” she said in a voice just louder than a whisper.

“What? I don’t see anything. Where are you looking?” replied the husband, noting the hour of the day.

“Over there. See, it looks like a stick, or a pipe, or something sticking up out of the water.” She pulled again on her husband and turned him slightly in the direction she was looking. Leaning forward, the husband strained as he gazed out to the sea. “Oh, yeah. I can see it now. You’re right; it looks like some kind of pipe sticking up out of the water. It’s probably some type of marker buoy. See how it bobs up and down with the waves?”

“I’m not so sure,” replied the wife. “It looks like it’s moving, and every once in a while, it flashes. See that? There. It just flashed again. And look, see how the water splashes up against it, and how the water peels off to the sides as if it were moving in the water.”

“That’s just an optical illusion,” replied the husband. “The waves are just crashing up against the buoy, which is fixed in place, anchored, you know. Ya see, he went on to explain, as the water hits the pipe it splashes over it, like that. Did ya see that?” replied the husband.

“I don’t know. If you’re so smart, then why is it following us?” responded the wife in a voice that took on a tone of bitchiness.

The husband, once again irritated by his wife’s demeanor, replied in kind. “Ah, the hell with it. Look, it’s lunchtime, and we’re going to miss out on our sitting. Let’s go back to the cabin so you can get dressed.”

“Boy, what’s gotten into you?” said the wife. “All I said was that that thing over there was following us. See, now it’s gone. Shit, sometimes... I swear. Okay, let’s go. We don’t want to be late for your, what, third meal of the day?”

The husband, fuming, could only grit his teeth. In a huff, he watched as his wife turned and began to walk off. Cursing quietly to himself, he returned to the railing to peer once again out to sea, trying to catch one more glimpse of that mysterious pipe floating in the water. Seeing nothing, he rejoined his wife at the top of the stairway where the one-sided conversation carried them both into the bowels of the ship.