

Golden Spark November 7, 2002

The sea was at a dead calm and it was hard to tell just how far away we were when it happened. Or, just how big it really was. A mile? Ten miles? But one thing's for sure, it was the most colossal display of sheer power I have ever seen. Quite possibly the biggest display of power anyone has ever seen! Ever! Since the dawn of man. Not a lightning bolt but a tremendous golden colored arc that smashed down from the sky. Not a flash of energy and gone, but a sustained and prolonged arc from the heavens. Like a cosmic electric welder. It burned into the sea for what seemed like an eternity but was really more like ten seconds. Its' brilliant light burned in my eyes like the sun, as a shock wave sent the boat on its' port side pitching me to the deck of the wheelhouse and then into the closed port side hatch. It was almost the last thing I ever saw. Then a deafening sound. As if the planet itself was screaming in pain. I screamed with it as hell broke loose. It was the death knell of civilized man and the sound of it will forever echo in my mind. Nothing would remain the same.

The woman I love saved my life, our lives and the lives of countless others. I am astounded by her strength, compassion and will to survive.

It was late morning but still cool outside. Early spring. The sun was doing its best to burn through the high coastal overcast. David loved to listen to the cries of the seagulls and the crash of the distant surf on the other side of the

breakwater as he worked. His strong hands and back bent to his task while he tried to clear away his troubled thoughts of mounting bills and time tables. He let his hands do the work while breathing the fresh sea air. Very relaxing, almost a zen thing. It was promising to be a wonderful spring day. That is, if the sun finally comes out.

“Hello up there!!”

David turned around and looked down from where he was working on the scaffold and was visibly startled by the big beautiful brown eyes looking up at him. Attached to those eyes was a very attractive woman standing close by the ladder. Something about this woman made a tingle run down his spine and land at the back of David's knees.

“Sorry to bother you.” She said. “Do you have a moment to spare? I'd like to talk to you if you don't mind?”

David was a little perplexed as to why such a lovely woman would want to talk to him.

“Sure, you bet! No bother at all.”

David quickened his motions putting the last coat of paint around a freshly welded patch to the hull.

“Be right with you... This is two part epoxy paint and it sets fast.”

“Please take all the time you need!” was her answer. “I have all day.” Her answer was almost wistful. Like she really had '*all day.*'

As David was finishing up the woman wandered about close by. He

continuously stole quick looks at her as he finished up. From the corner of his good eye he could see she looked all of about thirty five years old and had short straight black hair. She was small in stature but looked to have the build of a swimmer. Strong square shoulders. Easily the most attractive women he'd seen in a long time. Not fixed up and painted pretty but a natural kind of beauty. You could dump a bucket of muck over her head and still look gorgeous. She wore an expensive looking short black leather jacket and tight denim jeans that showed off a first class back side. Her stance was solid and her moves sure like and purposeful. On her feet were new cross trainers. She gave the impression of class. She must work out. There was a dark green cotton bandana wrapped around her neck. He figured she was going to ask him directions to the yacht club, or more than likely looking for some boatyard information. Maybe even be a TV news reporter?

They have been coming around a lot lately wanting to talk about the freak waves that had been happening along the coast recently. She certainly had the looks for it.

"Okay," he said in his friendliest voice as he set down his plastic cup and paint brush and leaned over the safety railing all of ten feet off the ground, "I'm all yours. (*He wished*). What can I do for you today?"

The dark haired lady turned from where she had wandered off to and walked back toward the scaffold.

"This boat is beautiful! Is it yours?"

This got David's full attention. Compliment a man's boat and you compliment the man.

"Why yes it is thank you very much!" He said drawing himself up proudly.

"And I think she's beautiful too, if you can see past the rust and old paint that is."

"Sure. I can see it." She said with a smile.

David added. "However I like to refer to her as my ship though, not a boat."

"And how do you pray tell, distinguish the difference between a ship and a boat?" she asked.

David was happy to continue this conversation with this nice attractive lady.

As a matter of fact it had been a long time since he had the pleasure of talking to a lovely lady. He'd be willing to keep on chatting all day if she was willing. It had been awhile since he had a decent conversation, with anybody for that matter.

So he continued. "I've read somewhere that if you're sixty five feet or better then you can officially be called a ship." He was trying to sound light and conversational. "This old girl here is seventy two feet, five and three quarters inches. A small ship mind you, but a ship nonetheless."

She could tell he was a proud man. "Well Captain, so it looks like you have a ship plus then? And I'll just lay odds you measured it yourself to be sure?"

“Bet your ass I did!” He meant every word. “Oh, well, it’s more of a ego thing for me. Call it bragging rights. I like the sound of being the owner of a *ship* than just boat, makes me sound more important.”

She smiled and laughed at the remark. David was getting more tingles up and down his legs. Her voice was soft and friendly yet sure and easy. No sign of hesitation or unease. It was nice to listen to and she seemed genuinely interested. She was easy to talk to.

He carefully moved aside his cup of now set primer epoxy paint and climbed down off the scaffold. As he descended he could pick up a marvelous scent that had to have been her. A kind of a baby power scent. Fresh and clean.

“Please excuse my appearance as I don’t normally receive any visitors. You however look and smell much nicer than I do to be sure.”

She smiled at his compliment. “But I’m not a Captain. Not yet anyway.” He added. “To be an official captain you first have to put in your time at sea and study long and hard and pass several difficult tests.”

She turned her head a little and cocked one eyebrow as she took in the information.

David apologized. “Sorry for the lecture. I tend to run on about things that most people don’t give a hoot about. I’m David, the ‘owner/operator’, or ‘Skipper’ if you will, of this lovely but very needy little ship.”

“Well Skipper Dave, thank you for all that useful information.” She said it in a light playful manner that seemed genuine and without sarcasm. David

thought maybe she was just being nice.

Walking right up she smiled and stuck out her right hand and said “Hi, I’m Tory Simmons.

David took her hand and shook it. “David Webber.” (More tingles). Like her voice, her handshake was surprisingly firm and still warm from her jacket pocket. Her skin was soft. From her grip he got the distinct impression she shook a lot of hands.

David finally and reluctantly let go of her hand and said “How may I be of service Tory Simmons?”

“Well, It’s your ship.” She said. “I’d like to know more about your ship. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything quite like her.”

(Truer words were never spoken.) thought David not talking about the boat. He had a hard time pulling his eyes away from his visitor.

Tory added. “I walk the beach for exercise quite a bit and one of my high points is to see what else you’ve gotten completed on her.”

David felt the edges of an un-truth coming from Tory. He had never seen her nearby before. No mistake. He knew he was wrapped up in his work but he would have certainly remembered this Tory Simmons for sure! Was something amiss here?

Tory broke away from their face to face conversation and stepped backwards nine or ten paces to get a better side view of the full unique shape of the small working ship. She stuck her hands wide apart as she spoke more to

the ship than to David.

“I’m not sure what it is, but there’s just something about this ship that I like. I just can’t stop looking at it...”

Dave had to grin from ear to ear.

“That’s funny you should say that, those are my sentiments exactly. My ex-wife hated it.” David noted no reaction as he watched Tory stare at the boat. “So you’ve been watching the boat since my haul out then?”

“Yes, ah but it’s a ship skipper, remember? Your rules.” She pointed her finger at him and was being playful now.

“Ya well, it’s my tub. I can call it what I want.” He said, slightly embarrassed, though David could sense no ill will in the woman. She seemed all that she said, both interested and curious.

“So what made you come up from the beach and have a closer look?”

Tory put her hand up to shade her eyes and looked out over the water. “With these freak waves we’ve been having. Washing people out to sea. I thought it best to stay well above the beach for awhile.”

David felt another half truth and wondered just what this lady was up to. He did know he liked her though.

“Smart girl and lucky me. Look what the waves brought up.”

“You bet you’re lucky, that last big freak wave that came in here last week washed down the whole boat yard! I saw come in! I thought it was going tip over all the boats in there stands down here!”

“Ya, it was a big wave all right. I was down in the engine room with the

compressor running. I missed the whole thing! When I came up for fresh air and a look around, the place was nice and clean and everything was wet. Then I saw the flashing lights of the rescue trucks down on the beach. The water had knocked down my ladder, I was stuck on board till Doug in the maintenance shop came over and put it back up for me! On the up though, it did bring me a nice big sea bass and left it under my truck. I ate good for two days.” David stopped and thought. “You saw that freak wave? You weren’t on the beach were you?!”

“No thank god.” said Tory. “I was at my window on the tread mill and saw it from there.”

Dave turned and scanned the hillside. Adjusting his black baseball cap down low over his eyes to cut the glare of the sun that was now finally breaking through the coastal overcast. He looked up the hill. “ Which house is yours?”

“The pink one with the white trim.” She answered hesitantly.

David could see three houses matching her description. Whether she was reading his mind or just noticing all the pink houses as well she added. “The one on top. The big one.”

Spotting the big mansion on top of the cliff Dave let out a low whistle...

“Man, that’s no house, that’s a...”

“Oh I know, more like a big fish bowl.” Tory added.

“Nice looking fish bowl you got there lady. I bet you can see all over from up there?”

“Yes but I think I like it better down here lately. Closer to the beach and the people and the shopping. It’s really kind of lonely up there.” She closed one eye and held out her arm to the house on the hill. Taking mock aim with her little finger Tory said. “From up there your ship is only the size of my little fingernail.”

David copied her reference with his own hand doing the same, comparing his finger nail size to the house on the hill. “Man, if I lived up there I’d have a big ass telescope.”

Tory turned away from the hill and changed the subject. “I came to ask about your ship. What kind is it? I have never seen any like it before. Though novice as I may sound, I have been around a good number of ships myself.”

(Truth be told, her husband owned several big ones.)

“What do you call her? What’s her name?”

“Oh she has no brand that I can find. She’s custom built. One of a kind. That I know of anyway. But she does have a name alright. Good one too. Come on I’ll show you.”

Together they walked on the flat sand blown cement toward the aft. Reaching the back part of the large craft there was two big shafts sticking out where the propellers should have been and two large rudders.

They stopped momentarily and Tory bent to get a better look.

“Where are the propellers?” asked Tory.

“I removed them and sent them in for service. They’re being resurfaced, tweaked and balanced. Some things you just can’t do yourself. They’re all done and ready to be picked up. That’s if I ever send them a check that is. I’ll reinstall

them better than new. I just love the look of clean new brass props don't you?

Tory answered with a "Hmm. Doesn't everybody?" David couldn't tell if she was being flippant or truthful.

"In the meantime I pulled the shafts out and prepacked all the seals. All I need to do is put the props back on and get some new paint on the hull and she'll be ready to splash."

Tory let David lead her beyond the stern a ways then together they turned to look up at the transom where you could just make out the faded letters of the ship's name through the dirt and rust.

"GOLDEN SPARK" San Francisco.

"Golden Spark. What a nice name. I wonder what it means?" said Tory. When she said the ship's name her words caused another tingle of nerves roll down his spine and the back of his legs.

"Me too" was David's soft reply. Together they stood there quietly looking up. Both in deep thought.

'What is up with this women?' David thought. Who is she and what's her story? She has got to be married. She seems just too pretty and classy not to be. David felt lucky and happy just to stand next to her and talk.

God she smells good. She has to be married. Living in that big house alone? Not likely. I wonder what kind of car she...

Tory spoke up "I like what your doing with her. She looked so bad when she came in that I though maybe she was going to be cut up. When I saw

progress on her I was glad that this old girl was getting another chance.

Everybody deserves a another chance don't you think? Turning toward David.

"What's her story? How long have you had her?"

No response came.

"Hello... Skipper? You still with me?" Clearly David was not with her. He was standing still as a statue looking straight ahead with his arms hanging down. Tory could see he was breathing in and out and his eyes would blink, but nothing else. He just stood there! *Was he being rude?*

"Hello David." She said louder this time and waved her hand in front of his face. "Earth to Skipper Dave?" This was getting weird and she was starting to grow concerned.

Looking about the yard it was still fairly early and no one could be seen around. She stepped up close to him and moved her head into his field of vision and spoke. "You ok buddy?" Just a blank stare.

The spring time sun was full out now and she was warming up in her black leather jacket. David must have been heating up as well in his work stained coverall as she noticed a drip of sweat roll down his face. Tory wasn't sure if she should touch him or not, he might react violently.

But she did anyway. She reached over and carefully took his arm and gave it a jiggle. "Mr. Webber?" Nothing. No response.

A little harder shake this time. "Yoo hoo, Come on, Wake up!"

This was getting really weird now. No reaction whatsoever came from the man. Just a blank stare with no focus. Luckily Victoria was not prone to panic.

She had always been the one to keep her head when things went bad and clearly this guy was sick or something. Looking around again hoping for just a little help, the boat yard was still empty and quiet but for the sound of the distant pounding surf and the cries of a seagulls overhead.

Tory knew there was a lean-to built with a tarp on the other side of the ship known now as Golden Spark. One side of a large tarpaulin was attached to the ship and the other to poles in the ground. Standing at about six foot two David started to wobble on his feet in the morning breeze. "Can you walk Honey?" she asked and gave him a little experimental pull. Dave took a little shuffled step forward. Like a newly blind man might. Tory spoke calmly to the man lost within himself. "Good! That's good! Come on now, let's get some shade and have a sit down ok?" Dave allowed himself to be guided to the shade where Tory managed to pull him down into a big wooden kitchen chair and placed Dave's hands in his lap. Still no response, just a blank stare.

"There, how's that? You comfy?" Nothing. "Oh man, why do these things always have to happen to me?" She said out loud in frustration.

"What's say we have a better look at you?"

His color was still good and he was breathing regular, but his eyes were still far away. Reaching over she pulled off Dave's paint speckled black ball cap and tossed it on the magazine strewn picnic table.

"How old are you?" She asked making conversation and hoping for an answer.

"I'd guess you are in your late thirties early forties?" Tory felt better just talking to him anyway.

He was a handsome looking guy. Possibly of German decent. A little rugged looking from sun and wind, but for a big guy he was thin. Too thin really. His chiseled features were a bit hollow and sunken. Clearly he had been missing meals and working too hard. There was a strong sweet musky body odor about him that was not entirely unpleasant. Not like some men that stink when they perspire. It made her flare her nostrils and lean in closer to him. His long brown hair had been pulled back into a tight ponytail and there was a long streak of gray hair that started at his temple on the right side and ran all the way back. For the first time Tory noticed the light colored scars that ran down the right side of his face and under his neatly close trimmed beard. His left eye was as blue as the sea but the right was a odd faded blue gray color.

It became apparent to Tory that her statue friend here must have suffered some kind of head trauma once. He still may be suffering by the looks of things.

Removing the green bandana from her neck she folded it and dabbed at the sweat on her own face and neck first, then mopped the sweat off David's brow. There was little bit of drool running down the corner of his mouth. She fixed that too and with a quick fold she placed the bandana in the top pocket of his worn out coveralls so it would be on hand if needed again later.

Tory spoke to him in a sad tired voice, "It seems as though I'm not done taking care of comatose people." On that statement she bit her lip and closed her eyes, the pain of her mothers long battle with cancer rose up to grip her heart. It's been two years since her passing but still a very painful memory.

Looking closer she traced the path of the long scar, down the side of his

forehead and face, then under his beard to his jaw line, then down the right side of his neck where it continued down inside his tee shirt.

“Man, that’s a nasty scar senior. How far down does it go?” Curiosity got the best of her. Tory looked once more around the yard to see if anyone was around.

Then she hooked her finger in his shirt collar and peeked inside. The scar continued down to his chest and out of sight.

“Ah Hah!” Around his neck hung a medical ID tag. “Jack pot!”

Looking back into David’s still lost eyes she said “May I see your necklace please?” Silence.

“I’ll take that for a yes. Let see what we got here shall we?” The silver tag had a red medical emblem and the word “ALERT” on one side. Flipping it over the small print said:

David Alan Webber.

No allergies.

Subject to sudden bouts of short term paralysis.

“Now we’re getting somewhere!” There was an 800 number and a eight digit ID number. Quickly Tory whipped out her cellular phone and dialed. The phone rang only once and was answered by a lady with a droning matter-of-fact voice.

“Medical information services. Is this an emergency?”

“Ah, maybe. My name is Victoria Simmons and I’m in the company of one

of your patients who may need some assistance. A Mr. David Alan Webber, ID # 1727-6369.”

“Miss. Simmons is David conscious?”

“That’s Mrs. Simmons, and, um... I’m not sure. He seems to be locked up?”

“Mam, are you telling me you have him locked up? Is he violent?”

“No-No he’s not violent and he’s not locked up, as in a room. He seems to be stuck. On the inside. He’s breathing ok, but he can’t speak or move on his own.”

“Mrs. Simmons have you called the fire department maybe they can get him un-stuck?”

“NO” “You’re not understanding me!”

“Please hold,” was the lady’s clipped response and the sound of cheap tinny sounding music filled Tory’s ear. Tory let out a heavy sigh and rolled her eyes. (*Jesus Christ, why me?*) A short moment later a mans voice came on the phone...

“Hello Mrs. Simmons, I’m Dr. Richards. I know David. Is he alright? Where is he?”

“Oh thank god! Thank you doctor. I don’t know, he seems to be alright other than the fact that he has stopped cold in his tracks. We were having a conversation here in the boat yard. One moment he seemed right as rain talking away and the next he was as still as a statue? Is he ok? Do I need to call the Fire Department?”

“Well that would depend. Did he fall or hurt himself in any way?”

"No, he looks ok to me. I have been with him the whole time."

"Is he breathing ok and blinking his eyes?"

"Yes, I checked that first thing"

"Good girl, he isn't by chance still sanding is he? How long has he been like this?"

"No of course not. I was able to lead him over to the shade and get him to sit down. It's been at least ten or fifteen minutes.

"Good...good. You did the right thing Mrs. Simmons. David is just fine. He should wake up in short order, certainly within the hour and be just fine. Physically. But I'm sure he'll be embarrassed and probably a little depressed. I believe it has been a long while since his last spell. Are you a friend of his? Can you stay with him until he wakes up? Or shall I make arrangements to have someone come?"

Tory was both glad and relieved that David was going to be alright and that this was just a temporary thing.

"Sure Dr Richards, I guess I can stay. May I ask what happened to him?"

"I don't think David will mind if I bring you up to date. Almost two years ago David was driving on a country road in his work vehicle . He was struck by a lightning bolt, then had a bad crash. He was in a coma for some three weeks. Then he abruptly woke up remembering nothing since the accident. David continued suffer black-out's that lasted days. As time past the black-outs got shorter and shorter. Hours finally turned into minutes. Now they hardly happen at all. We were hoping they had subsided completely. I know he'll be disappointed

when he wakes up. Try not to make a big thing of it when he does alright?”

“Ok Doc, can do. He’s sitting right here, can he hear me talking? Will he remember anything I said?”

“It’s hard to tell, I like to think he can hear like normal while in this enthralled state.

But he never seems to recollect anything that happened while he is in this condition. To him, one minute he’s here, the next he’s there. Not sick or weak or fuzzy unless he’s fallen and hurt himself in some way. His case is very unique and has had us all scratching our heads for some time now.”

The doctor paused as if to give emphasis on his next words. “Mrs Simmons, I like David. He’s a good guy who has gone through a lot in the last couple years and I worry about him being out on his own.”

“Thank you Dr. Richards you’ve been a big help. I’ll stay and talk with him till he wakes up. I’ll call you if he runs long ok?”

“Sure thing Mrs. Simmons and thank you for helping David. You sound like a good friend to have. He could sure use one now that he’s not home anymore. Tell him I said hello and to call me please.”

“Ok I will. Thanks again, good bye.”

Tory disconnected and looked over to where the silent man was still sitting.

“That was Dr. Richards. He says to say hello.” Tory fell silent. It felt sadly familiar talking to a person that could not talk back. Lord knows she had lots of practice when she was caring for her mother. But it would seem as though she wasn’t the only one having trouble in days not so past. The doctor had said he

was not home anymore and alone. Her heart gave a pang for him. Bending over she wiped the corner of his mouth again and noticed a tear rolling from his faded right eye. She dabbed at it and returned the green bandana to his pocket. "So it looks like we have a little time to kill."

Standing up she stretched her arms and walked about the little encampment attached to the side of the ship. There was a full garbage can at one end. Overflowing with junk, beer cans and pizza boxes. (So much for a good diet.) On the picnic table was last Sunday's paper and boating magazines held down with a big red brick that said 'Home sweet home' on the side of it. *Curious.* There was a yellow legal note pad on a clip board. Half the pages were folded back under the clip.

"What's this? Is this your to do list?" Turning her head to read it, she didn't want to pick it up. That would be snooping. But she could read his bold block printing easily. There were some grocery items crossed off and hardware things as well.

At the bottom of the list in bold marker was:

Props back \$\$\$

Under that was:

Pick Hull Paint Color ???

Tory figured he must be having money and color issues. Turning back to David she asked him. "What color are you going to paint Her?" She bent down

so close they were eye to eye. Almost nose to nose.

Again she flared her nostrils and took in his musky sent.

“I like dark green” she told him softly. “Why don’t you paint her hull dark green. With white detail.”

David awoke from his fog. Tory was right there in front of him bending over. Face to face! (*This must be a dream.*)

‘I like dark green.’ She said... ‘Why don’t you paint her hull dark green. With white detail.’

“Dark green it is then!” David said. Tory shrieked and jumped back. Clearly startled. “Shit!” Tory said without thinking. “You startled me!”

She straightened up and tried to collect her wits. More than a little embarrassed for being caught trespassing in his personal space.

“Hi, welcome back.” Tory tried to sound conversational. “Are you okay?”

“Ah... I think so.” David stood and looked about his surroundings with a disappointed look on his face. “I was gone wasn’t I?”

“Please sit back down and talk with me a bit,” said Tory as she sat on the edge of the picnic table next to him. He slowly sank back down in the big wooden chair his expression turning glum but still trying to sound casual. “How could I refuse an offer from such a lovely lady.”

They sat quiet for just a short moment. For the first time David noticed that Tory had her hands clasped in her lap. Her right hand holding her left. He could not see if she was wearing a wedding ring.

Tory broke the ice.

“Dr. Richards says to say hello and for you to call him soon please.”

David looked down to see his medical alert tag hanging out of his shirt. “Ah I’m sorry, I’m really sorry! I hope I didn’t scare you or put you to any inconvenience.” He looked down at his watch. “How long was I gone?” He started to inspect his elbows and knees. “I didn’t fall down did I?”

“No falling, not long at all, maybe ten or fifteen minutes.” She lied, more like twenty or twenty five.

Tory tried to sound nonchalant, like it happen every day. She told the story of exactly what had happened while David listened.

She spoke matter of factly and without embellishing or adding any personal observations including a complete recount of the conversation with Dr. Richards. As Tory was telling her story David sat quietly watching her hands, she finally moved her left hand into plain view and sadly there it was, a wedding ring with the biggest rock you ever seen. *Of course she’s married you idiot! Just look at her. Why in the world would she have anything to do with me I’m a freak!* were David’s thoughts.

“Hello, you still with me over there?” She looked concerned.

“Yes, I’m sorry. I heard every word. Thank you so very much for your help. You did exactly the right thing. Lord knows I can’t afford another senseless trip in an ambulance with my meager income.” He mopped his face with his hands and spoke softly between his fingers. He said quietly. “At least I didn’t wake up naked with a party hat on again. God I hate it when that happens!”

Tory wondered if his last statement was just his humor trying to ease his

embarrassment or a sad truth about his past. She smiled anyway to be polite.

David sat back and returned her smile. "I'm sure I've inconvenienced you long enough for one day Mrs. Simmons, You probably want to get on your way."

"Not till I hear the story of your boat. Ship I mean." She acted and sounded like nothing out of the ordinary had ever happened. "That's why I came and that's what I want."

"Ok then, if that's what you want then I'll do my best to provide."

David was recovering fast from his funk and decided to live for the moment and have a nice chat with this lovely woman.

"I figure I owe you at least that much. You'll have to wait for the inside tour though. As much as I like to show off my boat, she's a mess inside and I need a few days to whip her into shape before company. I've been putting off house work for far to long now and hopefully splash down is coming soon. All I have left to do is some systems checks, get my props back on then paint the hull 'Dark green'. The rest I can do in the water."

"Are you sure you want that color?" said Tory with a big smile.

"Sure I'm sure. That sounds nice and restful. Kind of earthy don't you think?. It will go good with my white detail."

Tory was pleased that he had taken her color suggestion to heart.

Together they emerged from the shelter out into the full sun to survey the ships profile. Tory added. "Then all you would have to do is paint a dark green band around the wheelhouse to balance it all out."

"There." said David. "Glad that's all settled. One more thing to check off my list."

“Where are you sailing to when you’re all finished?” asked Tory . She was starting to really to enjoy her conversation. She was asking questions she’s been wondering about for months now.

David paused and rubbed his chin. “I don’t know, out there somewhere.” He turned to look out over the sea. I haven’t thought much about it really but something inside wants me to go that way.”

David pointed Southwest with his hand open. Must be the call of the sea?”

“It would seem you’ve come a long way on your journey to the sea already. Have you been a boat person for a long time?”

“Actually no and that’s the weird part. It wasn’t until after my accident that I had the urge to go to sea. While I was recovering in the hospital I started reading boat magazines and boat stories, then the sales listings. I couldn’t get enough. You name it, I’ve read it. From how to fix a marine toilet to Moby Dick. I couldn’t stop obsessing and it wasn’t until I sold everything I had left to buy Golden Spark here that I started to feel better. About myself, about anything...”

Tory was completely caught up in David’s story.” “Go on- Go on, tell me more about getting the ship! Tell me about the ship. This is all so completely fascinating!”

David was thrilled that Tory was hanging onto his every word.

“I read about an estate auction of this rich old professor. The guy was really loaded and quite the eccentric. He had lots of toys, houses and airplanes of every kind. When he died suddenly his family was so eager to divvy up the goods they were letting everything go for a song. I was the only bidder on the boat at the

estate auction and scored it for only forty thousand dollars. As is, full of equipment, charts, tools you name it. The thing is absolutely loaded! There are all kinds of things installed on board. Things that I still don't know what they do... I've been through most of the drawers and cabinets but I still have more exploring to do. Some things are still locked up that I can't even find the keys too."

Tory was hooked! "What an adventure! Maybe there are bars of gold stashed away or a secret treasure map somewhere?" Tory was being playful now. She could see that David was feeling better and that he liked talking about his ship. "What do you suppose is her actual worth?"

David pulled his black ball cap off and scratched his head. "I would say in her day she was worth 2 million easy. And that was a lot of money in those days!"

Now Tory was the one to let out the low long whistle... "What kind of boat is it? Who made it, why does it look so different?" Tory asked in quick succession still caught up in the story of the odd little ship.

"Here's where things get a little sketchy.

A Professor Bernard Anderson had this ship custom built in the middle of the cold war. It's a small but very robust research ship. Exactly what it researched I'm not sure but she's built like a tank and chuck full of odd test equipment. I think it was for monitoring dolphins or whales or something. There are big flood lights flush mounted underneath the water line. Two on each side. Interesting as hell.

Tory interjected. "I saw a special on the Discovery Channel some years back about the Navy using trained dolphins, or was it sea lions to retrieve warheads and things. Yes very interesting. I wonder if this vessel had anything to

do with that?"

"You know I'll just bet it did!" David finished. Caught up in Tory's excitement. This was fun talking to an enthusiastic, beautiful and intelligent woman. *'I'll probably never see her again'* "Tell you what Mrs Tory Simmons." said Dave standing upright and using a mock official tone. "I'm willing to give you special dispensation in reward for your level headed and quick thinking aid provided to me 'the skipper' in time of need.

I award upon you the title of Deck Hand in training and friend of the Skipper. This title binds you to the secrets of this vessel and its skipper. You may use any term you wish to describe the diesel powered vessel Golden Spark , short of "rust bucket" which is reserved for senior staff only." David bowed deep and slow then delivered a smart salute to the attractive woman.

Tory snapped to attention and returned the salute. "I humbly thank the good Skipper of the Golden Spark and promise to maintain the highest level of respect when addressing said vessel. I also promise not to divulge any proprietary or personal information about the ship or its skipper." After that said she bowed deeply. Facing each other they both laughed.

"Well said, thank you for your discretion." David felt odd. He should not be feeling this happy after having an episode. This was the best conversation he'd had with a woman in years.

Tory's phone started ringing softly in her pocket but she chose not to answer it. "I should go". said Tory, "and let you get back to your work. Are you going to be all right with your, you know... getting stuck?" She was showing

genuine concern.

David looked down embarrassed again and started picking the dry paint off his fingernails.

“Sure I’ll be ok. It only happens once in a blue moon now and never one right after another.” He looked up with a smile. “I’m not due again now til Christmas.”

Tory returned the smile. It was warm and friendly. Sincere.

No really, thanks again for coming by for a visit. I’m glad you did. The painful fact is I’m pretty much alone most the time and don’t get to talk much. Please stop in again and I’ll be happy to give you the fifty cent tour of the inside. I just know you’ll love it! Truly fascinating. Maybe you could bring your husband?”

David was fishing.

Tory’s face reflected a sour expression. “He would hate it. This isn’t his kind of scene. No, this is my end of the world down here. He likes to stay up there.” Pointing to the big pink house with the white trim. “When he’s not home working, he’s at work playing. Seems like never the vice versa.” Clearly she was unhappy with him about something. “I on the other hand.” Tory brightened. “would love it! I’ll give you a few days to tidy up, then I’m coming back with my fifty cents ok?”

“It’s a deal” said Dave and stuck out his hand. Tory took it firmly and gave a squeeze.

“Ok then... see ya!” She said with a smile and spun on her heel and started off to the west side gate of the boat yard, then down to the beach.

"Man that's some woman." David thought as he watched her walk back up the beach towards town.

"Why can't I meet a girl like that." Well actually, he corrected himself, he just did. (*But one that wasn't married.*) Yes, it was turning out to be a wonderful spring day, and she said she was going to come back!