

An Arrow
To The
Heart

Kit Cain

An Arrow To The Heart

Copyright 2006
Christopher C. Cain
All Rights Reserved

An E-Book
Published By:
Soulful Stories Publishing
Yarmouth, Nova Scotia,
Canada

www.kitcain.com

E-Book ISBN 0-9780006-8-4

INTRODUCTION

And story background

An Arrow To The Heart was originally a screenplay written as a follow-on sequel to the screenplay entitled Master Of The Welded Bead. There is a continuity to the two stories which is best bridged by reading Master Of The Welded Bead first. The stories are quite different—which is one of the main reasons for not combining them into a single continuous story. To bridge this gap of continuity in a lesser manner, however, I include here the pertinent details first presented in Master Of The Welded Bead which continue in An Arrow To The Heart in order to make the story more enjoyable.

The main theme of the two stories is the demonstration of how I feel someone—male or female—approaching the consciousness of a master of the universe handles the mundane affairs and problems of daily life. Jack Diamond is the main character of both stories and he is something of a renegade who has chosen to make his way through life on the “Road less traveled”. He is a college graduate and an ex U.S. Marine pilot who finds greater freedom and joy as a professional tradesmen—particularly in the trade of welding, which he pursues as a master welder at the Morgan River Shipyard. In Master Of The Welded Bead it is his spontaneity and expanded level of consciousness—his mere presence—which enables the Shipyard to avoid bankruptcy, changing hands to become a far more synergistic and successful company. The events which bring about this change are not always the events formed in Jack’s mind, but rather originate from unusual and unpredictable events in harmony with his consciousness from some mystical source which he merely acts upon.

Morgan River Shipyard is a very large ship construction and repair facility located at the mouth of Morgan River—a fictitious place similar in nature and geographical location to a cross between the harbor of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. The shipyard’s main specialty is the construction of high-speed patrol boats for international sale to government military forces and protection agencies. The 50 or so acres of shipyard at the river’s edge consists of a very large hangar building, office buildings, wharves, and a vast spread of scrapyards ... a veritable graveyard for steel ships, fishing boats, and surplus ships’ parts of questionable value. In a far corner of the scrapyards, a scrapped steel coastal freighter sits high and dry and rusting away in the weather. This is Jack’s home, aptly renamed the “Land Lady”, and whose title is painted in large, rough letters on the bow with a wide-bristle paintbrush. There is a steel stairway fabricated by Jack which climbs up through a hole cut in the bottom of Land Lady’s hull ... the stairway leading upward via serpentine meanderings and hallways through the

engine room and crew's quarters to the Captain's Cabin in the stern. Here, Jack has renovated and redecorated the quarters to suit his own impeccable taste and original design—even using the adjoining crew's staterooms as bedrooms for the occasional visits of his grown-up daughters.

Beyond his dealings with the shipyard, Jack has friends from all walks of life—none of them really close friends—but all of whom he interacts with in more of a constructive and altruistic way than any other. There is Marty, his girlfriend, who is a nightclub singer who is considerably younger than he and highly dependent upon him for emotional support. There is T-Bird, a full-blooded Indian and close relative of the chief of the local Indian tribe which has, by devious means, taken over Morgan River Shipyard using their considerable casino earnings and the clever manipulations of their Jewish casino manager. Along with Marty, T-Bird is about as close a friend as Jack has, both of them being interested in mechanical things and of a deeply spiritual inclination.

Jack's other friends: Sharky, Preacher, Ike, Trudy, and Beulah are like “children of a lesser soul” from the “other side of the tracks” as it would be put politely. Put not so politely, Sharky, Preacher, and Ike are winos with a capacity to laugh at themselves, laugh at life, and somehow manage to find not only fun things to do, but contribute in their own limited way to the tasks placed before them in the moment. Beulah is another of those lesser souls who has found her way into Jack's world by mysterious means, but whom Jack tries to help by inviting her to live in the Land Lady's crew quarters until she can find a place in life better suited to her talents and kind disposition.

The Master Of The Welded Bead story is primarily about Morgan River Shipyard under the helm of Don Hendrix, Jack's U.S. Marine companion from flight school. Hendrix has chosen the “Path well trod” by going into business right after his tour of active duty in the service and finally, later in life, buying control of the shipyard. His reign as CEO is checkered with employee and labor union strife, and long periods without government contracts during which time workers are laid off, but executives still draw their usual high-paying salaries. Hendrix meets Jack quite by accident many years after flight school and invites him to go to work as a welder at the shipyard. Jack does so and quickly becomes a champion of the underdogs: the shipyard laborers, and battles with his old friend bitterly for more consistent employment and better benefits. Hendrix is finally unable to land more fat government contracts because of his refusal to hire minority workers. It is at this point that Jack becomes the synergizing agent in rescuing the shipyard from certain bankruptcy in a way that most certainly would be called “Intelligent design”, but it is through a series of totally unpredictable, unorthodox, and unexpected events beyond Jack's own intelligent capacities.

The story of An Arrow To The Heart begins as the new controlling regime takes over management of the shipyard, hiring Jack as a sort of Carte Blanche supervising synergizer and efficiency executive at whatever level of management he chooses to move within. As part of the move to integrate minority workers into the labor force, Jack's job as a master welder has been delegated to a very attractive Swedish welding instructor named Kirsten who is herself an accomplished artist in the medium of welded steel fabrication and design, and none the less Jack's equal as a master of the welded bead and other illusions of the universe ... as we shall see!

Table Of Contents

	Page
CHAPTER 1.	7.
CHAPTER 2.	13.
CHAPTER 3.	21.
CHAPTER 4.	29.
CHAPTER 5.	37.
CHAPTER 6.	44.
CHAPTER 7.	50.
CHAPTER 8.	58.
CHAPTER 9.	66.

CHAPTER 1.

Inside the Shipyard hangar and several hours after her initial meeting with Jack, Kirsten puts the finishing touch on her welding job and starts to wash up for lunch. No sooner has she finished than the electronically amplified buzzer announces lunch break. She picks up her lunch box and heads for the employees' lunch room. Several minutes later Jack comes into the lunch room, sits down opposite her and opens his own brown-bag lunch.

"You're back in the employees' lunch room!," remarks Kirsten to Jack. "I thought they'd given you a new job ... maybe moved you up to the executive lunch room."

"The food tastes better down here," replies Jack. "The company's more friendly, too."

"I can understand that. Tell me about your new job."

"They just told me to make a job description for myself ... anything I wanted to do that needed doing."

"That's a sweet deal," Kirsten says. "I haven't been here long enough to imagine what needs doing, so tell me."

"I kind of think the easiest thing to do at first is to keep an eye on you ... especially considering the fact that you're so easy on the eyes ... sort of make sure your welding and teaching methods are standardized."

"Pfffft! That's a waste of company money," she says.

"Well, I thought I might learn something," says Jack.

"How is it I get paid to work and you get paid to watch?" asks Kirsten.

"What's the sound of an electric arc without electricity?" Jack asks with a smile on his face.

Kirsten puts down her sandwich, looks at Jack strangely, shrugs her shoulders and replies in a matter-of-fact manner.

"I guess ... it's ... the sound of no sound."

"Very good!" Jack replies. "And where do you suppose that answer came from?"

"I don't know, but probably from the same place your question came from."

"Would it make the same sound in a dense forest if there were no-one around to hear it?"

"Of course!" Kirsten replies. "If Nothing can make the sound, then Nothing can hear it."

"This is true!" says Jack, surprised that Kirsten is so quick with such esoteric questioning.

"And if No-Thing can get you a welder's job in a hangar full of male welders, then certainly No-Thing can pay me to watch some-thing, can it not?"

"I suppose," replies Kirsten, laughing and shaking her head incredulously.

The Shop Foreman is sitting at the next table. He stops eating and looks strangely at Kirsten and Jack.

“Are you guys all right?” he asks.

“I think she’s got something in her coffee,” replies Jack.

“I’d say you’ve both been too long in the paint shed without a mask!” says the foreman.

“Now, that’s a good idea,” retorts Jack as he balls up his lunch wrappers and gets up from the table. “I haven’t checked out the paint shed for months.”

“Send me a message from the moon!” says the foreman.

The hangar loudspeaker system suddenly interrupts with instructions for Jack to please report to the patrol boat construction area.

“That’s another one of my jobs,” Jack replies looking at Kirsten. “See you later.”

Jack walks to the far end of the hangar where several patrol boats are nearing completion. He opens the door to the Job Supervisor’s office and walks in. Chris Handley, the patrol boat job supervisor, looks up from his drafting table to greet Jack.

“Hi, Jack. The architect’s office doesn’t want to make the fuel system design changes you asked for ... can you believe it?”

“I can believe it, but I’m not buying into it,” says Jack. “They’ve been too long in school, and not long enough at sea.”

“They said it would cost about five hundred bucks more to filter and draw the fuel from separate tanks for each engine,” says Chris. “They didn’t say anything about the cross-feed you mentioned.”

“And what happens when the fuel is contaminated in one tank?” remarks Jack. “Both engines stop! ... And never on a calm day when you’re tied to the dock either.”

“So, what shall I do?” asks Chris.

“Leave it the way it is for now,” Jack replies. “We need to get this first boat in the water as soon as possible so we can start testing it. I’ll write it up as a required change for the next boats. You can incorporate the change right away on number two so we don’t have to tear things apart to accomplish it. Did you re-seal the water intakes with 5201?”

“Done!” replies.

“And the running lights are working properly now?”

“Fixed. It was just a burned out fuse in the power panel.”

“I guess she’s ready to go in the water then,” Jack says

“She’s ready! Are you gonna do the test runs?” asks Chris.

“As far as I know.”

“That’s what they told me upstairs,” Chris remarks. “Do you want to be here when we start up the engines and test the pumps?”

“Definitely!” says Jack. “Do you have a time frame?”

“I think we can shoot for tomorrow after lunch,” says Chris. “Give me a call first in case we run into problems getting her into the water.”

Jack’s new job description allows him to set his own hours with the proviso that any

responsibilities he has agreed to undertake receive first priority regardless of the time of day, night, or day of the week. Since his responsibilities have been fulfilled for the day, Jack returns to his quarters in the Captain's Cabin of the LAND LADY an hour before normal quitting time, showers, and puts on clean clothes in order to head for the shopping mall to obtain his weekly food supply. He climbs in his jeep and heads out through the back gate in order to avoid the 5 o'clock shipyard traffic and arrives at the main traffic stop-light intersection to see Kirsten waiting for the bus at the covered bus stop. He pulls over to the curb and pushes open the passenger-side door.

"Jump in," he says. "I'll save you the bus fare."

"But I'm going across the river," Kirsten replies.

"That's okay. I have time," says Jack.

Kirsten climbs in the jeep and Jack pulls away just as the bus drives up behind him.

"Where are you headed?" Jack asks.

"Home," she says.

"Do you usually take the bus?"

"No. My car is in the shop being repaired."

"You live on the other side of the river?"

"Yes ... Down on the waterfront."

"The waterfront?" Jack says with surprise. "But there's nothing but warehouses on the waterfront."

"That's right!" says Kirsten.

"You live in a warehouse?"

"Um-hm, almost as crazy as the place you live, isn't it?"

"How you know where I live?" Jack asks.

"Is there somebody in the shipyard who *doesn't* know where you live?"

"I don't really know," Jack replies. "I guess it is sort of unusual when you look at it. When you live it, it's just ... well ... home!"

"It's the same with me," says Kirsten.

As Jack drives by the nightclub where his girlfriend Marty sings, Marty is just going in the club door. She stops when she sees Jack's car, notices Kirsten, gives Jack a nervous wave, and disappears inside.

"Boy!" exclaims Jack. "That's an interesting coincidence!"

"Friend of yours?" Kirsten asks.

"Yes ... girlfriend," Jack replies.

"Looks like you're going to have some explaining to do," remarks Kirsten. "Sorry about that."

"No ... I think that was more of an omen than a coincidence, but it sure makes you wonder how events are formed, doesn't it?"

Jack follows Kirsten's directions to a parking area beside an older-type warehouse that sits partially on a wharf. Kirsten unlocks the small warehouse side door and leads Jack up a long flight of enclosed stairs to a landing and a heavy steel door that's also locked. The door leads into a huge warehouse loft space with windows along the full length of one side wall as well as along the end wall facing the river. Numerous skylights add even more light to the spacious area. About two-thirds of the total square footage is allocated to steel art-work fabrication with numerous partially completed projects scattered everywhere. The remaining third of the square footage—the part facing out onto the river—is separated off by a low partition and contains Kirsten's living area. Kirsten leads Jack through the studio area, past a woodstove space heater made from two 55-gallon oil drums welded one on top of the other, into a beautifully decorated living/kitchen area with a fantastic view looking up and down the river for almost a mile in either direction. As Jack takes in the view, in walks a young girl, Elvie, 18, dressed in tight jeans and a loose-fitting white blouse. She has long hair in a braid like her mother and a breath-taking body.

"Hi, Mom," says Elvie in greeting.

"Hello, Dear. Come over here and meet Jack. Jack, this is my daughter, Elvie."

"Hi, Jack," says Elvie, walking over and offering her hand and a warm smile to Jack.

"Quite a view you live with," Jack says to Elvie.

"Yeah ... after a while you don't notice it though." she remarks.

Elvie suddenly notices the Gold Wings on Jack's leather jacket and becomes instantly excited.

"Oh ... Wow! Are you a pilot?" she asks.

"Sure ... whenever I can borrow an airplane," replies Jack with a laugh.

"Can you take me flying some time ... please?" she asks.

"Perhaps," replies Jack.

"Oh, promise, please! I want to go flying so badly."

"Elvie!" interrupts her mother. "Stop being a pest! Where are you off to anyhow?"

"Can I borrow the car to go to Anna's?" she pleads.

"It's in the shop, Love. Take a taxi. Here's ten bucks ... and don't be too late, please."

"Okay. Thanks, Mom. I'm glad to meet you, Jack. And remember ... please?"

"How could I possibly leave you behind?" says Jack. "You'd never let me forget it!"

Elvie gives Jack a childlike grin and disappears. Jack and Kirsten sit down.

"Like a drink? ... or some dinner?" asks Kirsten.

"No thanks. I have to go back to the girl you saw or she'll be so upset she won't be able to sing tonight."

"It sounds pretty serious to me," remarks Kirsten, "but she seems to be quite a bit younger than you. How close are you?"

"I guess I'd have to say that she's closer to me than I am to her," adds Jack thoughtfully.

“There’s a kind of unbridgeable gap at some other level than the physical ... if you know what I mean.”

“All too well,” she replies. “I had my chance at being a middle-American housewife. I just couldn’t shrink into it ... at least not with the man I was married to at the time. Now I have other problems, but they’re not half as bad.”

“Like what, for instance?”

“You just met the biggest one!”

“Is she hard to control?” asks Jack

“That’s not the problem.” replies Kirsten, with a long pause as though she’s hesitant to talk about it.

“Do you want to talk about it?” asks Jack.

“Oh, yes. It’s that she’s a lot like her mother. She doesn’t feel that she fits in anyplace, only she hasn’t yet found a creative outlet for all her vivacious energies. The boys her age aren’t mature enough for her, so she looks to the men who are my age to fill the gap her father might have filled had I stayed with him.”

“In what way is that a problem?”

“If you stick around, you’ll see for yourself,” replies Kirsten. “She’s very precocious. She’ll monopolize your attention if you let her.”

“Is that why you’re alone?”

“Not really. It’s a matter of finding a man who can handle the situation, and I just haven’t found one yet.”

“Scary!” remarks Jack.

“It could be,” adds Kirsten.

“If you scare easily, that is! But you could put a stop to it.”

“Oh, yes, but there’s a unique sort of “aliveness” about Elvie’s naiveté and spontaneity that’s very beautiful. I don’t want to kill those qualities in her. I’d rather have her add wisdom and sound judgment to them, and that requires allowing her—and me—to experience things that most adults put a stop to before they get started.”

“That could be dangerous!” adds Jack with a certain amount of respectful surprise.

“She’s done quite well so far,” remarks Kirsten with a smile.

“Well ... you certainly seem to have a good grip on the situation.”

“I’m never really sure. She plays with things that are always a little over her head, like I did. Sometimes the lessons are hard ... for me as well as for her. I never realized I had so many dragons hidden in the caves of my innermost being. Know what I mean?”

“Do I ever!” replies Jack with more than a little dubious concern. “I can see why you’d have to be pretty selective about the company you keep.”

Jack looks at his watch and then adds:

“I’d better run. Marty’s a sweet girl and I hate to leave her wondering who I’m with. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Nightfall finds Jack sitting at his usual table in Marty's nightclub, drink in hand, while Marty belts out her repertoire of light rock songs to a largely inattentive audience. She seems to hardly notice Jack—which is highly unusual—and when the band finishes for the night she doesn't show up at Jack's table, but disappears behind stage. Having experienced this kind of behavior from Marty before, Jack knows she's probably headed for her room upstairs until it's time for the next set. After a minute or so, he gets up and heads for Marty's room. He knocks on the door. No answer. He knocks again ... harder this time.

"Who is it?" asks Marty from inside her room.

"You'll never guess" replies Jack quietly.

Marty opens the door, half undressed. Jack goes in and sits down on the edge of her bed.

"I didn't think you'd bother," says Marty with a sneer.

"I'm beginning to wonder if I should've," remarks Jack.

"Well! ... what do you expect me to think?" demands Marty.

"More ... and better than you do!" retorts Jack in a mild voice.

"Who is *she*?"

"One of the welding instructors at the yard," replies Jack quietly. "Her car broke down and I gave her a ride home."

There's a long period of silence while Marty looks intensely at Jack, weighing his credibility and trying hard to overcome her negative response mechanism.

"I was imagining all kinds of wonderful things you might do to her," adds Marty, still unable to completely override her negativity.

"You need a rope for your imagination ... either that or a sword!" says Jack with a slight smile.

Not knowing quite what to do or say, Marty walks into the bathroom.

"What are you doing tonight?" she asks finally.

"You know where I've been most of it ... downstairs waiting for you! But maybe I'd better go home until all this negative energy's died down," remarks Jack.

Marty walks out of the bathroom dressed in nothing but a frilly pair of underpants, climbs on top of Jack and sticks her breasts in his face.

"There's nobody I know can calm it down faster than you, you big Bastard."

And it suddenly becomes difficult to determine who is making love to whom!

CHAPTER 2.

Much later in the night, the full moon shines down through the bedroom window onto Jack and Marty lying together under the covers. Jack is wide awake. Marty is sound asleep. Jack raises his head, slowly creeps out of bed, dresses, and leaves without waking Marty. He climbs into his jeep VW and heads out towards a hilly part of the town where there are very expensive homes. He knows precisely and exactly where he's headed, having followed this route numerous times on his treasure hunting expeditions. After climbing through numerous twisting turns he finally turns down a small street with a sign that says "NO EXIT" and pulls to a stop in front of two large garbage dumpster bins set back off the road and partially hidden by high bushes. Grabbing a large four-cell aluminum flashlight from between the front seats and a short boat hook from off the rear seat, he climbs up on the front bumper of the jeep to look over into the garbage bin. He rummages around for awhile, turning things over and moving them about with the boat hook while examining them with a light from the flashlight. There's a toaster oven that looks almost new! He hauls it out, looks it over, and places it gently on the jeep's hood. "Just what I need," he says, knowing he can repair whatever may be wrong with it, if anything at all is wrong with it.

Down near the bottom there ... what's that? ... looks almost like a packet of letters tied up with a colorful ribbon. Can't resist that one! He hooks the ribbon with his boat hook and hauls the packet up to look it over more closely. Having found treasures enough for the evening, he puts everything inside the jeep and heads for home and his own bed. Next morning, Jack sits down to his breakfast with coffee, toast, jam, and the packet of letters in front of him. He takes a drink of coffee and opens one of the letters. There's a slight smell of perfume mingled with the smell of the garbage bin, but the letter is written neatly in fine feminine script. It speaks to its reader.

"Since your father's death, I've done very well managing this big house, but it's becoming more and more of a burden to me. Your suggestion of a retirement community with care is very depressing to me, so much so that I would prefer to die here with the house falling down about me. Also, I have carefully saved money for you children over the years. There's no need to give it to a rest home. You're comfort has become more important to me than my own."

Jack looks up ... a look of deep concern lingers on his face. He picks up the envelope and examines it.

"I guess she never sent that letter," he says quietly to himself. He looks again at the return address on the envelope.

“104 Forest Street. That shouldn’t be hard to find. It’s probably the next street above where the Dumpsters are located.”

Instead of driving directly to work that same morning, Jack winds his way up past the road where the Dumpsters are located and, sure enough, at the next road above, there’s a sign saying “Forest St.” and number 104 turns out to be a beautiful stone house set back from the road on a large lot with a well-manicured lawn and a number of mature oak, maple, and elm trees. Jack examines the house carefully, squinting when he sees a slight curl of black smoke issuing from the large chimney above the slate-shingled roof. Smiling to himself, he continues on his way to work.

Jack walks into the shipyard hangar just as the 10:00 o’clock break buzzer sounds. He makes his way over to his old welding station where Kirsten is instructing two Indian women in the use of welding equipment. He waits and listens patiently until she’s through delivering her final instructions and turns to greet him with a bright smile and a coy little “Hi”.

“Want to take a few minutes of your break to see what kind of boat the company’s building?” he asks.

“Sure,” she replies cheerfully, and, turning into her students, says, “At 10:30 we’ll pick up where we left off.”

Jack and Kirsten make their way through the hangar and out onto the wharf where the newly-launched patrol boat is tied up and rubbing against the wharf pylons with the slight swells from river waves and passing boat traffic. They both jump down onto the patrol boat deck and Jack leads the way to the wheelhouse which has its own business-like air from being filled with engine controls, navigation equipment, radio equipment, radar consoles, large magnetic compass, helm, and chart table.

“Ooooh! This is impressive! ... even exciting ... and we’re still tied to the dock,” says Kirsten enthusiastically.

“I have to take it out for its first test run with the mechanics and marine architect right after lunch,” says Jack, “then I have to come back, drop them off, and go out again to put some time on the engines and pumps. I’d like to have you along for the second run if you can get free.”

“I’d love to go!” replies Kirsten. “Do you have any idea what time that might be?”

“It’ll probably be very close to quitting time ... just after 4:30, I would guess. If the boat’s not back here at 4:30 waiting for you, give me a call on my cell phone. Here’s my card with the number.”

“Wonderful!” exclaims Kirsten. “I’ll see you here at 4:30 ... or whenever you get back.” Fortunately there are only minor problems during the patrol boat’s first run and Jack is able to return to the wharf by four o’clock in the afternoon. There are many people waiting on the wharf for the boat’s return: photographers, mechanics, executives, as

well as workers anxious to see how their handiwork has turned out. As soon as the boat is tied up, Jack jumps onto the wharf to confer with mechanics about adjustment of the pump drive mechanisms. Before too long there are photo-flashes going off and mechanics everywhere, checking engines, electronics ... and several hanging over the stern adjusting the trim plates and nozzle controls. Kirsten arrives promptly at 4:30, remaining on the wharf by herself until the activity subsides. Jack spots her after a few moments and motions her to come aboard.

“Let’s go below into the galley and have a cup of tea until things quiet down,” says Jack, ushering her into the patrol boat cabin and down the narrow stairway into the tiny kitchen/galley. “Since it’s quitting time, they’ll all be out of here in the next fifteen minutes.”

Coffee, tea, and doughnuts have been brought in and arranged on the galley table since the boat’s arrival.

“How did the test run go?” asks Kirsten.

“At least up to expectations so far, but we’ll have to break in the engines and pump drives before we know what sort of maximum performance she’s capable of doing,” replies Jack with enthusiasm. “You won’t believe how stable she is in high speed turns. It’s really fun!”

“Are you sure it’s all right for me to go out with you?” asks Kirsten. “It’s not exactly in my job description.”

“I told them up topside I was taking you as a navigator/trainee. Didn’t they get a laugh at that one! No one said no, so I guess you have two jobs now. Think you can handle it?”

“There’s no question in my mind about handling the first job,” she replies. “As for the second, I guess we’ll have to find out.”

The bustling activity gradually subsides as Jack and Kirsten drink their tea. Soon there is nothing but silence and an occasional creak and groan of the patrol boat hull as it rises and falls against the wooden wharf pilings.

“Sounds like they’re all finished,” says Jack finally. “must be time for us to get back to work ... or play, as the case is here.”

Jack shows Kirsten how to start the two engines, then casts off the shorelines.

“You can be the pilot for now,” he says. “Left engine forward very slowly. Turn the wheel slightly to the right—that’s starboard to a sailor—but not too sharply or the stern’s liable to bump the wharf.”

Jack carries on a constant stream of dialogue as they move out into the river, explaining everything in detail as to water depths and currents, buoys, and the dangers of debris in the water.

“Now that we’re out in the river, you can pick up your speed a bit,” adds Jack. “ ... that’s it. Can you hear the Runnnnn, Runnnnn, Runnnnn, Runnnnn sound the engines are making? It’s a beat frequency caused by the two engines running at different speeds.

Adjust one of the throttles a bit and listen for the sound. When the beat frequency disappears completely, both engines are turning over at exactly the same speed. In engineer's parlance, they're 'synched'."

The noise of the engines makes conversation difficult at best, but Jack manages to teach Kirsten several abrupt turns that one would not be able to do with a propeller-driven boat. The rest of the two-hour break-in run passes cruising up and down the river not far from where help is available in case of problems. When the patrol boat finally ties up at the shipyard wharf once again, Kirsten remarks:

"Whew! That was exhausting! I didn't think I'd worked that hard."

"It's a combination of things peculiar to life on the water," replies Jack. "The concentration, the boat's constant motion, the sea air and wind ... they each take their toll."

"It's late," remarks Kirsten, looking at her watch. "I've got to make some dinner for Elvie. Want to come back and eat with us?"

"Thanks, but I have to get some other matters straightened out first. The timing isn't quite right yet."

"Fine," replies Kirsten. "See you on Monday."

Later that evening, Jack is on the telephone talking to Marty.

"Hi, Marty," says Jack. "What are you up to this weekend?"

"Nothing planned ... why don't you come over tonight?"

"Can't ... I'm exhausted," replies Jack. "We put the new patrol boat through four hours of tests today, and I'm going to collapse in bed in a very short while. There's a dune buggy rally on the desert tomorrow ... want to go?"

"I have to sing at 9:00 PM. Can we be back in time?"

"I can have you back by then," Jack answers.

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all. How early can you leave?"

"Is 8:00 o'clock okay?"

"Great!" replies Jack. "I'll be waiting for you outside in the car."

"But ... but call me first before you leave ... okay?"

"Consider it done, Sweetheart."

By ten o'clock the next morning—Saturday—Jack and Marty turn off the freeway down a long off-ramp and onto a desert road leading to miles of sand dunes in the distance. There's a long line of pickup trucks with trailers hauling dune buggies in front of them as well as behind them. When they finally pull in to the park headquarters, there are hundreds of house trailers, pickup trucks, repair trailers, campers, hot dog stands, and an uncountable number and variety of dune buggies all congregated in a corner of a broad, dry lake-bed at the base of the sand dunes. Jack drives slowly in among them

looking for T-Bird. Finally, out near the perimeter of the temporary settlement, Jack spots T-Bird's black dune buggy parked beneath a sun tent set up for the rally. Alongside sits T-Bird's pickup truck and trailer and another sun tent shading a picnic table, chairs, and beer cooler ... and T-Bird sporting a fancy straw sun hat complete with Eagle's feather. T-Bird smiles and gets up as he sees Jack's jeep approaching.

"Glad you could make it, Jack," he says.

"Wow! What a crowd!" exclaims Jack. "There's ten times as many people as I expected."

"There's some pretty wild buggies out there. Make ours look like go-karts!" remarks T-Bird.

"Yeah, but we have more fun," adds Jack, as he starts unloading his own sun tent, table and chairs.

"They're about to have a follow-the-leader hair-raiser out on the dune's. Want to go along?" asks T-Bird.

"Nah! I'm not much of a follower," says Jack. "Why don't the two of us go out on the lakebed and play ... unless you really want to go with them."

"Hell, I'd rather play with you any day, Jack. What d'you have in mind?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. Keep an eye on Marty while I go get us a coffee, will you. Want a coffee, Marty? T-Bird?" They both nod affirmatively, and with that, Jack disappears into the confusion of activity looking for the coffee wagon.

T-Bird sits down next to Marty.

"So, how long have you known Jack?" he asks.

"We're old friends," she replies, thinking for a moment. "I guess it's been several years now."

"You work at the shipyard?" he asks her.

"No, I'm a nightclub singer," she replies.

"Hey! Wow!" exclaims T-Bird excitedly. "What kinda music you sing?"

"It depends on the band I'm with. Pop and country, but mostly country," she adds.

"I used to have a band," muses T-Bird, looking off into the distance, "and that's what we played, too. I'm thinking seriously of re-forming the band. I'm crazy about music."

"Me too," adds Marty with a smile.

They take a long look at each other, like they're seeing each other for the first time. Marty catches herself.

"Ummm ... what instrument do you play?" she asks.

"I play the bass mostly ... sometimes the drums ... and I sing too, but I don't have the greatest range in creation," remarks T-Bird, chuckling to himself.

Just then, Jack walks up carefully juggling a cardboard tray loaded with coffee and doughnuts.

“Dig in, Gang,” says Jack, picking out a doughnut and coffee for himself. “I’ll be right back. I just ran into a guy I haven’t seen for years.”

Jack hurries off, sipping at his coffee.

“Do you write your own stuff?” Marty asks T-Bird.

“Some of it ... some of its pretty good, too.”

“Gosh, I’d love to hear it,” remarks Marty.

“Any time’s a good time for me,” says T-Bird casually. “You interested in dune buggies?”

“Not really. I just come along to be with Jack.”

“I really like Jack,” remarks T-Bird.

“I do too,” answers Marty and adds after a long pause, “but I’m afraid I’m not his type.”

“Well, who knows what’ll happen next?” remarks T-Bird with a hearty laugh.

“Yeah!” says Marty nervously.

Jack hustles up.

“C’mon, T-Bird,” he says, full of energy. “I’ll show you a dune buggy version of what happens after a Navy jet gets catapulted off the deck of an aircraft carrier. It’s called a ‘rendezvous’. Then we’ll pretend we’re two planes flying in formation.”

T-Bird climbs into his fire-spitting dune buggy wagon and in seconds it roars into life. Jack walks over to T-Bird’s buggy, now idling loudly as T-Bird straps himself in. He hands T-Bird a hard-hat.

“Here,” he says. “Use this. It has a built-in two-way radio so I can talk to you.”

Jack kneels down beside T-Bird’s dune buggy and draws in the sand with a stick.

“You’re the leader,” Jack tells him with a raised voice. “Go out on the lake-bed and make the biggest figure eight you can. Stay on hard ground. Keep your speed nailed on 3,000 RPM in third gear. Don’t pay any attention to me. Concentrate on your speed and your figure eight. Run in your same tracks as closely as you can, lap after lap. I’ll be talking to you over the radio from there.”

“What’re you gonna do?” asks T-Bird.

“You’ll see,” replies Jack with a smile.

He climbs into his Porsche-powered VW jeep, then turns to Marty and yells loud enough to be heard over the din.

“Want to go along?”

“It doesn’t sound like it,” yells Marty back ... remembering the P-51 experience all too well.

“Okay. Actually, it’ll be more fun for you to watch,” replies Jack as he and T-Bird pick their way carefully out through the crowded base camp.

Once through the crowd and out on the lake-bed, T-Bird stomps on the dune buggy throttle and the engine roars into life—flames shooting two feet into the air from out of

the vertical exhaust pipe. Jack waits at the edge of the lake bed as T-Bird feels out the white-caked surface of the dried up lake bed. White dust and caked clay fly off the rear wheels as T-Bird accelerates to 3,000 RPM.

“How do you read me, T-Bird?” asks Jack on the radio.

“Loud and clear,” replies T-Bird.

“How’s the surface?”

“It’s good and solid where I’m running,” replies T-Bird.

“Okay. I’m going to rendezvous with you,” comments Jack quietly.

As T-Bird swings by a hundred yards or so away at 60mph, Jack stomps on his VW and its Porsche engine makes the car fishtail and kick up clay as it gathers speed. Jack cuts inside T-Bird’s wide circle, making a smaller, faster track until he has caught up and is riding on the inside of T-Bird with his right front wheel even with, and about a foot away from T-Bird’s left rear wheel.

T-Bird can’t help but steal a glance, but Jack checks him with a call on the radio.

“Don’t watch me, watch your speed so it remains perfectly constant. Make all your motions slow and graceful so I can follow easily. Right now I’m in what is called ‘left echelon’ formation.”

Jack eases backed on the throttle and drops his speed slightly, sliding around to the outside of T-Bird, then adds power and speeds up until his left front tire is even with T-Bird’s right rear tire.

“This is right echelon formation,” he adds over the radio.

After half a dozen or so figure eight patterns, Jack takes the lead and T-Bird gets to try out juggling power settings so as to stay locked into the echelon position. After that they break out of the figure eight pattern and do random sliding turns at high speed in formation. Still further on, one breaks off to the right, the other breaks off to the left and they make sliding 360-degree circles to merge back into formation again.

“Having fun yet?” asks Jack over the radio.

“Hey, I love it!” comes back the reply.

“This is dune buggy ballet,” says Jack finally. “Okay, let’s head for the pits.”

Both the vehicles wend their way slowly through the crowd and back to their sun tents. T-Bird and Jack climb out, their clothing and hair drenched in sweat, and throw their hard- hats on the seat of their vehicles.

“I don’t know about you,” remarks Jack, “but I’ve got to find the portable toilets.”

“Guess we both had the same idea at the same time,” adds T-Bird.

As they walk together toward the portable toilets, Jack asks:

“You like Marty?”

“Yeah, she seems really great,” replies T-Bird. “Are you two pretty heavy together?”

“She’d like it to be, but she’d never feel comfortable with me. She’d suffocate; or else I would. And I really don’t want to hurt her by calling an abrupt end to the whole affair. She’s too sensitive and too needy to just be dumped. The whole thing started out as a friendship and I should probably have never let it go as far as it did, but she has an awfully beautiful body in addition to that gentle and kind heart.”

“We seem to have a lot in common,” remarks T-Bird. “Maybe the easy way out for all of us would be for me to take your place, Jack, but I guess you’d have to set that up with her approval and I don’t know how the hell you’d do that.”

“You can leave that to me,” says Jack. “I think she feels the end is near anyhow. But be aware, T-Bird, she likes things ‘close’ ... real close and real clingy, know what I mean?”

“That’s the way I like them, too,” replies T-Bird.

“Then give me a couple of days to broach the subject tactfully and I’ll call you with the result.”

“Great! ... and thanks, Jack.”

“If it works, we’ll both be thanking you!” exclaims Jack. “Just take your time as only an Indian can ... and give me your word you won’t run around on her. She’s too good for that kind of treatment.”

“I don’t run around any more, Jack. Rides-the-Wind trained me to think of others first ... to, like, see the end from the beginning.”

The two look intently at each other with understanding and mutual trust ... maybe the first time in Indian and White Man History that’s ever happened!

“Funny,” remarks Jack, “how smoothly and painlessly things can work when you let them unfold with pure intent, isn’t it?”

T-Bird looks over his left shoulder ... then over his right shoulder ... then up ... then at Jack, and smiles. Then both break into loud, free laughter.

That evening, after several hours of driving, Jack pulls up in front of Marty’s club—she being sound asleep in the right seat.

“Wake up there, Sweet Thing,” says Jack, running his fingers through her hair. “You have half an hour to turn yourself into a screaming ball of fire.”

“Oh, My God,” groans Marty, coming back to life slowly. “I’ll never make it.”

She wraps her arms around Jack and kisses him on the cheek.

“Thanks, Jack. It was a fantastic day.”

“It’s okay if I don’t come up with you?” he asks.

“Yes, fine. I barely have time to put on makeup and my outfit.”

“I don’t envy you. I’ll be asleep before you finish your first song.”

Marty gets out and Jack pulls away.

CHAPTER 3.

At about noon on Sunday—the very next day—a white van with no name or markings on it pulls up into the driveway of 104 Forest Street just above Jack’s favorite Dempsey Dumpster site where he found the stack of handwritten letters—letters that carried the 104 Forest Street address. Jack climbs out the driver’s door of the van dressed in white coveralls and a ball cap—having assumed the role of a furnace repairman—and walks to the back door. He rings the doorbell and waits patiently for a response. Shortly the door opens and a white-haired elderly lady stands fearlessly in the door opening.

“Yes? May I help you?” she asks.

“I don’t need any help, thank you, M’am,” replies Jack politely, “but I think your furnace might. You have an oil-fired hot water heater or an oil-fired furnace, do you not?”

“Why ... yes ... Why do you ... How do you know that?” she asks curiously.

“Ordinarily I wouldn’t know, except that yesterday it was sending a signal out your chimney. I service oil burners in this area,” Jack lies with a straight face, “and I watch everyone’s chimney for signs of malfunction or poor efficiency.”

He stops long enough for his words to sink in.

“You saw something happening to my chimney?” she asks.

“Yes, I noticed a wisp of black smoke coming out the top. White smoke or steam isn’t a problem, but black smoke means something isn’t operating efficiently.”

“Well, I will certainly have my furnace man take a look at it ... and thank you very much,” she says, starting to close the door. Jack quickly counters her move.

“I wouldn’t wait, M’am,” replies Jack quickly. “It could be dangerous. House fires do start in furnaces that are not well maintained. I’ll be happy to look at it for free and if there’s nothing wrong there will be no charge. It won’t take but fifteen minutes of my time and I wouldn’t have stopped were I not concerned.”

The woman studies Jack’s face carefully for a moment.

“Well, then, perhaps you should take a look at it,” she says opening the door once again.

“I’ll just grab my toolbox,” says Jack, turning back toward the van.

Once in the basement of 104 Forest Street, Jack sets up a bright halogen lamp clamped to the floor joist over the burner. He opens his toolbox, takes out the necessary tools, and removes the nozzle assembly from the oil burner. Removing the nozzle from its assembly, he tries to blow through it and then mumbles to himself :

“There’s the problem. It needs a new nozzle.”

Just then a piano starts playing on the floor above almost directly over Jack’s head. Jack

replaces the nozzle with a new one and, as quickly as that, the burner is repaired. But his purpose in being there has not yet been fully served. From the letters, of course, Jack is pretty sure that the elderly lady's name is Eva since she appears to be the only elderly woman living in the house, so he pulls up a garden chair and sits to listen to what he recognizes being played on the piano as a Mendelssohn Concerto.

Meanwhile, in the room above Jack's head, it is in fact Eva herself (as Jack will soon come to know) who plays the piano so beautifully. As she finishes the concerto, she reaches up to open another page of music when Jack's voice comes booming up from the basement through the floor at her feet.

"Bravo! Mendelssohn would love to hear you play his concerto so well!"

Eva stops in mid reach; she can't believe what she's hearing from a furnace man.

"Yes ... yes, that was indeed one of Mendelssohn's concertos. And how do you know that?"

"Mendelssohn ... let me see ... that would have been music class in college. He's not my favorite, though. Mozart is more like the child in me."

"Ohhhh! ... You mean like this ..." and Eva plays several pieces of Mozart's lively, simple and childlike music.

In the basement, Jack listens from the garden chair with closed eyes and a smile on his face, his relaxed, crossed legs swinging in time with the musical rhythms.

"Exactly! ... Exactly!" exclaims Jack loudly enough to be heard through the floor. "I'm going to have to make a little noise down here, but don't let that stop you from playing. I'm certainly enjoying it."

"Perfectly all right," replies Eva. "Noise doesn't bother my playing."

As Eva plays more Mozart, Jack, without leaving the garden chair, picks up a hammer and taps the furnace casing lightly a few times. A few seconds later he picks up a large spanner wrench, then purposefully drops it back in the toolbox. He cycles the furnace motor on and off several times over the next few minutes, rummages in his toolbox to make a little more noise, then curses quietly to himself. Suddenly, the piano stops playing.

"Are you having problems with the furnace?" comes the elderly female voice from above with a note of concern.

"A slight one," replies Jack, still sitting in the lawn chair and about to tell a lie so he can spend a little more time at 104 Forest Street.

"There seems to be a small crack in the fire chamber that could be dangerous if it enlarges. I'll have to come back tomorrow with my welder."

Jack gathers up his tools and makes his way up the basement stairs to the kitchen where Eva is waiting.

"I'll be back shortly after five tomorrow," Jack says.

“Thank you so much,” Eva replies. “Do I owe you anything now?”

“No. We’ll settle up tomorrow. Oh, and by the way,” Jack remarks, “my name’s Jack ... Jack Diamond.”

“It’s very nice to meet you, Jack. I’m Eva.”

Jack smiles, doffs his hat very slightly, and goes out to the van.

One might wonder at this point why Jack would take it upon himself to assume the role of a furnace man, but that is an explanation not easily or logically given. For a man like Jack, the boredom of life is only defrayed by spontaneous action, and the mother of all spontaneous action is curiosity. Suffice it to say that Jack could not resist the pull of the packet of letters from the Dumpster—nor could he resist the urge to help—or avoid adjusting a furnace that he knew needed maintenance. Nor could he possibly have foreseen the mystical manner in which his spontaneous actions would affect the lives of those about him.

The master of the welded bead appears at times to be a fool—and is quite comfortable with that appearance—for experience has taught him that he is only the puppet, not the Puppeteer, and each day is a fresh new day with few problems as long as he sees himself as not performing for an audience, not pulling hard on the strings from which he hangs, and not thinking too much about the merits or demerits of the part he plays or the story in which he finds himself the performer.

After a brief stop to check out recent trash contributions to the Dempsey Dumpsters just around the corner, Jack heads for home and parks the shipyard’s white van next to his VW beneath the Land Lady’s high bow. As he makes his way up the noisy steel staircase inside the ship’s interior, he hears Beulah calling him.

“Mist’ Jack? Oh, Mist’ Jack ... dat you?”

“Sure enough, Beulah. What is it?”

“Mist’ Jack, Sharky and de boys come lookin’ fo’ you while you was gone. Dey was ver’ excited ... somep’m ‘bout a boat or somep’m. Said dey be back after dinner time.”

“Thanks, Beulah. I’ll be looking for them. I can’t imagine what they’re up to now.”

Jack turns to continue up the stairs, but just as quickly turns back to ask an intuitive question.

“Beulah, have you ever worked as a housekeeper?”

“Housekeeper! Mist’ Jack, I kep’ house fo’ a whole dam army ‘fo my place burn down. I clean from dawn ‘til dark. I wash clothes in de river. I cook. I plant de garden. I weed de garden. I pick de garden. I dig holes six feet in de groun’ an’ I build a outhouse on top de holes. I build de chicken coop. I kill de chickens...I pluck de chickens ...and I been thinkin’, you know ... I’s some dam glad dat place burn down! Yas, suh, Mist’ Jack, I’s a house keeper and a house ever’tin’ else. Why you ask?”

Jack has a good laugh before he replies.

"I'm not sure, but I may have found a home for you."

"Ain't nothin' wrong wit' dis home, Mist' Jack. I ain't been dis happy in years."

"Yes, I see that, Beulah, and I'm very happy to have you, but my life changes a lot, and it changes very quickly. If this works out, you would not only be well paid, but have a very stable home for many years."

"Can you tell me 'bout it?" Beulah asks.

"It's far from a done thing yet ... in fact, it's just an idea in my own mind so far. I just wanted you to know I'm working on it for you."

"Mist' Jack ... I do 'preciate you."

Not too many hours later, in the early evening as Jack is cleaning up his dinner dishes, he hears the DING-DING, DING-DING of the big brass ship's bell he's mounted on the outside of the gate for visitors to ring to announce their arrival. He dries his hands and heads out the door knowing full well who it probably is. Sure enough, Sharky, Preacher, and Ike are waiting nervously outside the gate. Jack walks up without opening it. He speaks to them through the fencing in a kidding fashion.

"No booze on Sunday!" kids Jack. "You know my rule."

"Now, Jack," says Sharky with a chuckle. "We ain't hit you up for booze fo' a long time! Nope ... we wants to talk to you 'bout somep'm else."

"Um-Hm ... I can see that," replies Jack slowly, quite at a loss to second-guess the situation. "And what might that be?"

Sharky becomes very nervous and can't quite get all the words out that he wants to get out.

"Why ...uh ...it's ... uh ..."

Preacher comes quickly to his rescue and interjects:

"Well ... tell him 'bout the boat! Go on! Tell him."

Sharky clears his throat, "Ahem ... ahem ... They's a li'l white boat down in de scrapyard; she jus' lyin' dere goin' to pieces, an' we was thinkin' we might ... uh ... you know ... fix her up or som'pm like 'at, you know?"

"Well ...I can't say I'm exactly clear on it yet, Sharky," replies Jack skeptically. "Which boat would that be?"

"You know ... de li'l white one ... de one wit' two ends."

"Most boats do have two ends!" Jack replies sarcastically.

Again, Preacher interjects:

"Says 'Lifeboat' on her."

"Um-Hm," replies Jack, knowing now which boat they're talking about.

"She not far from here," says Sharky, picking up the ball. "Lemme in an' I show you where'bouts she be."

Jack unlocks the big gate and the threesome make a bee-line down one side of Land Lady toward the waterfront part of the scrapyard, Sharky talking excitedly all the time.

“We was thinkin’ we could fix ‘er up, you know, and we could rescue other boats in trouble. We’d be kinda like, you know, the River Rats Rescue Team. Trudy, she can get paint and show us how to paint ‘er ... an’ ... an’ ... Ike, he already got a two-way radio and five gallons o’ gas. An’ we ... we found some other stuff in de yard, too.”

Jack has to walk rapidly to keep up with Sharky and his companions in their excitement.

“And just how did you manage to get in here to find this boat ... and the other stuff you say you’ve found?” asks Jack suspiciously.

“Aw, shit, Jack, ‘das easy. You jus’ waits ‘till de tide’s out an’ you walks right in on de rocks.”

Not a hundred feet back from the stern of Land Lady, Sharky stops next to the white, double-ended, ship’s lifeboat covered with a faded and torn canvas. It does indeed look like it’s been abandoned and left to rot the rest of its life away hidden amongst the residue of abandoned ships and parts.

“Here she be!” says Sharky pointing at the boat and looking up the Jack.

“So ... you fell in love with my little beauty, did you?” remarks Jack. “I thought you might’ve been talking about this one. It does have two ends alright.”

“Dis yours?” asks Sharky incredulously.

“Yup. It used to be the lifeboat for the Land Lady. I kind of liked it myself so I paid Hendrix fifty bucks for it several years ago.”

“Oh...darn!” remarks Sharky. “We don’t got fifty bucks, Jack.”

All three look dejected and unhappy as their dream dies. Jack looks at their disappointment.

“Welllll ... I didn’t say you had to have fifty bucks ... in fact, I didn’t really say she was for sale. But I’ll tell you what I’ll do. You start fixing her up and I’ll see how you do. If you do a good enough job I might just give you a part ownership in her. How does that sound?”

Once again the excitement mounts as it begins to look like the dream might materialize after all.

“There’s just a couple of things we have to agree to,” continues Jack. “You don’t cut or drill any holes in her hull without you ask me first, agreed?”

They all speak at once in agreement.

“And you don’t take anything out of this yard without I see it first or you put it on this boat. Agreed?”

Sharky and Preacher quickly agree. Ike looks at Jack with a frown on his face.

“That means you in particular, Ike,” says Jack firmly, knowing Ike’s penchant for claiming and disposing of anything not tied down and not too big for a shopping cart. Ike grudgingly nods his head.

“And last of all, you only work here after 4:30 in the afternoon when the shipyard is closed, or on weekends when no-one is around to see you. Agreed?”

Again they all agree.

“And if, by some long shot, someone does come out here and ask you what you’re doing, you tell them you work for me and to talk to me about it.”

Immediately, the three begin to untie the canvas cover to the lifeboat and look about for something to stand on so they can climb over the edge of the lifeboat as it sits there high in its cradle. It is not a small boat by any means, but neither is it very large, being roughly 25 feet in length. Seeing everyone excitedly engrossed in their new adventure, Jack smiles to himself and returns to the Captain’s Cabin on Land Lady where he can actually watch them at work from one of the porthole windows in the cabin.

Late Monday afternoon, after the Shipyard traffic has cleared out, Jack climbs into the borrowed van once again and heads for 104 Forest Street dressed in his white coveralls. Arriving at the house, he grabs his toolbox and a small TIG welder out of the van and goes to the back door which Eva has opened for him. After a brief greeting, he heads once again for the basement. This time, however, he first plunks himself into the garden chair. After opening the toolbox and shuffling tools around for a minute to make it sound like he’s busy, he raises his voice loudly so as to be heard through the floor.

“Feel like playing the piano for me while I work?” he asks. Eva answers from the floor above.

“Why, of course. What would you like to hear?”

“Anything you’d enjoy playing ... Mozart, Chopin, Grieg, Mendelssohn ... your choice!” Jack replies.

As Eva starts to play, Jack gets up and walks around the basement quietly collecting broken things that need repairing: a damaged stiff-tined rake; an old shovel cracked in the blade; and an iron garden chair with a broken arm. The crackle of the welding arc mingles with the smell of ozone in the basement air.

As the music stops, Jack raises his welder’s helmet to look at the welding job on the rake.

“Who takes care of your property here?” Jack asks loudly. “It must need a certain amount of care.”

“I have lots of help outdoors,” Eva replies, “But the inside is getting to be a problem for me.”

“Don’t you have a maid or a housekeeper?” Jack asks.

“No. I haven’t needed one. That’s sort of the way I exercise. But lately I’m thinking I may have to find someone.”

Jack sits down in the garden chair and shuffles his tools around a bit.

“Did you know the Hendrix family who used to live over on Cumberland Street?” Jack asks.

“No, the name doesn’t sound familiar to me.”

“They’ve just moved out of the area, and they had a fantastic housekeeper named Beulah who’s now out of a job. I could put her in touch with you if you like.”

Jack makes a mental note to reprimand himself for telling white lies.

“Is she dependable?” Eva asks.

“Definitely! Hendrix was the head of the shipyard and he wouldn’t have anyone working for him who wasn’t completely trustworthy and dependable.”

Damn, Jack thinks to himself; lied again! ... but Beulah’s better than any housekeeper Hendrix ever had!

“That sounds wonderful,” remarks Eva.

Jack makes sounds as though he’s putting his tools away.

“There; that takes care of your furnace. It’s as good as new and should last for years.”

Jack carries his tools and welder upstairs and out to the van. He returns for a brief word with Eva.

“I’ll try to locate Beulah for you and we’ll talk about your bill at that time. It was an easy job and won’t amount to much.”

Jack drives down the hill toward town and spots Trudy on the Park sidewalk with her art exhibited all about her. As she works away, he pulls over, parks illegally and gets out to pay her a visit.

“Hi, Jack,” she comments.

“Hi, Trudy. I hear you’re using a new painting technique and I thought I’d take a look.”

Jack walks around and admires her painting from farther back and then up close.

“Trudy, you’re really getting good. I’ve never seen such rich, saturated colors ... and it looks a lot like impressionism ... is that where you’re going with it?”

“Not exactly,” she replies, “but you’re very close. It’s my own version of Impressionism.”

As she continues painting, she motions over her shoulder and says:

“Isn’t that your old girlfriend over there on the park bench with that Indian fellow?”

Jack looks in the direction Trudy indicates and, sure enough, Marty and T-Bird are sitting on a park bench with their backs to Jack and Trudy, obviously enjoying each other’s company.

“Yes, that’s Marty,” Jack replies. “They’re both friends of mine and I sort of set the whole thing up not knowing whether it would work or not, but it looks like it’s working. The two are much better suited to each other than Marty was to me.”

“Ah, well ... all’s fair in love and war ... and I wasn’t the one who made that statement up, heh, heh,” remarks Trudy.

“Wouldn’t you say that being replaced is a lot more fun than being dumped?” asks Jack sarcastically.

“Actually, I find my art more satisfying, less traumatic, and a hell of a lot less trouble than either of those options,”

“Lucky you!” exclaims Jack. “Where’s Sharky and Preacher?”

“Working on their new boat ... or I should say, working on your old boat; and that reminds me. I’ve got to come up with some paint for it. Any idea what kind I should get?”

“Not to worry about it, Trudy,” Jack replies. “There’s hundreds of partly full cans of ship’s paint at the shipyard. They won’t miss several gallons of leftover paint. I’ll hide it inside the lifeboat for you; I want to see how they’re doing anyhow. I better go before I get a parking ticket. See you.”

Later that evening, Sharky, Preacher, and Ike are busy working inside the lifeboat when Jack walks up with four cans of paint. The lifeboat has gone through some major modifications. It now has a large steering station with a gigantic wooden spoked wheel; a large binnacle; a short mast with three stays and mast steps leading up the mast to a small lookout seat; an old car radio antenna attached at a weird angle to the tip of the mast; a ship’s bell screwed to the mast; a big anchor hung over the bow; a strong bollard post in the stern for a towing other boats; and a seat made from an old toilet seat—well supported—that hangs out over the stern. There’s a pile of orange life-preservers and two pairs of oars stacked nearby. Two folding garden chairs act as lifeboat seats and, in fact, one is not really certain just what kind of boat this really is. Sharky is the first one to spot Jack arriving with the paint.

“Hey! ... Jack! ... Jack! ... watch this!” yells Sharky over the side excitedly, and he runs back to give the steering wheel a spin. “Is it turnin’? Is it turnin’?” he asks Jack, referring to the motion of the rudder which has actually responded to the turning of the wheel.

“Like a jeweled watch, Sharky,” Jack replies.

“An’ ... an’ ... Listen ‘dis,” exclaims Sharky. “Ike? ...Ike! C’mon over here an’ show Jack you know what! Listen ‘dis, Jack. You won’ b’lieve what you gonna hear!”

Ike lifts the wooden box cover off the little three-cylinder diesel engine, fiddles with the fuel line shutoff and turns the ignition key on. He grabs the flywheel hand crank and gives it a hefty spin. The old diesel sputters, fires, and then roars into unmuffled life. It smokes like mad, spins the propeller, and runs for a few seconds before Ike proudly shuts it down before it overheats. Sharky can hardly contain himself.

“Whatcha’ thinka’ that, Jack? I betcha’ din’ think this ole thing’d ever run agin, didja? Ain’t that Ike smart? He sure knows how to fix things up. She all ready for the water soon’s the paint dries.”

“Beautiful, Sharky, beautiful,” exclaims Jack from down below. “What’s wrong that the starter doesn’t work?”

“We don’t had no batt’ry!” replies Sharky.

“I can fix that up,” Jack says. “You’ve got to have a battery. The radio and lights won’t work without one. I’ll dig one out of my storage shed for you.”

“Okay, okay, Jack. We be here ‘till dark.”

And with that, Jack heads for his cargo container shed beneath Land Lady to look for a car battery.