

BETRAYED

By Hank Barone

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Published and distributed in the United States by International Media Group.

ISBN-13: 978-0615824635

ISBN-10: 0615824633

Cover design by Brooke Halladay

Cover art by Enrique Velazquez

Book format by Betty L. Wright

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Lori fired up the diesel, backed off the dock and took a quick swing through the narrow passage. Boats of all types crowded the Spanish Town marina. Not much room was left to maneuver.

She spun the wheel to make a sharp right turn.

A loud “thunk” boomed, and then a jolt through the helm tightened her white-knuckled grip.

The boat failed to turn.

Yang Soon lunged straight for a houseboat docked ahead.

She slammed the engine into reverse.

Too late. The forward thrust carried the 36-foot sailboat straight ahead. It was like trying to stop a car sliding toward a tree on black ice.

A loud splintering followed a thundering crack. *Yang Soon's* sleek bow sliced into the wall and roof of the houseboat's living room, well above the water line, much the same as a wrecking ball smashes through an old building.

The impact jolted her like someone punched her chest with a giant fist. Her eyes bugged out. Her breathing came in deep gulps.

Lori leaned out of the cockpit and looked down to see a man and woman clad in shorts and t-shirts staring up from their chairs, mouths agape. The bow ground to a halt ten feet in front of them. The couple dropped the books they had been reading and toppled from their chairs, away from the prow.

The boat lurched, the motor coughed and died. Lori slumped, chin sagging to her chest.

I can't believe it. Dad'd sure be proud of me now. My first try without his guidance and I wreck two boats.

She sucked in a deep breath and stood straight. “Are you all right?” she called down.

“I'm okay,” came a deep, angry voice. “You, Midge?”

“Fine, John. Scraped knee, that's all.” She looked at Lori. “What in the world happened, dear? Scared me to death.”

“Steering cable snapped while I was turning. Couldn't stop in time. I've made that turn dozens of times before. I'm so sorry. I'll get your boat fixed. Can you call Bob at the marina's office? I can't back out of here without the helm. I'd probably hit something else.”

“Look at this mess. I've been in a car accident, but never a boat wreck when I'm tied up at the dock,” John snarled.

“Aren't you Matt Wagner's daughter, Lori?” asked Midge.

“Yes, Ma'am.”

“How old're you?” John asked, still angry.

“Nineteen.”

“We’re very sorry for your loss, Lori. Such a shock. Your dad always seemed so indestructible, and only 44 years old,” Midge said.

Lori’s eyes teared up. “Thank you,” she said. Lori could see him now - not murdered, lying in a casket as he had arrived home from Spain - but the way he was when she was a child. At six feet four inches and 225 pounds, he had seemed like a giant, but he had always been so gentle. Tears streamed from her ebony eyes.

“I’m Midge Edelson and this is my husband, John.”

“Bob will solve our problem shortly,” John griped.

It’s time to suck it up and face the music. Gotta go down there.

Lori hung onto a line from her boat and dropped down to the houseboat’s deck.

“May I use your phone to call my Uncle Jack? He lives here, on island.” She said.

“Are you talking about Jack Dolan?” John said. “A very strange man. I heard you don’t want to mess with him. His picture’s in the dictionary right there next to the word nightmare.” He paused as Midge elbowed him. “Sorry. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“It’s okay. Dad said he’s a tortured soul who doesn’t fit a familiar mold and it worries people. He’s not really my uncle, but Dad and Mom have always looked out for him. Now there’s only me. I don’t know him too well, because I’ve spent most of my time in New Mexico and he spends his time at our place here in the British Virgin Islands on Virgin Gorda. When I am here, it’s usually to go sailing and he doesn’t like boats.”

Taking the proffered cell phone from John with a shaky hand, Lori punched in her uncle’s number.

I hope this is one of Jack’s good days and he answers the phone.

Two nights ago she had gotten to know him better when he had visited her at home. Feeling downhearted that Matt had died, he told her a little about his past. In answer to her question about why he sometimes spent days at a time in his apartment without venturing outside, he said, “Sometimes I’m just too messed up to be with people. I’m probably half crazy and I’m dangerous. Not a night goes by I don’t have to dope myself up to sleep, only to have horrible dreams anyway. When I feel really over the edge, I know better than to go out.”

“Did you meet Dad in the Marines?”

“No. We met after I was discharged. I’m twenty years older than your dad was. He’d been through some of the same things I had. He and your mom, Sue, were the only two people who ever helped me.”

“You’re from the States. How come you’ve never visited us in New Mexico?” Lori asked.

“When I enlisted, I already had a police record and did some time. I got in trouble when I went back to the states after Vietnam. All the US taught me was to kill. I was considered one thing, a ‘kill’ machine. The government made me promise to not rob, kill or molest and they pay me to stay out of the US. I have no country and I’m glad of it because they’re all so screwed up they make me puke.”

Jack Dolan answered the phone on the tenth ring, sidetracking Lori from her thoughts.

“Uncle Jack? Lori.”

“I thought you’d be gone by now.”

“I know. I was supposed to be, but I had an accident.”

“Are you hurt?”

“No. I’m okay, but I rammed *Yang Soon* into a houseboat. The steering cable broke. Can you come to the marina?”

“Sure. Be there soon. If my car starts.”

“Thanks, Uncle Jack. You can’t miss *Yang Soon* jammed into the houseboat. See you then.”
Lori hung up and handed the phone back to John.

“Thank you. I’d better get my insurance papers. Be right back,” Lori scampered up the line to her boat. Thousands of workouts gave her no feeling of haste. Each motion flowed into the next.

In moments she slipped back down with a packet of papers.

“Where were you headed?” asked Midge.

“I was going to Dominica to scatter Dad’s ashes. He always loved that Caribbean island the most.”

The marina owner, Bob Douglas, stuck his head in the doorway.

“Hello, John, Midge, Lori. We’ll get this mess straightened out in no time. We’ll put a temporary cover over the houseboat’s damaged area after we get *Yang Soon* out of here and back to her own slip. I know Matt had insurance, Lori. It looks like you have the papers there. You want me to take care of this?”

“Yes, please, Bob. I don’t know how to handle it.” Lori’s voice shook as she explained what had happened.

“Okay. You’ll have to sign some papers later. Glad nobody got hurt. Both boats will be fixed soon. Midge and John, you might want to check into a hotel until the repairs are made. Lori, it’ll probably be tomorrow before yours is fixed. I’ll have them touch up the bow, too. Can you get home all right?”

“Sure. My Uncle Jack is coming.”

“How is Jack? Haven’t seen him around for a while.”

“Same old Uncle Jack,” Lori said. She faced John and Midge, “We can take you to a hotel.”

“Thanks, dear, but we’ll probably stick around until the repairmen get here,” Midge said.

“You’ve both been very kind to take this so well. I’m so sorry this happened. Call me if there’s anything I can do.” Lori turned to the marina owner. “Bob, okay if I leave my stuff aboard?”

“Sure, Lori. No problem. I’ll lock it up. Keys in the ignition?”

“Yep. I’ll be down later, or more likely, tomorrow morning.”

Jack, a rugged six-foot-two-inch man with a big frame, stepped onto the houseboat’s deck. Everyone turned when the boat dipped. He looked a little ragged, but he had not been a movie star to begin with.

As Lori walked to greet him, she marveled that the contrast between the two of them was so obvious, like life and death. She had never realized how pale he was, but in the bright sunlight it was easy to see.

Both his face and body appeared somewhat bloated. Nondescript except for his wide-brimmed black hat and black clothes, he limped as he plodded to the doorway. The black outfit set off his white, pony-tailed hair, white mustache and pasty skin. The only thing colorful about Jack was his multihued hatband with a dart shoved in it. She recalled her dad telling her it was a poisoned dart.

Lori glanced down at her flawless, honeyed skin, from her Korean mother, which made her look much darker than she was when she approached him. Having inherited her size from her dad, she stood only three inches shorter than Jack.

“Uncle Jack. Thanks for coming.” She smiled and hugged him. “I’ve sure made a mess of things. John and Midge, this is Jack Dolan.”

Jack gave a small wave and the others nodded.

Lori led Jack from the houseboat to the dock, explaining all that had happened. They climbed into Jack’s dented 1980 Toyota Land Cruiser.

“I don’t know why, but I’m hungry. Can we stop somewhere?” Lori said.

“Sure. How about the No Scum Allowed Saloon. They have good food.”

“Great.”

Jack drove them to the tavern.

Along the way, he pointed out a black Volvo following them. It made every turn he did.

“Lori, you ever seen that car behind us?”

“No. Is it following us?”

“Seems to be.”

The saloon was painted eye-catching colors and sported a thatched roof. A white sign hung at a 45-degree angle beside the door. In black print, it read No Scum Allowed. The establishment originally bore the name Spanish Town Saloon, but for years had been called what the sign said.

The car behind sped past them as Jack parked. Lori couldn’t see through its dark, tinted windows.

Lori and Jack sat at a table in the middle of the main room decorated with fishnets, hundreds of business cards stapled to the walls amidst advertisements for Pusser’s Rum and Red Stripe Beer, and an odd abundance of panties and bras of all sizes and colors hanging from the ceiling. At the bar, three men drank, doubled over with laughter and drank again. Happy hour was a huge success. The tallest of the three moved the hands of the wall clock back and extended Happy Hour a full 15 minutes before his plot was discovered.

Another, wearing a blue polo shirt, khaki shorts, scuffed Topsiders with a blue baseball cap pushed back on his head, acted the part of a confident yachtsman. A large paunch suggested there had been many days like this one; wild partying, drinking with near strangers, swapping lies, letting go.

“Watch those guys,” Jack said. “There’s going to be trouble.”

The yachtsman threw back another double.

“I don’t guess he’ll be standing much longer,” Lori said.

The man flicked his lighter and ignited a mouthful of rum that spewed flames into the air toward the roof. The dry, thatched roof.