

Praise for *Rigged for Murder*

Winner of a 2009 Independent Publisher Award for Best Regional Fiction, and the 2009 ReccasReads Award for Best Mystery/Thriller

“A winning combination of psychological thriller, police procedural, and action adventure. It’s a five-star launch for [LeClair’s] aptly named sea-going series and hopefully a precursor in an armada of others to follow...Tightly written and intricately constructed LeClair’s *Rigged for Murder* is first-class storytelling in a setting so authentic you can hear the ocean’s roar and taste the salt from the sea.”

—Mysterious Reviews

“An engaging New England whodunit...Readers will believe they are sailing on the schooner and waiting out the storm at Granite Island as Jenifer LeClair vividly captures the Maine background...With a strong support cast including the capable crew, the battling passengers, and the eccentric islanders to add depth, fans will enjoy *Rigged for Murder*.”

—Midwest Book Review

“Brie [Beaumont] is smart and competent, and she uses her brain and not her gun...Jenifer LeClair offers another appealing main character in *Rigged for Murder*, first in her Windjammer Series.”

—St. Paul Pioneer Press

“A strong plot, non-stop action, and first-class character development combine to make this an exciting, page-turning adventure novel. Adding to the tension, intrigue and mystery is the meticulous care in researching the details and terminology of sailing, lobstering, and the Maine coastal islands and communities... I have added Jenifer LeClair to my list of ‘must read’

authors and I am eagerly looking forward to the sequel to *Rigged for Murder*.

—Reader Views

"A debut mystery that is so well written you will hunger for more...Take a female cop on leave from the Minneapolis police force, a good looking sea captain, a crew of seasoned sailors, mix in a lyrically drawn sense of place, an approaching storm, a murder, well-developed characters, and superbly good writing, that's Jenifer LeClair. Read this supremely engaging mystery and enjoy the ride."

—Once Upon a Crime Mystery Bookstore

"*Rigged for Murder* is an exciting mystery with a little romance thrown in. The setting for this novel is unique and gives the reader insight into life aboard a sailing ship."

—Armchair Reviews

"The story develops logically, with interesting twists... The setting and the weather are well-handled and provide strong context without obtrusiveness. The characters have depth and movement... LeClair gets the sea and the sailing just right."

—Books 'n' Bytes

"The author did a good job of hiding who the killer was... To me that is the sign of a good writer...I recommend [*Rigged for Murder*] to anyone who likes mysteries and has an interest in sailing...This book is a great combination of the two."

—RebeccasReads

"*Rigged for Murder* is a fast-paced story which rings true both aboard and ashore on island communities. The characters are real, the situations are downright scary, tension is palpable. I'm looking forward to more sailing and better weather aboard the *Maine Wind* in the next book of the series."

—John Foss, master/owner,
Schooner *American Eagle*, Rockland, Maine

DANGER SECTOR

The Windjammer Mystery Series

JENIFER LECLAIR



Conquill Press

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For Craig

Who travels this road with me, ever cheerful, warm, and loving

For your reference, the author has included a glossary of sailing terms in the back of the book.

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“Exaltation is the going
Of an inland soul to sea –
Past the houses, past the headlands,
Into deep Eternity...”

— Emily Dickinson

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Prologue



Ocean and forest filled the artist's cottage that occupied a secluded point on the eastern shore of Sentinel Island. Waves slapped the rocky beach, and beyond the porch a red squirrel chattered and scolded from its perch in a tall spruce tree. Sunlight poured through two roof windows, caressing the honey-hued log walls and burnishing the metal castings and copper sculptures that decorated the artist's great room.

The killer paused a moment and smiled at the tranquility before dragging Amanda's body toward the other end of the room. The socks on her limp feet made a dusty sound against the wide pine floorboards. In the corner a large casting of a ship's prow lay overturned, waiting.

The killer maneuvered the artist's body into the hollow base of the casting. Sweat dampened his chest as he strained under her dead weight. "You should like this, Mandy," he belittled; "you're about to become one with your work. Not to worry, though. I'll be back tonight, and we'll go for a nice ride in your boat."

The killer retrieved a few slats of scrap wood from Amanda's fireplace kindling box. He placed them across the opening, wedging them under the lip of the casting to keep the body in place. Taking a rag from his pocket, he wiped down the inside and lip of the casting. He walked to the backdoor, stepped outside, and retrieved a piece of heavy plastic sheeting and a roll of gray tape he'd hidden behind a bush near the door. He returned

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to the scene, draped the plastic over the base of the casting, and cut it to the shape of the opening. As he worked the tape around the base, the thick plastic distorted Amanda's wide-eyed stare, giving it a Dali-esque twist of horror. Unnerved, the killer's hands began to sweat, and the plastic slipped beneath them. The voice inside his head yammered away, simultaneously berating and cajoling him. *It's taking too long. You have to get out of here. Don't panic, you're almost done. Someone could show up. Calm down. There, see, it's finished.*

The killer stood up and tipped the casting upright. It was easily done with all the weight in the base. Using the rag again, he rubbed down the outside of the cool metal surface and walked over to where Amanda had been sitting, having coffee. He picked the newspaper off the floor, folded it, and tossed it onto the table. He turned slowly in a circle, surveying the room, then moved to the back door and silently slipped out.



Chapter 1



Brie Beaumont shifted on the gray wool blanket. She stretched her arms above her head, laying them on the warm wood of the schooner's deck so the July sun could get at the underside of them. Her long blonde hair lay like an exotic fan on the spruce planking. *A ripe peach of a day—one to make you forget that life is chiefly about supply and demand. It demands and you supply.* Eyes closed behind her sunglasses, she turned the thought in her mind and smiled as it slipped away and drifted lazily down her stream of consciousness.

She turned her head and studied John DuLac. He'd dozed off, lulled by the sun and the motion of the ship at anchor. He was tanned from life at sea, and his dark hair needed a trim. Over the past two months she had come to recognize his presence in her life as a stabilizing force so strong it was almost tangible. The memories that haunted her retreated more and more as the uncomplicated routine of life aboard a sailing ship worked its healing magic.

John shifted as she watched him and, rolling onto his left side, opened his eyes. "Hey, you," he said. "I haven't felt this relaxed since I don't know when."

Brie felt a sudden urge to reach out and touch his face, but restrained herself. The beginnings of romance that had blossomed that night in May, on this very deck, had been put on indefinite hold when she had accepted his offer to become second mate aboard the *Maine Wind*. She had been the one to set

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the boundaries around what their working relationship would be. But the kiss they had shared that night called to her, the memory of it intruding more and more often when he spoke to her, moved past her on deck, sat next to her in the galley at dinner. And now this break in the cruising schedule so they could sail out to Sentinel Island.

Brie hadn't thought much about being along on this junket. After all, she was part of the crew, and she simply assumed John needed his three crew members aboard to sail the *Maine Wind* out to the island. But to her surprise, they'd dropped anchor midday, and John had come up from the galley with a picnic basket and a blanket. When she'd asked about Scott and George, she was told they were eating below deck. Clearly, John hadn't forgotten that kiss either, and the picnic announced his intention that they'd be sharing these next few days as something other than captain and second mate.

Brie knew that normally the summer schedule allowed for no such breaks. The cruising season for the Maine windjammers was short, and the captains made the most of the few months they had. But John had left time in this summer's schedule to help his friend, Ben, do some repairs to an old lighthouse he had inherited on Sentinel Island.

"Does Ben know when we're arriving?" she asked, staring up at the Atlantic sky. The motion of the ship, combined with her unearthly view, gave her a distinct and not unpleasant sense of floating in space and time.

"I didn't give him a definite ETA. He knows better than anyone that we're at the mercy of the prevailing winds. A part of me is eager to get there and see this lighthouse of his..."

"But?"

John propped himself up on his arm and looked at her. "But this is nice too, Detective Beaumont."

Brie pushed her sunglasses up on her head and stared into his unusually brown eyes. "That would be Second Mate Beaumont to you," she said with a smile.

A large cloud passed over the ship, momentarily blocking out the sun and bringing with it a gust of wind that made Brie shiver. John leaned across and drew the blanket over her shoulder. He lingered for a moment above her, the electricity between them so strong that Brie felt a crushing sensation in her chest. She'd already decided there was no way she was not kissing him. A wisp of hair blew across her face; John tucked it behind her ear, and at that unfortunate moment the radio crackled to life.

"Maine Wind, Maine Wind, Maine Wind."

John froze, and the pained look on his face from the moment being broken was so humorously pathetic that Brie reached up and brushed his cheek, chuckling softly.

He rolled over and sprang to his feet, walked past the wheel, and grabbed the radio receiver. "This is the *Maine Wind*—over."

"Maine Wind, this is the Honey Bee. How far out are you?"

"About four hours, Ben. Over."

"There's some weather moving in."

John turned and looked over his shoulder to the south. A dark line of clouds had formed on the horizon. "We'll beat it, Ben. We should be anchoring around six o'clock. Over."

"I'll keep a weather eye out. Don't worry about dinner—I've got it covered."

"Roger that, Ben. Over and out." John turned back to Brie. "We've got to get the sails up and get underway, or that weather will catch us." He helped her pile everything into the picnic basket and rolled up the blanket.

"Thanks for the picnic, John. It was lovely. I'll bring these below." She picked up the basket and blanket and headed down to the galley.

John walked behind her to the galley companionway and called down to the rest of the crew, "Prepare to raise sail."

First Mate Scott Hogan and George Dupopolis, the ship's cook, piled up the companionway ladder, followed by Brie. She

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and George got busy on the forepeak halyard, hauling up sail. Gaff-rigged sailing ships have a second spar at the top of the sail that sits at approximately a 45-degree angle to the mast. The end of this gaff can be lowered to depower the sail without lowering the entire sail. While learning the ropes, Brie had discovered that Captain DuLac often used this procedure when anchoring for brief periods in a sheltered bay, as they had today for lunch. Now she and George were resetting the foresail. Working aboard the *Maine Wind* the past two months, Brie had drawn on every bit of her police conditioning, and her body had taken on a toughness it hadn't seen since her academy days.

Astern of George and Brie, the captain and Scott were resetting the ship's mainsail. Muscles strained as they hauled up the heavy gaff and canvas to rhythmic shouts of. "Heave—heave."

They were anchored in a wide bay, the shape of a giant scallop shell, off one of the many uninhabited islands that dot the Gulf of Maine. Along the shore, a thick stand of spruce flanked a crescent of sandy beach. Brie loved these unspoiled islands. Undeveloped coastline was a rarity, but Maine had managed to preserve the wildness of many of its islands.

Captain DuLac took the wheel, and the rest of the crew went forward to crank up the anchor. The captain steered the *Maine Wind* to starboard for breaking out the anchor. Getting underway in a windjammer without power to raise sails or anchor required serious teamwork. It comforted Brie to know that, in a world where so much was done with a push of a button, there were still jobs that required hands-on strength and skill.

They cleared the bay and set a southwest heading. John held the schooner on a port tack in the freshening twenty-knot breeze blowing straight out of the south. George went aft to coil the halyards, and Scott and Brie made their way out onto the netting beneath the bowsprit to unlash the jib. As the *Maine Wind* moved off the island, the clean smell of salt air engulfed Brie. She always liked leaving an anchorage and that first blast of sea air hitting her senses. To her it was the smell of freedom.

The downside of never marrying or owning a house or a pet had been loneliness. The upside had been freedom, and now that freedom was all Brie felt she truly possessed.

In April she had left her job as homicide detective with the Minneapolis Police Department. A little over a year before that she had been shot, and her partner Phil had been killed in the line of duty. After a year of physical and psychological struggles, Brie had taken a leave from the force and come to Maine, where her paternal grandmother still lived. Left behind was the analytical world of the homicide detective, where she had lived day to day and year to year, her job serving up one grotesque puzzle after another, many of them with key pieces missing. Often, she had fallen asleep haunted by the images of grisly crime scenes. And though she'd been told years ago that this reaction would go away, it never fully had. And then she had been shot. On that spring night when the world was just beginning to wake up and smell of hope, she'd been taken down by the same bullet that had killed Phil. All the years of hard work, all that she had accomplished, crumbled around her.

Over a year's time her body had slowly healed but her psyche hadn't. Finally, she'd run away—taken the leave she had been offered and gotten on a plane east the same day. But even here in Maine, a place she had always loved, Brie had felt adrift, outside of herself. During the last two months aboard the *Maine Wind*, though, she had reclaimed parts of herself—parts she was sure had died, along with Phil, on that tragic night in north Minneapolis. She almost felt as if her existence were now divided into two separate lives, her before-the-shooting-life and her after-the-shooting-life, as if everything moved from that zero point either backward or forward in time.

Out on the bowsprit, they had finished untying the lace lines. She and Scott moved back to the deck and raised the jib and staysail. Through an odd series of events in May, Brie had become second mate on the *Maine Wind*, which suited her fine. Not only was she an experienced sailor, but for now, anyway,

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she had no desire to return home. She wanted to live for awhile with no sense of where the next day would bring her—with little more to occupy her mind than wondering if a squall would blow up or if porpoises might race off their bow that day.

Aboard ship life was simple. She kept in her possession only what fit in her sea bag at the foot of her berth. She followed the captain's orders. She ate whatever George cooked and, at night, she fell into bed with the kind of mindless exhaustion that resulted from a working life at sea. There was a lot to be said for that kind of simplicity—where life was reduced to its lowest common denominator. There was a lot to be said for escaping the mind-numbing complexity of modern life. For Brie it had been like taking up the old dust-laden rugs of routine and getting down to the bare boards of her life. And she had finally begun to heal.

But, while the flashbacks of that fateful night had become less frequent since encountering John DuLac and coming aboard the *Maine Wind*, they hadn't gone away. Maybe they never would. Occasionally, one would open a jagged tear in her being with such abruptness it took her breath away. Then she'd be plummeted back into that old familiar darkness and anxiety—symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, as the psychologist had referred to it.

Brie turned and watched John at the wheel. Their eyes met for a few seconds, and the beginning of a smile warmed his handsome face. She glanced around the deck, making sure everything was shipshape, before heading for her favorite spot. Now that they were a ways off the island, they had picked up speed. The wind had increased to twenty-three knots, and they were slicing along at twelve to thirteen knots—a speed that felt like flying under sail. Beating upwind, they were heeled enough to be taking seas through the starboard scuppers. The salt water surged in, rolled aft along the wood-planked deck and drained out the scuppers at the back of the ship.

Brie stepped over the gunwale, and with the agility of a tightrope walker made her way toward the end of the bowsprit. The sea spread out before her, a heartbreaking shade of blue. The big wooden spar extended a good fifteen feet beyond the bow of the ship. Known as widow-makers in the old days, it was not uncommon for mariners to fall from this part of the rigging, while furling sail, and be lost in heavy seas. At the end of the bowsprit, Brie turned and leaned against the pulpit. Below her the sea streamed by, creating the effect that it, and not the ship, was in motion. She watched the water foaming away from the ship's bow and took in the beauty of the *Maine Wind* from this vantage point. She had fallen in love with the fine old vessel. And the man sailing her? Well, that was a story yet to unfold.

Brie turned back around and lowered herself onto the tiny platform at the end of the bowsprit. Straddling the small piece of wood, she dangled her legs over the water flying by below her. The sea was a wondrous thing. On its best days it placed a calm around the heart like a giant, undulating tranquilizer. On its worst days it put the fear of God into you. All illusions of control tended to dissolve in its vast presence. For Brie, who felt she had lost control of her life fifteen months ago, surrender to the sea and the life one lived upon it had come as a surprising relief. The contradictory nature of the sea intrigued her. It was a place of constant change but no change; a place of great emptiness or fullness, depending on one's point of view; the great laboratory of life, with no permanent structure to house it. There was a lot of thinking room out here.

"Stand by to come about!"

The captain's voice roused Brie from her thoughts. She hopped up, threaded her way back along the bowsprit, and climbed over the gunwale. They had been on a southwest heading since lunch, and it was time to change course. The main and foresails would take care of themselves, but she and Scott would need to reset the jib. They took their places in the bow, Scott to port and Brie to starboard, to await the captain's order.

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“Ready about,” he called.

“Ready,” came their reply.

“Helm’s alee.” Stepping to the side of the ship’s wheel, the captain spun it hard, pulling the wooden spokes hand over hand. It took several rotations of the big wheel before the *Maine Wind* began to head upwind. When the ship was dead into the wind, Brie released the starboard jib sheet and moved across to the port bow to help haul in the sail and make it off. Scott’s short russet-colored hair glowed in the sun as he worked the line around the belaying pin in a figure eight. At the captain’s order they moved aft to sweat the foresheet—a process used to trim sail, allowing the *Maine Wind* to perform at peak efficiency. Scott hopped on the top of the cabin and grabbed the sturdy line that controlled the foresail. Tugging on it, he rocked back and forth to create slack in the line, which Brie tightened around the pin.

Brie had formed quite a friendship with Scott Hogan since her arrival on board in May. Scott was mature for twenty-five, so it was easy for Brie to forget that he was eleven years her junior. He came from a wealthy medical family in Providence, Rhode Island, and displayed a kind of deportment rare in young men of his age. At eighteen he’d jumped the family ship, which had him bound for Harvard. Like Brie, he had come to Maine, where he had met John DuLac and shipped out on the *Maine Wind*. She was sure this was part of the reason there was such a vibe between her and Scott. During their past two months of crewing together, they had become fast friends. She had learned that over the past seven years Scott had spent his time in the off-season working at John’s boat repair yard and attending the University of Maine, where he had acquired degrees in music and math. Now, when he came back to land in October, he tutored kids in math and gave violin and guitar lessons.

“So, Brie, looks like we’re going to spend a few days up to our elbows in paint and plaster dust.” Scott’s lively green eyes twinkled in the sunlight as he sat down on the cabin top next to her and leaned against the foremast.

"I'm looking forward to meeting Ben. John's talked about him so much I feel like I already know him."

"I felt that same way before I met him. But he took me a bit by surprise. He was sterner than I'd expected."

"Really? That *is* a surprise. From the way John talks about him, I've been expecting someone more Kris Kringlish."

"Don't get me wrong. It's clear he loves John like a son. He's just reserved about it. He was a career Navy man, you know. Maybe that's why he comes across the way he does."

"Well, I'm glad you told me. Forewarned is forearmed."

"I think we're each gonna *need* four arms the next few days to get everything done that John's talking about."

"He hasn't really filled me in."

"Well, there's talk of tearing out a couple walls in the keeper's house to do some plumbing and wiring work. And I guess the roof has some issues too."

"Doesn't sound like we'll be getting in a lot of hammock time."

"I wouldn't bank on it if I were you. I don't mind, though. John's done an awful lot for me over the years."

"Hey, Brie," John called forward. "You want to come back and take the helm for a bit?"

"Sure!" Brie hopped down off the cabin and headed aft. On regular cruises she didn't get this chance often. If John had to leave the wheel, Scott usually took over. She guessed John wanted to spend a little time with her, but she also knew that *he* knew how much she loved sailing the *Maine Wind*.

"I need to go below and pull a chart," he said as she approached.

Brie stepped behind the wheel and took note of their heading on the compass. "Take your time, John. I've been hoping to take a turn at the wheel."

"All you have to do is ask, Brie. I'm always happy to let you sail."

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She watched as John went down the companionway in front of the wheel and, at the foot of the ladder, ducked into his cabin on the port side of the ship. She pictured the cabin in her mind's eye. The space was small but functional. The double berth was tucked partially under the deck overhead. To the left of the door sat a chart table, and beneath it, a rack with small, square pigeonholes held rolled-up charts. More long cylindrical charts were stored on a shallow rack suspended from the ceiling of the cabin. A small bookcase next to the chart table held a collection of sea literature. A wood chair in front of the chart table was bolted to the floor. John would have pulled a chart and sat down at the table to spread it out.

She settled in behind the wheel, holding the schooner on its southeasterly heading. Taking the helm of the *Maine Wind* thrilled her. In all her years of sailing, she'd never experienced anything like it. Up until the time her father had died, her family had owned a large cruising sailboat they'd kept on Lake Superior. *Edna Mae* was a trim craft, and they'd tasted many adventures aboard her. But the *Maine Wind*, at 90 feet and carrying 4500 square feet of sail, was a true sailing ship. Her rich history lived in her; every polished spar and plank of decking had a tale to tell. The ship was like a living thing with a heart and pulse—each creak of timber and groan of rigging an inhalation and exhalation. To sail such a ship was to become one with it, to feel its power with each movement and vibration of the wheel, to harness and command an awesome force of nature. For Brie, sailing the *Maine Wind* embodied joy.

She surveyed the horizon line to the south, where a widening band of charcoal smudged the sky. Reaching into the cuddy across from the wheel, she pressed the "WX" button on the radio to hear the NOAA coastal weather forecast. The forecast was for thunderstorms and increasing wind in the midcoast region by later that night. She hoped the bad weather would blow through overnight. John had told her Sentinel Island had some pretty spots. She was hoping to explore the island tomorrow,

demolition schedule allowing, and break in her new hiking boots.

Within ten minutes John climbed back up the ladder, chart in hand, to join her on deck. "I ran a plot, and it looks like we're on schedule to arrive at the island around six o'clock."

"I just tuned in the weather. They're saying the front won't arrive until tonight."

"Great. I hope it holds off at least till we anchor and get up to the lighthouse."

John sat down on the starboard side locker and leaned back against the rail, watching Brie steer the ship. She had a typical helmsman's stance, with feet apart for balance on the sloping deck. Her clear blue eyes flashed with pleasure as she held the wheel, and her long hair blew out behind her like pale ribbons of silk. She wore a plain white tee shirt and loose-fitting cargo khakis. The crew preferred these because they allowed for freedom of movement when working on deck or up in the rigging, and also because they dried more quickly than denim, when wet. A leather sheath on Brie's belt held a rigging knife that all sailors wore when on deck. A long, braided lanyard attached the knife itself to her belt so it couldn't be dropped and lost. The wind played with her clothing, so occasionally John caught the outline of her small breasts or her trim waist and hips.

He liked watching her sail the ship. It seemed odd, but there was an intimacy about it. The *Maine Wind* was his life and his home six months out of every year. And here she was, temporarily in control of it. Seeing her there at the wheel—master of ship and elements—stirred something in him.

She was a good sailor, too—every bit as confident and steady at the helm as Scott. That didn't surprise him a bit. He knew what Brie was made of. He'd seen what lay beneath the slim body and shy demeanor. While he'd held back from physi-

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cal contact with her the past two months, his feelings for her had only deepened as he watched her work with the crew and passengers aboard ship. His real respect for her, though, stemmed from the incident at Granite Island back in May, when they were marooned during the gale. There he had watched the homicide detective at work—seen her strength, both mental and physical. He had also watched her grapple with her inner demons. She was courageous. He'd fallen in love with that, and with her.

Brie glanced over at him, feeling uncomfortable, knowing his eyes were on her. John stood up and moved to the side of the wheel. He unrolled the chart and slipped it under two bungee cords that held it in place on the cabin top.

"So, has Ben made any friends on the island?" Brie asked.

"He's only been out there since April, and he's bit reclusive. According to him, there's not much at that end of the island except for the lighthouse. There is one other cabin out there that's owned by an artist. He's mentioned her a few times, so I guess they've gotten acquainted."

"Hmmm, do you think there's any romance involved?" The minute she'd asked the question, she wished she could call it back. It seemed like prying. She knew Ben had lost his wife to cancer a few years ago, and all of a sudden the comment struck her as inappropriate. She wrote it off to John's proximity, and also to the fact that romance had been on her mind since lunch.

John smiled. "I think they're just friends. At least so far. You never know what might develop, though."

As he said this, he stepped over and stood behind her at the wheel. Actually, a little too close for Brie's comfort. She felt her stomach muscles tighten, and the blood seemed to stop flowing to her head. She noticed Scott had fallen asleep on the cabin top near the foremast, and George was nowhere to be seen. *Oh dear*, she thought. John stepped forward so their bodies were touching and reached around, placing his hands over hers on the

wheel. After a brief inner struggle, she decided to go with it. Leaning into him, she drew in a deep breath that, unintended, slipped out as a sigh.

"It's good for me too," John said into her ear.

Brie felt color wash across her face. Why did he do this to her—reduce her to something like a driveling adolescent? The last time she could remember feeling this dopey about a guy was in college, and that was a long time ago. It was an absolute puzzle to her, and she couldn't help wondering if it had something to do with being shot. *Oh, snap out of it, Brie, and quit pretending you don't like this. And by the way, quit overanalyzing. This isn't a crime scene—it's simple biology. Just let yourself go.*

She let time and thought slip away till nothing but the sensory experience remained—the feel of the wind, the feel of the ship, the feel of John. She didn't know how long they stayed like that, leaning into each other, steering the ship, but when John stepped away, she actually experienced a moment of disorientation. Then she noticed George emerging from the galley companionway. John had reacted to seeing him and moved away from her. Possibly he didn't want George to intrude on the moment, or maybe he didn't want to make *her* feel uncomfortable. Mainly, though, Brie knew that John chose to maintain a certain decorum aboard ship when they were under sail.

George walked aft.

"Hey, George, it's beautiful up here. You should come topside and enjoy," Brie said. She knew George was pretty much married to his galley, though, where he spent endless hours concocting the best meals in the windjammer fleet.

"I was wondering if I need to start some dinner prep, Captain?"

"No need, George. We had a call over the radio from Ben. He said he's got dinner covered."

"Oh," he said, momentarily flustered. He nodded his head seriously, as if he'd just been told the lettuce was bad. "Well, then, I guess I'll just hang out on deck and catch the sailing." He

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ran a hand through his curly black hair, pulled a ball cap from his back pocket, and put it on.

Brie watched him walk forward, climb onto the cabin top and lay back in the sun. She supposed he already had the dinner plan thoroughly in hand. George came from several generations of Greek restaurateurs in New York City. She knew that letting someone else prepare the food felt as unnatural to him as breathing underwater.

"So, tell me, John," she said, turning to him, "was Ben surprised when he inherited this lighthouse from his friend Harold?"

"Surprised would be an understatement. It wasn't so much the inheriting part. Harold McCann had no family still alive, and Ben was pretty much his only close friend. But Harold's death really shocked him. Harold was only sixty-five, and in peak condition. According to Ben, he ran three miles a day on the island trails and ate a vegetarian diet."

"So how did he die?" It was a morbid question, but one that came as second nature to Brie.

"He fell down the lighthouse stairs. Died from the head trauma. It bothered Ben, Harold being a runner and all, and obviously sure-footed. Ben even talked to the coroner, but there was nothing in the autopsy to raise any questions. I guess it had been raining the night he fell. He'd gone up to the top of the light to watch the storm. His shoes would have been wet. The coroner said that most likely led to the fall."

"So, who found him?"

"It was the artist—Amanda's her name, I think. She came over the following morning because she'd noticed the lights on in the keeper's house all night. Apparently she can see his lights from her place at night."

"How long had Harold lived at the lighthouse?"

"Not very long. About a year, I think. He died last year in the spring."

“Hmmm,” was all Brie had to say. But her detective mind was busily turning over the details of John’s story and wondering if a little more digging might not be called for.

