

Chapter 35 "Soon Leave Come"

Standing in the sand stimulated me beyond my imagining, feeling the adrenaline moving through my body made my neck hairs stand. A perfect night to leave, no moon with calm waters. Now we just needed Kenny to be out there on the sea. Along the horizon, there was nothing but the lights of a few big freighters' miles offshore. It was no surprise not to see the sailboat we planned to anchor a mile out with no lights.

We had twelve minutes before pushing off, so I instructed Jerry to load the bundles in the wooden fishing boat. It was about eighteen feet long and powered by a Johnson 50 horsepower outboard motor. It was old but solid with a wide beam and the smell of dead fish all over it. I took out the radio and compass and started to instruct Ba and the boatman on how we would find the sailboat. After a few minutes I realized it was like talking to drunken Chinamen, they did not get it for a second. The best I could do was hope for the best. I made Jerry, who could talk with the Ja accent, repeat repeatedly what we are doing. Slowly he told them "first we lined up the compass with the pass through the reef; next, we radio Kenny, and he would radio back, after that he flashes the lights three times and that's when we shove off." Simple enough right! At midnight while standing in the fishing boat I radioed Kenny, "one" he radioed back "two," looking out at the Caribbean both Jerry and I pointed out the flashing lights to our fishermen. They confirmed they could see the lights. Hugging both Jerry and Ba, I handed Ba all my remaining Jamaican money, minus what I was paying the fishermen, then we departed. We took off, but not at all the way I wanted. The crazy bastards floored the boat but not in line with our carefully planned compass reading. Frantically waving for them to slow down did nothing to stop them from the manic exodus. The old Johnson engine was so loud that they could not hear a word I was screaming, my hand signal did nothing, no stopping them. It sounded like four old lawn mowers without mufflers flying across the water. Within a minute we crashed right into the reef. It was a miracle the boat did not bust to pieces. My shoulder took a big gash and bruise when the sudden stop threw me onto the floor of the vessel. Half of the boat ended up on the top of the reef.

By pushing off with two paddles and putting the engine in reverse, we manage to get off after five minutes. We were making a hell of a lot of noise, which was making me fucking nuts. Sound travels great distances on water. Once freed the driver started probing the reef

for an opening by backing up and running forward into the reef hoping he would find an opening. More fucking noise and stupidity like out of an insane asylum. Running into the reef!? Finally getting them to stop I pointed to the area where I knew the reef opening was. Standing on the bow with one of the paddles I poked at the reef until we found the opening. We slowly worked our way through it. With a moment of calm, and a little remorse from my floating partners about crashing, we regrouped. I asked them to go slow and to let me radio Kenny again to spot the lights. There was no answer. He must have turned the radio off. There was no way to be sure where he was at this point, but I had a strong hunch. Pleading with them to go ahead slowly in the direction we saw the lights turned out to be useless once again. Using, every gesture and sign language my body could produce to reinforce my message did no good at all. Once again, they floored the throttle and headed straight out to sea. Letting it go for a while with the hope we just might run close enough to the sailboat to see it. The sailboat's hull was black ½ inch steel so finding it was not going to be easy without a direct sight and a light.

Between the motor roaring and the wind blowing in my ears, there was no way to hear anything. In the middle of jetting out to who knew where at this very intense moment, the younger Rasta was trying to talk to me and kept pointing at my Nike sneakers. I knew this because his mouth was moving and, he looked a little bullish doing it. Meanwhile the driver is drilled on moving in a straight line as fast as he can. While all this is going on the only thing I wanted was to slow down and look for a sign of the sailboat. There was a moment that I did not know whether to laugh or get into a fight. Moving right up to my face the younger Rasta started yelling that he wanted my sneakers. Displaying a lot of anger, he was animated about it. Like they were his shoes to have. It felt like a street mugging at high sea. Thinking this man would kill me for the sneakers I was getting my mind ready for some serious shit. Then there was the pot and cash on board. Never have I felt so close to getting murdered than in that moment. The situation was so loopy and surreal it really pissed me off. Here we go. All the planning and diligence in the world and you end up with two crazy stoned Rasta's out in the Caribbean carrying 380 pounds of pot. Proof life is like a box of chocolates. The young one was so persistent about the shoes I just said yes to defuse the confrontation. Wrong place, wrong time but what the fuck! But that did not end. Next, he wanted my windbreaker and kept yelling at me about that. All I wanted was to find Kenny,

by now we were at least three miles past Kenny and one short fuse from a fistfight at sea. Kenny was a dead accurate navigator, and if we planned for a mile, he was a mile out, period.

Instead of calm, it was anger and confusion that was happening to me. Pissed to the point of near blind rage I slammed the oars on the deck of the boat and turned the engine off. It stopped dead and shocked both, and that was the intention. Grabbing the old Rasta, I told him not to move the fucking boat, or I'd turn it into a dinghy. Hollering "where the fuck are you going" my fuming anger worked to scare him. Now I am feeling bad - after all, this is a seventy-year-old fisherman. He pointed to one of the ships out on the horizon. Good God he never understood our instructions, the whole time he was thinking we were connecting with the ship 10 miles out. Frustrated and breaking our rule I just radioed to Kenny to pick up the radio. He did, and I told him to turn on the lights and leave them on. Sure enough, we passed him by at least a mile or two. The Rastas saw the lights and had a wake-up moment. The old man even hung his head a bit. We turned around, and ten minutes later we tied up to the Kona. We loaded the pot onto the deck with Ricky, a friend from Miami who had come along to help Kenny sail down. We knew him, a 19-year-old aspiring musician, a solid guy and the kind you want on board. He is into adventures with a capital A. We had a lot of fun in Miami, especially on the waters. As for my sneakers, I threw them at the young Rasta after paying the old man. Rejoicing at succeeding without drowning I dropped the windbreaker into the fishing boat just before they took off. It is so easy for me to forgive. Only a few minutes before I wanted to push him overboard. Now we only had 1500 miles of water between us and the west coast of Florida. My recollection was it was 12:43 am when we set sail. The first thing I did was burn a fat joint and took off all my clothing, I was naked again with the Caribbean air rushing across me as we set sail. It was a huge relief to see the lights of Jamaica fade away. Now for a 900-mile pass across the open blue Caribbean to the Yucatan pass.