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The Crossing

It wasn't a boat I normally take. In fact, I've never taken the 6:30 a.m. from the Cape to Nantucket. It's a bit early for me, though I haven't been to bed yet. I linger too long at a casino chasing two hundred bucks. It's two days out from the summer solstice—the middle of the night is now dawn. I teeter between going to sleep and staying up. That's when I decide to squander one of my nine-life passes and make the two hour drive, well past the speed limit, to catch the first ferry home.

It's a packed vessel. The windows are fogged with morning breath. Thankfully it only takes an hour to cross. Many of the wealthy island residents travel by air. Back a few centuries, everyone traveled by sea. Only now, the descendants who sailed the Mayflower arrive in Gulfstreams. If your ancestry sailed into Ellis Island, chances are, you're still on a boat. The majority of passengers are men in the building trade along with a few tourists.

As I make my way toward the few available seats, the distinguished captain stops me. He's blocking off the back section. "We have a 'celebrity' coming onboard." My shameless seductive smile suggests he should introduce me. Then he qualifies, "Well, not really a celebrity—it's the trial folks. They couldn't fly to the island this morning because of the fog." I freak, yet manage to pull off a nonchalant nod. A few trips around the oversold boat and it's clear I'm on the losing end of musical chairs. I wouldn't be in this panic if the island had its own jailhouse. The game ends two rows up from where I started. While plunking down, I peripherally witness the grand entrance of my former shackled-up-for-one-summer-a-decade-ago-secret boyfriend, chained at the wrists and ankles. What are the chances? I could have used these odds at the casino last night.

Steering clear of media fascination about the murder hasn't been easy. The frenzy even found its way to me when journalists uncovered a summer stock stint from ten years ago. I directed him in a show, one, ironically, with macabre undertones. Several inquiries were left on my voice mail. Of course they didn't know about our personal liaison—

even more reason not to return calls. A reporter from a celebrity magazine conducted her interrogation in a phone message. “Was he difficult to work with?” *No.* “Did he exhibit bizarre behavior?” *No.* “Did he ever get enraged?” *No.* “Did you ever suspect?” *No.* “Are you surprised?” *Yes, about the public’s salacious appetite.*

As we pull away from the slip, my curiosity gets the better of me. There he is, neatly groomed in a dark tailored suit surrounded by an entourage of heavily armed law enforcement and tasseled loafer lawyers. He looks pretty good for being locked up for two years while awaiting trial. Not like some prisoners denied access to their vanity products. He still holds the essence of a privileged background. Do I say *hello*? Not sure what the social protocol is for this one.

Better stay out of it. He’s considered psychotic. It’s the only pitch his defense has, being the physical evidence is so conclusive. In a way, I feel sorry for him, for the person I once knew, for what he made of his life. I keep telling myself, it’s crazy to even consider sympathy given the murder was brutal, hideous, horrific...yet, condoned and awarded in entertainment.

I realize feeling badly for someone who committed a real-life, heinous act is poor form. Maybe I can because my loved ones have never been violated. Still, I’m not about to don a habit and become the next Sister Helen Prejean. Any remorse quickly evaporates whenever encountering the victim’s family. In those moments, I feel awful for having known the guy and worse, having liked him. It’s then that I send a blessing their way.

I haven’t had my coffee yet. I do a tire training maneuver between big tan boots, careful not to lose my sea legs in the course of a pitch. In my effort to avoid landing in a lap, it feels like I’m imitating the shackled gait of our *celebrity*. The concession counter lines me up in perfect view with the detainee. I order my coffee with extra cream—might as well propagate the colony of teeth fuzz—and furtively glance his way. He appears serene, calmly fixated on the fog shrouded Sound, as though taking in his last views of the outside world. I study him until he feels a presence and turns my way. It would have been the perfect moment to

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give him a nod. Instead I avert my eyes until my coffee is delivered. In my imagination, he feels embarrassed. While I, on the other hand, fall prey to the running-into-the-old boyfriend-how-do-I-look concern. I think I looked pretty damn good for being up all night.

When I return to my seat, the man next to me is reading about the trial in the local newspaper, not putting together the perpetrator is ten feet behind him. A rugged builder approaches, straddles my chair, bends down, nose to nose, and indicates, *there he is, the murderer*. I'm not sure who my anonymous carpenter is more aroused by, me or the presence of notoriety—hopefully not a combination. I press my head back until I feel the steal shaft beneath the headrest. He smirks and withdraws.

I wipe a porthole vista on the clouded window and peer out. It's the exact time of year we hooked up. I never would have come up with this rendezvous scenario ten years later. I ran into him only one other time—a month preceding his rise to infamy. I was in the balcony at a concert sitting on the floor. Someone was standing in front of me. My head traveled up the six-foot frame. He looked exactly how I remembered. We shared a laugh and then he scooped me up and gave me a warm and friendly embrace. He pointed to an attractive woman sitting nearby. It meant he had to get back. I nodded yes.

We met at the theatre. I was management, he an intern. He put his nose up to communal digs, so I took him in. I suggested he not mention our living arrangement to anyone else. Now there's a decision that paid off. He was twelve years my junior. I used to think our harmony was born out of extremes, but in reality, we were equally dedicated to our cause. I was devoutly macrobiotic, he was a full-fledged alcoholic.

When not at the theatre, we would hang out at the beach or drive to secluded spots on the island, listen to Tom Waits and have heart to hearts. He often spoke fondly of the Jesuits from whom he received his early education. As with most impressionable youth, it was a lifestyle to be considered. By the time all the history had been divulged, the season faded, along with his attention. I was bummed...until the onset of winter started feeling cozy with somebody even taller.

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As the boat glides towards the wooden dock, I stay seated while his posse disembarks. Special arrangements have been made for their port-side exit. As they clear the steel ramp, I observe him coordinating ankle chains and wrist manacles. During his freedom days, he fantasized about handcuffs on a few occasions. It wasn't for me, but it just goes to prove the old adage, be careful what you wish for.

I overhear a conversation that today is the closing arguments. Since I'm a betting woman, I would put my money on never running into him again. There's a long line of people waiting to make the thirty-mile crossing. It looks like a scene out of antiquity, only the clothes are all wrong and the crowd should be jeering instead of the silent scornful stares. I continue to watch as he's paraded before the onlookers. It's then that I have the most bizarre thought, either that, or sleep depravity. He's heading toward his destiny—to live out an ascetic life—imprinted from his early education. It sure gives new meaning to the perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

As I make my way past the stream of embarking passengers, I'm left with regret I didn't take that moment to acknowledge him, just a simple nod to let him know that I still believe in his humanity. But where I come from, we don't do that. Hailing a taxi at the end of the wharf, I decide to go home and sleep a few hours before heading to the theatre where I'll feel more comfortable in the world of make believe.