



DEATH ON A
SHETLAND ISLE

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CHAPTER ONE

Wednesday 28th July, Kristiansand

Low water 05.12, BST + 1 (0.02m)

High water 11.31 (0.26m)

Low water 17.58 (0.01m)

High water 00.19 (0.026m)

Moonrise 00.51; sunrise 05.14; moonset 16.38; sunset 22.08

Crescent moon

Cat's pre-leaving vet visit went as I expected. He lashed his tail from the moment of setting paw in the surgery, crouched sulkily on the table with me holding his harness in a vice-like grip, and greeted the thermometer with an indignant hiss. After it, I took him to our favourite café, where we shared the swirled cream on a cup of drinking chocolate, and he smoothed his rumpled fur, tail still twitching from time to time. Then we strolled down to the grass by the marina, where I could let him

off his lead to scamper around the Shetland pony statues.

It was a bonny morning, with fluffy cumulus on the horizon promising a sea breeze to set us on our way later. The promenade was quiet, with only a couple of tourists strolling along the marina path: a fair woman in one of those puffed jackets, powder blue, her hand through the arm of the man beside her. Her head blocked my view of his face, but there was something urgent about the tension of her shoulders, the way her face turned to his.

As I watched, she shook her head violently and shoved him away from her onto the path leading to the old fish market, then headed for the street at an easy jog. I watched her go, intrigued. Maybe they hadn't been tourists; maybe she was making sure he went for a job interview, or a dentist appointment. Maybe she was his mistress, and he was off to confront his wife . . . I shut off the speculation, and clipped on Cat's lead to saunter back to our ship.

Kristiansand was *Sørlandet's* home port. She had her own berth before the ochre-coloured Customs House, where her three masts reached up into the summer sky, and her bowsprit with the gold scrolling stretched towards the elegant tenements of downtown Kristiansand. The sight of her filled my heart with pride. I still couldn't believe my luck: Cass Lynch, teenage runaway, sailing vagabond, with two stripes on the shoulder of her navy jersey, second mate of the world's oldest square-rigged ship.

I paused at the foot of the gangplank to unclip Cat, and ran straight into Captain Sigurd. There was always something to take the gilt off the gingerbread. Captain Sigurd was an excellent seaman, and I'd trust him with my life in maritime matters, but he was a stickler of the deepest dye. Officers wore their caps at all times outside and carried them under their arm to the captain's

dining room, where we ate in a glory of red velvet and portraits of King Olav and Queen Sonja.

In the stress of taking Cat to the vet I'd forgotten my cap. I straightened up quickly and stood to attention, my hand going smartly up to my eyebrow as he passed me. He took two steps on shore, then paused to look round. 'Your cap, Ms Lynch?'

Nothing to be done. 'Sorry, sir.'

'Remember that everything you do reflects on your ship.' His blue eyes met mine, totally serious, then moved along *Sorlander's* swan-white hull. 'You are letting her down.'

I kept my hand up. 'Yes, sir.'

'Don't forget again.' He turned away and strode off. I let the salute drop and followed Cat aboard.

There was a little knot of my fellow-crew gathered at the far side of the deck: my friend Agnetha, recently promoted to first officer, Sadie, the medical officer, and Mona, one of my ABs. I went over to join them.

'Tut, tut,' Agnetha said. 'Consider yourself rebuked, Ms Lynch.'

'He didn't have to worry about whether Cat was going to bite the vet again,' I retorted.

'Did he?'

'A close-run thing, when the thermometer went in.'

Agnetha wrinkled her nose. 'Well, never mind our esteemed captain. We're drawing lots here.'

'What for?'

She rolled her blue eyes, laughing, and linked her arm through mine. 'You don't get to join in. You're spoken for.' Her friendly tone warmed me. There had been a distance between us since the events of our voyage to Belfast, and I still hadn't dared ask what she'd finally decided about her pregnancy, whether to keep the baby or not. I had the Catholic stance on abortion, and though I

hadn't preached it, just knowing how I felt had made her defensive. I smiled back at her, and repeated my question. 'What are we drawing lots for?'

'The new third mate.'

My brain caught up at last. He was to arrive this morning. 'Rafael Martin. Spanish.'

'Too young for me,' Sadie sighed. 'Early thirties.' She brightened. 'He might like older women.'

'Or be turned on by the uniform of a superior officer,' Agnetha agreed.

'More likely he'll slum it with the galley girls,' Mona said resignedly.

'Tall, dark, cheekbones to die for.' Agnetha's chin tilted backwards over her shoulder. 'Take a look.'

I wasn't turning to stare. 'I can wait.'

'What it is to have a man of your own!' Agnetha mocked. 'Doesn't stop you window-shopping.'

'More to the point, does he look as if he knows what he's doing?' I grinned. 'Or didn't you even consider his seamanship qualities?'

Agnetha wrinkled her nose at me. 'You can stop being so lofty. He's going over to talk to Cat.'

'A point in his favour,' I conceded.

Cat had headed straight for his favourite post on the afterdeck, the raised area at the back end of the ship where the officers gathered once trainees were aboard. There was a bench by the navigation hut where he sat and surveyed the harbour, washed his white paws, and looked down on cats from lesser ships.

I turned. Rafael Martin was tall and slim, with a mop of unruly curls. He was bending down to extend a hand, which Cat sniffed warily. Then he straightened, and turned, and the familiarity of the movement made me catch my breath. His face was towards us

now. My heart gave a great kick and began hammering so crazily that I wondered Agnetha couldn't hear it.

I was looking at a dead man – the man I'd killed eleven years ago halfway across the Atlantic.

My first thought was a sudden rush of love. The guilt had swamped out how much I'd loved him. I looked at him and felt it flood back. I'd never thought I'd see that face again this side of heaven: those upward-tilted eyebrows above slanted sea-grey eyes, the high cheekbones, the long nose, the mobile mouth that could go from laughter to curses and back in the blink of an eye; the stubborn chin, half hidden now under a stubble beard.

He was beginning to smile at us, the charming smile he used on strange women. The breath caught in my throat. 'See?' Agnetha murmured in my ear.

'A charmer,' I muttered. *Your voice gives you away*, my policeman lover, Gavin, told me. I took a deep breath and tried to persuade myself I was wrong. Some extraordinary resemblance. It had to be. At the same time my brain was reckoning up impossible scenarios. I'd thrown out the lifebelt as soon as he'd gone over. Suppose he'd grabbed it, been swept away by the waves . . . suppose another boat had come along, and picked him up . . . suppose . . . suppose . . .

He came down the steps with that same easy stride. He was right beside me. I tried to steady my breathing. His eyes met mine as if we were strangers. 'You're Cass, right?'

It was Alain's voice, velvety-brown, like pouring Guinness, but now he spoke English with an odd Spanish-American accent. He held out his hand, and I shook it, the world whirling around me. Our hands fitted together as they always had. 'Glad to know you. That's a fine cat – a pedigree one?'

'A mog,' I said. My voice was astonishingly steady. 'He likes being the highest-ranking cat in the harbour.'

‘Land cats always pretend they live in the grandest house in the street,’ he agreed. His eyes just touched the bullet scar running across my right cheek, and moved back to mine. ‘You’re all making me feel very welcome aboard.’

‘We’re glad to get a full crew again,’ I managed. I leant back against the rail, putting a metre between us. It was Alain, back from the dead, looking at me as if he’d never known me, as if we’d never lived aboard *Marielle*, never loved and fought and made up, never dreamt of sailing the world together. It wasn’t possible he didn’t know me. Why he was pretending to be Spanish I didn’t yet know, but presumably he’d explain . . . unless he’d decided that explanations would only lead to recriminations, and the past was best forgotten. Rafael Martin. I had to remember to call him Rafael.

He leant beside me, and smiled round at the others. ‘Now, warn me about the captain. What’re his particular bugbears?’

‘I’d better go and get my cap,’ I said, and shoved myself from the rail so hard that I almost stumbled. *Damn*. I wanted to be as cool as he was. I strode away to the door below the aft deck and felt him watch me go. By the time I’d swung past the curtain that covered my cabin entrance I was sweating as if I’d run a marathon. I dropped onto the couch in front of my berth and pressed my hands to my breast. My fingers felt my heart thudding. I took a long, deep breath, counting four in, four hold, four out, and repeated the exercise until my heart rate had steadied.

It was Alain. I wasn’t being misled by a resemblance. It truly was Alain. I hadn’t killed him. The relief of it flooded through me. I hadn’t left him to drown in the middle of the Atlantic. By some miracle he’d been saved. He’d caught that lifebuoy and floated with it, been found by another ship, taken to America.

I caught myself up there. It just wasn't possible. It was eleven years ago, but I could see it unrolling in my memory as if it had been yesterday. The boom had gone over just as Alain had come up with our breakfast, a plate in each hand. I could still hear the crack as it hit him, and the way he'd reacted – making light of it, but with a blank look in his eyes, and swallowing as if he tasted blood. He'd insisted he was fine, and gone below for a sleep. When he came back up, his gun was in his hand, and he ordered me off the boat. He'd thought I was pirates. 'Get off my boat, or I'll shoot you. Get off. *Get off.*' When I hadn't obeyed, he'd fired at me. My hand went up to cover the snail-trail of scar along my cheek. I'd kicked the tiller across and tacked the boat, and the jib had caught him off balance and knocked him overboard. Even if he'd grabbed the lifebuoy I'd thrown, even if he'd drifted many metres on the rolling swell before I'd got the boat turned, he'd still been injured. A dip in the Atlantic wasn't an NHS-recommended cure for a severe head injury.

I was being misled by a resemblance. No matter how this Rafael moved, no matter how his hand fitted mine, Alain had died in the Atlantic. His death would always be on my conscience. As for this Spanish lookalike, I'd just have to learn to live with him. Rafael.

I picked up my cap, squared my shoulders, and headed back on deck.

Captain Sigurd was also a stickler about crew muster. At precisely two minutes to eleven, we stood to attention in line of seniority, Agnetha at the head of the line. Nils radiated importance beside her, promoted to first mate at last. I was next, and Rafael stood beside me, back straight, head up, with just one quick gleam of his eyes downwards at me to show he was playing at being the compleat officer. I felt his presence beside me, and knew he

was Alain. However much I tried to rationalise it as a chance resemblance, however crazy it should seem that he was pretending not to know me, he was Alain. Every movement of his body, every turn of his head, the shape of his hands so close to mine . . . I stood beside him and argued with myself. He was Rafael, a stranger. He was Alain, being Rafael.

Captain Sigurd cast an eye along our straight line and stepped forward to address us in Norwegian. ‘*God morgen.*’

‘Good morning, sir,’ we chorused.

‘Our orders for today. The trainees will be arriving from noon. For this voyage, Mr Andersen will be on red watch, Ms Lynch on white and Mr Martin on blue.’

White watch was my favourite, on duty from four to eight. Rafael would be after me. We’d meet at handover and meals, and otherwise we could avoid each other, if that was the way he wanted it. I felt a smouldering anger stirring deep within me. I’d spent eleven years believing I’d killed him.

‘There will be fifty-one trainees on board, seventeen on each watch, with one more joining the white watch in Shetland.’

That one, all being quiet in the Scottish criminal world, would be Gavin. My anger subsided at the thought of him. Alain was in the past. Gavin was my present and my future. I couldn’t wait to see him again. It felt a long month since we’d been together, even though we’d spoken on the phone or computer whenever the ship had a signal. We’d have the voyage round Shetland, all the way back to Kristiansand, and end with a couple of days together in Bergen before his leave ran out.

‘The whole-crew muster will be at 14.00. Each watch will be taken round each part of the ship: forrard, rig training and aft. Are there any questions about this?’

We shook our heads. It was all routine.

‘These sessions will end at 15.30. Then we will prepare to set sail, leaving at 17.00.’ His blue eyes swept around us. ‘I wish our ship a good voyage, fair winds and free sails.’

He nodded dismissal. As we moved away, I felt a hand on my shoulder. Rafael bent his head to mine and spoke softly in my ear. ‘I wasn’t expecting Norwegian. I’m third watch, right? Eight to twelve?’

‘Yes.’ I turned to face him, and saw only the intent look of a crewman checking his instructions. I made my tone matter-of-fact. ‘When the trainees come on board, Jenn checks them in.’ I gestured at where Jenn, our liaison officer, was setting up her table. ‘She’ll send them below to the banjer, where we’ll help them sort out their lockers and find the hooks for their hammocks.’ He nodded. ‘Then we’ll gather them on deck at 14.00, and each watch will get their introduction to the ship. They get a tour of the foredeck area, afterdeck area, and rig training – just up the mainmast to the first platform and down the other side. Your watch leader and ABs will lead that.’

‘OK. Routine.’ He stopped being official and gave me that charming smile again. ‘Thanks, Cass. I’ll appoint you as my personal translator.’

I waved my hand airily and turned away, speaking over my shoulder without meeting his eyes. ‘Any time, no problem.’

My fingers were trembling as I strode away.

I went as far as the Customs House, and fished my phone out of my pocket. It was Gavin’s tea break in Scotland, supposing he was able to get one. Police work, as far as I could see, was either non-stop with time only to send a uniform for a sandwich, or long night hours of filling in forms in front of the History channel.

He answered on the third ring. ‘Cass, *halo*. *Ciamar a tha thu?*’

My Gaelic could cope with that. I answered in Norwegian
'*Bra. Og med deg?*'

'Hmm,' Gavin replied. 'You sound more like *ikke sa verst.*'

Not so bad. 'Mmm,' I said, and realised at once that I was at a loss. I was Gavin's girl now. How could I raise Alain's ghost? 'It's just something odd . . . I'll tell you when we meet.'

'Saturday's still looking good. I have to appear in court tomorrow, but that should be it.'

'The people-trafficking case?'

His phone crackled as he nodded. 'It's just the first hearing. The trial won't be until autumn, but I hope this middleman and his underlings will go down for as long as the judge can give him. The top man is free and rich in the Med.' He sighed. 'I suppose it makes a change from Spain. The French police know who he is, and can't find a scrap of evidence to nail him on. Three months, six at best, and he'll have built up a new chain.'

'Mmm.' He sounded down, and cynical. I tried to think of something encouraging to say. 'They got Al Capone on tax-dodging in the end.'

That made him laugh. 'Well, if you can come up with some odd Med regulation pertaining to super-yachts in Cannes, just let me know.'

'I will. The day after tomorrow, then, Lerwick, DV.'

'Weather permitting. I know. How did Cat get on at the vet?'

'Nobody got bitten this time.'

'Because he was happier, or the vet was quicker?'

'The vet was better prepared. He remembered last time.'

'But does it let him go ashore?'

I sighed. 'You tell me. I've read the regulations till I'm square-eyed. He's got his passport, he's had his injections, he's been checked within twenty-four hours of leaving. All that

should let him in. But *Sørlandet's* not a ferry, and Lerwick's not a recognised port of entry, which I think may mean he has to stay on board throughout our visit. It doesn't exactly say so. They won't impound him or anything, just stick him in quarantine till we leave again.'

'Does Lerwick have somewhere to quarantine him?'

'Of course not. Besides, it's all very well to say he has to stay on board. They can come and explain that to him. He's been a ship's cat since he was six weeks old. He's used to coming and going as he pleases when we're in port.'

Like travelling cats on every boat, he also had an uncanny sense of what the ship was up to. He occasionally spent the night ashore, but he'd always return in time to slip into his place on the aft deck for the morning all-hands muster.

'I'm sure there'll be no problem with sticking him in your dad's car for us going to dinner there.'

'I'm sure there won't.' Cat knew he could rely on Maman for a plateful of interesting scraps.

'Have you asked your captain about Glyndebourne?'

Maman was singing there in three weeks' time. 'Luckily he considers opera one of the civilised arts. Once he's met Maman, I hope he'll let me come. I've told her to be on the pier in Lerwick as we come in, so I can introduce them.'

'Machiavellian.'

His soft Highland voice sent a wave of longing through me. 'Oh, I'm looking forward to seeing you. Two days.'

'Is your stickler captain going to condemn me to a hammock?'

'He hasn't said anything. You're not a crew member.'

I could hear he was smiling. 'Perhaps he hasn't considered anything as appalling as sleeping with the trainees.'

'Oh, there are strict rules about that. I just don't know if they

apply to current partners. Anyway, I hope we'll get a night aboard *Khalida*, in peace.'

'I hope so too. What other news? Has your underling arrived?'

He meant Rafael. 'Yes.'

'Ah. That's your problem?'

'I'll explain when I see you.'

Alain would have teased it out of me, between urging and guesses, but Gavin understood privacy. 'What watch are you on?'

'White. Four till eight.'

'A better one for phoning.'

'Except that I won't have a signal until we get within sight of Shetland.' I knew that we were rambling now. 'Good luck with your court thing.'

'Thank you.' I heard a voice in the background, calling his name. 'Have to go. Day after tomorrow. *Beannachd leat.*'

'Bye,' I said softly, and held the phone at my ear a moment longer, hearing the silence; then I snicked it off. It was ridiculous to have this hollow feeling about being on my own till Shetland. I squared my shoulders and turned back towards my ship.