

Hook, Line and Sinker.

'Hello, do you have one free, please,' said Maisie.

'Twenty-three,' said the Goth girl.

Maisie read the badge. 'Thanks, Zetta.'

The child's dark blue eyes flicked to her screen, back to her inner space.

Maisie was taking her Mum on an outing today, playing an ageing hippy in tall clumpy boots, a baggy purple dress under a faded scarlet cardigan, and a three rope necklace of shiny orange beads. She wore a slash of orange-red on her lips and large orange rimmed specs with dark yellow lens. She rolled stiffly as her Mum had done towards the end. Maisie liked to take her Mum on regular public outings like this, as she did with her other dramatis personae, keeping herself on her toes, in practice, should the need arise. To her neighbours in the luxury apartment block she was Maisie Kaywood, the reclusive eccentric out-of-work actress, who was always flitting hither and thither, looking for chance to rejuvenate her career.

I'm invisible to them; odd, polite, patient, elderly and harmless.

Maisie sat at twenty-three. The Mitchell Library was busy, just the way she liked it. Maisie chose Veronique's card. Veronique would not need it; she had been dead for several years but the systems did not know that. If it 'failed' Maisie had several other cards. Like Veronique the other card owners fully deserved their place in the cosmic dust of permanent retirement, while still making reparations, Maisie the guardian of their posthumous generosity.

Sipping her cappo-lite she settled down for a longer session, to check every detail one last time:

This project had started last September when Wee Harry's mug shot had smirked at her while the BBC reporter regaled the nation with Harold Malcolm Skinner's dubious business history, ending with his latest scam in Torquay. An artist's impression depicted 'The Oasis', a proposed gated retirement complex to include a 27-hole golf course, a signature restaurant, indoor/outdoor tennis courts, private marina, hi-tech gym-spa-massage complex, and a well-being medical centre. Under the name of Henry Malcolm, Wee Harry had relieved a group of well-heeled locals of their upfront investments before disappearing into the ether. On that evening Maisie had smiled, poured a glass of 'Terrace Road' Sauvignon Blanc, and toasted Wee Harry, surprised only that he had enjoyed such a long and apparently successful career.

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Her experience of him had been as an annoying, boastful boy at school. Wee Harry had conned her out of £20 for two tickets to a 'Wet Wet Wet' Concert. He claimed to have posted them: she was still waiting. The entire school rejoiced when he left to join Skinner & Son (Motors).

A month after the TV article her second-cousin Elspeth had phoned, from Brighton, distraught: her celebrity chef son Iain and his life partner Lawrence had committed suicide. Harry had played on Iain's Scottish roots to persuade him to invest in this chance of a lifetime. Other projects would be rolled out using 'The Oasis' model throughout Europe, but they had to show commitment. The young men had lost everything; and had been ashamed to face those other investors that they had introduced to Harry in good faith.

Maisie started tracking Harold Malcolm Skinner that evening.

As Veronique, she used Trainline and TripAdvisor and arrived in Torquay on the next afternoon.

'Reflections', the restaurant the boys had owned, had re-opened with an unsmiling Albanian in charge. Its location overlooking the harbour was good, and it seemed to be thriving. She found the food disappointing and the wine undrinkable. (Later she traced the ownership of the new business to HMS Property Holdings (Guernsey)).

As Veronique, a writer from Brussels with halting English, she sat each morning in "Castaways", the trendy harbour-side deli/bar, eyes fixed on her iPad, and was soon invisible, listening to the ebb and flow of the yummy-mummies and glam-grannies. Henry Malcolm and the boys' suicides were still hot topics. Soon Maisie knew more about the whole sad scam than the police constable who visited the harbour each day to stare hopefully at the spot where Wee Harry's gin palace had been moored.

She played the innocent tourist with the harbourmaster and soon learned of absent motor-cruiser, a Sunseeker 28, had left owing money to many local traders as well as outstanding harbour dues. She called in a favour with Paolo, the Owner of Croatian Coastal Cruises at Herceg Novi, south of Dubrovnik.

By mid-December Paolo had provided her first real clue. HMS Enterprises (Palma) had traded the Sunseeker 28 for a nearly new Sunseeker 34, modified to include a game-fishing platform. 'Super Trouper', registered at Palma, Majorca, was berthed at Cala Carbo near Porta Pollenza. Her enquiries showed

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that the berthing fees were being paid by Herr Henrik Fleischer, (aka Wee Harry).

Since then Maisie had been using the web, calling in favours or, where necessary, paying with one of her benefactor cards or by anonymous transfers for one of their bank accounts.

She had found Wee Harry dotting back and forth across the Mediterranean, 'working' several groups of wealthy Scandinavians in the Malaga area, setting up a repeat of his previous scam in Torquay.

Soon there was little that she did not know about Harry/Henrik. But it was his passion for big game fishing which caught her attention.

Lights, Camera... Roll Film... ACTION!

Maisie pressed 'Confirm Bookings', signed Veronique out, *and clumped noisily across to Zetta to say thanks.*

The clapping began as the air brakes whined and the cabin leaned forward onto its nose.

'Welcome to Malaga Airport and the start of your winter-sun holiday. Please remain seated...'

Maisie collected her two large suitcases, took a taxi to the self-catering apartments that she had found on TripAdvisor: "simple, quiet, economical". She had negotiated a lower rate for her three-month stay. Maisie hated cold weather and her novella needed some authentic winter-sun atmosphere, now that it was reaching its steamy climax.

Next day Veronique sprang to life again and hired a white Fiat Panda then spent the next few mornings re-exploring the area and shopping at several different chandlers for the things Maisie needed. A lot had changed since her trip twelve years earlier; the whole place looked as if it was up for sale.

Each afternoon, as Anna, a softly spoken rather dowdy lady, with mousey-brown hair, wrap-around sunglasses and a large over-stuffed handbag she sat at her shaded table in 'Carlo's Bar' overlooking the harbour, watching the comings and goings of the yachts and motor-cruisers, tapping on her iPad or reading her Kindle, waiting. Carlo was talkative and complaining. Life was tough for the little guy,

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especially with that flashy new restaurant dominating trade. Rumour was that the new guy Herr Henrik was behind it, and he was 'un tiburon', (a shark).

On the fourth day of her vigil the Sunseeker 34 raced into the marina, heading for its reserved slot beside an elderly Moody 27 ocean-racing yacht. A twenty-something blonde from the front page of 'Elle' lay face down on a lounge: she took no interest in the docking process; this was done by a lanky fair-haired man. Wee Harry was on the bridge, hauling at the controls, well above the 5-knot limit and literally creating waves. He fluffed his turn, bounced off the soft side-fenders and hammered the bow against the harder rubber of the pontoon, setting up a chain reaction which brought him to the attention of the long row of adjoining vessels.

'GET IT INTO NEUTRAL, FOR GOD'S SAKE!' shouted the crewman, struggling to tie off the mooring lines against the screws now in reverse.

'Watch your FUCKING tongue, you!' was his captain's response.

Herr Henrik ignored the angry mutterings and tut-tut-ings from the elderly English couple on the Moody. Their pride and joy was now yawning violently and thumping into the pontoon and side fenders.

'Monica, I need a beer.'

The sunbather did not respond.

'NOW!'

The girl rose slowly, yawned as she Y-stretched before sauntering confidently across to the cool locker, displaying a perfect all-over golden tan, attracting the attention of every male in the marina.

Wee Harry had not improved with age. As a pasty-teenager he had been heavy-set with lank black hair and bad acne: knocking fifty he was short, fat, head shaved and broiled a dark tan. He would have been well advised never to wear shorts and especially not in canary yellow. He snatched his beer and lay back in the lounge as she stretched out naked alongside him, now on her back. He used a remote control to turn up the speakers, obliging the world to share, as Abba belted out 'Super Trouper'.

Following an angry altercation with his captain, the crewman left carrying a large kit bag. There was no cordial exchange of farewells. The disgruntled Sven made his way across to Carlo's and during the next hour shared his tale of woe with the

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world. In summary: Herr Henrik was a fat lazy bastard who had refused to pay him and the Russian bitch was a man-hater.

At six o'clock Anna ate an excellent seafood paella at Carlo's and tried a sip from a glass of white Rioja, shuddered, and left it undrunk. She drove out of town to her apartment to emerge later as Cristina from Los Angeles, with large white sunglasses perched on an auburn hairpiece, dark-green contact lenses, knee-length two-tone green shift, teetering girlishly on 4" Flamenco-red wedges. On her back she wore a new dark-green leather backpack containing her iPad, head torch and deck shoes. This was the new bag's first outing, a recent gift from Veronique.

At nine o'clock she began her slow circuit of the restaurants, pretending to compare the menus while listening to the voices, surreptitiously scanning the faces of the beautiful people as they dined. On her second sweep she saw Henrik and Monica arrive to join a noisy group, two older couples and two single women. Cristina found a table nearby, opened her iPad, switched on the record function, and ordered a small tapas platter with a glass of Chilean Sauvignon Blanc, (which she found very quaffable). She spent the next hour earwiggling as she caught up with her emails and checked her investments.

Henrik played mine host, ordering further drinks, noisily directing the waiters. At first Maisie thought that the 'targets' were the retired Danish couples who were down for two months of golf and tennis. Kirsta, their hostess, was also from Copenhagen but now lived in Malaga on a full-time basis with Reita, another stunning blonde who could have been Monica's twin. Monica was seated on Krista's right, Reita on her left. Kirsta was tall, dark, mannish, early forties, incongruous in a tight lavender trouser suit. They all spoke English, Henrik's voice always the loudest; sometimes he tried to sound German but, as he got drunker, slipping into a slightly anglicised Glasgow accent.

Henrik and the older Danes were drinking heavily. Both blondes were drinking slowly. The words 'Oasis' and 'Bulgaria' were mentioned repeatedly. At first Cristina did not notice that Monica's left hand had wandered and was caressing Krista's thigh: the older woman responded in kind. If the older Danes noticed this they ignored it. For a while Reita seemed unaware but when Krista began to nibble at Monica's ear, Reita rose, slapped Krista hard across her face and ran from the room sobbing. Kirsta whispered a parting message into Monica's ear, made a curt apology to the others and left. The party disintegrated, leaving Henrik and Monica alone.

'Well done, phase three now in play,' he slurred.

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She tracked them to the marina and waited in the shadows. Within a few minutes 'Super Trouper' was in darkness. She waited another thirty minutes then, red shoes dangling by her side she swayed up to the security gate, blocking the Moody 27 couple as they approached. She dropped her head and scrabbled in her bag, as if searching for the slip of paper with the code. The man in his blazer and cravat reached past to punch the keys.

'Allow me, please.'

'Thank you a million times, my key I forget her,' she mumbled in her best Russian accent.

'Bloody Russians everywhere,' he grumbled to his wife.

She waited then slipped aboard in her deck shoes. From the slit under the portside Guest cabin the ever-changing flashes of a TV monitor and the low voices of Richard Gere and Julia Roberts suggested that Monica had not yet given up on her dream of finding a rich lover. The deep rumbling snore from the starboard side master cabin suggested she might be disappointed with her current candidate.

Two hours later Maisie left with more information than she had expected. Harry/Henrik/Henry/Enrico was very lazy about security and quite a bit wealthier than she had imagined. There was enough fuel on board for her plan.

Next morning she was ash blonde, (from a bottle), blue-eyed, (herself), dressed in sun-faded blue denim capris, blue and white striped smock, deck shoes, with her short pony-tail under a jaunty skip cap which announced her as 'Crew'. Everything spoke of sea, sun and salt; her Anita outfit from that Croatian summer a few years back.

Before leaving the apartment she had studied herself in the mirror.

'Nice one Maisie!'

She slipped a note under the Concierge's door:

'Off to Gibraltar to stay with friends for a bit.

Back???

Who knows?'

She sat on the marina office step, every inch the girl who spent her life bumming about in boats. The manager arrived, Angelo Frederico, Italian, mid-fifty, taciturn, reeking of garlic, stale alcohol, and smoking a dubious cigarette.

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'Come back later, I ask around. Hey, you know the Sunseeker 34?'

'Sort of, I had four months on a Sunseeker 40 last summer out of Ibiza,' she fibbed, in her best sing-sing Swedish-English.

'Right, leave with me, eh, what you call?'

'Anita Egstrom from Stockholm.'

'OK, come back later, eh? No promises.'

'OK, thanks. It's Angelo, yes?'

She gave him her ten thousand watt smile and this time he smiled back.

'OK, OK, I have idea, Anita. OK?'

'Thanks, Angelo, you're a star. See you!'

She could feel his eyes on her bottom and added an extra swing as Anita would have done. She deserted Carlo for the downmarket locals' bar to wait and watch.

Shortly after ten the pair surfaced and took a table on the balcony of the flashy restaurant. Henrik wore short tight orange shorts and a sky blue tee-shirt with his Captain's Cap over wrap-around sunglasses. Monica wore an itsy-bitsy white bikini and flip-flops, talking constantly on her mobile. Soon Henrik was tucking into a Full English, sipping a pint of Best and studying 'Sporting Life'. Monica sat with her feet up on a chair, knees apart, doing her toenails, nibbling on a lonely bagel and sipping black coffee. The young waiter leaned back against the bar and fantasied.

Rieta arrived by taxi, skipping up the stairs to join them. Her bikini was pink. She lifted his cap, pecked at his pate then leaned forward and kissed Monica full on the lips. Harry was on his phone now and nodded as the girls left, arms around each other's waist to disappear on board 'Super Trouper'.

Anita waited until he returned to his equine studies to make her call. Maisie did speak a little German but decided to use Spanish-English.

He snatched phone at the second ring.

'Did you get it oan fur me?'

'Herr Henrik Fleischer?'

'Aye, eh Ya, I am he who speaks,' in fractured Spanish.

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'Are you on Mallorca, Seneor? You are having a problem with your habitation. She is broken down in bad fuego but she is extinguido. You can to me come now?'

'Who the hell is this? Is this some bloody joke?'

'I am not happy to say 'no', Seneor Herr Henrik, I am the Inspetora de Policia: I call myself Sofia Mendez. I stand away from your Villa at Cala Cabo and there is too with me Inspetoro di Edificios who saying that the habitation must be crushed to the ground to prevent danger to the harbour under.'

Harry lost contact with his German persona and launched into a strong Glasgow accent.

'Naw, no way Hosey. Tell him to keep his haunds aff ma property. I'm in Malaga the noo but I'll be right back ower there wi ye in jig time.'

'Seneor Herr Henrik, it is making me muchos sad to say I am not understanding of you.'

'OK, OK. Listen. I-WILL-COME-SOON. OK?'

'Ah, you are coming to me soon, before we crush it down?'

'Naw! Naw! Aye! Look I'm comin' the noo.'

She cut the connection and watched. She had reprogrammed the number for his Villa at Cala Cabo and knew he would get a null tone. She watched as he went ballistic. He threw a handful of coins down and waddled off towards the Marina Office. Angelo was leaving it with The Blazer and his wife.

She hefted her big rucksack onto her back.

Angelo made Harry wait while he sorted out the problem for the English couple. Anita sauntered into view right on cue as Herr Henrik came to the end of his tale of woe. She stopped where she could hear everything without invading their privacy.

'Your day is lucky, Herr Fleischer. Here is the girl who help you,' pointing past him.

Anita stepped forward and offered a shy smile of thanks.

Wee Harry rotated his corpulence to face her. She watched his eyes for any signs of recognition. He saw Anita, waiting demurely to be invited into the presence of this important Captain.

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'Anita, this is Herr Henrik. He needs a crew to Mallorca.'

Now she would play hard to get.

'Well, Angelo, that's so good of you, but Carlo at the bar knows a guy who...'

'Look, five hundred Euros and all you want to eat and drink.'

'Ah, do you have any nice Sauvignon Blanc?'

'What?'

'I only drink good stuff.'

'Look, here's a fifty, go an' get yersel some, quick.'

She stepped forward and grabbed it greedily.

'Are we leaving right away?'

'Aye, I have to get back to Cala Cabo A-S-A-P!'

'Ah, but Captain there is to be a big storm tonight, perhaps we should wait.'

'Look, I'll make it seven-fifty and that's my top offer.'

'Plus the fifty for the wine?'

'Aye!'

'Cash in hand as we leave the marina?'

'Aye! Come on get a move on, will ye!'

'It's a deal!'

Fifteen minutes later she passed an unhappy Monica and Rieta on the pontoon carrying bundles of clothes and shouting curses at him in Russian.

She had three bottles of 'Oyster Bay' in a plastic bag, and stood to one side, ignoring the insults they spat at her. One less complication; she had expected Monica to remain aboard.

He already had the big engines rumbling in gear, tugging at the mooring lines.

'NEUTRAL PLEASE, UNTIL I GET HER FREE.'

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He got the message and put them into idle. She fended off as he reversed out and slammed the lever into forward. She stowed the fenders and mooring lines then joined him on the bridge as they shot out of the harbour at twenty knots and rising.

'Excuse me Herr Fleischer, but if you don't mind, I need to be paid now, please.'

'Can you steer this thing OK?'

'Of course, I am fully qualified for both power and sail. I've been all over the Med. And I've been over the Pond and back three times.'

'Good take over then.'

He was out of the chair leaving one hand on the wheel. She refused to take his place.

'Sorry, money first, please.'

He went to his back pocket, wiggled out his wallet and, as she sat up, he palmed the fifties into her free hand.

'Thank you, Herr Fleischer.'

'Right, take me to Cala Capo, OK?'

'Aye, Aye, Skipper,' she saluted.

His eyes narrowed and she wondered if she had blown it.

'I need a drink,' he said, disappearing below.

The wind got up as predicted but only to force six; the boat powered on through the afternoon. As darkness crept up behind them she switched on the navigation lights, checked the GPS and set the autopilot for Paolo's place. A few hours later the storm blew through.

At midnight she reduced speed to 5-knots, checked the GPS and autopilot before moving downstairs to find him snoring in front of the hissing plasma screen in the lounge, an empty bottle of Remy Martin rolling on the floor amidst a pile of squashed beer cans and empty peanut bags.

She visited the galley, rejected what was on offer, returned to the bridge and ate fruit with bottled water from her rucksack. She loved the silky, inky blackness of these cloudy Mediterranean nights and settled down in the captain's chair, snoozing on and off, occasionally checking the GPS and autopilot and scanning ahead

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with the big night-sight binoculars; fishing boats could be a menace when the dowsed their lights to fish.

Dawn lightened the sky: she adjusted to trolling speed and went aft to the fishing platform. Firstly she rigged three rods with lures hoping to catch tuna for bait. Then she adjusted the fighting chair and gave it a good shove back and forth to be sure it was to her liking. She stopped fishing when she had caught nine, all smaller ones. She then re-rigged the three rods with the tuna bait and made a chum-mash with the remainder, saving a steak for her breakfast.

She had caught and tagged great whites in the Med when she worked with the Survey during that Croatian summer. They were hard to catch, often following for hours with a dorsal fin showing before they struck. That's all she needed. If she caught one it would be a bonus.

She did another slow all-round scan with the binoculars: still all clear.

She went below, grilled her steak and took it to the bridge with a glass of chilled 'Oyster Bay', her allowance held over from last night. She plugged her iPod into the audio system, set the sound to low and settled down to wait, listening for the fish alarm, checking for other craft, watching the autopilot and GPS readings and singing quietly to herself. Multi-tasking: easy-peasy.

At eleven o'clock Wee Harry surfaced, hung-over and ready for an argument: just as she had hoped. She looked past him; he turned, following her gaze.

'What the hell do you think you're playing at?'

'Oh, just after a shark.'

'Whit?'

'Are you *deaf*?'

'Whit?'

'OK. Want to come and have a look?'

She waltzed past him, slid expertly down the companionway to the fishing platform. She threw the chum into the water.

'Listen you, what's yer name, you've nae fuckin' right to use ma gear.'

She grabbed a rod, hauled it to accelerate the bait then put it back in its socket.

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'Hey, are you fuckin' listening to me?'

It was then she got lucky.

The alarm screamed. She did not need rile him further. He was hooked! No need for Plan B.

He clambered down, stumbled towards her, levered himself into the fighting chair, strapped himself in, put on the harness, rammed the rod it into the socket and attached the clips. He yanked up hard to set the hook.

'GOT YE, YA BEAUTY!'

The big fish felt the hook chug at its mouth and turned away.

When Maisie had adjusted the chair she had removed all twelve deck bolts, replacing only three, using spacer sleeves; these three bolts were now holding the chair in place but by a only few threads.

Maisie looked down from the bridge. She turned the stereo to full volume.

'Love is all around'.

It had always been her favourite 'Wet Wet Wet' song.

She pushed the throttle forward hard.

The bolts sheared and Harry went off to meet his friends.

She eased the throttle back and raised the binoculars to focus on the thrashing water and spread of red, then scanned slowly through three-sixty: still all clear.

She put the drugs into a weighted bag and sent it to the depths. She already had all his account numbers and passcodes.

She scanned all round, still clear.

She checked the Autopilot and GPS readings:

-time to make another deposit in the Bank of Paolo,

-time to enable Wee Harry to make reparations from Purgatory.