

Holy Shoot and The Temper



**THE CURSE OF THE
DOLLARD TWINS**

**ROBERT
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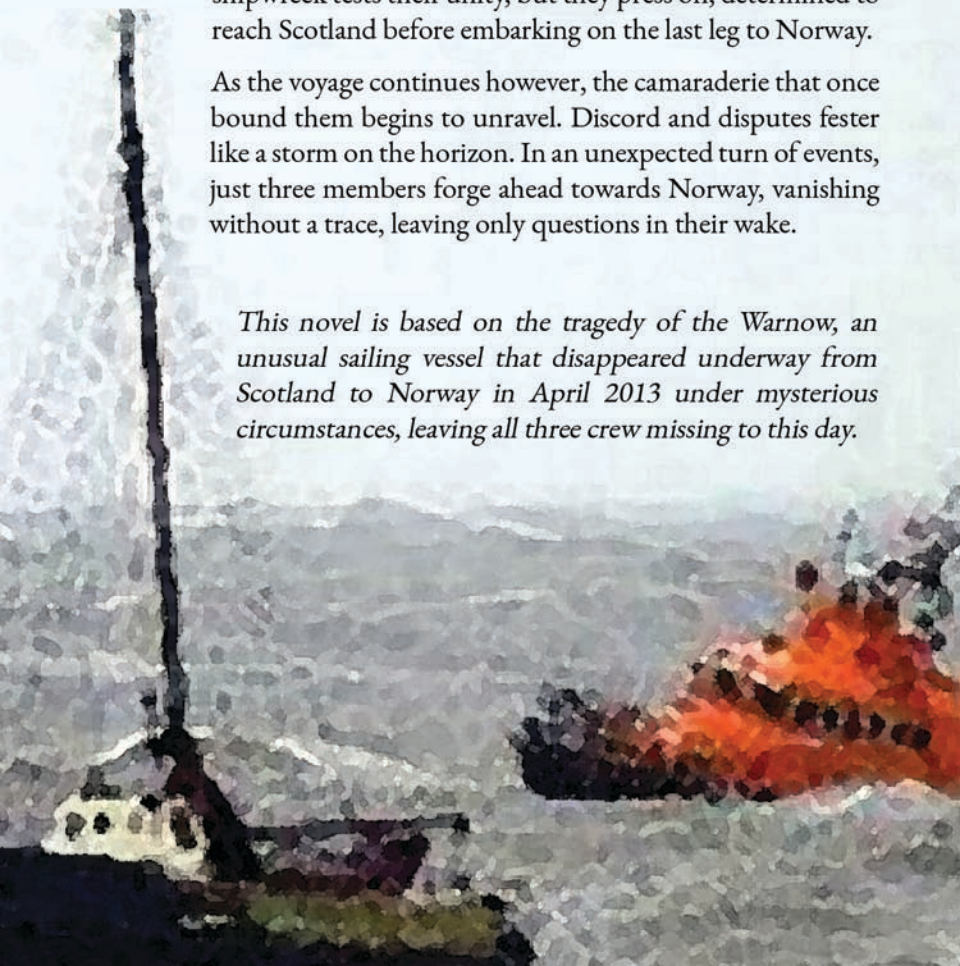
'It was a very romantic idea, but nobody was a sailor.'

All five members of the cover soul band Holy Shoot and The Temper, with ages spanning from twenty-one to fifty-five, including two very young identical twin sisters, embark on a freedom journey they believe will solidify their friendship. It is a quest for inspiration to fuel their upcoming music album. Their destination: the elusive Northern Lights in Norway. The vessel of choice, Dollard, a barely seaworthy traditional Dutch inland sailing barge, sets out from Schiedam, The Netherlands.

Navigating the treacherous waters of the North Sea en route to England, disaster looms ominously. The threat of shipwreck tests their unity, but they press on, determined to reach Scotland before embarking on the last leg to Norway.

As the voyage continues however, the camaraderie that once bound them begins to unravel. Discord and disputes fester like a storm on the horizon. In an unexpected turn of events, just three members forge ahead towards Norway, vanishing without a trace, leaving only questions in their wake.

This novel is based on the tragedy of the Warnow, an unusual sailing vessel that disappeared underway from Scotland to Norway in April 2013 under mysterious circumstances, leaving all three crew missing to this day.



Holy Shoot and The Temper

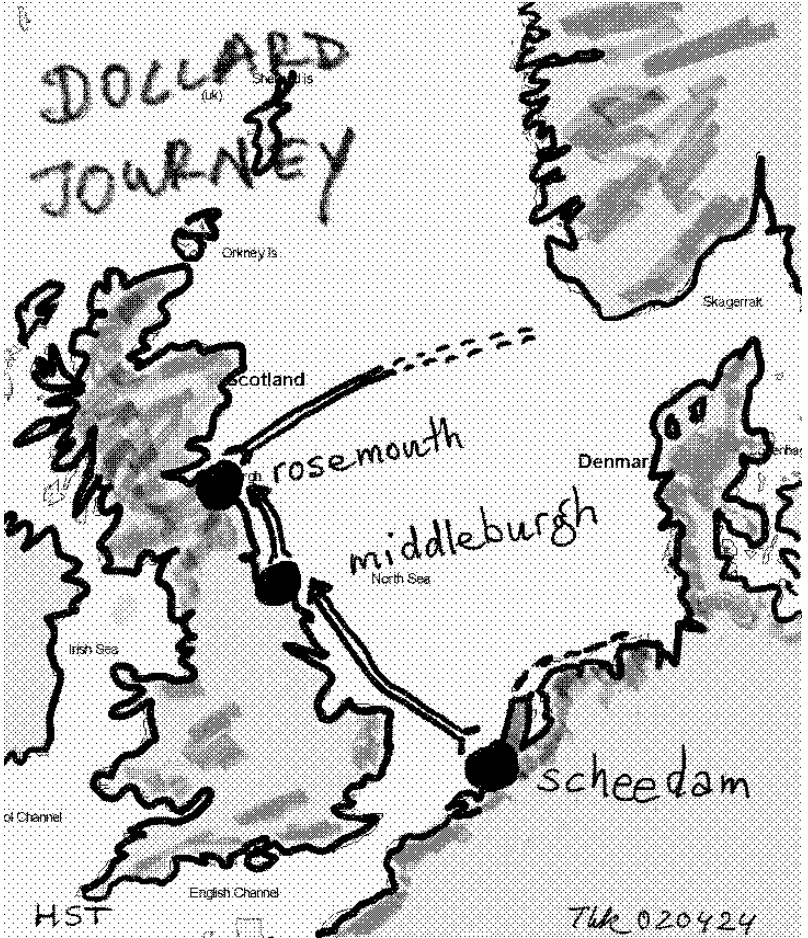
The curse of the Dollard twins

Inspired by true events

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To the Royal National Lifeboat Institution



The voyage

I am a sailor, you're my first mate
We signed on together, we coupled our fate
Hauled up our anchor, determined not to fail
For the hearts treasure, together we set sail

With no maps to guide us we steered our own course
Rode out the storms when the winds were gale force
Sat out the doldrums in patience and hope
Working together we learned how to cope

Together we're in this relationship
We built it with care to last the whole trip
Our true destination's not marked on any charts
We're navigating to the shores of the heart

Life is an ocean and love is a boat
In troubled water that keeps us afloat
When we started the voyage, there was just me and you
Now gathered round us, we have our own crew

Johnny DUHAN

I - FREEDOM

'Freedom... earth beneath my feet!'

(Nana, after arriving on an English shore)

The pub serving as the band's home turf, the *Grey Stallion* - in the old Rotterdam suburb of Scheedam, near its smelly derelict harbour - profiled itself as the only natural-bar-music pub in the Netherlands, whatever they meant by 'natural'. There was no stage. Management insisted that every time there was a performance, the performing band should find its own stage-place, its corner, its rightful, deserved territory. Awkward, but also, in a way, fun. Holy Shoot and The Temper had no issue with being casual. They were not in it for the big money. Well, weren't they?

The shitty thing was the final placement of the equipment every time with this set-up, thought Jolle, while he was unloading his drum kit from the battered old Rent-a-Dent van. Where the fuck do they want us this week? The only other member he saw present for now was Pieter, sitting at the still empty morning bar having his first pint of Heineken for the day. He slammed Jolle on the back when he passed him carrying the gear in. Saturday morning eleven o'clock thought Jolle, as

he saw an enormous joint lying in Pieter's ashtray, with small streaks of thick smoke curling up. He set up the drums in the corner near the fruit machines; that's where they normally ended up, their Holy Shoot and The Temper, the upcoming (as the bar advertised them) all-round funk, jazz, and rock, but - let's face it - still mostly a bit of stale soul cover band, that Pieter had been running for about two years. Jolle sat himself next to him and took the orange juice, Pieter, at home behind the bar, had produced for him. Jolle relaxed and thought of his fresh love, still asleep in the bed he had left an hour ago to fetch the van and the borrowed drum set. Nana. Weird, Nana had lured him into this band, but she, one of the singers, was still snoozing while he worked his ass off for her success later.

He daydreamed over Nana and wished he was still with her in bed now. She would soon be having her shower, would probably shampoo her beautiful long silk hair, wash her body, her gorgeous firm small breasts with the tiny black strong nipples, her incredibly stylishly curved back, her tight looking but soft bum and... "TOOOOOT!" He was rudely woken from his erotic reverie. Naut, their saxophone player, like many times before, had made his entry in the pub, stealthily. He had taken his tenor sax out of the case and blew himself an unsolicited obnoxious welcome. Pieter rang the barbell in a cheeky

response and all those already present before the formal opening hour got a drink.

I do all this for Nana, right? Jolle thought. Without Nana he would have never joined this band. Nana and her twin sister Tiara, had both dropped out of their studies, rebelled against the far too traditional roles they got imposed on them, even as art students: Tiara doing creative writing, Nana some fashion academy. They could not swallow the requirements of doing two hours per week of mathematics in their first year, involving statistics, methodology, numbers, and such shit. These studies were not serious. They were creative, playful, positive girls - why force them into a cookie cutter harness and become like everybody: non-entities in the ever more standardised chain of global mechanisms and certified processes? Well, they could not always express clearly what they were against - but studying turned out to be complete crap. They were good singers, musically talented artists and that was where they wanted to go.

Jolle had met Nana 'on his work-floor'. Well, desk-floor really, where he worked as a data analyst for a contractor to a bank. Sitting all day staring at three screens at the same time, waiting for signs that interest rates were changing - somewhere in the world. A computer program could do that, but they wanted him. His knowledge of sociology, which he had studied for

six years, did not contribute at all. The money however was OK, he could afford a nice small studio apartment overlooking the Scheedam harbour. But he felt nearly every day for a few hours like he was going fucking nowhere. He had no interest in money trends. Interest rates were as exciting as the wooden sleepers on railway tracks. One after the other, for miles, and changes that were difficult to discern. They were all the same. At night he played for hours on his electronic drum set, with very loud volumes - but good citizen as he was, all done on his headset. Usually, he drank at least one bottle of wine as he drummed on. He had asked his neighbours in the elevator one day if he bothered them with the sounds of the drumsticks hitting the electronic skins of the drums. They, an elderly couple, smiled at him and told him that they thought the sounds were him just doing the dishes. (Yeah, he thought - hours of doing dishes... rhythmically).

Nana having dropped out, with parental financial support cut off, needed money, and had enrolled with a temp agency. She worked for one of those dark kitchens which were now everywhere, delivering food to offices, last minute, customised hence expensive. On a dreadful Wednesday in November, on one of those Dutch suicide-inviting days, characterised by no light, being overcast and difficult to judge if the water in the air outside was true rain or persistent drizzle, he was the last to be

served by little twin Nana, with an Indonesian meal he had ordered by phone.

Falling in love, as Jolle the rationalist knew, was mostly a sublimation of pure physical lust, with a bit of aspirational relationship dreaming thrown in. She had truly worked him up. She leaned over on his desk, getting the styrofoam container out of a larger rigid case on wheels. He peeped at her two beautiful, in spite of the season, very visible unharnessed breasts and thus felt uncontrollable excitement. This episode would determine his starting life from there on.

He chatted her up, found out that she had not eaten yet, 'work-work-work you know', so he shared his meal with her in the secluded little canteen room.

Nana was twenty, three months short of twenty-one. Clearly a racial mix, Asian, half-Indo most likely. While she was chatting away (quite a happy puppy he thought!), he saw that her hybrid constellation had leaned over to the white part. Mixed girls looked mostly more Asian rather than Caucasian, but here the DNA gamble had resulted in a rare victory for the white genes. Her eyes were greenish blue, not dark, her hair was thin and flax. More of a vixen than a pussy cat, Jolle thought - at the same time hating his stupid profiling. He wanted to make love to her. As soon as possible. Love. Physical love. The NOW type.

That lovemaking happened less than a week from that impromptu lunch. Nana was bored and entertained all his suggestions. She came an hour late that Sunday night and brought a bottle of cheap prosecco wine and also some weed. They kissed and fucked within half an hour. Jolle was hooked. He learned that evening that there was an identical twin sister. After the second time, which was quite different, more powerful, he quipped: "Are we sure it is you now Nana, or your twin sister Tiara?" Silly joke, but somehow it challenged and excited him. Nana's face was blank.

Nana liked Jolle though, he had a good slim strong body, tight ass, security and also a job with money. He looked nice so far, not aggressive and had a large bed to sleep in, so she forgave him the nerdy stale joke, having heard all of those twin one-liners so many times before and finally replied: "You never know Jolle, and by the way, would you care he, he, he?"

In all fairness, she also needed a place to stay, being fed up with sleeping so often in one small bed with Tiara. Tiara would always take up more space than she, persistently changing positions. Tiara moved through the bed like a snow angel whilst Nana curled up like a baby. It was about time for a bit of un-twinning, wasn't it!? Jolle could play a role here, she thought.

When she started working for her money, like being employed in the manual kitchen and as a delivery girl and burning long hours, both twins were still under the spell of Pieter. The music magician. The man that could pull all strings, musical and life's. The guy that could set their direction, escaping parental spheres and onto the world stage. Pieter had, as one could say, groomed the twins.

Jolle liked Pieter straight away however, as he was an incredibly creative artist. They met at the *Stallion* (as they commonly referred to the pub), at Nana's suggestion. Also, it was the first opportunity he could observe Tiara. Fock, he had difficulty hiding his dual sentiment. The twin feeling. Initially Pieter had him drum along with a few songs and then he was hired on the spot. Beggars can't be choosers - drummers were not available in abundance, really.

While Jolle was drifting into his new twin mode, Nana wondered how the same Jolle could help get her out of it. Out of Pieter, out of Tiara.

At three in the afternoon they played, not next to the fruit gaming machines as anticipated, but instead at the very rear, against the wall with the old ships' pictures, a place normally reserved for

the most successful bands with their large crowds. They were up and coming, 'promising' in the pub management's view.

In all fairness, thought Jolle, Pieter was a master in his profession. Not only a very skilled multi-instrument musician, but a guy who knew and got what he wanted. The band was his. He started it with Naut, some time ago, who he had known from an earlier band that had collapsed under cannabis and later heroin, petty crime, and prison terms. Band members disappeared. It was all a bit unclear and too embarrassing for small talk. Pieter and Naut started jamming, finding their 'new roots' as Pieter would construct it, then Pieter brought in the twins, spring chicken young girls, identical, nearly impossible to tell one from the other - although different in character. Pieter had taught them how to develop their voices at the free community music school where he worked for seven hours a week. Pieter also talked them out of becoming an anonymous non-entity in the boring real people's society. 'Never take a job', was his adage, borrowed from musician Brian Eno whom he admired, from one of Eno's YouTube thought-challenging college lectures. But nobody realised that he stole the idea. They thought Pieter was an original mind. Work hard, enjoy the reward, but not for somebody else was also one of his mantras.

For the girls it was liberation from the mathematics and statistics that their single mother wanted them to navigate. Pieter talked a lot with them, together and separately. Oh man, he had all the time in the world to talk to his girls: sugar daddy conversations. It was like having them both on his lap. Jolle was sure he had laid his hands on at least one of them, he just hoped it with some irritation that it wasn't Nana. Grrrr. Jolle would never know that Pieter had actually slept with both and had nearly bedded them together at one time. Every male's female identical twin obsession, as old as the world.

Naut, when stoned or drunk, which happened again frequently, not only referred to Pieter's musical skills but also his grooming ability while teaching late teenagers, laughingly, but often also a bit pedantically irritated. He could get angry at something he had had no part in. A bit of jealous autism. Isn't that also called frustration? The girls tried to push their Pieter episode away, as a stage in growing up rather than a serious misjudgement. They laughed and sneered about him now and saw him merely as an innocent teddy bear that could stay in one's bed for life, but had lost the attraction, the routine for blind teenage puppy love. When Tiara started sleeping with Naut and Jolle got further hooked by Nana, Pieter became, for the twins, a fast-disappearing memory, not clear whether it was a good or a bad

one, in any case one of which one wonders after a while if it had actually all really happened.

Their standard Saturday afternoon act started with *Do you remember*, from Earth Wind & Fire, introducing the whirlwind stage twins, then moved through *Boogie Wonderland* into Kool and the Gang's *Celebration* and just kept going - in a harder and faster tone than their original versions. The tsunami of Naut's sax flooded the bar, followed by a soloing Pieter or a hard reggaeing Pieter. Jolle had been allocated a solo as well.

After a short break, they took it down a bit on the heavy sound and mellowed. Bill Withers, a very funky *Just the Two of Us*, KC's *Please don't go* - the audience had started to move as a heavy swell on an ocean, even the slow songs they experienced as lovely hard rock. 'Holy Shoot completely dug it', they said to each other, the best respect ever paid to an eighties soul band. Even if it would qualify as a cheap disco sound. Ha!

The second set was indeed all twins, they shedded more clothes and ended up in jeans and bikini tops winning over more of the audience. *Cherish. I am your Boogie Man*, Naut blew, from his imaginary ivory tower, everybody away.

Then, their signature sign off tune of George McCrae's *Rock your Baby* enthralled the wild

audience - carried again by Naut's sax, supported by Pieter and Jolle coming in strong with the girls, sexy as hell in tight jeans and a bikini top. It was warm in the pub!

And then... it was over. They were spent.

Jolle was of the opinion that an afternoon of good music and hard playing had the same effect as an afternoon of skiing or a full winy Sunday night with unbridled sex. He felt physically kaput but mentally totally elated; reborn, re-invented.

They sat in their corner at the long bar, now indeed near the fruit machines. Naut, standing up, talking with his back to the band to some audience members who had come to congratulate him over today's performance. Pieter, all smiles, talked to Tiara, sitting again on his lap, like in the old days, while she teased him with throwing lip-formed kisses. Nana sat on Jolle's lap like she was also somebody's teenage girl. Well, she was once again, wasn't she?

When Naut came back to talk to them all, Pieter felt he had to grab the moment, raised his voice, and said:

"Guys, really splendid, fantastic, really happy, best ever." He looked, albeit indeed a bit obligately, happy - but did he mean it?

They toasted, clinking with their glasses. The twins were drinking a cool pale ale from a bottle, Pieter unexpectedly had an orange juice - he was off the booze for a while he said. That could take months, hours or like today: minutes - with Jolle holding a normal Heineken and Naut, of course, was on his third or fourth, or most likely fifth gin and tonic.

“Holy Shoot and The Temper!” The few audience members standing close-by overhearing them started to clap and cheer. We want more!

Pieter felt they had done their best gig ever particularly for a band not even playing six months together. Naut was still a fucking hit, not the most melodious player, missing entire chords of ideas sometimes, but he had a stage presence like a tornado, the audience were attracted to it like a cheap disaster movie; then the twins, oh my, they are cute and horny at the same time Pieter thought - there must be a divinity to design them like this, god exists! They could do a bit better in their harmonies, but here, like Naut, their sheer (and yummy!) stage presence compensated for all imperfections.

“Anything we can do better guys?”

Tiara jumped in straight away, loud and without ado.

At its best, the dynamics of the relationship between Tiara and Naut were unclear. Naut was deep down a silent and private person, moody and headstrong. Tiara, as if forced to take the bait, always wanted to outclass him. Always the last word type of girl. Even small, non-serious light arguments needed to be won by her. Naut took some delight in being pushed back by her - it was also attention after all, which he clearly craved. Nana had challenged her sister once on her childish school square type of behaviour. Tiara had answered her dead-serious: "He likes it. It's like he is testing me all the time, like a father does. Discovering the boundaries. I wonder if he will ever explode." Nana had stared at her, she did not really understand, as she herself was so different. Tiara had then continued, in a conspiratorial tone: "And, after a good fun fight Na, he performs like a god. Him being challenged - no: 'dominated' is a better word - by a girl works like an aphrodisiac. Make-up sex is the best!"

"We need our own stuff, yes, Pieter, we need to write. We really need our stuff. We are more than ready for it; you've seen it today! Bloody hell yes, where is our music?"

Pieter felt a hot flush. The exalted ambiance flattened out. They were suddenly quiet; the

enthusiastic groupies had retreated to their places in the bar area - something in the air had changed. Pieter had heard this 'own stuff' many times before. But he doubted Tiara could have been aware of this. The two-year lucrative run earlier in the Rotterdam *Salty Salmon* had ended because the owner of the place wanted to have 'real authentic' music. He had won a prize for his public stage and innovative band selection but was told that he had to get rid of cover bands. The jury was too polite to mention Holy Shoot and The Temper by name. The message was clear. He refused to renew a contract if there was no original work. Although it made the beer pumps flow, they had had enough cover soul and reggae shit. Get a life. Artistically, Pieter was on the streets.

Even at the subsidised music school where he was teaching, the management had let it be known in no uncertain terms that they were disappointed that he was still doing this eternal Earth Wind & Fire crap while he could do something better. A few influential entitled parents had complained. The 'authenticity' word had been dropped, again.

A sudden low-pressure cloud befell the group further. Tiara looked around with a wide but a bit of an artificial smile, wondering what she had caused.

Naut belched an enormous loud burp which broke the ice and made everybody laugh. He

stepped forward and clanked his empty glass on the wooden bar.

"I have offered you the barge Pieter, many times."

"I know that Naut. I know that... I know."

"Time is really ripe for it mate. The guy who owns it is doing time - eighteen months unconditional. Cocaine bust - here right in the Scheedam harbour of all places! Yeah. Stupid dick. If we chip in some bucks together or pay him later when he walks again, it can basically be for free. He would love to see his boat used. Then, he has something to do in prison. Worry about us." He laughed a bit too loud.

Naut scanned the group and saw interested faces. There were some encouraging smiles back.

"It is a matter of discipline. Play and write two to three hours a day together and a few hours individually to write more personal stuff. Half of the old cargo hold can be set up for music. I believe there is an electric piano on board already running on solar panels."

Nana looked Jolle in the eye and gave him a full kiss on the mouth. Tiara bent over to Pieter's unshaven cheek and planted a firm kiss there also and when Naut jokingly protested, he got a full mounted one also - on his lips. "Do I need to kiss you Naut also?" Pieter chuckled. "Looks like our twins have approved..."

Naut, in a bit of a pose, ordered up, with one finger his next gin and tonic, number six, then addressed the team:

“It is February now. If we get ready in two weeks, we can sail before mid-March. Imagine guys, spring in Scotland with music, retreat, inspiration and the icing on the cake, the Northern Lights. And then Norway, fjords, and freedom.”

Nana’s mouth fell open. “Yes... the Northern Lights. Always wanted to see them. That’s my dream.”

Pieter raised his glass, slowly, looking them all in the eye and the group followed suit, ready to clink.

“To the first album of Holy Shoot and The Temper: ‘Northern Lights’”.

Pieter thought it felt great. But if one would look more closely, a sudden spurt of tiny sweat pearls had formed on his forehead, his upper lip and - not visible to the public - on the lower side of his back where he was wet. The sweat signalled something: his point of no return had been reached. This train had in fact already left the station. This ship had left the harbour. A plane had taken off. An old fear overcame him.

The novice crew couldn't believe their luck. If these first two, three hours were representative of the entire trip to come, the musical journey to the Northern Lights would be as Germans would have said, a 'Kindergeburtstag', a kids' birthday party. A proud Naut, seeing his sailing dream materialise over the horizon, had them hoist the sails, under his benevolent command, with laughter from the hard drinking on-looking jolly pub crowd that had come to bid them farewell from the shore. With the large mainsail and smaller jib, they sailed on nature's power straight out of the wide river mouth that separated the freshwater port from the North Sea. They sped away from the Dutch coast at at least five or even six knots, which was quite fast for a traditional boat design like this. The sea stayed flat, like a teenager's belly, Pieter said. Flat, yeah... They all trusted Pieter on his knowledge of teenage bellies, but his judgement of the future of the sea surface would turn out to be very unreliable.

They sailed away from their safe haven, their country, their little town of Scheedam, under Naut's larger-than-life maritime self-confidence, driven by a near impossible desire. But in the first hours, instead of being filled with dreams, all were in fact still occupied with the mundane business of settling in on board. They were supposed to have installed themselves during the

last few days before departure, but Naut had not thought out any scheduling of such work, nor did he care. He played, alone with Pieter, nearly three nights nonstop in the *Stallion* for quick busking bucks and had not really anticipated the most important part of a long sea trip: preparations. They left him alone at the helm, the large imposing wood that turned the rudder. He nearly tripped on his happiness that his personal vision and ambition had finally come true; a drug feeling from the old days creating his new world. He would not have left the steering on this important start of their journey to anybody else. The helm was his new world.

Pieter had carried a large, strong, used plastic supermarket shopping bag aboard, with only the most essential personal paraphernalia, his worn-out address book, an extra pair of jeans. His acoustic guitar came uncovered on board, the electric Stratocaster and Gibson swaddled in a sleeping bag. Toothpaste and shampoo could be borrowed from somebody else, right? Why change a winning sharing formula that had served him his entire life?

Tiara also travelled light, a small, used army-dump travel bag held more books than clothes. No sailing gear or sailing clothes - it was for all the first time on the seas. Nana had - next to two garbage bags with clothes - also brought a small

foldable plastic camping table. She was determined to finish her short novel *Connected*, a compilation of scenes describing 'twinness' during this trip. Hadn't Naut confirmed there would be ample time for diversions from the new album? She took her book seriously and couldn't write with a sketchpad on her knees, she needed a desk to work on. That she also needed a chair had not really occurred to her. In the hold, she appropriated a large hook on a beam to hang her beanie on, her inseparable companion on any trip.

Jolle was the most credible traveller. He introduced a huge old Samsonite hardshell suitcase containing his laptop, some books and, interestingly, a pair of new rubber boots plus an old sailing overall he had borrowed from a drinking buddy friend in the *Stallion*.

The girls were the busiest with homemaking; guys exploring the environment, girls creating the nest, a centuries' old pattern. First thing of course would be the sleeping arrangements. Tiara would sleep with Naut - obviously - in the relatively large original living cabin at the rear; Pieter, Nana and Jolle in the old low cargo hold ahead. This would be where they would also cook and, where they would play music, during the long hours of smooth spring cruising and practise for their Northern Lights inspirational tour to Norway - Naut's ideas were not small. It was only Jolle, by the way, who noticed that there was no electric

piano - and definitely no solar panels. In the euphoria of the departure, he omitted to explore Naut's promise adequately - he therefore missed a crucial sign of his unpreparedness: white marketing lies for this trip of a lifetime.

Pieter, Nana and Jolle smoked a joint below deck, Pieter then snugly nestled up in the large collection of foresails that they had secured but were most likely never going to be used. The materials smelled of the sea, old adventure, romantic sunsets in undiscovered fjords. Nana and Jolle were sitting on cheap foldable mattresses on the other side of the hold, hand in hand. They were still very much in love. If the need presented itself, Tiara had suggested with a wink of her eye, they could use the big bed in the rear cabin. Just make sure Naut is at the helm and the wind is strong. He will not notice. He chooses his helm over pondering who is in his bed, let alone what they are doing. Sailing over love. They laughed.

Later in the afternoon, four hours after their departure, they could hardly discern the Dutch dunes behind them anymore. The wind, unusual from the east, was strong and had picked up big time. The teenage belly was now definitely not flat anymore. Hints of evening and night touched the cloudy horizon that hung far away over the

English coast, their destination. Naut, still at the helm. He was actually always at the helm. He would not tire. Naut cannot tire.

It is in human nature to ward off stress by making love. An escape mechanism. No fight, nor fright but flight. Or an old reflex to make DNA available to influence evolution, before dying. Vikings impregnated their women before going into battle. If they lost and the victors would rape their wives, their semen had been in first and the genetic survival of the clan guaranteed!

When they were sure that Naut was safely locked at the wheel, Nana just led Jolle to the rear cabin. Tiara was sitting on the foredeck, trying to doze away her developing seasickness. The worst place to nurse this condition is at the bows of a ship, but she wouldn't move.

After their climax, Jolle dozed away for maybe a few minutes. He saw in his half-awake daydream himself with both Nana and Tiara, naked, active, repeating the love scenes they had just enacted - the three of them. In the end, he always made love with them both. It was a fantasy that was now routine. He didn't like it, but he could not push it away. A fantasy, a wish, a threat?

When they sneaked out of the cabin, Naut looked again at them with a mix of disdain and disgust. Not about their hidden lovemaking, of which he might be aware, but that he was the only one that

could master the boat! Landlubbers all of them, focking useless. They were so damn lucky they had him...

Naut, suddenly wanting to nap, had tried to hand the helm for ten minutes to Pieter, who did a formidable clumsy job. Twice they fell completely still, rectangularly between large waves, a dangerous position. Sails flapping scarily, the routine sounds changing into the frightening and unnatural. The second time this happened, Naut, who had obviously not been able to sleep at all, came rushing out of the cabin and pushing Pieter rudely away, took back the long tiller. He swore. Focking landlubbers! Was Naut angry or scared?

That first night was plain horrible. No other words for it. Tiara was alone in the rear cabin, having found the motivation to move from the bows, although still very seasick. Nana and Jolle had equipped themselves with all potential sleeping material that they could find in the back of the cargo hold, following Pieter's example, trying to sleep under sails, covers and sleeping bags. Thank god all was still dry then.

Nana slept most of the time, which can also be a sign of advanced seasickness, Jolle had read in the minimal preparation he had done for his first sea trip. Suicidal depression being the last stage. He himself also didn't feel very good but was

managing to override the urge to puke. He had tremendous difficulty in concentrating, to keep thoughts in a logical sequence and drive them to synthesis.

Naut had now been steering for nearly eighteen hours, except the few minutes that Pieter had tried. Pieter was sitting-squatting next to the standing Naut, keeping his eyes on the horizon behind the boat, waiting for the sun to come up, but more importantly, giving warnings of any large waves as he supplied Naut a continuous flow of canned lukewarm beer. Jolle smiled wryly when he took in the scene: an almighty stage god Pieter, reduced to a servile factotum. The Holy Shoot... had become holy shit.

Pieter yeah, the stage god, a man as beautiful as his ancestry. Hailing from Surinam, he was huge and muscular without an ounce of unnecessary fat. Pieter was the leader of the band; he actually was the band. The twins and Jolle were mere followers of the unchangeable core that Pieter had created with Naut - in the aftermath of their dark drug days. Pieter was Naut's saviour. The roles were turning now, different rules on the open sea than on the stage.

The beauty of Pieter was not only his physique, but he was nearly perfect in authenticity. Aware of his colour, yes, but proud of it in a matter of fact, humble and self-understood way. He knew he was terribly attractive to most Dutch girls, and he played his trump card efficiently, although dosed, wisely, and discreetly. Everyone suspected that both the twins had slept with him. He would never tell anybody, but the girls were kind of, yes, proud even, 'show off' with it in the beginning. Me too! It's not only boys that mark their conquests, some females gladly do the same.

Holy Shoot and The Temper (*HST* in short), as Pieter's band was called for irretrievable but likely good reasons (Pieter claimed he had heard a member of the audience once shout at him while playing: 'Holy shit, he has a temper!', but Naut persisted in a similar, more maritime observation, more specifically directed at him: 'Wholesome tempest!'), had built a strong following, but also in mere limited circles. Pieter, ever juggling his ambitions between artist and budding businessman, wanted to focus completely on his rich varied roots and produce the most authentic South American Suri-reggae tunes. Unfortunately, he was forever stuck in the well-paying bars, indulging in large audiences and in the good-looking girls that came for his earth, wind, and fire. The now inevitable had happened, Naut had

cemented a trap that he couldn't get out of, with his dominant saxophone, being the extension of his personality and their shared success. His helm on the stage.

Sudden panicked shouts and cries from the open cockpit forced Jolle out of the hold and his nauseous sleepy condition. Naut at the large tiller gestured wildly and waved at Jolle to approach him. He crawled through the invading seas which encroached over from the stern, getting soaking wet in a few seconds. He was not wearing his borrowed sailing gear, simply because he had not sorted his luggage and it was inconveniently deep in the suitcase. He found Naut in big distress, trying to steer the boat away from the growing waves rolling in from behind, all the while trying to attend to Pieter, who lay slumped over in a puked-filled corner of *Dollard's* small cockpit. Was that blood on his forehead? Naut shouted at Jolle to take care of him, as he had to steer, which he pointed out was much more important. It was clear who was in charge now. Jolle was the nurse.

Pieter was half-conscious and smelled of booze; beer Jolle guessed. Pieter tried to smile and wipe off the blood, which was slow, yet continuously oozing from a wound on his head. He studied his finger carefully, before the blood was rinsed off by the next wave. He was laughing, trying to downplay the situation. He explained to Jolle

what had happened - he simply fell when Naut had given the helm a big jerk while he was - as instructed by the skipper, monitoring the waves from behind. Later Jolle found out that Naut, undoubtedly creative but equally utterly unprepared as he was, had improvised an alert system that Pieter was supposed to use, relatively small waves to be announced as 'C', bigger as 'B', large killer ones as 'A'. 'Super A' to be reserved for those that had the potential to drown them in a few bubbly seconds.

Jolle didn't know what to do. Strangely enough, Pieter was not in distress, but was rather childishly fascinated by his blood trickling out and kind of, happy to be relieved from wave duty. Something had snapped in the man though. The big man had turned small.

Jolle looked at Naut, working the wooden tiller next to them, like a madman. Soon, it would be twenty-four hours since he had last slept. He was most likely soaked to the bone and hungry. But not yet dehydrated, he mused, he did not realise the true effects of excessive alcohol consumption. Chah ha ha. He could smell his breath too. Very unusual for the hippie green lifestyle he advocated, he told Jolle to simply kick the empty cans overboard. Jolle couldn't suppress an inward

smile though, when in a slightly quieter moment he saw Naut again jerking at the large wooden helm; it looked like he was playing his tenor sax, in the savage first few minutes of a gig when he had just come out after the band's intro, to impress the audience, to take away the attention from the girls and to establish his presence. The sideways sudden rudder movements were the same. Naut was on stage, establishing Naut, taking over the band.

By now, the two young female passengers were very sick in the hold, the leaders were drunk and hurt. All felt a vulnerability, aggravated by inexperience. A teenage party, with parents away, had gotten out of hand. Jolle, the youngest of the males and not a true alpha one, was not equipped to make it all stop.

Still, something had to give. He had never sailed in his life before. Let alone been in a weird boat like this fucking *Dollard* in the middle of a storm, with a skipper that had just run out of a last century thirties' black-n-white fake Hollywood movie set of a *Flying Dutchman* remake. Mad, sailing against the wind - not the real wind, but his life's wind. His soul having been sold to the devil for a vague promise of redemption.

Jolle went back to Pieter. Dragged by Nana into the band, he had never stopped liking Pieter - Pieter was safe, fatherly, friendly, an open emotional soul, free, independent, without being weak. Naut was his opposite and actually Jolle now realised he had never understood why Naut took, no: accepted second place in *HST*. Well, did he ever? Was this the opportunity he craved?

Three days later, Naut was again pushing the exercise like a madman - driving everybody else if not crazy, then at least restless, and unhinged. Back in the safety of a port *Dollard* was a complete and utter mess, they had hardly survived, still he urged for leaving as soon as they could and continuing further north straight away. Jolle kind of followed his orders, and worked on the sails, removing the mainsail that had been ripped apart by the storm and replacing it with an old sail. Naut was obsessed with the engine, which after two days of hard work he got running again after cleaning and blowing out and drying all the fuel lines. He was boastful about it, but the work on the boat was half-baked. Nana and Tiara slept most of the time, recovering from their seasickness.

Pieter's world had been turned upside down. He had joined the trip for the artistic challenge. His dream was not cruising endless hours on a nice smooth sailing course, sipping cocktails. His objective was to make music, write up the unique tunes they would generate in jam sessions in the hold, play creative live sessions in welcoming pubs in the fantastic harbours around the North Sea. The new album would be generated as a result of the sea - not necessarily on the water! They all needed to play, let the waves, the lights, yes, of course their Northern Lights, inspire them into their own jazzy, funky, new maritime soul sound. Pieter's vision on where they should be going musically was clear.

The storm and the inherent change in leadership was now troubling Pieter to the core. Music, his rock, his existence, had disappeared in the threatening waves.

He had been into music since he was born. Born in the late fifties, he moved with half of his country to the Netherlands in 1974, when he was seventeen, to avoid the negative repercussions of the colony's independence and the probable loss of his passport. Growing up as a teenager in Surinam, Dutch Guiana, his earliest and fondest memories were music. Both his parents played in

a very successful and famous Paramaribo cover band. He started playing the guitar when he was eleven, soon playing along on stage with his mum and dad. When he was just contemplating starting his own band, his family, well his entire clan, moved to the Netherlands. He was so excited - and frankly not prepared by anybody. His biggest fantasy was to tell all of his new Dutch friends about his wonderful country, the food, the history, but most of all the music. He had dreamt of having his band in Amsterdam, inviting warm welcomes, and fostering understanding. Instead, his family was dumped in social housing in a terribly cheap built high-rise estate near the airport. They had no money and could hardly survive on the dole handed out. But that was all easy compared to the non-welcome he got in his high school where the government had placed him. To say the welcome was racist would be an understatement - he was faced with aggression, violence, and exclusion. 'Hey little Sambo, fock off, why don't you go back picking coconuts.' He laughed it off. You don't pick coconuts, he thought. They fall on your head. These Dutchies are stupid.

And then the crash happened.

He said, when asked about their whereabouts, that his parents and many of his uncles and aunties, had gone back to Surinam after many years of low paid jobs, continuous blunt racism

and disappointment and tried to pick up something of their old lives. But those were lies. They had disappeared.

Pieter was thirty-five when the apartment block collapsed. He was not at home. As far as he knew, his parents were. His father must have come home, perhaps a bit early, as he had started work that day also earlier than normal. He had taken the mail round for a colleague who had reported sick - and who was also a friend of his - exchanging his regular round with somebody else. His mother would have been home to welcome his dad with a cup of tea, or what happened more often, a small cold Heineken, which he would drink straight from the bottle. That he was home early that day became such an obsession for Pieter when they needed to determine whether his parents would have been there when that plane hit the building.

The convention of covering for others, like a ship's mate, 'of course I will take your watch' had cost his father's and also his mother's life. She would have been out for her weekly card playing in the other building had his father not come home early. Pieter wondered whether their being social had killed them. How can you be free of social convention?

At the time, Pieter had dated a steady Dutch girl, quite a bit older than himself, but his new questions about social obligation, freedom and similar, made him mentally (and for a while also physically) impotent. He could not talk about it. The months after his parents disappearance were hell. He got depressed, broke up with his girl and dived into drugs.

The air disaster investigation itself did not help him either. It strengthened his feeling that larger forces were after his liberty. The cause of the disaster, an El Al cargo plane, which had lost two of its engines just after take-off, both under the right wing. It was directed back to Schiphol airport, and it was guided safely over the old downtown Amsterdam, with all its tourists and expensive old monument houses. However, it was strangely assigned to an uncommonly used runway, for which the glide-path took it over the vast low social status estate where he lived with his parents. Pieter was devastated and disgusted when a theory surfaced that the doomed plane had been deliberately routed over the estate - where immigrants, mainly coloured, and from very diverse backgrounds, lived. It did not make sense to a lot of people, but it deepened Pieter's strong desire for independence from convention,

freedom from social normalcy, to avoid being part of this rigged world.

The social conspiracy theory took over the attention that he should have given to his own mental recovery. He pushed his well-being to the end of the list and developed a refuge in music. Music became his addiction. He knew however that the plane could come down anytime again. Which would then break him to pieces, irreparably.

Pieter was now fifty-five and felt, in spite of the air disaster and its speculative origins, entirely Dutch. He had his music, his body, his colour, and a band had materialised!

He had not realised that his plane had been circling above him all the time and could come down again so fast.

Their rescue from the English east coast's mortal rocks at the end of their first leg, had been heroic. Jim, the coxswain of the Middleburgh lifeboat that pulled them to safety, had taken to

the sorry half drowned bunch that he had towed through the tempest back to life. Once ashore, he dropped by a few times a day, chatting mainly with Tiara, although he sometimes had no idea which of the twins he was talking to. Identical twins always presume people see, know, understand who they are. A delicate game. He advised Naut on technicalities and lent him some simple tools from the nearby RNLI, Royal National Lifeboat Institution, lifeboat station workshop, as *Dollard* was obviously not overly equipped. His near-parental interest gave trust to the crew, he felt free to jump on board whenever he wanted, to which nobody objected. They all talked to him freely - when Naut was out of hearing range that was. It was just great to have somebody local around who cared about them.

When Naut worked on the boat, he bossed Jolle around aimlessly. The twins slept mostly, or when awake, shopped for food with the loose change they found, cooked, and were basically 'just around'. There was no structure in their activities. Nana suggested they could do some laundry for everybody, but Tiara shrugged her shoulders and said that they had no spare clothes to wear when the originals were being washed. Nana dropped the subject and went again for a nap.

Jim tried to get information on their next passage plan and in spite of his insistence, he couldn't get a clear idea on what the crew were preparing. Not surprising, as the crew were still tense and on edge. Naut seemed to be doing all the planning, not involving the crew.

The day after the near-disaster Pieter had stayed mainly below decks. He had for hours collected all the parts of the musical instruments that had been flying around in the hold. He carefully and diligently first repaired the drum set and set it up relatively intact in the right front corner. His second electric guitar, the Gibson - fortunately not his favourite - was a total loss, the neck had broken halfway along, not a point where repair was possible. He made a mental note to donate it to the musical sea gods once they were well under way again, perhaps a sea sacrifice would bring calm waters and great music. The Stratocaster was kind of OK, it had been wet, so he needed to dry the electric elements. The amplifier running on batteries still worked fine and so did the microphones used by the twins. He hauled the wet sleeping bags and sails up on deck, where Jolle hung them out to dry. The hold was clear. He set up the entire band equipment, tried all the instruments again. Then, for the first time that day, he too went topside. He saw it was slowly getting dark. He stood halfway out of the hold

companionway and called everybody in, by name. The teacher called for class.

They all gathered in the hold, Pieter sat on the drum stool, smiled, and said: "Guys, we need to play. I've salvaged nearly everything, so we are ready to continue our musically themed discovery to the Northern Lights. Our Northern Lights, remember?" He stood up and gestured towards Jolle to take the stool. He handed him the drumsticks.

Jolle looked at Naut, whose face had grown grim and grey in the fading light in the hold. The twins... Tiara looked at Pieter smiling; Nana studied Naut's expression with an open mouth.

Naut spoke straight away, no time for deliberation: "We are on a ship Pieter, we are on a sea trip, don't you understand, you fucking landlubber? We are going again tomorrow. To the Northern Lights. We are running late. Those that shine, not those that sound. Stop fucking around with me - with your music, Jesus Christ, where is your sense of reality? We are leaving tomorrow. Anybody keeps on talking to that Jim guy, can fuck off back to the Netherlands."

Angry like never before, he left swiftly up the companionway back on deck. The skipper had left the meeting that he had not called for.

The girls had thought it was not worth the fights; these men were just bidding up, having a pissing contest. Pieter had stopped arguing with Naut, Jolle had no choice - if he would not join, Naut would have kicked him off, Nana or no Nana. Twins or no twins. The Northern Lights had become his Odyssean sirens. None of the crew would be able to put wax in his ears.

The reasoning the girls later brought in, in another impromptu gathering on deck, was not entertained, no, worse than that, it didn't even register. Naut was busy with male discipline, not female worries. At the end of that second, initially loud but later subdued group argument Tiara said: "OK, we will take the bus to Scotland." Nana had looked at her, wanted to object, but understood the de-escalation attempt immediately. It worked, Naut accepted it without a word, raised his eyebrows faintly and also left this meeting. The less women on board the better. They bring bad luck.

The six-hour journey made Nana think of the second bus ride in that movie *Midnight Cowboy*. Also here, they had a lot of opportunities to talk

long and deep, but their conversation came in snippets, during irregular short periods of wakefulness, when neither of them could sleep. Focking hell, they were tired of that sea trip, the smell of diesel and sick, the mopping up, the forever changing plans, the tension... the change in expectation, trust. But even more so, the change in pecking order, the male adrenaline and the resulting anger leading to silly fights; the signs of war strengthening. A leadership contest had been brewing since the beginning within their cherished *HST*... Nobody had realised it. Naut's intentions were clear. Pieter's yielding had happened already. What about Jolle? And how would these guys see their own role towards them, the twins, the glorified success of the band?

Nana wondered whether the bus ride had been on Tiara's mind already a bit longer, or if it had indeed been a spontaneous last-minute decision. She found it strange, as she had not known Tiara to be like that in the past. From the two, Tiara was in fact the most amenable to their group process, wanting to be onside with Naut, Pieter, herself Nana of course, and even Jolle. From Jolle, she would have understood the idea straight away. He was a bit like that, as they had found out in the last few days: an outlier, critical of all intense team developments. He was drifting out of the band or

from what was left of the previous coherence that now lay in tatters.

“Do you think they will make up, like, get together, solve their boys’ problems, if we take ourselves out of the equation?” Nana asked.

Tiara had either not listened properly or used the question cleverly to drive her other agenda. She snuggled up to the bus window, sank a bit deeper into her seat - she craved a cigarette - and embarked on one of her more mature reflections (at least that was what she thought) on the developing situation, in a slow sleepy voice. She knew Nana had heard most of them. She now felt like going through Naut’s life, as she always learned something new while reconstructing his character.

“Naut is a vat full of contradictions. He is super-bright, that is not so difficult to see, but he refuses to use his talents for self-improvement, financial gain, or to further his career. You have to understand where he is coming from. His parents were, well, not particularly dominant, perhaps a bit, but obviously very successful. That also can scare people off. His dad was a full-time university professor, with a minor TV celebrity role specialising in aerospace and satellites, while his mother, a medical doctor, was running a highly profitable pharmaceutical company. Naut,

an only child, was brought up with a combination of love and expectation, unspoken perhaps, but in this balance with 'love' eighty percent was unspoken expectation. It was like a deal where the love was conditional and dependent on fulfilling their considerable expectations. His parents compensated for the lack of love by just spoiling him the old-fashioned way. This took the shape of ridiculously expensive birthday theme park visits with a private touring car and dinners three times a week in starred restaurants. Anything he wanted, he got. His dad was never there, his mom usually came home late. He saw more of the mailman delivering weekly toys, gifts, video games than he did his parents.

An easy pattern and nothing new in the shared global history of growing up: turning fourteen, he rebelled. Marihuana, bunked off from school, living and sleeping rough with the squatters in the provincial university town he grew up in. His parents lost control; they were too busy anyhow with themselves... He drowned his intellectual interests in booze, girls, demonstrations against whatever there was to demonstrate against. Every stone he threw at the riot police was a stone against the establishment, against the rotten world order, against his mom and dad."

Nana was going to ask a question, but Tiara cut her short - she wanted to stay in her narrative - a typical small Tiara-Nana conflict.

“Ha-ha, no questions, not yet I guess this is what you wanted to know Na: he picked up music when he had no more easy funds to buy weed, he saw that the guys on the streets made quick bucks with simple instruments, the saxophone was an obvious candidate, an impressive visual instrument with a loud sound. Great for busking. He told his parents to buy one for him, which they did as they saw it as a last straw to keep him out of the eternal gutters. Funnily enough Naut had never done music when he was young, as he was too lazy to have the discipline required to learn music. He did pick up the sax pretty fast to much acclaim by his peer street artists, many of them junkies. He climbed fast in the pecking order of the buskers and untalented street beggars.

Mom and dad naively thought he was improving in general. They were very nice to him, being smooth and slick - but had no clue. They had sailed so quickly, sailed far away from him. They did take his baby daughter in for a while, but that was not the glue they had in mind. It didn't work either...”

“What? He had a daughter...?”

“Not a lot of people know. He never talks about it. But it is also no secret. When he was eighteen or nineteen or so, only playing on the saxophone, he slept in a derelict houseboat, with a teenage heroin junkie girl. It was her that made him try it, only try, yes, I’d like to know your experience, blah blah blah. Long story cut short, in three months he was completely and utterly hooked on heroin. Fully and utterly addicted. He had become one of them. A ghost. Stealing. Cajoling. Conning. Anything for a fix. He had days that he couldn’t stand or walk, let alone blast his tunes out through the medieval centre of the town.”

“You can still see from his face he’s been a junkie,” Nana said softly, “that haunted look, that craving... now I understand, wow, exciting but scary.”

“The poor girl had a child at seventeen, Naut was not even twenty or just about maybe. The police - female officers only - came to take it away from the leaking houseboat and from the addicted youngsters. They tried his parents, they were hopeless. Lots of good will, but they were self-occupied. They hired an undocumented Filipina nurse, which of course didn’t work. The child

went back to her young mother, to live with her in a mental prison institution. No idea what happened to them. Naut had cleaned himself up by then. And, in spite of what everyone expected, continued playing music. He had found Pieter.”

Just as we found him, Nana thought wryly. Had Naut changed a lot after finding Pieter?

They slept again for half an hour or so, dozing away, caressed by the wallowing suspension movements and the oppressive heat produced by the ill-regulated modern coach’s heating system. Nana, her beanie covering head and face, woke up first, something in the rhythm of the bus had changed.

She watched her sis, sleeping serenely. Something had also changed in Tiara over the last few months. The sea trip had further catalysed it. She didn’t open up spontaneously to her as in the past, she had become pensive, contemplative as if brooding on something. The umbilical communication cord they had always shared seemed cut. Naut was not overly nice to Tiara anymore. The way he looked at her during the last few days... Angry, frustrated, impolite. Tiara had not slept with him since they left Scheedam, she was sure about that. Nothing to do with the storm. Twins know that. She had seen before how he reacted if he was denied his immediate conjugal

rights, like after a good gig. Naut saw this sailing adventure as a good gig.

All fine, thought Nana and in fact she couldn't care less about Naut and his sailor's needs. She wanted her distracted Tiara back. Back on their shared track: two people with one mind. Twins. But Tiara might not think the same.

The driver had loudly announced that their stop in Rosemouth was approaching. Both were quiet, but the refreshing sleep had given them the same idea. Something must be done.

Nana smiled conspiratorially. Tiara opened her mouth first: "I know what you are going to say Na. And if you are not gonna say it, I will. But who says it first owns the idea and has to action it. D'accord?"

They laughed and felt like little girls. They had played this game so often, in teasing their mother or plain revolting against her, especially over the last few years.

"Naut... we have to talk to Naut - and we have to slam the table. Enough is enough."

"Ha-ha, OK, you do it then," said Nana, enforcing the agreement.

“Yeah, or still you,” said Tiara. “He won’t listen anyhow.”

“It is us or the boat, sis.”

“I just wouldn’t know when to tell him. There is never a right moment for these things. He stalks out in conflict.”

They giggled. Slam the table. There is, except your camping gear, no table on the boat. They laughed.

Will he listen? Will it be too late already? And when? They thought deeply but couldn’t agree fully on the execution of their plan. There were too many variables: he would go, they knew, but would he go alone, with a small crew, or would he insist on all? Where was the leverage?

“OK, OK,” said Nana. “Best moment is before we all go on the boat again. The night before. What about Jolle and Pieter?”

“Pfff, Pieter is with us, I know that already. I don’t know about Jolle. He must have also seen the real Naut and is getting scared or angry. It seems to me that Jolle is evading a showdown. He is not an alpha boy; however, I think you do not fock around with him. Actually Na, I don’t know him so well, you should know.”

Tiara searched for Nana’s hand and squeezed it. Nana felt in spite of their fatigue - with the trip and the thought of the upcoming confrontation - a

sudden happiness. They hadn't been so close for ages. These guys going after each other frightened them. But it also brought them together - like when they were young teenagers. Bad things always bring good things.

The bus halted at the only square Rosemouth could boast of, not that far from the harbour where they would be expecting *Dollard*; today, tomorrow, they had no idea. They got their backpacks from the lower luggage compartment of the bus, helped by the sympathetic stocky driver. They geared up and walked to the nearby town centre - another drab post-industrial struggling settlement, with only the past and no future - and looked for a pub that might be open at this late afternoon hour. Strolling leisurely towards some promising flickering neon lights in the beginning of a mellow early evening drizzle, Tiara thought: "If you can't beat them - confuse them." The idea, in separate, but twin minds, developed further. Anything to slow down this accelerating train wreck. Rough intervention. They needed something unexpected. To deflate, decelerate, decompress.

To confuse! She looked at her sister. Nana smiled back, a kind of understanding. Again, they had the same idea. Disruption.

He is fucking faking his seasickness, Naut thought about Jolle. He pretends to puke; nothing comes out and then he works attentively on the screen of his phone. Pieter's condition was genuine, he disappeared with the large first waves under-deck and slept, sick as a dog again.

Naut didn't leave the helm alone, only for a pee or to get something to eat. He was forced a few times to leave the boat in Jolle's hand. Jolle had no experience but was learning fast. Naut saw him building up the right reflexes in steering *Dollard* down the aggressive waves rolling in from behind.

They were closely under the lee of the east coast of Scotland. However, the westerly was strong. There were not so many high waves. These were normally quiet waters, being sheltered by the Scottish shore that lay in the west.

Jolle, in the middle of the pitch-dark night, squatted at the opposite end of the cockpit and looked at Naut. They were both smoking. Naut one after the other, Jolle only when he got one offered. With every Dutch-style hand rolled cigarette he lit, Naut also looked at his phone to

see where they were. For their location. On Google Maps. No money for nautical charts... They had never talked about all this before they left. All trusted Naut that he would be adequately equipped with his imprisoned friend's boat.

Their social order had now irreversibly changed, Jolle realised, probably to do with extremes like fear and pity rather than respect. Recently, his deep emotional feeling - something resembling respect - for Pieter had been replaced by a pitying love. He wanted to wrap the man in his arms and... well, bring him back to his obedient safe place. A straggler on a rainy street in the middle of a sleeping town. You would take him in, make him comfortable then bring him home - whatever that was. The love for a stray dog, a dementing grandparent. Bring 'home' - was there a 'home' for those on board?

Pieter had indeed changed dramatically during and after the crossing from Scheedam. His mature yet playful cheerfulness, humour, sparkle in his eyes, naughty innuendo with the twins - had disappeared like a thin layer of night snow on a first warm spring day and not to come back. He hardly conversed with Naut anymore, restricting his responses to a monosyllabic reply like yes or no but still attending to the boat's chores immediately when instructed by the skipper.

Jolle was challenged by this development. It was not merely Naut's character that led *Dollard* in unsafe uncharted waters. A plane never goes down only because the pilot is drunk, Jolle had once been told, there are so many other factors that play a role in a crash.

One of the most important risk factors was clearly present and not addressed. On the first leg, the unfamiliar nautical environment was so overwhelming that Jolle had no reason to analyse the overall situation. Hollow leadership and fake team spirit had fast evolved into sheer panic, for all of them. Panic is a common emotion, one of the rawest human experiences, without levels or grades. From panic, fear becomes respect.

It had all looked so self-understood, Jolle thought. Borrow a boat, go out, do what you like, freedom. He kind of knew it was for him, being in his early thirties and it most likely being the last opportunity to show the world he was in charge of his own destiny. He felt, unconsciously, that his future would be with a family, a wife, some kids, an inevitable divorce and preferably a good job that could carry it all. The 'deserved pension' would follow and then looking back at an overall,

not so adventurous life. He had never actively considered this, but deep down he was perfectly OK with it.

That did not just fall from the sky: Jolle's father, like most fathers in the developed world, was never home. He faked overtime, business trips and was with a number of lovers, sometimes part-time student prostitutes. He was a kind of sex addict. His mother was more pained by always being alone than the thought of being cheated upon.

As an only child (like everyone except the twins on board he realised), he grew up with his mother, who was simple and - becoming cold and hard in living alone - rather distant. He couldn't remember he needed her emotionally as a young boy growing up, he knew she would turn down his small feelers for contact, attention, and exchange. Jolle could not say it made him unhappy, but he felt something was missing all along the way. The scarce moments he did have access to his father resulted in boasting moments, drunken fishing trips and early visits to disreputable bars in the city. His father as a positive contributing factor in Jolle's growing up was non-existent. He was useless.

He saw that his early independence made his mother happy, and he got all kinds of small paid jobs, which included newspaper routes, and which involved illegal waiting at sports canteens. Jolle liked the smell of money, income, and the status it gave him. At around the age of fifteen he had some money in his village bank branch - where he had opened an account, the first one of his school class and age peers to do so. He was challenged by the fact that his male classmates looked up to him because of his relative personal economic success, however girls were not interested in his precocious capitalist career.

His life was his work; instead of girls he took up drumming, what he thought would be the easiest of all music instruments to learn, also with the dream of attracting, perhaps, the females.

What was he doing here with these drop-out idiots? It was only the drumming and Nana that bound him to fake Tiara, mad Naut, and pitiful Pieter.

During this second leg, a long, long lightless night trip, with lots of wind, but acceptable moderate seas, with one crew member disabled, another not allowed to participate, Jolle came to a simple conclusion: Naut had no clue about sailing. No clue about captaincy. He acted illogically, erratically, and rebelled against time-old laws of

good seamanship, like he had rebelled against everything else in life. This guy is not just bad news, he is a train wreck waiting to happen... an accelerating one at that.

He was cocky on stage, but that was always perceived as good fun. Pieter guided him there, let him act the rebellious teenager, everybody loved it. The obnoxiously large saxophone was his social phallus, intimidating the audience, showing independence and perhaps leadership even? But now the world was pretty well-turned upside down - he had pushed his stage act too far. Naut had truly become the Flying Dutchman, its stubborn captain, obsessed with a perfect trip, selling his soul to the devil to let him sail for eternity - however without ever touching land, oops, sorry but that was the deal.

Jolle, in spite of the gloom that had descended on their glorious trip, smiled at the comparison, not only because of the group's goal going haywire, but rather because of the respect he was starting to lose for this man: his brother-in-law, his brother-twin-law. The intended lover of both twins. His rival.

Even now, well, as ever, the twins dominated his thinking. Hey, were their *Dollard* twins in fact some expression of the Northern Lights? Were the boys on board all looking for something elusive, esoteric, lights beyond reach? Mythical structures you wanted to have seen and once done to be credited on a macho points scale.

Nana did not carry her heart, let alone her youth and her related struggles, on her sleeve, but sometimes, after love and wine, he got her talking about herself and about Tiara and about being a twin, being part of something that others often see as a unique single identity, but they themselves scarcely did. At least not Nana.

For Tiara it was slightly different.

He knew from Nana that Tiara was not always the tough cookie she appeared to be. Nana couldn't care less, but her sister hated that she was born second, it didn't fit with all the rest of her world.

Tiara would be the first one to ask questions at grade school when allowed, the first one to enrol for a volunteer job, to be given a sports

assignment. She displayed a combination of a teacher's pet and an alpha-female. Kids would love her, follow her, listen to her. But they were also a bit distant with her, scared even. For advice on actions initiated by Tiara, they would go and see Nana.

At fifteen Tiara got some small, yet nasty bouts of depression. Nana got her first loves, boys that would write small notes to her, but Tiara got nothing. Following the pattern, the boys went to see Nana to ask for advice on how to conquer Tiara - and then fell in love with Nana. Child's play for Nana, who looked much more mature, as things came by themselves on her path, but for Tiara they were a matter of teenage life and death.

This created some distance from their closeness. A quite fine crack though, they never lost their inseparability, speaking up on what bothered them. At least one could say, yes, they were different. Nana was the real ticket, there was always a chance of fakeness in Tiara.

Best illustrated, when Tiara and Nana were with Pieter in their college drop-out months, Tiara did everything to get Pieter for herself, to get Nana out of the equation. Nana tasted very fast the vulnerability and loneliness of Pieter. She gladly yielded the beautiful friendly man to her sister. Her sister Nana loved the tender teddy bear and was proud of her achievement but after a few weeks recognized the utter spinelessness that was

also Pieter. Tiara's fakeness had initially closed her eyes to it.

Naut was different - but with him Tiara had lost her voice, her strong-willed dominance. Wanting to combine the relationship with Pieter and Naut, to keep them both - she took the only opportunity available and that was to sail with them.

The three men sailed into daylight, the wind calmed a bit, and they did not change their positions on the boat - not a word had been spoken over the last four to five hours. Social exchange was through tobacco and related rituals: through helping each other light their fags.

When the waves became less powerful, Pieter came forth from the cargo hold. Jolle could not hear what Naut told him, but he disappeared into the hold and came back five minutes later with a steaming cup of coffee. He handed it to Naut, who did not acknowledge it. Jolle, who realised he might be overdoing this theorising, wondered why good ol' Pieter was now reduced to a subservient, domestic role, while he Jolle had been kept exempted from household chores. Life on board is fine, he chuckled in spite of the total awkwardness that had engulfed them.

Pieter squatted next to Jolle, tried a 'good morning' smile, and said (Naut could not hear them): "I think we are nearly there. Pfff, what a trip again, hey Jolle," Pieter changed his voice and looked suddenly very stern and serious, childish nearly: "Naut took all my money, he said he needed it for the repairs. Did he take yours?"

Jolle smiled back and kept his thoughts to himself. No, he wouldn't dare ask for my money, no, and besides I have no money. And then he spoke: "Yes, Pieter, we are nearly there."

When *Dollard* entered the small, well indeed very small port of Rosemouth, mixed emotions ran through the crew. Although they were glad this second leg was over, it was recognized that the sea had been forgiving in contrast to their nightmare on the first leg. Yet to be out here was not attractive. They needed something different, a better way to compensate for their first leg nightmare.

All three of them were desperate to be in the protection of land, an environment they could trust, a rock to anchor behind, a bay to seek shelter. And to see their twins again.

Nautically, the wind and the plain sailing on this twenty-four-hour trip had been rather uneventful.

They came ashore as different people. They had however sailed on the high seas for the second time and completely by themselves. Perhaps they had now shown they were worthy to continue.

The Sunday night before their intended departure for the third and final Norwegian leg, the *Buoys 'n Gulls* was a madhouse. The day had been a nice warm early April spring day, with quite a number of people driving to the coast for the bank holiday. Larry had opened the gas-heated outside terrace and asked the band to come a bit earlier than usual.

They played their majestic full funky soul set, all the hits that were needed. The twins were fabulous, relaxed, in tune, flirting with the now two-hundred and something audience. Pieter, always the Surinam rhythm man, was like a modern-day Rory Gallagher, his modest off-stage personality changed into a devilish demeanour once he soloed, taking the stage with his one-man invasion, making the audience cry for more. Naut held back initially. It was clear he was also ready to explode.

After their second and last break, it became his moment indeed. He talked to the audience,

explaining in his thick but clear Dutchie accent what they were up to. Music and the Northern Lights.

“We’d like to play a brand-new song for you. I wrote it here in Rosemouth, for you, for us. It is called *Aurora*. Sorry Ti and Na, it is an instrumental.”

Raucous laughter. The band gave a deceptively good impression of a solid group, artistically and more importantly, socially.

Larry, the *Buoys ‘n Gulls* owner, found that bland intrusive tenor sax absolutely over the top, but his young partner Emma and with her the entire audience, went through the roof. A sax solo is like a storm. You want it to end, but it doesn’t. And then suddenly it wanes, it’s gone, it is quiet again, the sea is flat. While the drummer continued alone to provide the now tranquil sea with some soft wavy rhythm, Naut went back to the microphone.

“Hope you enjoyed it... We are going to the Northern Lights, come all on our boat, there is soooo much space... who will join us? Not with a yellow submarine, but in a sturdy Dutch cargo vessel. Who will go with us? Who has the guts for adventure, music and most important of all, FREEDOM!?! Now who?”

The band fell silent. Naut squinted through the light into the audience. Many hands had been raised in front of him. What he couldn't see was that from the band, only Tiara had her right hand raised high as she jumped up and down in her excitement, scanning around to check whether people saw her enthusiasm and thus follow her to the Northern Lights!

Pieter started a tune (Aretha Franklin's *Freedom*), it sounded like a bass on his all-tunes-can-do anything Fender guitar and his wonder amp that had miraculously survived the sea travails. The audience started clapping along. They were waiting for the drums to join in.

Jolle then made a remarkable move - he stood up from behind his drum set, a feat hardly seen with drummers and proceeded to the main voice microphone. He was unstable in his few steps. The audience was screaming for music. We want more!

"Yes, you will allave more! Of gourse! But first I wannuh pay tribute to two great men, sailors and musisians. Pieder and Nau, or should I now say Naut and Pieter? Ha-ha-ha."

Everybody in the audience and in the band noticed that Jolle was undeniably quite drunk. They felt from his tone that his contribution was meant to be in humour, so they laughed diligently and roared again.

“These two guys alone will continue their already now epi...pfff epic, sh... what a word, trip to the Notter Lights...” (Jolle was drunk indeed!) “... true sailors in Dutch spirit. Fock. Fock! Hands together for these modder day heroes! They will come back with albussss foow of new music. The Noddern...”

His voice disappeared.

What Jolle did not see, as it was all behind his back, was that Naut had moved to the voice amplifier and had unplugged the microphone. He then turned incredibly fast to the audience and produced his signature blast of the monster sax, TOOOOOOOTTTT. With that signal, Pieter started an infectious reggae rhythm, the girls went up to their own microphones, vocalising the Jimmy Cliff song for which Pieter was pumping the rhythm out. Jolle looked over to him, confused, Pieter avoided his stare, but Naut gave him a false grin. Djunkie face, thought Jolle. The visceral dislike became stronger and stronger. Fock. Junkie-face Naut had cut him short, no: cut him out. Artistic excommunication. He saw Naut and Pieter looking at each other, surprised but also amused. Their boat’s hierarchy had disappeared. Equals again. Music softened Naut’s leadership ambitions. Their eyes exchanged winks. In some way the audience all experienced it as a playful lead up to the music, a bit of an act, a joke, not very well rehearsed, but still fun. And

wow, did they play that night. They went on until hours after the legal closing time, Larry took the risk with the opening hours, booze flowed, he made a fortune. The girls went busking in the audience, had taken off some more clothes and showed their pretty small tits from the side of their open tops. The old ornamental southwester caps they had taken from the wall of the *Buoys 'n Gulls*, filled up with a large number of bills. This was no coin work.

They made everybody happy.

The first thing Jolle realised when he woke up was that he did so with a herculean hangover. He was still heavily intoxicated, but the alcohol did not soften the head and stomach aches. But something worse, he had lost his glasses somewhere. Then, Tiara had gone. Tiara? Tiara! He suddenly remembered the last night's music gig, but not how he had got back to the mobile home. He experienced an enormous hot flush, his face burnt for two seconds, his heart skipped a few beats, sweat broke out and he wanted to puke. All at the same time. Huh? Why Tiara now? Had he slept with Tiara? Fock, he had slept with Tiara! Where's his Nana? No, this cannot be.

He panicked, slipped on his underwear he found on the floor and rushed out of his super-small bedroom in the metal dwelling. He opened Naut's door to the larger master bedroom in the back of the trailer. Without knocking. Naut was gone, but clearly somebody had slept there with him. Fock, where was Nana? Where is his Nana?

Pieter, who he had expected to be comatose and slumped over in his chair in the front part of the mobile home, had also vanished. Jesus, he was all alone. They had deserted him.

His instinct was to rush to the pub and check whether the twins were back there in their bunk bed. But there was no need. Although limited in his sight, he clearly saw Nana in the garden, wearing her trademark beanie with the marijuana logo, squatting, feeding the birds that came to the mobile home's garden, with breadcrumbs. He felt a jolt of love, tainted by some strange guilt, but also relief - Nana was safe! He shouted at her, she didn't turn around, as she was busy with the birds, maybe she did not hear him through the glass window and Nana, well yeah Nana... he didn't sleep with Tiara after all, where did that come from? Why is that nagging him? That Freudian twin curse. The tick-off desire. Hangover remorse.

But where the fock were the rest? In his still invasive drunkenness, he remembered Naut's pathetic sailing outburst yesterday on stage. Oh

my god - the megalomaniac pledge he had made, dragging the audience along. His own intervention, then the black-out. He wasn't serious, was he?

Back in the caravan, Jolle rooted through his things and dressed. Well, he put on what he could grab from around his messy bed. Time was of the essence.

He kind of ran the distance to the harbour, resulting again in a scary irregular heartbeat and him sweating profusely. He stopped halfway along the straight country road for an emergency puke, barfed beer, and bar snacks in the dewy grass verge.

An early commuter honked at the unusual and unattractive sight so early in the morning and put up his middle finger while passing him by. They hated fucking junkies here. It turned out to be difficult for the early commuter though, to keep up his disgust for outcasts, when he stopped for a hitchhiker a mile further down the road. The new day was materialising with full light, and he could not suppress the excitement when he saw the divine beauty of a young hippie girl. He offered a ride through his lowered window. She dropped her small bag on the backseat and joined him in his large car. Some of the hippie species are however very digestible, the early driver thought.

This one is very cute with her cheeky marihuana-logo beanie that she was wearing just above her pretty eyes.

Dollard was gone! He couldn't believe his eyes. The boat was gone. It was just before high tide; they must have left no longer than an hour ago. He looked frantically further up the harbour, sprinted to one of the harbour piers and walked as far as he could on the basalt stones of the northern head towards the water. Without his glasses he was unable to see small details, but vaguely, quite far out, he thought he recognized a masted vessel, slowly drifting out on the wind - which was blowing offshore, a simple quiet westerly near the land, but probably stronger further out.

With a few coins he found in his pocket he bought a faux croissant at the bakery that had just opened. He swallowed the sloppy fatty piece of bread in one bite and felt immediately better. Fock, he needed a cigarette and a coffee, or maybe an early beer. Now! Then at least he would be able to think clearly again. *Dollard* sailed out - so, Naut had been serious. On board Naut, Pieter, Tiara? Tiara he could not imagine. It looked to him that she was on a clear collision course with Naut. Well, on the other hand, she had raised her drunken hand last night, hadn't she?

At least Nana was safe in the caravan. He went back into the bakery store and asked if anybody could spare a cigarette. They gave him a crumpled one, under the condition he smoked it out of sight of their clean shop. Real customers would arrive soon. They hated these hippies here.

Jolle decided to return to the mobile home. Where else would he go? The food and the cigarette had made him feel slightly better, helped also by the deflating, easing action of his earlier retching. He was still terribly hungover. Negative emotions dominated, not only through normal booze-guilt and shame about loss of memory... there was more, he had to talk to Nana.

The caravan was deserted. Naut and Pieter obviously gone; their only remnants were the rubbish which they had obviously not bothered to clean out of their rooms. Tiara's stuff - gone. He suddenly remembered that they had all decided to stay together in the mobile home that night to facilitate their team's departure the next morning.

He could not locate his phone. His glasses he had written off, lying most likely somewhere in *Buoys 'n Gulls*, scattered in pieces on the dirty floor. Glasses, phone, and now Nana was suddenly also nowhere to be found.

When he had left his small bedroom-cubicle earlier, Nana's bag was still there, he was sure about that. Now, Nana's bag was gone. From all the bags, only his own, non-hippie Samsonite was left.

He discovered a remarkable item while searching his aluminium prison cell: Nana's phone charger. People leave and lose their chargers all the time. Just like house keys. Wallets. Other keys to their life. But not Nana. For Nana, a phone with its charger were as inseparable as house keys on their key ring, a reference point in her travels perhaps. They brought stability and human access to her life. He was too exhausted to speculate how and why Nana, of all people Nana, could have left without her charger.

Skip Nana and her stuff - he now started searching in earnest for his phone. Under the bed, in the bed, later throughout the entire caravan. Gone.

Like *Dollard* - and its crew. Gone. He had never felt so alone, left behind, abandoned.

For a week or two, he went every day to the harbour in the idle hope of seeing *Dollard* return. He phoned the twins five times a day on his new phone, the purchase of which had stripped him of half of the financial reserves he still had on his

accounts. All phones were off. He left tens of voicemails and texts. No reply. Coxswain Jim's number was on his old phone - no use calling him anyway. Later? Maddening, really.

After a week of total *Dollard* silence, he decided to alert Jim, after retrieving his number through a call to the RNLI. Jim turned out to be completely up to speed on *Dollard*; Jolle was not surprised nor irritated about that. It was Jim who suggested putting the alarm out with the Coast Guard, the UK one, the Scottish one, the Norwegian one - even the Dutch one - they might have sailed back.

Jolle felt his own job had been done for the well-being of the stubborn crew. He himself needed to move on, preferably with Nana. He had put these assholes behind him, junkie face, spineless guitar man, even this Tiara bitch - gone from his life. Goodbye and good riddance.

Still, where had Nana gone? Why had she left him and not waited for him to go home together? At least she could have told him. Or leave a sentimental note, like in the movies, or in real life if you like.

She had only left her phone charger.

Jolle hitchhiked back to Scheedam, in three miserable days, slept under bridges, under a

blanket he had appropriated from the metal trailer home. After the phone purchase, he had just about enough money left for the ferry Hull-Hook of Holland, with food, transportation, lodging being unnecessary luxuries. He missed the booze.

The last few weeks he had had ample time to reflect on the origins of the mess he had landed himself in. He realised that he had not seen the dynamics changing between the girls and between the guys.

But how could he have expected to see his situation clearly... all was clouded, as he was still morbidly in love.

Back in Scheedam, he cleaned out their shitty studio apartment of all of Nana's stuff, bargained with his work to come back (which was successful) and went every day to the *Stallion*, the only place he could imagine the *Dollard* crew would automatically gravitate towards, or leave a message for somebody. After a few weeks, when it had become clear that the ship really had been lost, people stopped asking him about it and he sat more often than not a full evening alone at the old *HST* slot - at the long bar next to the rear wall. He sold his home electronic drum set - what's the meaning of music now anyhow - and after Christmas he stopped going to the *Stallion* all

together. Not a sign from Nana. Not a sign of anybody else, for that matter.

One-year passes, two years, going into three. Loneliness, depression, survivors' guilt: someone still in the *Stallion* had suggested that, joining him for a few awkward minutes in his alcoholic loneliness. He looked it up: '*A condition of persistent mental and emotional stress experienced by someone who has survived an incident in which others died*'. It was irrelevant and therefore useless - nobody had formally died, so nobody had formally survived. Life without any meaning took over.

Then, a person who called herself 'Tina' contacts him.

II - NORTHERN LIGHTS

*'It is not the ship, she cannot capsize, as she is heavy
and kept in her place by the enormously heavy mast,
also the shape of the ship.'*

(Yawl, when asked much later)

Rob's first visual memory of life was an ominous one - for this *Dollard* story at least. He had been playing with some other small kids in the makeshift lawn near his family's houseboat, close to the water. Supervising the toddlers were two teenage girls - you would say they were identical twins - in round blown-up light blue or maybe pink petticoats, with puffy healthy young Dutch female faces. They were fifteen, sixteen or so and sitting on a chequered multi-coloured plaid (a very British type of picnic blanket en vogue at the time) which was populated with milk bottles and crumbled biscuit remnants. There was at least one large young dog happily roaming around the unburdened party. A baby stroller had been put on its immobile side, most likely to prevent it from rolling into the water by itself.

Robbie, naked except for his cloth cotton diaper, was suddenly running towards the water, about a

meter lower than the grass of the lawn and separated from the land by vertical tarred wooden piles. He was then playfully pushed in by one of his toddler peers, either by the boy from the neighbouring farm or the girl from the jobless paupers' run-down houseboat, moored in front of theirs.

The last view of his planet was the river Spaarne, with a fast-moving rowing scull on its flat surface. Three people in it: two rowers looking backwards and a cox sitting in the back opposite them, facing forward. Although it was a static picture, he would always remember there was a lot of velocity in it. It then turned into a dark muddy blank. No fear, no scare. Until later. Shouting, screaming. A person jumped in after him and pulled him back on dry land. There, he saw only the face of one teenage girl, and he started to panic. There should have been two! Until he realised the other girl had jumped in after him and had lifted him out of the knee-deep water. That's why he could not see her, but only the other one. He instinctively asked for his milk bottle, not his mother.

All in all, it was not a big thing, no drowning, no drama. The wet twin hoisted herself out onto the

grass. Everybody laughed and was jolly. Summer was back in minutes.

Just that simple picture of the fast-rowing scull. Of course it stuck. His fall in the water was a baptism. Rescued by an angelic face, yet for a split second, a missing twin too. It would never leave Rob.

Rob's podcasts always start with the signature tune of 'Robbers' - the popular 'true crime podcast'; with a jingle once hastily made based on some bad interpretation of that James Bond 007 tune. The Robbers podcast is very popular through the unorthodox approach that the presenter Rob Vreeswijk takes - he confronts witnesses, and relatives with the truth, but more often also with wild speculation and theories. Speaks his mind, lets his emotions take over easily. He makes dramatic stories laughable.

Rob Vreeswijk is uncultured, controversial, and still somehow respected. Because of distance, out of fear rather, he doesn't give a shit about his subject, the characters, the emotions. The story counts, even more the twists he can give it. He cares about how many people listen. That number

pays his salary, through the advertising revenue coming in.

Now Rob is nicely settled in his home studio at the large microphone dangling in front of him. He usually starts his recording with some instructions for his sound editors.

*Podcast **Dollard one**. Crew, this is for immediate release, just tidy it up, will ye?*

(Clears his throat).

Hello Robbers, here is your Rob! New episodes of Robbers! New story... What's happening now is going so fast that I think I will record everything just as it comes in. No more studio editing on everything guys! Raw deal from now. No more fake news... We are going on the high seas! Put on your oilskins, rubber boots and sou'westers.

(Sounds of water gushing, followed by a regular, but pretty loud surf).

Some three years ago, the pleasure sailing ship Dollard disappeared. There were three people on board, an older guy Pieter, yes, let's do some profiling straight away, yahee, he is from Surinam and is fifty-five years old. A second male, a whitey this one, Naut, forty-four, from, yes of all places, Scheedam, yes that is the poor-man's Rotterdam, you wouldn't want to be buried there, ha-ha-ha... and then a baby on board - sorry I should be more respectful - Tiara, a singing beauty from Amsterdam, originally. She is twenty-one. Twenty-one! SHE IS A BABY!

They are musicians, half of a band of five. Mathematics is not my forte! World famous in that shithole Scheedam. From the other two, those that didn't join the last trip - a boy and a girl - the girl: one of the twins is chasing me, yes that is Tiara's twin sister Nana and one, the boy, a lone hurt wolf, has kind of disappeared. Identical twins, identical eternal beauties - 'tick-off twins', yes, the story is getting hot and sexy... which guy has not got this one on his dream list, bucket list or is it suck-it list, yeah-yeah-yeah?

And then, pfff, her name is Nana. Nana: prettiest name I heard this year. And now, where is our Nana? What is her estimated location? Beep, beep, beep, the radar is on!

Has that ship, well barge rather, really disappeared? Where are these guys?

Music is mixed in, a song: *Sloop John B.* from the Beach Boys; it transits into a messy live performance of some loud improvising bar band - but fades out quickly, as it is not a nice song, it is too rough for his introduction today.

Rob takes over suddenly, imitating Claus, his boss (well, rather the slick pony-tailed guy who owns the podcast site) in a heavily German accented voice.

Ja mein Rob, zis is for you. You like ze high seas, nichtwar? Ha-ha-hah. Zis guy Jelle or Jolle or Jesse or what-the-fuck rang me three times. At home even. He believes ze Dollard is still afloat. After three years. My ass. He is ze drummer. Pfff... Losers in my opinion. Zose lost three are having a three year long barbecue in a Norwegian fjord according to him. Ja, ja, ja. Ze twins are still talking, he says. Anyhow mate, zis is about music, more than your thing, wow look at these pics... zese chicks look very appetizing. You will agree. I insist you will agree! Ha-ha-ha. If zere is no story, make one out of it, ja?

Coz' you need better figures Robbbbb. No true crime zis time - dat zing is over anyhow. True crime is boring. You cannot handle true crime. You are too much involved. Robbie numbers are going down. Find us zis boat or find us a story... Or find ze better job, ja?

Claus laughs out loud; he thinks that Rob can handle a bit of rough. The podcast now skips some time. It is a different recording, involving the same person, with the same German accent but with a complete change in tone; deadly serious, in fact.

Rob, zis is maybe not for the podcast, or maybe it is. Your ATM bust story... She has now filed a formal complaint. You know everybody files something just about whatever. Zey go to ze police nowadays. In a way it is creative - she claims that you went too far in getting too personal with her in researching the disappearance of all that money. Played on emotions that should have been left out. Love and harassment type of shit. So, our lawyers will contact you, but my instruction is stay away from that girl and her father - they are smelling money. OMG they would have sued you for sexual violence but now everybody is doing that, so judges getting bored with it all. There is a bit of 'sexflation' going on, if you catch my drift... ha ja, ja... now it is all emotional blackmail. Stay away from that bankrupting chick mate, zey gonna kill you. There's no more true crime, no more participative journalism, it's all hands off.

In spite of the general serious tone, he chuckles.

Lie low for a while Rob. Get dis boat above water. Nice change. Change of tack, ja, I looked that up, it is a sailing term ja, ja. Three people have disappeared. The guy Jolle is hunting for them - on and off, motives unclear. Bit of ze nutcase of ze story. Not clear what's behind it. Enigmatic. Rob! We might not have any crime at all here. Good luck. Take a salty break. Make us happy. I look at the number of listeners. Ahoy mein Rob!

Dollard two. *Crew, yes this is good, nice work gluing it together. Schedule it indeed for Sunday.*

Hello Robbers, Rob is here again.

He goes straight away into the German jokey accent of his boss.

Hallo Rob, ja. His name is like yawl, or haul, or jol, something shippy, maritime, nautical, funny name. It sounds like wind, tar, sails, mermaids with no clothes. Here is his number, it is a UK number, so be careful ha ja ha. Don't mention the War ja, ha, ha.

A collage of phone dialling tones, an incomprehensible voice answering, fading into a clearly edited monologue; the interviewer parts have been cut out. What is helpful is that Jolle kind of repeats the questions asked.

Yes, most likely they are gone, yes, I mean dead. But we will never know if we don't look. My feeling is they could be back in the Netherlands, a new identity, not the first time they've lived anonymously on the fringes of a generous welfare society. Parasites as they are. Possible still now? Why not... I know it is three years on. But is three years so much?

What if they could still be barbecuing on a beach in a Norwegian fjord? We cannot rule that out, the place is very big. They are urban nomads you know, they can live in a park, under a bridge, in a stolen houseboat and never get discovered. They blend in any environment where living is free.

What I'm asking you to do, Rob, is talk to Nana. The twin that didn't join. She knows more. She has hinted at that when she still spoke to me. She knows something I don't know. And I don't know why she is holding back... She was my girlfriend before.

No, I don't know where she is. She's also disappeared, just not with the others. I am sure she is at least on dry land.

Well, you have the contacts, Rob, the time, and the money to go after it, don't you? You are the only one who can pull this off.

No. No idea where to start. The story should tell itself. Find Nana. You might like her (cynical chuckle), sure you will hit it off. Sorry, she is every man's type. Oh ja, one more thing, she calls herself Tina now.

Yawl hung up on me. Not all my questions were answered. Find Nana. Tina. Thank you, ja, where?

Again, sea sounds and music, with wavy, surf noises, seagulls, and the like. Rob changes his voice into that of an old-fashioned, last century, sixties TV news anchor. He is good at that!

Sailing vessel Dollard, a good-looking, traditional, but old and ill-maintained inland sailing barge, with a very flat shallow draught and classical leeboards left Scheedam, that is near Rotterdam, on the 15th of March 2013. On board Skipper Naut, First Mate Pieter, Bosun Yawl - what's in a name - and, last but definitely not least, the two Able Seawomen Tiara and Nana. (Then in his own voice) Funny always in this order... while Nana was ten minutes older... My sea girls!

(News anchor voice:) They were bid farewell by a small group of well-wishers. Pub mates from the Grey

Stallion, their stage, their watering hole. Music was played (nondescript soul music fading in) and bottles were opened (cartoonesque sounds of champagne slushing out of popped bottles).

The weather looked splendid. Holy Shoot and The Temper to the Northern Lights! All hands-on deck!

Dollard three. *Crew - well done. Good to go.*

Completely out of whack, but perhaps as the music was so universally recognizable: the intro plays the Beatles' song *Back in the USSR*... perhaps to indicate air travel for Rob? Music fades out in the classical windy air-conditioned white noise of an airplane cabin in-flight. Rob sounds relaxed, self-confident. He knows what he is doing...

Robbers, I am on a plane to the UK. Our dear Jolle, Yawl, suggested I taste some salty water from the English and Scottish eastern seaboard. Dear Yawl, who disappears and pops up again. We are on our own. Yawl, not sure if you are listening to my podcast, but you make it easy and difficult at the same time. Difficult, as you could have told us the complete story, but easy, as I can now figure things out myself. A journalists' dream, really, some of the facts are there, but the characters, the players, even the dropouts, the non-joiners, have disappeared. So, what the fock

My pleasure and my duty. Middleburgh is not a place where we see many yachts all together. Not in summer, but definitely not in March. Yes, we are proud of our town, but we know that our past looks different from our present. We were once a thriving industrious happy town. Thrifty, that's a nice word. We are now a place with problems. The new industrial revolutions after the War have passed us by. We are living in a revolution of the past.

He changes tone and continues in a more professional, less jocular voice.

They said they tried to raise an alert themselves when there was still time. But I don't believe them - when I came on board, when they were finally, full of water, moored here, I asked for their communication equipment, but they looked as if they didn't understand. What they probably meant was that they had tried to use a landlubber cell phone, most likely wet, to contact us. They had no VHF radio, no GPS, no radar, charts - not even old ones. They had Google Maps...

We saw them on our shore radar and when they were nearly on the rocks, we had them clearly in our binoculars. There! At that point, we launched and were with them in fifteen minutes - they were this close to foundering.

Jim apparently did not know podcasts do not do visuals - anyhow, his index and thumb showed two millimetres distance.

I saw only one person on deck, a man, a halfway large fellow, slim, yes, the sax player (he chuckles) and I decided to put two of our own good fellows on their boat. That saved them, but it did not save us, but let's not anticipate the story.

Lifeboats are made for two things - both for saving lives. Firstly, get people off ships, or out of the water and secondly for emergency towing. And that's what we eventually did. We pulled Dollard away from the rocks, the mouth of death, towards the mouth of the river and safety. Raymond, who went aboard, checked if the helmsman was OK. He was not, he was tired, spent, said he hadn't slept for two days, so Ray told our Roger to take over the helm. He instructed the helmsman, Naut, as we now know he was called, to sit down below and not move. Nobody was in the rear cabin, but there was an unholy smell of having been at an unkind sea for a few days, puke, diesel, urine. Further illustrated by large vomit stains and debris everywhere on the bare mattress. The rest of the crew (Naut had told us there were totally five on board - that's of course the most important information we check first thing) was in the old cargo hold. They were either sprawled out, sitting, or squatting, or laying close together in a large heap of

sails, sleeping bags, and tarpaulins, all shoved to the front side of the hold. Not the best place to avoid motion sickness - illustrated by the ubiquitous heaps of sick and the related smell. The sickest sick bay I ever saw. The two girls looked unresponsive, sleeping and did not open their eyes when I spoke to them. The older guy, the black one, wow he was big, he tried to smile at me as if he immediately understood that we were there to help. He stood up, but we instructed him to stay down. The young man, yes, with the glasses, bit of an angry one, the drummer, yes, sat with his head between his knees. I think he realized something was going on, but he didn't acknowledge our presence. I still wonder if they knew they were safely under tow by now. Rescued! With every wave and roll all their musical instruments bounced through that hold, a rather avantgarde symphony of natural movement and loose end sounds, the drum set was all scattered in pieces and played the biggest role in this independent performance, but also guitars, the trombone, a saxophone, and stacks of paper music travelled through the seemingly weightless space. It looked like they had been playing just recently, ha-ha-ha. It must have sounded great...

Exactly at the moment when we pulled Dollard away from its inevitable sinking and now between the harbour heads, our tow rope snapped - odd as the water was smooth here and the rebounding shore waves had all but disappeared. We then fouled our now broken towline in the propeller...! Usually this is a disaster scenario. Your worst nightmare. But, luckily, with the

tide coming in and the wind behind us, the two vessels just floated into the small tidal river mouth of Middleburgh. Dollard made the smoothest landing without an engine - most likely because nobody interfered. We were helped by our own open water lifeboat rib, which had been on standby already afloat and moored back at our launch site. Divers went straight into the water to cut the rope out of the prop - otherwise we would have been uselessly floating up on the flood.

Our complete lifeboat crew, me included, out of protocol and a tinge of curiosity, boarded Dollard. It could have been a weird movie scene, orange suited men from another planet descending on a boat full of surviving humanity, with all the related sounds and smells, but also very much from another planet. They were hippies, we realised, all with long or totally unkempt hair, smelly, unwashed for weeks, no foul weather gear - we couldn't even locate a single life vest when we delved deeper into the vessel. We took a group picture later, on the quayside, with the sea and the Maria Aurora set as a backdrop. Our fundraisers love those visuals and I've even pinned a print on the corkboard in my office. Both crews seemed to be grouped in their positions to reflect the alternate state of dress... bright RNLI orange, dark hippie gothic; super-organised spacemen, joined together with loose cannon misfits, all with the same big smile though!

Who were these people? It was youth gone wrong, sinister characters, society's dropouts, men angry with something... The only glimmer of hope, with a hint of serenity too, that sprang from Dollard were the two young twins, in stark contrast to the rest of the uninspiring male landlubber crew. Stunning beauties they were, Dutch to the core, but with mixed Asian looks, I thought, couldn't ask for further confirmation. Identical, yes, but dressed rather differently. They talked differently too. Clearly in their early twenties or maybe even younger, just pretty, pretty, pretty. It was nearly impossible to keep your eyes off them, as a man and even more as a seafarer, tsss ha-ha. Hey Rob, please don't broadcast this last part.

Jim laughs, a bit apologetic. The conversation is cut abruptly. The now usual seagull sounds are edited in, then fade, back to Jim, sounding like he is elsewhere, somewhere inside now.

'Thank you very much, on behalf of my crew.' Yes, he said, 'my crew', the joker. On behalf of his crew. Naut, the unfortunate skipper. He had come to the office here to thank us for towing them in. Their engine had apparently failed. Perhaps water in the fuel. He of course should have said thanks for saving our lives, but I think he never realised they were close to foundering. He gave me a shrink-wrapped pack of these Dutch sweet waffles, stroopwaffels. The Dutch think they are a

unique gift, but you can buy them in every street corner grocery shop nowadays. Seawater had leaked in; they were mushy and salty. Ha-ha-ha. For an operation that would cost the RNLI charity at least ten-thousand-pound sterling, tsss ha-ha. Fucked-up propeller on top of that too. Total snafu. 'stropwafels' tsss ha-ha, how do you pronounce that, Rob?

Rob gave him the right pronunciation. *Yeah, right, Rob, stropwaffels.* Jim pronounced it again wrong.

Rob takes over for a question returning to his parody.

Naut, we don't see a lot of Dutch yachts here, but this one is odd, isn't it?

(Rob mimicking Naut's heavy Dutch accent) *Yesh, it ish a Dutcsh traditshional barge, a tjalk. Transhport boat used for ages, a workhorsssshhhe.*

Jim chips in: *Yeah, I quipped, for lakes and canals. They don't look seaworthy.*

'They are flat,' Naut had told me, with that arrogant stare I had come to recognize. He could stare at you going straight through you - like he was not interested.

'They are flat, and we have a very heavy mast and sails pushing the hull firmly in the water. For stability, you know. They are very seaworthy.'

This Naut guy had no fucking clue, really! Sorry Rob, I shouldn't be swearing on the radio. If we'd been half an hour later, we'd have seen them crashing onto the rocks, surfing with their stable, flat, immensely seaworthy hull over the huge waves, as a lost inflatable paddleboard. What do these people do on the seas?

One of the twins - I later learned their proper names, I had already given up trying to see which one was which - came to fetch Naut, 'there was a new leak,' she said, 'the bilge pump is not working again.' She tried to smile at me. I saw those northern lights now also... there and then in her eyes, I felt weak in the knees.

Rob took the mic, ending the podcast, with these stale infernal stuffed seagulls again accompanying the fade-out.

Robbers, the first leg is over!

Dollard is safe in England, United Kingdom, for now. I think the next leg is also interesting. Scotland, equally still in the United Kingdom, here we come!

Dollard four. *Good to go, guys. Good job.*

The *Sloop John B.* music is back inevitably as is the tone of Rob's smooth and soft voice. This will be similar to one of his more familiar true podcasts, as if it is true crime typified by Rob talking and theorising, speaking his mind, babbling away - without a lot of preparation. He is after all more of a talk show host than a serious forensic researcher. The stale music fades out.

What follows now I pieced together from talking to people; the bar owner and the folks that went to listen to their music in Rosemouth's 'Buoys 'n Gulls'. And a little bit from good ol' Jim again - over the phone. I invited him to come over here to Rosemouth where I am now, the site of the end of their second leg. He initially backed out. He got scared with the story, he said - he felt Yawl might be after him. Yawl also didn't want to talk to me directly anymore. I don't know what to think about Mr Yawl. Ever heard of survivors' guilt? He will come back to us. Ha-ha-ha, maybe drop-outs' guilt is stronger than survivors' guilt!

Nana and Tiara arrived by bus, the day before Dollard would arrive and had no place to go. They checked out the little town, a bit more glory left here than in Middleburgh, but still also a pretty drab shithole. The place smelt of fish, the 'slightly off type', rancid fat, and overused frying oil. They went straight to the big pub with the obnoxious neon lights and stayed there until closing, when the landlord took pity on them, only half-believed their barge's story, but still fixed them up in the spartan spare room with the bunk bed above the pub - normally reserved for his illegal seasonal workers.

The girls slept together in the upper bed, as the lower bunk had no mattress. They sobbed themselves self-pityingly to sleep. How deep had they sunk with this trip, this versatile Naut, this spineless Pieter, this flip-flopping, enigmatic Yawl? They were desperate to go home, but had no idea how, when and with whom. Their college drop-out adventure year had just started, they had slammed doors to academia, parents and well... the world, well shut. They were convinced a fast music career was on the horizon. There was no alternative, no other plans and most importantly, no money. With no lovin' in our souls and no money in our coats, as that melodramatic Stones' song had it. Going home... Where was home anyways?

Their benevolent landlord, Lawrence, of course we will call him, like everybody does, Larry, ha-ha-ha from whom we will gain a lot more insight - he is a fast

analyser. Having run pubs for forty years, he understands life, people, both girls and boys.

Here he is! Larry, the owner of the Buoys 'n Gulls, the place to go in Rosemouth.

Recorded live music of a very busy heavy band fades in, becomes very loud for five seconds, then fades out fast. Lawrence has a husky voice, typical for a heavy smoker. He sounds more philosophical than one would expect from a popular rough law-breaking pub entrepreneur. What follows is a taped and edited phone call with Larry.

Of course, I had heard Naut's cry of freedom on stage. Bands vent crazy things between their songs, especially when they're stoned or drunk. Happy crowds laugh about it and raise their hands at any proposal or at nothing. On Saturday, gig nights, I stay up personally until the place is empty, clean and everybody paid. Early morning job. I often do the lock-up myself. It is a critical night in my business, swats of cash around, you see. The band was elated, they all left for a snack in town and then - I guess - they retired for their last night to Mum's Mobile, haah, yeah, will explain that later. Not sure, but I am pretty sure the twins did not sleep in their bunk bed upstairs.

Around six AM we were done, and I paid the rest of the other guys and girls. All clean, they were great. It was getting light by now. I knew I couldn't sleep anymore so I drank more coffee, and then drove to the harbour. Walking to the quay, Naut saw me and invited me on board with an imperial hand gesture. I disliked the guy from the first time I saw him. A man against everything, except himself. Well, maybe he was also after himself. Total disaster.

I was very sad to see them going, split up, never good when half of a crew abandons ship, it's like desertion in the old days. It had always been looked upon very badly, a wisdom as old as the world. A hanging offence. Stay together on the seas. Don't forget: the sea is after you. But together you are strong and together you will survive the salty onslaught.

On the other hand, I was happy for the girls to be safe. They had learned a lesson from their first ordeal. I followed Naut's invitation and jumped on board. True, the engine was kind of running again, sputtering with the aftereffects of having a contaminated fuel supply. The basic engine electronics were active with the new battery I had donated. But the rest was still a fucking mess, can't say otherwise. Not a sign of the girls on board. I did hear somebody else; I think it was the black guy rummaging around in the hold.

The cargo hold was perhaps the least messy - all musical instruments tied up in a corner, with ropes

and tarpaulins around them. Still three waves would kick them loose all the same. The engine room had at least a foot of bilge water sloshing around, Naut just didn't see these things. The same three waves could splash ample water over connections, electronics and air intakes and silencing the old engine again. Then, the cockpit... the small broken doors to the rear cabin had not been repaired. Those same three waves could flood the vessel again and dump a truckload of water in there. The skipper of Dollard had no eye for danger. I never found out if it was complete stupidity, or just being cavalier. He was rebellious, like in who gives a fuck! I would not have entertained a single foot of this Naut guy going on my own sailing boat. His face expressed despise, condescension, mistrust towards everything that was common sense, natural, organised, hierarchical. Now I know he was the perfect asshole. What did my twins have to do with this guy? I thought they were clever enough to back out if you were to press me.

Yeah, Rob, now that you ask, these two girls were of course not a big thing to take care of. What do you do? I am a father myself, my girl Jessie, thank god, never had to beg, well these chicks were not begging, but they made it very clear they had no money. They were also so damn pretty, that helped. They didn't play that card actively, but also didn't hide it. They kept on talking about this band, a barge on its way. Weird stories about writing music, a new album, also a poetry book, the

Northern Lights, aurora borealis. Yes, I have had some education, haah. They were completely bankrupt, for money and for social, intellectual coherence. They played some of their music for me from their phone, not bad, funky soul stuff, sixties, seventies, ha-ha-ha yes definitely Larry's disco époque, thirty kilos ago. Haah!

Two innocent girls OK, but I didn't want to have to care for three more male souls. So, I told Tiara - she was kind of dominant over the other one I felt - if you could play like three nights per week, then I can give you drinks, food, a bit of money and you can stay upstairs here and the other guys in my late mother's seaside mobile home, which nobody is using anymore. Should have sold that fucking thing, but you know no time and sentimental value and that type of shit. We had started calling it 'Mum's Mobile', haah.

Tiara tried to deal out some type of regular payment. Pretty sharp cookie this one, entrepreneurial, cheeky, or perhaps already in survival mode? Let's not walk too fast here, guys.

An intermezzo. The loud obnoxious music is back, crowds screaming and shouting. Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive* sets in. Is this actually Holy Shoot and The Temper? Are those the twins singing? Where, if ever, did Rob get those tapes? The music fades out before the song has properly started; it remains with the intro only. Does it get a real hold on the audience? Larry comes in again.

Having these Dutchies play in the Buoys 'n Gulls, was the catch of the century. Fuck, they were good. Wow, then these girls.... But I get carried away here now. Again. Sorry.

So, I let the boys set up in Mum's Mobile. Hadn't been there myself for two years. I told them to fix everything themselves, it was for a couple of weeks at the most anyhow, we agreed.

Dollard five. *Crew, production team, listen up. This one is on hold for now. Have a look at it, that's OK, but don't edit further, OK? On HOLD!*

If we do this one, it will be 'Twins have two fathers'. Wait for my OK.

No sounds, music fades etc. It is like Rob is just compiling raw material. Then the voice of Coxswain Jim comes in.

Three years now since Dollard disappeared. Time flies when you are having fun. Time also flies when you count the dead-people-years, years since people are dead. Because they are dead, clear, no doubt for me.

Those dead-people-years are the fastest in time. They do not leave any trace in their accelerating speed. Death is faster than disappearing!

I had received a text message from one of the twins - that's what I guessed at least, as it was a Dutchie number - she did not identify herself, asking if I could come to Rosemouth urgently. 'You must talk to the guys, especially Naut.'

Sue, my wife, mocked me saying that I had fallen in love with the twins, obeying their every wish, but - I don't care, perhaps it was some form of love - I felt kind of responsible for that wild bunch and especially for these poor young ladies. Pfff, my god, who wouldn't?

Funny to be back talking to you, Rob. Thanks for inviting me. The episode has not left me.

But I was late, 'cause I hesitated. Girls were fine but I didn't trust these men. I drove up the harbour quay where the mystery twin had told me Dollard was supposed to be moored - just in time to see them leaving Rosemouth harbour. Three people in the cockpit, two tall and one short. I got my binoculars from the car and walked to a better viewpoint. Yes, the black guy and the junkie (as I had started to call Naut), they were there alright. Then a girl, one of the twins. It was Tiara. Her full hair looked like Tiara and she was looking back to the harbour, so I could see part of her face.

I tried to call them on channel sixteen on my small handheld VHF set which I had always with me - old lifeboat duty habit, tsss ha ha - but not surprisingly there was no answer. Phoned the number that had texted me. No reply. Voicemail mode. No name. One of the twin's voices, clear. What could I do...? Had no other number.

I was late and they were on their own, maybe it was time to take my hands off these kids.

My only worry was that an enormous westerly storm was brewing below Iceland and was heading fast towards Scotland and the upper part of the North Sea, exactly where they were going. It was beautiful now, but I knew it was gonna rock & roll in a few hours. A monster was moving in from the Atlantic.

I went back to the car and sat behind the wheel. Took a break. I was tired of driving all night, so I dozed away, not knowing what to do.

In the rearview mirror, a lone person came running from the town towards the docks and harbour. He was slim, not tall, underdressed for the relative cold of the morning. I recognized him straight away. The Doctor - because behind his back that is what he was called by one of the other men from the band, or should I say boat? - Jolle, the young somewhat nerdy guy who slept with Nana. 'Doc'.

This Doc stared at the spot where Dollard had been just a while ago, then ran to the harbour head and

looked, classically with his flat hand above his eyes and scanned the horizon. It was not clear they could still be seen, moving out steadily on their unreliable engine.

The poor sod walked back to town past my car, looked me straight in the face, but I saw no sign of recognition. Maybe that was because he was not wearing his doctor's glasses.

Doc stayed on for a few weeks I heard later from Larry - then called it quits. Lost everything, his job, his love, his musical instruments, his - what he thought - friendship with the crew. He was on his own. And that's where this story started, really. Now, after some three years, he wants answers - you told me, Rob. Not sure we can help him.

(Different background noise settings - sounds like somewhere inside, hollow. After some coughing and clearing his throat, it's Larry from the Buoy 'n Gulls talking).

Three years is not that long, at my age (he laughs). Thanks, Rob, for seeing me. The disappearance of that boat touched me more than I thought.

It was my partner Emma who pushed me to give them shelter. I first hated them - I knew these negative urban

cowboy types as parasites, stingy Dutchies moreover, they come here sometimes in summer, always for a free ride, cheapskates - especially that ratty faced junkie snout, Naut, yes. Emma, it helps that she is a bit younger than me (he chuckles) suggested that they could take Mum's Mobile. After their first night in town, they played at the Buoys 'n Gulls, so we could check them out. What the heck. They could work for their lodging!

Business-wise, Rob, to be honest, I never regretted having them around for these few weeks. Also, for them, it was good bucks. They would play a few nights per week, Thursday - Sunday, for free, with drinks and food thrown in and they could busk, which with the pretty twins going around was of course a golden concept. They needed money for the repair of their engine, food, and drinks aboard - and undoubtedly for their copious amounts of weed. I understood they were quarrelling, well they sounded like open fights really, about whether to continue the journey or to go back to the Netherlands. Money, they needed irrespectively.

The hippies stayed a little bit less than two weeks. After the first gigs, word had spread and the audience tripled overnight, drinking like tigers on their music. We had the best early spring season in years. I wish I could have kept them the entire summer, I would have been able to retire after that... yeah, I could have.

Then follows a Larry in a clearly different tone, which sounds to have been recorded later.

Still, they were gone the next day, the men on the boat, the girls... I have no clue, they must have gone home by themselves, all gone, except our Doctor, was he looking for the girls? Too scared to join? He remained a squatter in Mum's Mobile, I wanted to kick him out. The music playing was over. Emma said it was OK, but finally thank god he also disappeared - well after another few weeks again - without a word, without a trace, no thank you, no nothing. Fucking hippies, the world doesn't need those misfits. Cheap, sorry Rob, ha-ha, Dutchies, what can you expect? The only thing he left as a thank you, were his glasses, which we found in the high up in the water reservoir tank of the toilet flush system in Mum's Mobile. Who the fuck puts glasses there? In a spy novel you put a gun there, or a huge stack of dollars, but glasses...?

Dollard six. *Edit this one guys, then it's good to go. No, no, I hear you asking - we will not go sequentially! Need this one anytime anyhow. Urgent this one. Can go this Sunday, yes. I do not believe in sequential - news comes as and when it comes. And when it fits me!*

(Sad classical music. It is the opening tune of the nineteen seventies' TV series *The Onedin Line*. It then fades out into Rob's podcast voice, the solemn type. He sounds as if he is speaking at a funeral).

They should have completed the passage to the south of Norway in three to five days. The sudden storm was from the west, which should have made the passage even faster. Unless something happens, then a storm can delay progress, or even terminate a passage, as we will see.

I got a voicemail from Yawl - still doesn't speak live. Probably mad at me again. He thinks I don't take it seriously. He gave me this narrative: after a couple of weeks, the maritime authorities were alerted, after another three weeks the same authorities closed the case. Dollard had disappeared. Take it or leave it, coast guards and lifeboats will try to save you while you are still on the surface. They are not gonna dive for you.

Yawl, I know you are listening - Me, good ol' Rob, I will take over from here. We will look for Dollard, while you look for Tina, well Nana. I can also do that for you... in case you wanna yield her to me. Got to like the idea of her, you see... never seen a picture, but listening to all these guys... (He chuckles half-heartedly, bored with his own stale humour).

Music fades in, a bit more upbeat, *Sailing to Philadelphia* by James Taylor and Mark Knopfler. Yet again a totally misplaced song. A voice mail from Jolle comes in, without added introduction by Rob.

Rob, how's things? Niceties aside: just thought it might be interesting to check on these phones again. Your work is not done Rob. The Coast Guard only checked for Naut's and Pieter's phones pinging in that oil rig. I lost mine the evening before departure, with my glasses. Could these assholes have taken it? No coincidence, no? Are you even still interested?

(Rob:) Jaaaa, Yawl you have a point. Big Brother is not something to fear for the future, as he is already a fully-fledged family member at the centre of our lives. So, I filed a request for information with the phone companies. Surprisingly they were not difficult, but they simply wanted to have money for it, there was a certain time limit they explained after which it was not free anymore. I clicked eighty euros through and got the results the next day, fast! Were they auto generated or had somebody looked at them? Were they aware of what I was doing? Discreet?

The phones of the entire crew, Naut, Pieter, Nana, Tiara... but also yours, Jolle, all were delisted after four

months. Their load had expired, payments not renewed, the numbers were given to others. What I didn't know is that one can ask easily for old records of expired numbers: never from active numbers. Got all the raw data and had to narrow it down to the last two weeks after they had left Rosemouth. Tiara's phone had no more signal communication with the shore after just a few hours. Switched off for ever, most likely. Nana's, Pieter's, Naut's phones stopped communicating with the shore a bit more than one day after they left, out of cell phone coverage most likely, but all three picked up a roaming signal from that oil rig in the middle of their course from Scotland to Norway. No active communication though, the phones were just pinging automatically into that small mobile network, meaning they were 'on' and could have received messages. Naut's phone showed much more roaming once in reach of that oil rig cell site, using up most remaining data - indicating he might have been trying to see on his landlubber Google Maps where he was, or Google Maps did that by itself.

After that, four days out of Rosemouth, the oil rig was passed: all signals dead. Battery gone, switched off. Or something more drastic might have happened? Phone dead, person dead.

I thought that was it, until the phone company which I had by now paid handsomely, called me (yes, they called me!) and said they had found more in Nana's log. I now meticulously studied with them the last entries. Wow, that was a discovery: Nana's phone had

checked in with a network three weeks after their departure on one of the most southern cell sites, near the coast, in NORWAY! It was in contact for three days, then nothing anymore. As far as we know, cell phones don't float, not even watertight ones. But corpses may... and swimmers do...

As you might say, Yawl - where the fock is Nana?

To close my quest, I checked the numbers with the land sites, along a theoretical way back from Norway to the Netherlands. Found nothing, not surprisingly.

Robbers, I need to do this, otherwise I won't even grasp it myself. Drive to a conclusion!

This is where we are with the phones. Tiara's and Yawl's phones stopped working altogether in Rosemouth. Dead. No more pinging to cell sites. Pieter and Naut switched off permanently after the oil rig. Dead.

Nana's showed signs of life weeks later in the south of Norway, a few hours only. Then, dead? Stealthily back home, Nana I mean, ha-ja-ha?

Dollard seven. *Going under. Crew - can go straight out. For Wednesday now. Don't delay, as something has changed. I see things a bit differently.*

Rob has picked yet another totally inappropriate song: *Sailing* from Rod Stewart. It is so obviously stupid that one would suspect he does it on purpose. Music fades out, followed by sounds of a boat going smoothly through head waves. Pfff... where do these sound mixers get all those sea sounds from? Most are very similar though. Anyhow, Rob is rather cheerful.

Robbers... Rubber boots time! We are on sailing yacht Albatross, with a very seasoned skipper, who likes to remain anonymous, as it is... our pub owner Lawrence! And we will therefore call him 'Captain Larry'. (Multiple people are heard bursting out laughing boisterously).

Captain Larry, blistering barnacles... tell us the story of Dollard!

(Larry:) Sure, yeah, thanks Rob. Worked with these guys, saw them in action in the pub, but also saw their boat. I am always out on the water, mostly off season, so I know the fringes of what the sea can mean here. Let's get to the point: I think there is no reason to

believe the boat is still afloat. Whether the crew is still alive, you can speculate about. We have not found any debris, no distress signals, no sightings - for some years. It is truly a cold case. Yes, yes, I know what you're gonna ask. (Disrespectful rough laughter all around again, quite a lot of folks, have they been drinking?) Nana's phone signal from Norway is an enigma. I am not a specialist. Maybe she had packed the phone in a watertight bag or container, I see people doing that on my charters all the time and it just floated up. Or with her body... Or... somebody threw it overboard just before the sinking. A last-minute message in a bottle.

(Rob:) Can you talk us through their last moments?

(Larry:) Let me give you my synthesis of the disaster. They left under a severe storm warning, the first few hours during the perceived calm before the storm. Naut had opted to sail under full rig. This would prove to be fatal but let me stick to the assumed sequence of events. They were all stupendously hungover I heard, so most likely the rest went below decks to sleep, or just to be seasick. Or both. Not sure Naut suffered from it, but by now he wouldn't yield the helm to anybody as he didn't trust their seamanship - just as much as he unconsciously didn't trust his own.

After five hours the wind picked up drastically and, as they had left the protective east shore of Scotland, the waves grew significantly in size. This was a bit unexpected as they had also had a lot of wind on their first leg. Staying close to shore had been deceptive and

had given a false sense of security on their ill-chosen vessel. Naut had most likely lowered one of the leeboards, maybe even both, used normally for courses close-hauled to the wind, but useless while running - even dangerous if the barge had broached. These boats with their weird boards are simply not made for the sea. The Dutch have known this for centuries. And they never sail with both down. Naut must have thought it was for stability.

After another hour, the storm - which had been, by the way, very accurately forecasted had materialised. We are left to wonder whether this precious and crucial information had made it to the brain of the skipper. Naut only now realised that his full gear gave far too much power to the mast and boat. Pieter, predictably, was semi-comatose downstairs, Tiara came crawling up once in a while to check if all was OK and then retired in the master's cabin she shared with the absent skipper. She was doubtlessly, as per her earlier trip, sick as a dog. She suggested Naut put on a safety line, but he replied that that would hamper his mobility and was therefore dangerous.

Nana, yeah, our Nana, assuming she was also there, she would have been most likely cuddling with Pieter under the now familiar stack of sails and sleeping bags in the hold. Jolle wasn't there to rely on - but that's none of my business.

Dollard, *believe it or not, started to surf over the waves, completely unusual and unknown for this type of traditional steel boat. Naut had more and more difficulty keeping the course and worked the helm like crazy. Very tough work indeed.*

I guess he must have asked Tiara to wake Pieter up to see if they could do something about the sails, or at least to ask him to help in steering against the now overwhelming forces that the storm put on their gear. Coming from behind the wind felt deceptively less than it actually was so they didn't notice the stresses being put upon their vessel.

They must have heroically braved the elements for a significant period by the time they reached, now in the pitch dark of night, the area where their cell phones suddenly communicated with the oil rig with their roaming pings. They were halfway through their intended journey and unbeknownst to them those pings would later in retrospect announce their demise.

They are now in storm force ten conditions on a barge only designed for flat rivers and lakes. Here, Dollard would get pooped by a large wave or broach or capsize, either way its curtains!

Pieter had joined Naut for half an hour then slumped back into stupor in the hold. He couldn't care less; drowning would be a relief to him in the condition he was. Severe seasickness has a distinct death wish.

My theory now, Rob, is that something must have happened, that suddenly took all attention away and forced Naut to make a wrong manoeuvre... Even without a mistake, a very experienced sailor would not have been able to avoid their fate.

(An expected intermezzo is cut in, with waves increasing in sound, one after the other rolling in - actually it sounds like a beach, a surf, but still...).

Yes, also, the rig, the boom may have broken, a shroud snapped, or - most likely - these fucking leeboards were torn off. This is an attractive theory as it puts the burden of guilt where it should not be. It should of course be on their overall rebellious cavaliers unpreparedness. They were on the wrong type of boat. A plane never only goes down because the pilot is stoned. But here, it was just know-it-all-better, naive Naut - most likely indeed very stoned - that made them go down. He failed to anticipate one big gust and maybe broached, steering Dollard now midships on the waves, with the leeboards still down capsizing was imminent as they only served to trip Dollard up as it drifted sideways. Sails flapping loudly, still caught the remainder of the gust and pushed - very simple, nothing sensational really - Dollard over on its side, with the mast lying on the water, ninety degrees, mast and sails started to go down deeper fast. Water flowed in; in five seconds she was sinking. In twenty seconds,

she was gone. Just a large steel open dinghy capsizing, with no protection, all doors and holds wide open. She went down at record speed, there was no time to react. Tiara drowned in her master's cabin, Pieter in the cargo hold, Nana with him, most likely. Even if they had wanted to crawl out, they would have had no chance against the overwhelming power of the seawater flooding in. Besides, there were no life-vests. Besides, yes one more, in the water temperature of eight degrees they would get hypothermia in thirty minutes and their hearts would stop beating.

(Larry now clearly answers a question:) No. No fancy theories here please. Blame is solely on Naut, to go sailing while inexperienced himself, with an even more inexperienced crew, in a totally unsuitable, unseaworthy vessel. Blame is on Naut, taking a completely inappropriate vessel, made for flat inland waters, to the craziest part of the North Sea, in the stormy remnants of winter. The blame is on Naut who is a power and thrill junkie and whose leadership relies on adrenaline.

(Indeed, an inappropriate choice, Rod Stewart finishes his lamentable song, fading out in the now overly familiar seagull cries.

Then, a great change in tone, surprisingly Rob rants, he shouts - it sounds like he has no idea the mic is still open).

Thanks Captain Larry, you pompous yachtie. Pub owner with too much money. Who came up with this dick? Awful prick! Looks like you fucking like it Larry, what happened. Albatross my ass. Armchair sailor. They made money for you, Larry, filled your dying pub to the roof, money flowed everywhere and now after the job is done, it would be handy to get rid of them. You are talking this boat into the deep Larry.

(Rob is working himself up, in sad anger).

These were kids dying there, man! I am not sure about Tiara but think of this poor Nana. Lured into this trip by these assholes. Nana.

Nana on my mind - Tiara, fock you, you can drown as far as I am concerned. I hate you anyhow. Careful Robbie - you get carried away matey.

I want Nana to live, to float up, get rescued and be happy forever after. Hey Nana, can we cut out Yawol? He is getting on my nerves. Where are you, Nana? Don't drown... I am dying to talk to you. Dying to meet you.

Dollard eight. *Team, listen up. Title: The Doctor's Diatribe. No introduction needed. Keep this one stand-by. But keep it well filed as the original is now deleted from the phone company files, they send it only once they said! And it was expensive.*

Robbers ladies and Robbers gentlemen and everything in between: Here, this is now the famous Yawl on that weird voicemail. All phones are gone, but this snippet survived. It is eerie, isn't it?

(Jolle, low, very slow drooling voice:) I know Pieter fucked them. Literally, he fucked them, as in making love, physically and hard and often, self-centred. Coitus un-interruptus. How do I know? Because I see it when I talk to him, when I look in his eyes, when I see Nana sitting on his lap - still going on here in Rosemouth fucking hell. I am hundred percent sure he fucked them both. Provincial beauties coming to the big city, full of talent, full of hormones. No role model, single mother, unknown father. Easy! The music teacher, the good-looking exotic man, with nothing but music in his life. He took Nana in first, then Tiara also moved to his large squatters apartment in that old dock warehouse building at the wide Rotterdam harbour

river. Not only romantic, but also exciting. They were nineteen.

Then Naut came along, the loser, the junkie, the dropout, the misfit. He and Tiara hit it off straight away, with tons of pot and nice music, psychedelic lights, and mirrors on the ceiling in his roof room in the same building. Love! He tried to go after Nana too, in a very dopey night he tried to corner them both. Unsuccessful, they laughed it off. Men!

Nana started to snub these two misfits, who were only good in music, drugs, alcohol and chasing young chicks, pathetic, Naut had a daughter himself after all - for which he did fock-all. Pieter could have been a grandfather. Maybe he was. Here was a nice role model. Never worked a day in his life. Scared of his own shadow. It was all disgusting really.

I came in only when Nana was running out of ideas, money, and a bed to sleep in... Nana thought stability was freedom. Tiara hated me - no artist, no love, no future. No cause to fight for.

I love the twins. forever. Hate these dropouts. Hate them. Spineless Pieter, junkie-snout Naut. Love the twins... Love the twins.

The sound clip ran on for quite a while. Some kind of nose, snoring sounds were heard, very soft. Most likely Jolle had fallen asleep, inebriated, as he preferred to be most of the time.

Dollard nine. *Crew, personal notes for now. Can NOT be broadcast. Ideas welcome though. What you hear next is a voice mail from Yawl - he didn't say where he was:*

Claus listen, it is Nana, yes, of course it is Nana! She changed her name to Tina, I found out. No idea why, maybe to honour her dead sister? 'Ti' and 'Na', you get it? Spoke only once to her, not even half a minute. She hung up on me. She doesn't want to see me, doesn't want to talk to me, she has told me now many times; e-mails, apps, whatever, I can show them all to you. Same reply. Can't talk. Only thing she mentioned, she lives 'in a lighthouse without any light'. Might be a metaphor, or it might indeed be a building somewhere. Most lighthouses are extinguished now, with GPS most ships don't need them. Hence, I have no direction.

Now can you ask your Mr Rob the very successful podcaster, can you ask him? Can he get to her? The whole world listens to him. I know he is not so bright, but he gets things on the table. Sure, she knows his podcasts. She might trust him, jeez for fock's sake, if you can ever trust a fucking journalist... Good luck, make me happy. Find her for me. Get her out of her lighthouse. I wanna close this.

(Rob:) Voicemails again, shit, nobody talks to real people anymore. When can I talk to this guy? Is he actually real? What is he hiding from? I start to understand why they called him the Doctor... annoyingly arrogant, looking for the next specialist consultant who cannot heal the disease, illegible handwriting translated in incomprehensible voicemails, nowhere to be seen when you really need them.

Also, his begging is very consistent - 'get to her'? Can I 'get to her'?

I hate doctors. They are so useless. Creating more problems than they solve.

Dollard ten. *Crew: these are personal notes - if anybody receives this by mistake: NO PODCAST. I will delete it. Or I will use it later. File it please with the confidential stuff. Thanks! Don't use it.*

Finally, she wanted to meet. In Scheedam, in the Grey Stallion, this Saturday afternoon, early, before the house band would start. It made me smile - had it not all started there? Somebody wants to close a cycle.

I had told her what I would be wearing, what I looked like (asked if she needed a picture but she said no) and she then instructed me where in the large bar area she would prefer to find me. We were going into a spy

novel again. Have to be careful again, if Claus finds out ha-ha-ha, it will be the ATM story revisited, oh la la, careful with the ladies now Robbie. Not another court case, please.

At the moment where I started to think that she had kept me waiting a long time and that I should call it a day ('sorry, it had all been a misunderstanding' type of no-show) and not even to my surprise, Yawl walked in. I had not told him where and when I was going to meet Nana. However, it did not feel like a coincidence. There was something bigger at play. Nana? Had I been tracked by the Doctor, my phone hacked? Was my Google Maps on location sharing?

Then, Nana materialised from the other side of the bar, through the backdoor. But only for a moment. She saw Yawl and immediately rushed out to the toilet or maybe back outside. So instantaneous that it was, it seemed like a mirrored choreography. Yawl saw me and went back where he came from. Nana left me alone, Yawl left me alone, Nana left Yawl alone. Nana left all alone. We were all abandoned and alone. Shipwrecked in the Grey Stallion.

A stocky stern looking staff girl from the Stallion wearing a logo-ed polo over her jeans, came to see me and said that there was a lady waiting for me outside at the end of the bar's small parking lot near the water. I left straight away.

Nana and I walked to the place where Dollard left three years ago. Arriving at the water's edge she took my hand, not as a romantic gesture, rather looking for comfort, safety. I wanted to hear: 'Take me with you, Rob, anywhere away from these creeps. Take me to the Northern Lights... I am ready to watch them now'. She said nothing however, she just had a stern look on her face.

I desperately wanted to but could not kiss her. When we saw Yawl appearing under the lights of the quay we tried to sneak away as guilty caught-in-the-act teenagers leaving the scene, together. If we were lucky, he had not seen us yet, was what we thought.

Dollard eleven. *Just continue, crew.*

A bit further away now, we thought we were safe. When I tried to kiss Nana, I turned away from the quay view, dragging her with me. This time I really did not see Yawl coming, Nana didn't see him approaching either. He stepped towards us and exclaimed loudly 'Holy Shoot and The Temper' - like a password to get through a medieval sentinel post in the middle of a pitch-dark night. We woke up out of our embrace and we both looked him in the eye. He stared back like a wounded, scared animal, trembling, shaking, perhaps drunk? He wanted to say something, but only managed

to stutter: "Nana." Then, his eyes narrowing, his breath changing, asking in a completely different tone, like he had seen a ghost: "Tiara?"

I later thought that if he had had a gun, he would have shot us both. At this very moment though, I only felt lucky that he had not pushed us, or at least me, in the cold, smelly, oily waters of the old Scheedam harbour.

"Can't do it, Rob," Nana said and moved her face sideways away from mine. "Not yet, Rob, we need more time. You must try to understand me. Get me out of this story, Yawl's story, first." She started to cry. A final touch with the softness that she's blessed with, she turns her back and walks away.

So, in fact, I was pushed, after all, into the deep below me, by a twin girl. Nana. Tina. In the nearby harbour, a steel rowing dinghy left a tugboat from its mooring, coming our way. That would have been my last sight before I went under. And saved by a twin?

Dollard twelve. *Lighthouse with no light. Team: this part 'as is'. Don't change anything, don't edit, no nothing, OK? It is Nana herself. Authentic, that's what we want, don't we? Will let you guys know tomorrow if it can go out. No, hell, go out tonight. The gulls are loose anyhow if you catch my drift.*

(Rob:) *Man, man, I felt like I was in a nineteen-sixties Italian black and white movie. Antonioni, something*

like that. My Po delta was the ueber-flat surface of that weird landscape we Dutch create after we pump the salty water out from our muddy sea bottom. A polder! Roads were as straight as old school rulers, trees were planted at the same interval, accurate to the millimetre.

The landscape formed in the last century's megalomaniac planning mind was en vogue suddenly, this small polder originally created for corn, grain or cows had turned out to be useless in a world that was now more suited to large scale agriculture. It had nowadays become a refuge for the rich, who bought all the privatised large obsolete state farms. And as for the have-nots, they flocked to the remaining crumbs of land and squatted in dwellings that nobody wanted. A landscape that had been under the sea since glacial times, first reclaimed by man into productive agricultural land, now given away to city-dwellers looking for a green lifestyle. Useless after a few decades. Robbers, a lesson in geography.

Last time I got a message from Tina, well Nana, she shared her location unknowingly or perhaps it was knowingly. I had pinned it as a favourite on my maps.

Picture this: my sporty low Lexus sneaking smoothly over the road, built between the two dykes that had formed seventy-plus years ago the mouth of the river, once flowing into the old sea, now hard soil; concrete, asphalt, macadam. I stopped at an unpainted wooden gate, which hung askew on its post. It was locked by a firm padlock, rusted and had probably never been opened after it had been placed there many years ago.

Difficult to describe on this beautiful early autumn day, I had anticipated my Tina opening the gate in a summer dress, swirling up in the autumn wind above her knees, with a big welcoming smile. At the same time, an unsettling thought: why should I expect something from Tina - we kissed, that's all. Could be a confirmation or a first exploration - or anywhere in between. Had I fallen under the spell of the Dollard twin curse, joining ranks with Pieter, Naut, Yawl? I was kind of nervous indeed, when I stepped out of the car and grabbed the flowers from the backseat. They were large, exotic, and pretty - no expense spared. It was so quiet here. No wind, no cars, no nothing. I imagined hearing the whispers of the old driven-out sea. Tina had come back to a sea, a sea that once was, but did not exist anymore. Her ocean was now dry land.

I climbed over the gate, flowers in one hand. At the lighthouse, an envelope was pinned to the front door, which she never used apparently, as pots with high plants and wildflowers were just standing against it. This signalled that my visit was anticipated, but also perhaps that I was not expected to use the usual entry point like this door. Was it instructions to get in, to proceed?

For Rob the Saviour. I know what you think Rob, it is a funny place indeed, funny like in 'weird'. A derelict lighthouse building in the middle of reclaimed polder land. There used to be a sea here and a river ending in that sea, with this lighthouse at its end. They pumped the sea dry halfway into the last century, during the occupation in the War. The lighthouse building was left empty, so squatters over the past years had nearly demolished it. Very appropriately, they were urban cowboys, *Dollard*-type hippies. I took shelter here. I found that the landlord was not bothered by my presence, being filthy rich and not needing anything, let alone my money, but he kind of believed in my repair commitments. I was in perfect hiding here, in a sea that was no more, recovering from that stupid boat trip, the deaths, and indeed my sister.

That was until those *Dollard* ghosts started knocking at my door. You were not the first, the Doctor was the first. The first time he was somewhere the 'first' in his life, chah, ha-ha the loser he was. Sorry Rob.

How he found me is still a mystery. I had not registered anywhere, was illegal in my own country, lived off the land and worked for the farmers in a trusted neighbourhood. They couldn't care less, at least I was not an illegal immigrant and I spoke Dutch like them so that

was in the pocket, a sense of legality. Losing my sister was the only thing I was busy with. Then new Tina came along, an idea at first, an individual person at last - two twins become one person. Being completely alone for those two years made it possible to blend in. But it is not a big country.

Jolle obstinately called me Tiara and not Tina. His choice, but it was only half correct. We had passed that station. No more different names along the track. I was Tina.

The first time he harassed me, he was waiting for me when I came back from getting milk from the dairy cooperative at the end of the road, at the milk-hippies, yes. I saw him standing on the old dyke. He was silhouetted against the dark rain and thunderous night that lay ahead, he looked slumped, beaten. I ran for my door, got in, with the milk miraculously unspilled and waited, panting against the wall. He started banging on the door. Tiara, fock it, open it. What happened to Nana? He was so wrong, so wrong! Things had changed. How would he know?

The next time I came back from working at the potato harvest with the hippies in Kragburg, near here, around the corner, he had found his way to my lighthouse. He had waited in his car for two days. That's how he followed me to Scheedam the other day.

Maybe you are the way out, Rob, maybe you are not. Where can I go? Pieter's daddy's lap got stale the moment when we met Naut. With Naut, there was no way out. Naut was non-negotiable.

If I ever leave the lighthouse, you can maybe bring me back to the sea. The sea of the real world. It is you, but it could have been anybody, but Jolle... I can't go with Jolle. Jolle is 'the old sea', a polder himself perhaps. I need to leave the polder now that he has appropriated it.

With you, I am just one girl, not half of a set. A new girl. You never knew my sister. Yes, I miss her like hell, but it is also a relief and an enormous feeling of liberty. Freedom. She also found her freedom.

It had to happen anyhow. These men were so serious in their relationship. They appeared cool and non-committed, but they were scared like little boys to lose their girls. Then, their entire demeanour of owning us, it looked all the time like a cheap buy-one-take-two. Fock. We hated it. We hated it. We are not one, we are two!

We did not plan it - but in Mum's Mobile that last night it had to happen. They were gonna smother us, both of us, all of us, by their threats, peer pressure, pecking order. It was like an old seamen's loyalty spell had come over us all. The

Flying Dutchman saga revisited. We needed to fight it. We needed to slam the table, throw a spanner in the works, sand in the gearbox, sugar, no water! in the fuel tank.

If you can't beat them, confuse them. It nearly worked.

I am alone now, by myself. No more a twin. No more desired for being half of two.

Come and get me Rob, give me some time. Get Tina out of here. Or Nana.

Tiara, if you insist. A name. Does it matter to you?

III - TINA

'But the skipper, he would not take advice and he was determined that he was going.'

(Harbourmaster Rosemouth)

Their hangovers made conversation nearly impossible. The alcoholic stupor mixed in with the awkward guilt they had over sleeping with each other's guys. Yup, someday it had to happen - it had been inevitable. They had slammed the table indeed!

Tiara poured gin in her morning tea; from the bottle they had furtively appropriated last night exiting from the *Buoys 'n Gulls*. They tried to laugh it off. It had been a daring but brilliant idea. Tiara said it was actually not such a bad experience, you have a nice guy sis, he might be dull, the Doctor, but he can be very sweet. Nana chuckled and told Tiara what Jolle always told her (preferably in public, with people around, so he looked like a casual open-minded joker - which he was not, the jealous prick: 'Baby, if it is to happen, go for it, but think of two things, one, don't get sick and two, learn something new, hey hey!'), then said: "Your Naut was so drunk and stoned, that he babbled

like a toddler about boats, points of sail, navigation compass courses, wind direction, hoisting sails. But he couldn't hoist his own mainsail up. He-he-he! Completely impotent. Old fart. I should have done Pieter instead."

"Not here, different experience," Tiara said and avoided her sister's sorry look. "It was good. He performs. All tackle up! Congrats. Although he had no clue." They laughed out very loud, obnoxiously, relieved.

Now also Nana took to the gin and gulped it straight from the bottle.

Pieter and Naut were already gone. The twins were sitting at the small table in the kitchen block. They were silent, looked at each other, smiled, laughed, then were quiet again. The conversation had covered the flawless execution of their scheme. Now it was waiting for the intended success or unexpected adverse fall-out.

"Is he still asleep, our Doctor?" asked Nana.

"Yes, said Tiara, "he's still very drunk."

They smoked, sharing a cigarette. Nana nearly puked and stuffed out the fag. Tiara laughed.

Nana looked at her phone.

"Jolle left me a voicemail, huh? He is here in bed... Lemme see. From earlier."

She played the voice mail, a long drunk boring diatribe. They looked stunned at each other. When had Jolle taped this?

"Fock, if he finds out where we slept...", Tiara's voice trembled, "Shit, he sent it to me too. The whole focking world most likely."

"I am not sure Naut had any clue. He wanted to kiss and fumble but then collapsed. When he left, he didn't say a word, I think he didn't even check on me. A real man. Everything for granted."

"Jeeez, Nana, they really shouldn't go. This is exactly what Jolle wants! This is a game. Him last night at the microphone? A focking game. Boy scouts territory, capturing the flag. Fock! Hurry!"

Tiara stood up and looked around for her things, she found a coat, recovered Nana's beany from the floor and put it on. She moved fast. No time to waste. It was very cold outside.

"Naut won't believe you. He doesn't know I slept in his bed. He won't believe you," said Nana, "approach Pieter!"

"Fock him, he is a dummy. It is all Naut now. The Temper is in charge."

“I’ll go. Maybe Naut will listen to me, not so much to you, Ti. He is scared of me because he can’t have me. Where is Jolle’s phone?”

“Why do you need that?”

“Want them to listen to this stupid rant. Jolle could delete it soon when he wakes up. Or later, even by distance and then it will be gone forever from my phone. I wouldn’t be able to retrieve his story. Gimme your phone too, just in case. I can show it, so they know you trust me.”

Tiara went into the tiny metal cubicle and came back with Jolle’s phone.

Nana left to get her things, picked up a man’s coat she had found on the couch where Pieter had slept and disappeared outside.

Tiara suddenly felt like crying. The stress was piling up again, but there were no shoulders to sob on anymore. She tried another cigarette, took the remaining part of a half-consumed old bagel lying on the kitchen table and went outside, needing distraction and fresh air. She squatted and started to feed some very hungry cocky little sparrows with the bread.

She did not notice half-drunk Jolle getting out of bed and watching her from behind.

Upon approaching *Dollard*, she could see that Naut was fuming. He was standing up, looking at her coming down the dock. Pieter sat slumped over, smoking a thin hand-rolled cigarette. He acknowledged her with a fake smile. He looked terrible, seasick before even having gone out on the waves. She was thirty metres away from *Dollard*.

“Where’s the rest? Where’s your luggage, Tiara?”

“Nana here.”

Naut looked in great amazement, contemplating his possible mistake. But also, betrayed by his glance, it looked like he had understood straight away. Perhaps he should play along.

“Hey, what the fock? OK, where is Tiara? I don’t like these focking jokes. It won’t stop me. We need to leave now.”

“I am not sure they will be coming. Wait a few days.”

“I don’t want ‘they’ - fock that Doctor, loser, landlubber. Nobody needs that one. I want Tiara here. Now. Our Tiara, my Tiara.”

In spite of that wish, he started to go all over the boat, casting off the lines which they were moored with.

“Wait Naut,” Nana sounded scared. She approached the boat and jumped on board, now more than a metre away. “Listen to this,” she produced Jolle’s phone and started playing Jolle’s voicemail, his twins’ diatribe.

“Ha hi ho.” Street-smart Naut got the gist of it straight away. He commandeered Pieter around and started the engine.

“The asshole, I never trusted the guy. Tolerating him, is all. Lover of the other twin, that’s why. Did you sleep with him last night? Did he find his glasses? Yoah... sleeping with a Doctor. Or was that Tiara? Focking sluts.”

Nana suddenly realised the boat was fully unmoored now and being pushed further off by Naut, who had put the engine in gear, *Dollard* moved slowly, but definitely, away from its dock.

“Hey Naut, fock, put me back on the quay. We all need to work on this.”

“Out together, home together... Get me Tiara now,” (with a grimace:) “It is Tiara I want, then I go back.”

Naut had never looked as ugly as he did now.

Nana judged the distance to the quay and pondered jumping back, worst case landing in the water. She couldn’t decide, seconds ticked by and made it so much harder for her to jump ship.

“Put me back, Naut,” she tried again, sternly.

“At least I have one twin,” Naut said, “half a twin is better than no twin. A fake Tiara is better than a missing Tiara. We can manage with one singer. We will find another drummer. They are expandable anyhow. Norway is less demanding. Fock Tiara. Is she after our Doc?”

She appealed to Pieter, who just looked away like a shy dog - shrugged his shoulders in evading the conflict. She dug out her phone from her coat and to her horror, saw it was Tiara’s. Naut grabbed it rudely from her and without looking at it, threw it in the water.

She started to cry and sat down in the cockpit. With her hand she fumbled her own well-wrapped phone, now the only link with civilization, to be disappearing over the horizon. Pieter came to sit next to her and said: “Just go to sleep somewhere, he is not going to take you back. We are just sailing to the Northern Lights, that is all, one night at the most, they can follow later. We will be in Norway soon, and you can jump ship there, if you like. Relax baby, it’s just a few days. Going back now will create more trouble for everybody. Hand it to Naut, having you on board - he will go mad if he won’t get at least something.”

She was not sure, but the look of his eyes showed at least he understood she was Nana, playing

Tiara's role and not only that: he was completely at ease with it.

She hugged him and felt completely, well, royally fucked. All ideas had backfired. The Temper had taken over...

At Mum's Mobile, Jolle rushed out, realising that now three of them had left, no, four. His Nana was also gone and with one of Pieter's coats. Had the twins flown him or had they puked him out?

Epilogue

The 'Warnow,' a woefully ill-prepared, home-modified vessel unfit for the open sea, vanished into the tempestuous embrace of the northern part of the North Sea in early April in 2013. A trio ventured into the abyss: an elderly would-be seafarer in his fifties, a young maiden who was half of a pair of identical twin sisters in her early twenties and her paramour, the vessel's debuting captain, a man in his late forties. They had once been part of a larger group of eight, but they alone clung to the dream of chasing the ethereal Northern Lights.

The saga of the Warnow is eloquently chronicled by Hans Steketee in his journalistic opus, *De Warnow - een schip - een man - een droom* (The Warnow - a ship, a man, a dream), though it is penned in the inaccessible tongue of the Dutch. It yearns for a translation into the lingua franca of the world, for the story it weaves, the interplay of its protagonists, the absurdity of the vessel and their grandiose ill-preparedness is nothing short of legendary folly, leaving readers ensnared by countless enigmas.

In the realm of moving pictures, Wim van der Aar crafted a documentary film for the Dutch indie film circuit (*Warnow. Reis naar het noorderlicht. Warnow. Voyage to the Northern Lights*), equally attempting to capture the essence of the Warnow's enigmatic journey.

Hans' book delves deep into the souls of its characters, the essence of the vessel, the cultural context and shrewdly hints at the truth of what might have transpired. It speculates about bitter conflicts, disagreements born of desperate circumstances and the emotional storms that culminated in the ultimate chaos.

Conversely, Wim's documentary film - although innovative and technically spotless - merely scratches the human surface, focusing on vivid original crew cell phone imagery and later voice-over interviews, rather than in-depth person or group analysis. Thereby, it reflects the spirit of its era, where spectacle often overshadows introspection. The director was criticised for focusing more on the success of his movie than on empathy with his characters. A curious facet emerges when we observe the survivors, those who wisely opted out of the tragic finale, harbouring no remorse nor forging a coherent understanding of the risks. Perhaps distracted by

the exhilaration of embarking on that ill-fated voyage, they did not prepare adequately for the challenges of such a voyage. Their actions appear to defy societal norms for mature adult relationships and friendships, while at the same time embodying a cavalier approach to the boundless sea - all as a canvas for freedom. Whatever that is.

Now, this short *Dollard* novel is not a literary magnum opus; it does not endeavour to elucidate the intricacies of the Warnow's miniature catastrophe. Its narrative is constructed from fragments gleaned from Hans' book and Wim's film, blended with the tapestry of my imagination. Indeed, it is, in its entirety, a work of fiction.

Naut, resembling the real-life skipper Arnoud and Pieter, a fictional figure bearing only the name of loyal band member and non-surviving crew mate Peter, are characters born out of creative thought.

Tiara, an enigmatic, bewitching young woman who happens to have an identical twin sister, is as much a figment of my imagination as she's a reflection of her real person.

As for Nana, well, Nana shall be her own judge.

Inspired by:

- ❖ *De Warnow - een schip, een man, een droom* (book)

Hans Steketee

Uitgeverij Pluijm, Amsterdam/Antwerpen,
2019

- ❖ *Warnow - reis naar het noorderlicht*
(movie documentary)

Wim van der Aar

Periscoop Film, Amsterdam, 2023

The personal quotes introducing the back cover text and the three chapters have been taken from the documentary and adapted to this story.

Dedication:

This story is dedicated to the *Royal National Lifeboat Institution* (RNLI), the charity that saves lives at sea around the coast of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man. 2024 marks the remarkable milestone of two hundred years of lifesaving activities since 1824.

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Robert CLUTIER is the *nom de plume* of Thom KLEISS, a European national and corporate retiree, who lives in the Philippines and Ireland. Husband and father of three, he spends his other time writing, sailing and impact investing. He



published his experiences from his long expatriation career in 'Moveologue' in 2015 (English). Earlier fiction works were 'Aan Dek!' (Dutch, 2010) and 'Locked' (English, 2004). Recently, 'Doon Island Dummies' (English, 2020), 'De Loser' (Dutch, 2021), 'Dr Brendan's Bar' (English, 2022) and 'Loops' (English, 2024) were added to his portfolio. Islands, Ireland, Bere Island and sailing figure in most of his work.

About 'boovies™'

Thom KLEISS co-initiated the concept of 'books like movies' (*boovies™*) in 2020. This format is designed to offer readers a straightforward and entertaining experience, with stories that can be enjoyed in approximately ninety minutes of reading. The aim is to provide engaging content without being overly intellectually demanding and it is explicitly not intended to be 'literary' in nature. Like most movies. Thom has - within this model - recently authored works each of which are approximately 25,000 words in length and span around 120 pages.

The primary objective of *boovies™* is to offer readers a pleasurable and brief escape, providing a 'me moment' for those who delve into them. Just like movies...

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