

Summer Sail

by

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For my beautiful Bruce

Who taught me to love sailing

Chapter One

It was raining. Of course it was raining, it was always raining in Auckland. Kellie leaned past the sleeping form of her six-year-old son and stared out at the wet tarmac of her home town. It had been a long time since she had last stepped foot in the Land of the Long White Cloud. It had been raining then and for all she knew it had been raining ever since.

She sighed. Now she would have to wake Tim. Tim, who for two hours of the two hour and forty minute flight from Sydney, had been squirming in his seat. Tim, who had taken it upon himself to demonstrate every function of the airline chair to her, from the overhead reading light to the mechanism of the seatbelt to the mysteries of the multi-channel headphones. Tim, who had finally and completely, exhausted himself.

She took one long last look at his beautiful sleeping face, savouring the peace and quiet however brief, and then she shook him gently. “Wake up, Darling, we are h – here.”

She had been about to use the word ‘home’ but, of course, it was not Tim’s home. He might have been born here, but it was not home to him. Not anymore. Probably never would be.

“I wasn’t asleep,” he protested, struggling to sit up and then, looking out the window, contradicted himself. “Mum! Why didn’t you wake me? I wanted to see us landing.”

Kellie smiled, tousling his hair. “Never mind, you can see us landing when we fly back into Sydney.”

“It’s not the same!” he cried, but it was a lack-lustre protest, his attention already diverted by the traffic on the tarmac.

“See that, Mum?” he said, pointing to a brightly painted jet, “That is an airbus. And that –” pointing to a plane with a distinctive red and white Kangaroo-painted tail, “That is a 747. Why couldn’t we fly in a 747?”

“Because we couldn’t,” she said with the kind of parental logic that had infuriated her as a child. “Pick up your backpack, it’s time to get off.”

The queue at Customs this late in the afternoon was thankfully short. In less than an hour they were standing outside Auckland International Airport under a banner advertising an international optometry convention.

“Where’s Dad?”

Good question.

“I don’t know.” Kellie frowned, her eyes scanning every passing pedestrian. She was not quite sure why she was surprised. She had forgotten many things about her former husband, but this was not one of them. It had been – and apparently still was – his modus operandi. Turn up late, if at all, and then wonder why every one was frustrated and annoyed with him. She pulled out her mobile phone and turned it on. The New Zealand network picked up her global roaming instantly and she waited for the electronic buzz that would indicate she had a message. Nothing. He had not even had the courtesy to phone ahead to let her know he was running late.

She sighed. Already tired, she was now growing more and more annoyed. Where was he? She was beginning to seriously consider climbing into one of the many black and white taxis in the queue. There they were; warm, dry and more to the point, ready and waiting. Unlike Anton.

She dug deep into her handbag, extracted her wallet and began sorting through the business cards that were a necessary hazard in her line of work, for the scrap of paper with Anton’s mobile number on it.

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He was late. His eyes studiously avoided the digital readout on the car's clock radio. If it was one thing he had not wanted to be, it was late. He found an empty car space at last, albeit at the back of the parking lot and jumped out, slamming the door shut and locking the vehicle behind him with the remote control tag. Then he was sprinting through the rain, slowing down only as he drew close to the automatic doors of the international terminal.

He had taken too long deciding what to wear, that had been part of the problem. And it annoyed him that he still cared – that, after four years of separation, two of them divorced, her opinion of him should still matter. He had known what he did not want to wear – one of the Italian suits and silk ties that had been his uniform when they were married. But was it really okay to meet the mother of his only child in cargo pants and a tee-shirt and loafers? In the end he had decided that it was. Or more correctly, he had run out of time to make a more conscious decision about it.

And suddenly there she was. She had not seen him yet. She was standing near the cab rank, eyeing the taxis off as if half-expecting she would need one. She was holding his son, the most precious thing in the world to him, by the hand and their baggage was standing neatly beside them. Matching luggage, he noticed with a slight smile. Not only did the suitcases coordinate with each other – her's lemon, his son's lime – they also coordinated with what she wore. A trim designer skirt suit in that new fabric that did not crush. The jacket was neatly cropped to her waist, the skirt cut just above her knee. He knew she was wearing stockings. Even from this distance he could tell – not from seeing

them but from knowing her. She always wore stockings on what she would call ‘formal occasions’ which is what she would deem this to be. Stockings, not pantyhose. For a brief, unsettling moment his memory flashed a picture of her naked in their bedroom, slowly rolling down first one lace topped stocking and then another. Those neat little suits of hers ... so deceptive.

He shook his head to clear the imagery and thought hard about the mechanics involved in changing a flat tyre in the rain, in an attempt to prevent the rush of blood to his crotch. This was ridiculous. She was five metres and many years distant from him and still he lusted after her. That was the word for it, he reminded himself, lust. That was the only word for it.

It was not just the golden hair drawn into a neat, sensible pony tail. It was not the milk of her skin or the curve of her full, rounded breasts. It was not even the deep, drowning green of her eyes. It was something else, something about the fragility of her, the vulnerability she hid beneath her sophisticated veneer. Something that made him want to scoop her up, press her into him, hold her there and never let her go. Just as he had last held her two years ago. So closely, so briefly. On the steps of the divorce court, sobbing in his arms, sobbing as though they had just made the worst mistake of their lives.

It still confused him. The way she had clung to him, the desperate way she had turned her lips into his throat. Through all the pain and agony of that moment he had still desired her – wanted her beyond reason.

He stopped just short of her. She still had not seen him. He had a minute, maybe two, to pull himself together. She looked incredible. If not for the small child at her side, no one would suspect she was a mother. For an instant he allowed himself the luxury of subtracting the years, to a time when they had both been single and carefree. If they were both single now, if he had simply seen her here, waiting, her eyes anxiously scanning the car park, tossing up whether or not to take a cab, would he try to pick her up? And if he had tried, would he have been successful?

He watched as she seemed to sigh. She opened her handbag, scrabbling through the contents in search of something. Her mobile phone? He watched her turn it on, check the screen, then grimace as she realized he had not left a message.

It was at that moment that his son spotted him, throwing himself headlong into his open arms.

“Daddy!” Tim shouted and it was the most beautiful sound he had ever heard.

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Kellie watched as her son was swept up into a pair of ludicrously sun-tanned arms, his head disappearing into the crook of a neck which was shaded by a baseball cap emblazoned with the words *Haven Hideaway*.

So here he was, the man who had once been her husband.

Something hammered inside her, knotting into a ball in her throat. He was taller than she remembered, his tan darker, his shoulders broader. Or maybe it was his clothes.

Whenever she thought of him – and she tried very hard not to – the image that came into her head was Anton dressed for work in Hong Kong, in one of his immaculate suits teamed with a bright white, housemaid-ironed shirt and understated tie. Certainly never like this. Was he actually wearing cargo pants? A tee shirt? She scanned her memory for an image of him dressed like this during their marriage but could not find one. Perhaps on their honeymoon in Noumea?

“Mum?”

Damn. Obviously Anton had said something to her, which she had just as obviously not heard, and now they had both caught her staring at him.

“What?” The word came out harshly, so she tempered it belatedly with, “Sorry, Darling. I was checking my messages – what did you say?”

“I said Dad’s going to take me sailing. S-A-L-E-I-N-G, sailing! In a yacht with a mast and sails – SAILS!”

Kellie’s eyes snapped angrily up to her ex-husband’s. To say she was furious was a serious understatement. Sailing? Without asking her? Without even discussing it with her?

And that is how she came to look into his face.

It was his eyes that caught her by surprise. Had they always been so unexpectedly blue? Had his hair ever been that long? It had grown past his collar and – unbelievably – fell in short dark waves around his face.

“You’re late,” she said finally, leaving the ridiculous notion of sailing out of the equation for the moment: best to take this encounter one argument at a time.

“Yes, sorry about that. I had trouble parking. Must be a popular time of day to fly in.”

His voice was casual, lazy even and it carried not the slightest hint of remorse. Worse still, as he spoke he smiled, showing perfect white teeth. For an odd, contrary moment she remembered what it was she had seen in him. Quite apart from his – she had to admit – quite obvious physical attractions, he was, to put it bluntly, charming. Or at least he

could be when he chose to be. In fact, she remembered somewhat belatedly, that had been part of the problem.

He reached down to pick up their luggage – two small suitcases on wheels.

“It’s okay,” she said crisply, “We can manage. That’s why I bought them with wheels.”

He flicked her protest away. “It’s not a problem,” he said, another little smile appearing at the corner of his lips as he looked at the two neat little bags she had purchased from the specialist luggage shop in Sydney’s Queen Victoria Building. “How very you,” he said, almost under his breath. His eyes flicked up to hers in a knowing gaze, before turning back to his son. “Your’s is the green one, right?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so – it’s the heaviest,” he said with a wink.

Kellie let them walk on ahead. She had to. She did not want Anton to see the stain his throwaway comment had brought to her cheeks. The way he had said it, “... how very you...” she knew he was remembering every other way in which she liked to colour coordinate. How he had laughed at her – or was it with her? - over the way she had insisted her underwear coordinate with the rest of her clothes... the way he had always helped her to ensure that it did. Silks from Paris in shades of ecru and gold, finest cottons

from Switzerland in clouds of white and sky blue, exotic reds and greens from Asia. Discreet bras and panties for every day wear and sinfully alluring lingerie for evenings and nights. He had loved it as much as she had, finding them for her, presenting them to her after each too long trip he took away and then watching her model them, helping her to unfasten the clips... she could almost feel the way his hand would start its slow journey across her shoulders, the way his finger would slip under the slender strap of her bra, the way his lips would follow the slow path of his hand...

She shook herself mentally, averting her eyes from the breadth of his shoulders and focusing instead on his incongruous shoes. Was he actually wearing loafers?

“Here we are,” he said, stopping in front of a mud-streaked four wheel drive, the door of which was emblazoned with a logo of a bird – the New Zealand Shearwater – and the same words that appeared on his cap: *Haven Hideaway* along with a phone number.

She was puzzled. She knew, of course, that Haven Hideaway was one of his companies – but she had thought that his role in it was hands off. The fifteen or so years he had spent as an international banker around the world meant he did not need to play an active part in it. Unless he wanted to...? That was an interesting thought. And what was with the four-wheel drive? Where was his Alfa Romeo?

“Wow,” Tim said, eyeing the vehicle as his father might once have eyed a red Ferrari, “Is this yours, Dad?”

“Yes,” Anton laughed, pushing the button on his key ring to unlock the doors. “Give me a hand to put these bags in the back and we’ll get going.”

Kellie reached out her hand to take control of her own suitcase. “I will need to get back to the cab rank,” she said, annoyed with herself for following them this far. It was his stupid colour-coordinated remark that had caught her off guard, that had made her follow him like a lost puppy.

“Where are you headed? I’ll give you a lift.”

Like hell, she thought. “No thank-you,” she said tightly.

“Suit yourself,” he shrugged, “But in case you hadn’t noticed, it’s raining and I suspect the cabs have been snaffled up.”

She looked back towards the exit door to the terminal. He was probably right – but the light summer rain had turned to a humid foggy drizzle and it was difficult to distinguish which of the, admittedly few, cars in the airport concourse were private vehicles and which were cabs.

Tim was already climbing over the seats, his wide childish eyes evaluating all the widgets and gadgets on the dashboard. In order to even say what would now be a very wet

goodbye, she would have to drag him out of the car – an exercise that was likely to incur wails of protest. And all the while she hesitated, the rain was dampening her light-weight summer outfit and threatening to curl her carefully straightened hair.

“All right,” she said begrudgingly, adding a somewhat reluctant, “Thank-you. I’m heading for the city.”

She sat in the back feeling like a very wet Queen Mother while Anton and Tim chattered their way out of the car park.

“Where in the city?” Anton asked as they turned onto the motorway.

“Just drop me in Queen Street.”

He caught her eye in the rear vision mirror. “Have you booked anywhere?”

“No, but I am sure one of the chains will have a vacancy.”

“Well you might be lucky,” he said nonchalantly, “Then again, you might not. Didn’t you see the banners at the airport? There’s a convention in town. We had around two thousand optometrists descend on us last night. I can’t say for certain, but I would hazard a guess that most of them are staying in our wonderful hotels. If you want a room, you might have to share. How friendly are you with optometrists?”

Oh very bloody funny. She scowled back into the mirror at him. “I’ll take my chances,” she said.

“Okay, well, if you get stuck, you can always bunk in with us,” he said, with a kind of innocence that did not fool her for a minute. “You wouldn’t mind if Mummy came to stay with us for a couple of nights, would you, Tim?”

Her blood began a slow, furious boil.

Tim’s head swivelled around quickly. “That’s a great idea – come and stay with us, Mum.”

”Yeah, Mum, come and stay with us,” Anton echoed almost, but not quite, inaudibly.

“We are staying in Dad’s apar-men in the city,” Tim told her matter-of-factly – as if she didn’t already know, as if it hadn’t been all Tim had talked about in the three weeks leading up to this trip. “I have my own room, don’t I, Dad? With a big bed and a huge window and out the window I can see the Sky Tower, can’t I, Dad?”

“You certainly can.”

“Yahoo!”

This was the first time Tim had been to New Zealand to visit his father but they spoke on the phone all the time – which was how Tim came to know every detail of the bedroom he had been allocated in his father’s apartment. They also saw each regularly, every school holidays in fact, but until now it had been Anton who had made the trans-Tasman trip. He caught up with Tim in Sydney, on neutral territory – meeting at the home of her friends, Sandra and Geoff Luxford who had generously agreed to be trusted go-betweens. Kellie simply dropped Tim off the night before Anton’s arrival and picked him up again a week or so later, once Anton was safely on his way home. It had meant she did not have to see him, did not have to make polite conversation, did not have to think about him at all, except in the most abstract and distant way. Of course there were times when she had to speak to him – on matters concerning Tim’s schooling and other related issues, but these were things she could discuss with him impersonally, on the phone.

“It’s not just an apartment, Mum,” her son said, conspiratorially, “it’s really a steakhouse.”

“A steakhouse?”

Anton laughed and it was a warm, gurgling sound that seemed to rumble out of his chest and mysteriously echo through hers.

“Penthouse,” he corrected.

Kellie's expression soured. Tim's excitement about coming to visit his father meant she already knew much more than she wanted to know about Anton's apartment. But she hadn't known this. A penthouse, with a view of Auckland's famous Sky Tower no less... Why was she even surprised? This was the Anton she knew. The Anton of the expensive tastes, the Anton who spent much too much time buying gifts for women who were not always his wife. The Anton who would never have allowed his hair to grow long enough to curl on his collar. The Anton who would never have worn a hat of any kind; let alone a baseball cap with an advertising logo embroidered on the brim – even if the logo did belong to his own company.

“Thank-you,” she said primly, “But I'm sure I'll be able to find something.”

“Might get a bit exhausting going door-to-door lugging that suitcase around.”

He made her sound like a vacuum cleaner salesman.

“I'll find an Internet café,” she snapped, “And log onto one of those accommodation sites.”

“Good plan,” he said sociably, “I haven't noticed any in Queen Street – not, of course, that I have been looking. But there is bound to be one somewhere, it's a big city these

days. Maybe you'd be better off if I dropped you off in the backpacker area of town. There will be something open until all hours out there."

"I'd prefer it if you would just drop me in Queen Street," she reiterated through gritted teeth.

He glanced at the clock on the dashboard. "It's getting on for seven o'clock - and in this weather it'll be dark soon. Why don't you just come up to the apartment and log on to my computer?"

Kellie's eyes scanned the rainy motorway. He was right, of course. Wasn't he always? And maybe it was childish to refuse. Her head was beginning to ache and it would only take her five minutes to log on and find a hotel. It seemed an infinitely preferable option to lugging her suitcase around town in the rain, looking for a backpacker's Internet café.

"Okay. Thanks," she said, knowing she sounded anything but thankful.

"No problem. Can't have my son's mother out in the cold, dark night."

Josh would not approve. Not that it was Josh's business any more anyway. Josh had been absurdly jealous of the former husband he had never met. And there had been absolutely no reason for him to be. All hell would freeze over and lock the gates before she would

have anything to do with her philandering ex-husband. The only good thing to have come from their marriage was Tim - her beautiful golden-haired boy.

She looked at them together now – her son’s head was cocked, listening to his father.

They were not at all alike, not really. Tim’s hair was more like her’s than his - the colour of an early summer peach. Tim’s skin was like her’s too – although he tanned more easily than she did. The only thing he seemed to have inherited from his father were his startling blue eyes, eyes that could freeze you to the bone in an instant; eyes that had turned the love that had lived in her heart for him from the day they first met, to a lump of glacier.

He was the reason. Her husband – ex-husband – was the reason she had not married again, the reason she had recently refused Josh’s proposal. She never wanted to get married again. It was too difficult, she had ultimately decided, too difficult in every way. Of course she had been very young when she married Anton and incredibly naïve. She had long since forgiven herself for falling in love with him – who had not fallen in love with Anton Benedetto? He had been every girl’s romantic dream – tall, dark-haired, handsome, rich... a man who travelled the world widely for both business and pleasure, a man who had lived in some of the most exciting cities in the world – London, Sydney, New York. A man with power and influence but also with grace and charm, the perfect package. Or so it had seemed to her, at the ridiculous age of twenty-one. She forgave herself for falling prey to him but she did not forgive him. He had already turned thirty by the time they met. He should have known better.

“So – will you, Mum?”

“Sorry... what did you say, Darling? I was miles away.”

Her son made an exasperated sound. “Will you come sailing with me and Dad?”

She came back to Earth with a thud.

“I don’t think so.”

“Oh come on, Mum, *please*. It’s going to be great! We’re going to sleep on the yacht and everything.”

Did Tim actually understand what sailing meant, she wondered. Did he realize that yacht was synonymous with boat? That sailing involved water, lots of it?

“I think I really need to talk to Daddy about that,” she said stonily, staring into the rear vision mirror in an attempt to catch his father’s eye.

“Nothing to talk about,” Anton said, with a hardness that matched her own. “Tim and I are on holiday. We are going to spend that holiday on board my yacht. If you can spare some time while you’re in New Zealand, you are most welcome to join us.”

Huh! A less welcoming tone to his voice was hard to imagine.

“See Mum – Dad wants you to come too!”

“It’s a lovely idea, Tim,” Kellie answered, in a voice which she hoped might scare the living daylights out of Anton – let him think that she might, even for a moment, actually consider the possibility.

“So – come with us!”

“I think Daddy might want you all to himself for a little while. He hasn’t seen you for ages and ages.”

“That’s right,” Anton agreed, his eyes firmly fixed on the road ahead, “And that means that you and I are going to spend three whole weeks together, Tim, doing *exactly* what we want to do.”

It was an answer designed to raise Kellie’s heckles and it succeeded. But she held her tongue. She was not going to start an argument here in front of her son, she simply would not. She turned her head to the window to watch the world flip by. The rain, in typical New Zealand fashion, was easing. The sky had lightened and the grey clouds were now blushing pink with sunset. Anton took the city exit off the motorway, making a right-hand turn at the lights as they travelled towards the CBD. The grey ribbon of motorway

was behind them now and the roads into the city were bordered by lush green lawns and gardens, the leaves freshly cleansed by the rain. This was the Auckland she remembered – mild, sunny and raindrop green.

Anton took the scenic route, obviously delighting in showing his son what had been the hometown of both his parents. Kellie smiled – she could not help herself – as Tim pressed his face up against the window to stare up at Sky Tower – the tallest building in the Southern Hemisphere.

“Is it for star ships?” he asked his father seriously.

“Well, you’d think so, wouldn’t you?” Anton answered. “But it’s not. It’s actually a radio tower. If you like, we’ll go up in it when we get back from sailing. Maybe even go for dinner.”

“Is there a restaurant up there?” Tim demanded. “Is it a revolting restaurant, like the one we went to in Sydney? You know, Mum, the one Josh took us to.”

Great. Now her six-year-old was going to expose her sex-life to her ex-husband.

“Josh...” Anton said slowly. “He takes you to a lot of revolting restaurants, does he?”

“Revolving,” Kellie corrected her son, “So far, only the one.”

“Well, is it Dad? Is it a revolving restaurant?”

“There is a revolving restaurant, yes,” his father confirmed. “And yes, I am sure we will be able to find some time to eat there. Now,” he flicked on an indicator and turned left at Customs Street into Queen, “here we are.”

Ah, Kellie thought, catching a glimpse of the building before the car tunnelled its way down into the resident’s car-park, The Grand. The penthouse in The Grand. Of course. In less than five minutes they were out of the car – which looked incongruous parked beside the BMWs and Mercedes – and taking the lift to the twenty-sixth floor. And then they were at Anton’s front door. A swipe of a non-descript white security card and they were inside.

It was just what she expected. Pristine white walls, heavy oyster-coloured drapes, drawn back with mint green tasselled cords from floor-to-ceiling French doors. The doors led out onto a balcony which was almost as deep as the living room in which they now stood. A long, low antique Kauri wood coffee table sat in the centre of the room, its feet resting on what was, without doubt, a Persian rug. The floors were highly polished and two white leather lounges, placed at right angles to each other around the coffee table, overlooked what had to be one of the best views of Auckland.

Even in the fading light she could see right across the bay, where hundreds of sailing boats were tied up at marinas. Further out the Auckland Harbour Bridge was lit up with the tail-lights of homeward bound commuters. From the other window, to her right, there was an up close and personal view of Sky Tower.

“Wow,” Tim said, awestruck.

“Tomorrow, if we’re lucky, we will be able to see sky jumpers jump off the Tower.”

“What?” Tim demanded, his face ashen. “People jump off? Do they die?”

“No,” Anton laughed, squatting down to knee height and putting a reassuring arm around his son’s waist. “It’s like bungee jumping. They have a rope tied to them. The only difference is the rope helps them to land softly on the ground rather than pulling them back up.”

Tim listened intently as his father explained the technicalities of sky jumping. Then he said solemnly, “That is something I am *definitely* not going to try.”

His father smiled, ruffled his hair, and then steered him towards what could only be a bedroom.

“Why don’t you get settled in your room, son, while I show Mum where the computer is?”

With Tim safely out of earshot, Kellie turned on her ex-husband. “You are not taking him sailing,” she said firmly, and before he had the opportunity to protest, “I mean it Anton and I am not saying it just to be obstructive. He can’t go. It’s a safety issue.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” All the warmth he had shown his son only moments ago was now gone from his voice.

“Tim can’t go sailing,” she said, not wanting to say the next words, but knowing she had to. “He is terrified of the water and so... he has never learned to swim.”

Her words failed to compute. He stared at her uncomprehending for what seemed like minutes, but which were quite probably only seconds.

“What are you talking about?”

She would not look at him now. Her eyes were everywhere except on him and her cheeks were beginning to stain a dusty pink. He was steadily growing more and more impatient with her and yet he couldn’t help noticing how the colour enhanced the green of her eyes. He was angry, so angry and it made him angrier still that all his fury served to do was make him want her - he wanted to pull her close to him, hold her, touch her, kiss her - kiss the lipstick off her impossibly soft, full lips.

“I mean ... Tim is terrified of the water,” she repeated, as if he were a slow learner. “And that means he has never learned to swim.”

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