

## THREE DATES

by

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### First Date

Casey, the nurse from Montreal, waves from the *Mandalay*, a beautiful 150-foot schooner. I'm sailing on the *Polynesia*, but luckily both boats will stop at the same islands in the Bahamas. Casey and I meet on the beaches, strike up a friendship, and wander off to explore. One day we are late getting back to the ship. *Poly* is gone. Not to worry, though; *Mandy* is still at dock. I view this as an opportunity to hang out with Casey a while longer.

*Mandy's* captain, a grumpy Dutchman, is not happy to see me but says I can sleep on deck if I stand watch from 2 till 6 a.m. His present grumpiness will pale in comparison to his disposition in a few hours.

Casey and I sit on the deck talking until two when I report to the first mate. He points to a spot in the sky and says, "Head for that star." It's bright, up high, and in alignment with the forward mast. I step behind the wheel. I've done this before. Any idiot can steer a schooner.

It's smooth sailing for an hour or two. *Mandy* responds instantly to corrections. The sea is calm, the winds light, the sky clear with a crescent moon; we are alone on the ocean with no boats or lights in sight.

"Have you ever been to Europe?" Casey asks.

"No, but I'm going to Paris this fall."

Normally, a change in direction only needs a small turn of the wheel. When the star drifts away from the forward mast, I make a gentle correction.

"What month?"

"September, I think."

The star continues its drift. I turn the wheel more.

Sailing in the middle of the night is a little bit surreal as this huge mass of wood and canvas plunges along silently except for an occasional creak of wooden joints or clank of rigging. *Mandy* doesn't rock on a sea like this, but rather sways with a slight up-and-down motion as she crests small swells.

“Are you going back to Europe?” I ask, trying to multitask the conversation and the steering problem.

“Yes. Maybe I’ll meet you in Paris, eh?”

More drift, more correction. The star speeds up. Now, a drastic spinning of the wheel. Suddenly, God loses patience, reaches down, picks *Mandy* up, and shakes her. We go into a spin; the aft end is swinging around to where the pointy end is supposed to be.

The captain explodes on deck as if launched by a catapult, vents Flemish oaths, and tries to hit me. I outrun him. He turns back to matters at hand as the crew boils onto the deck. The captain and first mate bark orders, lower the sails, start the engine, and turn *Mandy* around. One of the crewmen says, “If the winds had been any stronger you’d have snapped off the masts.”

I hide out the rest of the morning. Later, when we pull up near *Poly*, I dive off and swim away.

## Second Date

“Bonjour, monsieur. Deux cafés lattes, s’il vous plait.” The restaurant atop the Eiffel Tower has a spectacular view, and Casey is taking care of the language barrier. I notice she leaves the “eh” off when speaking French.

“Ever been to California?” I ask.

“Maybe this fall, eh?”

## Third Date

“Bartender, two Anchor Steams, please,” I shout over the cacophony in Earthquake McGoons. Turk Murphy’s Dixieland jazz is great for listening to but not for conversation. I lean down to be heard over the music. “Want to grab a cable car to Fishermen’s Wharf?”

“Sounds good, eh?”

We’ve been married forty years.