

A movie poster for the film 'Swept'. The background is a photograph of a woman's legs from the knees down, standing on a sandy beach. She is wearing a white dress with a red and green floral pattern. Her feet are bare, and she is standing in the shallow, foamy surf. To her left, a crumpled newspaper lies on the sand. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The title 'swept' is written in a large, black, serif font across the middle. Above it, the text 'A true story' is written in a smaller, black, serif font. Below the title, the subtitle 'Love with a Chance of Drowning' is written in a smaller, italicized, black, serif font. At the bottom, the name 'TORRE DEROCHE' is written in a white, all-caps, serif font.

A true story

# swept

*Love with a Chance of Drowning*

T O R R E   D E R O C H E

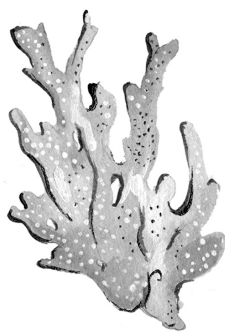
## Swept: Love with a Chance of Drowning



A true story

# swept

*Love with a Chance of Drowning*



T O R R E   D E R O C H E

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a true story. All of the characters, events, and embarrassing mishaps recounted in this book are authentic. In some cases, names were changed to protect the identities of certain oddballs encountered en route. In an effort to pull the reader into the experience, much of the story is told through dialogue and, while it's not verbatim, conversations have been reconstructed from memory to remain true to either actual discussions, or to articulate the actions and motivations of each person represented. Some sequences of events were shifted for pacing, and a few voyage destinations were omitted in order to capture a three-year experience into a concise read.

**Photographs can be found at:** [www.sweptbook.com](http://www.sweptbook.com)

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*Only a fool tests the depth of the water with both feet.*

— AFRICAN PROVERB

## *Prologue*

This must be how astronauts feel during the countdown as they're about to be thrust into the empty uncertainty of the universe.

*Ten ... nine ... eight ... seven ...*

As Ivan revs the engine and backs up, I look around our tiny sailboat. It's obsessive, like patting the pocket of your jeans before leaving the house, checking and rechecking for a wallet you already know is there. Have we got everything we need? Quick, think!

I catch Ivan's dad wiping his eyes. Seeing a grown man in tears makes me realize how much of a big deal this is. He must be afraid he'll never see his son again—and I'm terrified that he could be right. The feverish excitement in my belly has turned into a curdled, dreadful mass from knowing this could be the last time we see land.

*... six ... five ... four ... three ...*

A small crowd has gathered on the docks of Marina del Rey to watch the spectacle of our departure. I wave and smile through gritted teeth, concealing the doubts that are twisting my stomach.

The Cuban man who keeps his boat in the slip adjacent to ours—a sun-ripened, height-challenged character who has a permanent drift of smoke rising from a cigar in his lips—points at our boat and then points to his neck, drawing an index finger across his throat in brutal, universal sign language: *You're dead.*

He manages to unsettle me, the leathery old bastard.

Since we announced our plans, I've learned that there are people in the world who get off on planting a stick of dynamite in the ambitions of others, lighting it and then running like hell in the opposite direction. We've made ourselves prime targets for these dream terrorists.

"They're just cowards," Ivan says. "They don't have the guts to do what we're doing."

I don't have the guts either, but I'm somehow aboard this old run-down vessel, captained by the man I love. Frankly, I'd be happier to curl up under a mohair rug with some chocolate and a DVD of *Titanic* or *The Perfect Storm*—to watch an epic adventure rather than live one out for myself.

The two of us are about to take this boat across the world's biggest ocean and I'm lacking the three essential ingredients of a first mate: experience, a passion for the great outdoors, and a willingness to meet my death by drowning. I won't dare swim in deep water for fear of what lurks below, and I get seasick just watching the swell off a beach.

I stand at the helm, doing my best to steer while Ivan wrangles with coiled ropes beside me. He lifts the sail and wind exhales into the canvas. As the boat leans and our world is tipped sideways, my stomach protests in a combination of seasickness and fear. Ivan switches off the rumbling engine and silence takes over until I hear only the cathartic trickle of water and the sound of my trembling breath.

"*Te quiero*," Ivan says, swooping me into his arms to cover my face with soft kisses. "I love you, baby. This is it! We're living the dream!"

*We're living my nightmare*, I think, but I don't say this out loud. Instead, I do my best to smile through my nerves.

Outside the marina, litter dots the water's surface and for

a brief moment, I'm glad we're escaping the claustrophobic city of Los Angeles, bound for the distant white-sand shores of the remote South Pacific islands: Hiva Oa, Nuku Hiva, Tahiti, Moorea, the Cook Islands ...

But then I notice the litter is made up entirely of helium balloons that have lost their air. They drift on the surface, crumpled and decaying, wishing 'Congratulations!' and 'Happy Birthday!' to nobody. One of the sinking balloons declares: 'I love you!' and panic grips my throat. Joyful messages that once floated high have come out here to die, to slip below the surface and be forgotten.

*... two ... one ... zero ... BLAST OFF.*







The one-night stand



# I

A beam of morning sun pierces my closed eyelids and draws me from the dark depths of a hangover. Memories race in from last night. “I’ll have a dirty martini.” What was I thinking? I scorn myself as the bass amp is turned up in my head, reverberating through the soft tissue of my brain. But I have worse things to worry about right now than a hangover. Like the fact I’ve just woken up in a stranger’s bed. Naked.

I hear a shower going in the bathroom. Good—there’s time to work out how I got here. Memories flash in: stormy green eyes, dusty blond hair, an overall appearance too stylish and clean to be straight. I thought he was gay. This is San Francisco after all.

*“So are you going to tell me your name?” he’d asked.*

*“I’m Torre.”*

*“Nice to meet you, my name is—”*

I snap upright in bed. *Oh my god, I don’t remember his name!* Pieces of information are missing: his name, his job—drowned in gin and vermouth. I’m not the kind of girl who forgets the name of the guy she’s just gone home with ... in fact, I’m not the kind of girl who goes home with a man she’s just met.

The name ‘Ivan’ rings from a neglected corner in my brain, scattered with dust bunnies and useless trivia. I scan the bedroom for clues—an electricity bill, an award on the wall, a sports trophy—anything to save me from certain awkwardness.

Bingo. A wallet on the bedside table. Would that be wrong?

I hear the shower stop. John Doe will need to towel off and dress, which leaves at least sixty seconds to find out who, exactly, I just slept with. I nudge the wallet with the tip of my index finger, hoping to ‘accidentally’ flip it open and spy his name through the license window, but, poking with sharp jabs, I’m only inching it further away. My opportunity is ticking by, so in one clean swoop, I snatch up the wallet, locate his license, and steal his name.

I remembered right, he *is* Ivan. Ivan Alexis Nepomnaschy. It seems he was named by a cat walking across a keyboard. When I try to pronounce ‘Nepomnaschy’ out loud, my mouth sounds like it’s full of peanut butter. Six-foot tall, blond, green eyes, thirty-one—seven years older than me. His headshot is handsome, just as I remember, before I guzzled that damn martini like a cold beer on a hot day.

A cupboard door slams in the bathroom and I flinch, guilty with my crime. I work fast to slip the license back in the wallet, fumbling. *“Yes, good morning, Ivan ... What’s that? Oh, you mean this wallet? Ha ha, no, I wasn’t stealing anything, I just couldn’t remember your name, so I ... Oh, no, please don’t call the cops!”*

I don’t even know myself right now.

The license slides back in and I toss the evidence like a hot potato. But he doesn’t come out of the bathroom, so I collect my clothes from beside the bed and throw on last-night’s outfit—a pencil skirt, a turquoise silk blouse, a black sateen blazer—feeling odd to be wearing yesterday’s work outfit at this time of the morning.

Head pounding, I collapse back into bed and try to piece my fragmented memory back together.

It all began with a phone call. I was leaving a job interview when I heard an annoying ringtone following closely behind me. Just before I spun around to see who was there, I noticed the

ringing was coming from my handbag. Someone was calling *me*. My housemate, to be exact, and also my one and only acquired friend since moving to San Francisco.

She asked if I wanted to meet up to check out Oysterfest with some of her friends. I hung up the call, with a smile, happy that I'd just booked my first social engagement since moving to the United States on my own.

At Oysterfest, the sun was shining, I was making new friends, and apart from the gritty, oversized D-grade shellfish, my day was going superbly. The fun continued when my new friends proposed a guided tour of the city's bars and restaurants, so we sipped our way across town, trialing everything from hot coffee mixed with vodka to sangria floating with fruit. We had dinner in a Haight-Ashbury restaurant and, when the time came to go home, I congratulated myself for remaining clearheaded despite a day full of beverage tasting.

But that was about to change.

As we were trying to hail taxis home on Haight Street, we passed a Persian-style cocktail bar, spilling light onto the footpath, where hippies sprawled playing guitars, burning sage sticks, and hawking crafts for dope money. I was tired from a long day, yet a spontaneous impulse urged me inside the bar.

"One last drink?" I asked my friends.

They checked their watches and returned uninspired frowns.

"Just one," I said, darting inside before they could say no.

Inside, candle-lit lanterns cast patterns across the walls. Persian-style archways led to nooks for mingling in the dimmed light. The place was as warm and cozy as a genie bottle.

"What are you having, Torre?" my housemate asked, putting her order in with the bartender.

"I'll have a dirty martini," I said, quoting straight from the movies. Freshly arrived from my beer-drinking homeland of

Australia, the only cocktails I was familiar with were the ones I'd seen Carrie Bradshaw drinking on *Sex and the City*.

I sipped from my stemmed glass, feeling swanky in my sleek outfit with a martini in hand, until the olive toothpick stabbed my lip. While rubbing my injury, I noticed a guy on his own across the bar, leaning over his cocktail as though he were wearing an invisible backpack loaded with the weight of all the world's sorrows. A curiosity nagged at me: *Why is he so sad?*

I reminded myself to steer clear. I didn't travel to San Francisco to hook up. In my US arrival documentation, I could've written 'Finding myself' as the reason for my visit, but not only would I have baffled the Department of Homeland Security, I would have overwhelmed myself with sheer pressure. So taking a less existentialist approach, I kept my plan simple: leave my comfort zone, work in a foreign city, enjoy some uninhibited fun, and return home in one year. I was sent off traveling with two conditions, echoed by friends and family alike:

Rule one: Do not fall in love with an American man.

Rule two: Come home in one year.

*"One year, no American men," I'd promised.*

And it was a promise that I had no intention of breaking, but how could I forgive myself if I stood by and watched a handsome young man wallow miserably on his own? Plus, in his leather jacket and tidy shirt, I'd have sworn he was gay.

Feeling tipsy and daring, I separated from my group of friends and made a beeline to his side of the bar. I sat down to his left and leaned in towards him. "Why are you sad?" I asked, skipping the small talk, or even a polite greeting. I sipped my martini, carefully navigating around the sharp toothpick.

He looked up. A strong jaw line and nose combined with a light complexion struck me as European. His serious, stormy green eyes softened as they met mine. "I look sad?" he said.

“Well, maybe not now but you did a second ago. You were staring into your drink, all somber and serious.”

“That’s strange because I don’t feel sad.”

“You’re sad,” I said with an insistent nod.

“Okay, well ... Um, let me see. I suppose maybe it’s because I just moved here from LA. I don’t really, like, know anyone yet. Maybe that’s why?”

I noticed he had a sexy Antonio Banderas accent, combined with the word *like*—iconic Californian slang.

“You’re not American!” I declared. I’m sure he already knew this, but his accent took me by surprise and I felt the need to broadcast this news aloud.

“Right. I’m Argentinean.”

*Excellent*, I thought to myself, *he’s not an American man. Technically I’m not breaking any promises then.* “Why are you in California?” I asked.

“I immigrated here with my family when I was seventeen. You’re not American either. Let me guess ... you’re British?”

“Australian. I can only stay one year, though,” I said, reciting my family-imposed terms and conditions upfront. “I’m going home at the end of the year.”

“Working or traveling?” he asked.

“Both. I’m working as a designer while seeing a new city.”

“So then you’re an artist?”

“Sort of. A graphic designer, which generally means selling my soul to the corporate devil.”

“You and me both,” he said with a laugh. “And you traveled to San Francisco alone?”

I nodded.

“Wow! That’s awesome. He pulled his head back to inspect me anew. “So you’re an artist on an adventure. I’m very impressed.” He raised the rim of his cocktail to clink with mine. “*Salud.*”



I guzzled distracted sips of my martini, unacquainted with the potency of pure spirits. Which explains why, after that, my memories of the night adopt a petroleum-jelly blur around the edges.

I recall chatting away, covering a range of topics, waltzing from families to ex-relationships to music tastes. He told me he'd just severed a long-term relationship—just as I had, back home.

“There was no zeal,” he said, something I could identify with myself. “Things had just grown stagnant between us and I needed to get away. That’s why I moved here to San Francisco. For a fresh start.”

I told him my own story, which bore a striking resemblance to his.

What’s left of the night, however, is a tungsten flash of snapshots.

I asked Ivan if he could speak Spanish for me. He said, “*Tenés ojos hermosos.*” I asked him for the translation and he said, “It means you have beautiful eyes.”

He asked me to speak in Australian English and I said, “You’re a spunk,” which I translated into American by telling him it means he’s hot.

Ivan put his hand on mine and electric sparks shot up to my already-dizzy head. It was then that I reminded him again of my plans to return to Australia. “I’m not kidding,” I told him. “I’m going home in December. I can’t meet anyone, not even you.”

He replied with, “Okay,” before leaning in to kiss me.

Ivan is still in the bathroom and I feel silly lying in bed, clothed in yesterday’s wrinkled outfit, so I go for a wander around his small apartment. One thing is immediately evident about this

Ivan Nepomnaschy fellow—he’s an extreme minimalist. Apart from the bed and two white armchairs facing a TV, the apartment is crisp white and empty. His personal effects consist of a world globe and a model ship sitting on the mantle. This kind of freakishly stark minimalism can mean only two things: (1) Ivan just moved in, or (2) I just slept with Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho*.

The bathroom door opens and Ivan walks out, interrupting my paranoid conjectures. He smells delicious. Dressed in jeans, a white T-shirt, and stylish brown boots, he looks even more attractive than his license photo. I almost tell him this, but I catch myself right before blurting out that I went through his wallet.

“Good morning,” he says. “Can I make you some eggs? A milkshake? I make an awesome shake with frozen strawberries. Coffee?”

“No, thank you,” I say, entranced by his eclectic accent. The words “frozen strawberries” comes out in a staccato *fro-zin stra-be-rez* while “awesome” is elongated and entirely southern Californian.

“So,” I say. “I guess you just moved into this place?”

“Yeah, I did.”

Phew. He’s normal.

“Well, actually,” he continues, “that was, like, six months ago now.”

“Six ... *months*?”

He nods.

Where the hell is his furniture? I stare at him, waiting for more information as to why his apartment is psycho-killer minimal. He doesn’t expand, so I don’t probe, I just grow insanely curious. Perhaps his rage-filled ex-lover cleaned him out? He did say he’d just ended a relationship ...

“I’m really sorry, but I have to go,” he says. “Got a flight to catch, I’m going to Washington for business. I’ll drive you home on my way if you want.”

We get into his car and I catch a glimpse of myself in the sun-visor mirror. Yesterday’s slick ponytail is now a wild mane of wavy brown locks. The collar of my blazer is wrinkled from being tossed aside in the heat of the moment. My cheeks are glowing and my lips—rubbed crimson from so much kissing—are fixed in a delighted expression from last night’s impulsive escapade. The person in the mirror looks daring, sensual, and womanly. I hardly recognize her.

I direct Ivan to my shared terrace house in the Western Addition. He taps my number into his phone and gives me a quick peck just as I’m stepping out of the car.

“I’ll call you,” he yells from his window as he speeds away.

I stand on the street, touching my lips as I surrender the devilish grin I’ve been holding back all morning. My Latin lover may never call, but either way I’m thrilled to have just had my first ever one-night stand. What’s the harm in having some fun? That’s precisely why I traveled here, after all, to live a little.

When I find myself at work mid-week google-stalking Ivan, I can’t deny the truth: he’s on my mind. His aftershave has permeated the collar of my jacket and I’ve been unable to control my foolish grin for days.

Since I have no chance of remembering his last name, I google Argentina, hoping that if we meet again, I can charm him with mind-blowing grenades of knowledge, or—more specifically—conceal the fact that I know nothing about his home country.

I discover that Argentina is a beef-steak-shaped landmass on the southern tip of South America—a fitting form since they eat

the most beefsteaks per capita of any region in the world. Their national beverage is a herbal tea called *maté*, which is sipped through a straw from a piece of apparatus that looks illegal. I wonder if Ivan drinks *maté*? I'll ask if I see him again.

Only, it's now Wednesday and I've given up on the idea of hearing from him ever again. According to the non-existent (but widely referenced) *Complete Compendium to Dating*, Wednesday is the final deadline for receiving a phone call after a weekend hook-up. The same guide also claims you can't meet a good man in a bar and that all the good ones are gay. To make it worse, rules state that guys only pursue women who play hard to get.

I've breached every rule.

Having had only one boyfriend in my life, and single for the first time since nineteen, my inexperience with The Dating Game is showing.

I finish work for the day, close down my computer, and walk to Market Street to wait for the bus. The city is alive with office workers, aimless tourists, and shoppers carrying handfuls of bags. My eyes wander in the direction of Union Square and I contemplate an expedition to the underwear section of Macy's for a new set of lacy underwear. I've never owned nice lingerie ...

My handbag buzzes.

*It must be Ivan!*

I fumble through my oversized bag. Novel, purse, umbrella, tissues, lip-gloss. Fourth ring ... fifth ring, I'm going to miss the call! Sketchbook, pen, one earring, AH! Side pocket? Yes!

*Flip.* "Hello?"

"Good. Afternoon. Ma'am. How. Are. You. Today. I am calling today to let you know that you have won our sweepstakes and we would like to give you a pair of ..."

"No thanks." *Flip.*

I toss the phone back into my bag.

Give it up, Torre, I tell myself. You let yourself get giddy over some guy from a bar. Yes, he was interesting, gorgeous, and smelled lovely, but you don't want to get into a relationship right now anyway, remember? The last thing you need is some guy complicating life when it's time to return to Australia, back to your dear friends and loving family and your mother who emails a thousand words a day because she misses you so much already. Remember? Stick to the plan. A year in San Francisco, an experiment in independence, a taste of a different life, then home. *Rule one: Do not fall in love with a man.*

I make a pact with myself: if Ivan calls, I'll turn him down.

My handbag buzzes again.

*Rummage, grab, flip—*

"Hello?"

Ivan apologizes for not calling sooner, explaining that he almost lost his phone at Washington airport—he was waiting for his flight to board when he reached into his pocket and discovered it was missing. Realizing he'd last seen it while going through security, he ran, caught an airport train, and found the phone. He sprinted back to his boarding gate, scraping past the doors just as they closed. "I knew there was a chance I'd miss my flight, but it was the only place I had your number," he says.

"Wow," I say, visualizing the whole story starring Ivan dressed as Indiana Jones.

"So anyway, can I take you out to dinner tomorrow night?"

"Absolutely," I say.

I clap my phone shut and spin on my heels in the direction of Macy's.

My doorbell rings. I check my outfit in the mirror for the tenth time: fitted pants, a scoop-neck knit top, a knee-length leather

jacket, and my favorite shoes. I smooth down my hair, freshly straightened, and nod once for courage at my reflection.

Ivan stands outside clean-shaven and dressed—once again—as a stylish gay man. “Hi,” he says. “You look beautiful.”

“So do you. Uh, I mean you look handsome.” Blood rushes to my cheeks. I’m confused about the protocol—are we lovers? Or strangers? We’ve already slept together, so do we kiss and hold hands, or do we act first-date awkward? I’m bad at this.

“Hey,” he says as we walk towards his car. “Do you mind if we go to the Golden Gate Bridge before dinner? I usually don’t get out of work this early so I never get to see it during sunlight.”

“Sure. I’m easy,” I say, turning densely red at my poor choice of words. This is awkward: *we’re strangers*.

We drive through a rollercoaster of streets and come to a beach that overlooks the bridge. I’ve never been to this part of the city and I haven’t seen the Golden Gate this close.

Ivan parks the car and I open my door to blustery wind. As we start to walk, he wraps his arm around my shoulders, pulling me close. We don’t speak, we just walk in comfortable silence, humbled by the red bridge, which is partially lost in fog. The view is stunning.

I notice that, in my kitten heels, I’m just a little shorter than his six feet—a nice fit under the crook of his arm. I breathe in his aftershave smell of lavender and spices, a smell that is both foreign and familiar. *We’re lovers*, I realize with a smile.

We get back in Ivan’s car and drive to a tapas restaurant in the Mission District. Flamenco guitar noodling and warm lighting set the scene. I open the menu and panic internally to discover the menu is in Spanish and there isn’t a single food item I recognize.

“I can order if you like?” Ivan says, intuiting my dilemma.

A leader. I like that.

He calls the waitress over with a flick of his hand and speaks to her in fast-paced Spanish. He points to the menu: *uno, dos, trés*. He has a confidence about him that I find irresistible, and if he is trying to impress me with his Spanish, it's working.

The waitress brings a jug of sangria and Ivan pours two glasses. "*Salud*," Ivan says, clanking my glass. "That's how we say cheers in Argentina." He takes a sip and then bashes the base of his glass into his plate, momentarily silencing the restaurant. He's clumsy—how adorable.

"So, that tea you drink in Argentina," I say, "how do you pronounce it? Is it *mate*? As in 'G'day, mate?'"

His eyes light up. "Maté? How do you know about maté?"

"I ... just do. So you say *mah-tay*? Like that?"

"That's right. So you've tried it?"

"No, but I'd like to."

"Oh, I'll make it for you," he says.

I smile at his offer.

"Americans don't often know what maté is," he says. "I once had a cop pull me over at nine in the morning. I had my maté in the cup holder and the cop looked at it and he was, like, 'Would you please step out of the car, sir?' I got the full sobriety test—'Please walk in a straight line, sir. Please touch the tip of your nose, sir'—all that crap at 9 a.m. just because I was drinking green tea from an unusual cup."

I laugh hard. I'm wiping tears from my eyes when the waitress delivers our first dish.

"This is called *ceviche*," Ivan says. "Raw fish marinated in lemon with a little onion and cilantro. Oh, I forgot to ask if you like raw fish."

"I love it," I say.

"Awesome. Do you like sailing?"

I pause, confused by his non sequitur. Sailing? Why is he

asking this? Sailing is about as appealing to me as tap dancing in steaming piles of cow crap with brand new shoes on.

“No. I don’t particularly enjoy sailing.”

“Oh, so you’ve tried it?” he asks.

“Once as a teenager. It wasn’t my thing. I get seasick and the ocean scares me because of, you know, sharks and stuff.”

“You’re scared of sharks? Why?”

“Um ... have you seen their teeth?”

He returns a perplexed stare.

“I don’t know why,” I continue. “Water just freaks me out. It’s not just sharks, though, I’m scared of everything that hangs out in seawater: claws, urchins, stinging barbs, poison darts, teeth, jellyfish, tentacles ...” I pause to swallow, “... suction cups, creepy crawly *wet* things. Pretty much anything that would fall out if you turned the ocean upside-down and shook it. That’s why I won’t swim at the beach, not past knee-level anyway.” I fork some raw fish into my mouth and bite down. “It tastes delicious, though.”

“Wow, that’s ... a lot of fears to have.”

“Great start to a date, huh? ‘Hello, I’m Torre,’” I say playfully, “‘I’m extremely neurotic. Let me brief you on all my fears.’”

“Well, everyone is scared of something,” he says, laughing.

“So then what are you scared of, Ivan?”

His eyes drift off as he thinks. “Housing estates and shopping malls. Umm ... theme parks, crowded places,” he says with a firm nod. “Oh, and dictatorships.”

“Wow, you’re quite the neurotic yourself,” I tease.

He laughs. “But I love sailing. Actually, I have my own sailboat.”

The waitress interrupts to serve more plates and I reflect on how well we were connecting up until now. The stylish outfit, the romantic stroll, the alluring Spanish—something had to be



wrong. A yacht owner at his age? I know the type: on weekends he wears deck shoes, an anchor-patterned shirt, white slacks, and a pastel sweater tied at his neck. He hangs out at the marina and talks in nautical jargon to anyone who'll listen, but he never leaves the dock incase his 'baby' gets scratched. A bored yuppie with a fancy boat. Not my type.

The waitress leaves and Ivan walks me through the tapas. "*Albondigas a la española, y pulpo a la plancha*. Meatballs in tomato sauce and barbecued octopus."

I pause my critical judgment to hear his Spanish, the lisps and silent letters merged together in long, silken ribbons. His full lips move differently when he speaks his native language.

"My boat's in LA," he continues. "Whenever I have time, I go see her. She's called *Amazing Grace*. Well, that was the name she had when I bought her, but I like to call her Gracie. "

Gracie? Yep, 'she' is his 'baby' alright. I take an extra large gulp of sangria and snatch a covert glance at my watch, wondering how long this guy is going to talk about yachting.

"I've thought about moving Gracie to San Francisco, but my parents are in LA so I can visit them too when I go down there to see my boat. I sail to Catalina sometimes."

"Sounds like fun," I lie.

"You should come sometime, it'll be fun. You'll like it."

"I dunno, maybe," I say. "As I said, I'm not a really a boat person."

"I'll take you to Catalina Island," he says, running off with my maybe. "It's six hours from LA and incredibly beautiful. If you sail there during the week when there are no crowds, it feels like you're arriving at an exotic, secluded paradise." He sips his drink and clanks it back down onto the table, full of enthusiastic energy. "Actually, I'm planning to sail Gracie around the world next year."

I pause a forked meatball in front of my mouth. “Sorry ... what did you just say?”

“I’m going to sail around the world. My boat’s pretty much ready to go. I just have to finish up my project at work and then I can start getting my boat ready for a circumnavigation.”

“A circumnavigation? Wait, did you just say you’re planning to *sail* around the world?”

“Uh-huh. Mostly I want sail through the islands of the South Pacific. They’re supposed to be beautiful. But I’ll have to, like, sail all the way around to get home again.” He chuckles, dismissing two-thirds of planet Earth as a minor commute.

“So, you’re sailing around *the world*?”

“Well, yeah. I want to travel and a sailboat is a great vehicle for seeing the world. I’m leaving early next year when the weather is best.”

I stop myself from asking the same question again. I’m having trouble digesting this. I sit with my mouth in a dazzled ‘O’ while Ivan explains the details of his plan.

Hours pass as I get the full run-down.

He tells me that seven years ago while he was a student living in LA, he noticed the sailboats off Santa Monica beach while rollerblading one day and began to think about the places he could take a boat. He booked sailing lessons and, not long after, bought his first boat. For five years, he’s been saving, planning, researching, reading, studying, route-mapping, and, now, his dream is ripe and ready for plucking. Three years ago, he crossed the Atlantic Ocean and spent twenty-four days at sea crewing with two others on a yacht delivery from Spain to Florida to gain experience and see if he liked it. He loved it.

A crevasse of difference cracks open between us and all I can do is stare with wide eyes. I had him all wrong. He’s not a bored yuppie. He’s a man with a wild dream. I’d never met a real-life

adventurer before; I've only ever seen them on the breaking news report, generally being dragged from catastrophes.

"So that explains why your apartment is empty!" I say.

He lets out an embarrassed laugh. "Yeah. When I moved here from LA six months ago, I gave everything to my brother. Figured I wouldn't need it on the ocean. Actually, Mom offered to buy me Italian leather couches. I told her thanks but no thanks."

"You refused free couches to live in an empty apartment?"

He shrugs. "I think she was trying to keep me from taking off sailing. I guess she thinks it's harder for me to leave if I own quality leather furniture. She drives me crazy. She's Jewish."

"Oh, your family's Jewish?"

"No, no we're atheist."

I consider this for a moment, confused. "So then, your 'Jewish' mother wanted to buy you the couches as an anchor to stop you sailing the world?"

"Yes, exactly—an anchor. My family doesn't really say much about my trip, but when they offer to buy me large furniture goods instead of stuff I can actually use on a boat, I figure they don't support what I'm doing."

"Maybe they're just afraid for you? It's pretty dangerous. I'd be scared if I was your mother."

"Yeah, well it annoys me. But let's not talk about my family dramas. Would you like to come back to my place for tea?"

*I really like this guy*, I think to myself. He's so interesting—a sailor, a dreamer, a leader, a visionary, a unique soul. And the best part is, since he's leaving, it's a commitment-free relationship. We can date, have fun, and then go our separate ways.

"Can we drink maté at your house?" I ask.

"Sure, if you like."

But, back at Ivan's apartment, we find far more interesting things to do than drink tea.

## 2

I smell lavender. My eyes open to Ivan's face inches from mine, just visible in the dawn light. For five weeks, I've woken in his apartment almost every morning. On the bedside table sits the first sign that things are getting serious. It was Ivan's gift for my twenty-fifth birthday last week. He told me he'd take me anywhere, so I chose the artists' open studios in Sausalito, where we watched ceramicists and painters working on their crafts. There, from a talented ceramicist, Ivan bought me a sculpture of a mermaid.

My housemate keeps texting, asking where I am and I explain that, once again, I'm with 'The Man from the Bar.' My friends haven't formally met Ivan, since our relationship is nothing more than a fun fling that will expire in six months time when he goes to sea—not long after I'm due to leave San Francisco myself and head home.

"Good morning." Ivan drums my face with a thousand quick kisses. This man is a woodpecker of affection. "I have an idea," he says.

I pull the covers over my head and speak through muffled layers of sheets and blankets. "An idea? Now? It's so early. Let's go back to sleep."

"I was thinking, if you want, we can call in sick and go on a road trip to LA. I'd love to show you my boat."

I check the time: 6 a.m. I have another hour until I have to

*"There's a hole in our boat!" I yell.  
An idea comes to me. I poke my finger into the hole,  
plugging the squirting artery. "Okay, now what?"  
"Um ... Would you like me to put my finger in there?" Ivan offers.  
"But that's not a solution, is it? We're in the middle  
of the Pacific Ocean! We can't just keep  
fingering the hole until we reach land."  
"Good point."  
"So?"  
"Duct tape?"*

A chance meeting in a San Francisco cocktail bar sparks an instant connection between two opposites: Ivan, a man with an adventurous dream of finding freedom on the ocean aboard his humble sailboat, and Torre, a city girl with a morbid fear of deep water.

As their bond turns to love, Torre realizes the only way to keep the man of her dreams is to embark on the voyage of her nightmares, so she waves goodbye to dry land and braces for a life-changing roller-coaster ride that's as exhilarating as it is terrifying.

**Set against a backdrop of the world's most beautiful  
and remote destinations, this sometimes hilarious,  
often moving, and always breathtakingly brave memoir  
proves there are some risks worth taking.**



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