

Hearts of Fire Alternative Ending

August 25, 2013

Aboard Our John Alden Schooner, Wing
En Route to Miami, Florida

Vee One and Vee Two are standing watch when it happens. You and I are sitting below, in the salon with Ric, Mahri, Marty, and Maire, when I get the call from Vee One to come up and see what he sees. Twelve blips on the Raytheon radar screen. Picture a clock, with the spindle in the center that holds the hands, and twelve points around the perimeter, where the twelve numbers go. The twelve points are equidistant from the spindle (us), and all appear to be converging on us at the same rate of speed.

I don't have to look very long at the screen to know that we're doomed. "Let's see how fast they're coming." I push the proper buttons to make the time/speed/distance calculation. They're cruising at 25 knots, and they're now about 30 nautical miles away from us. "Well, shitfuck," I say. "Let's not make it easier for any of them. Heave to, and join us below."

I walk back down below, to deliver the last bad news I will ever deliver, to my husband and my friends. "Dear ones. We are surrounded by twelve motorized vessels in clock formation, each traveling at about 25 knots. They are 30 nautical miles away, which gives us a little more than an hour, to make our decisions. That is, unless they speed up as they get closer. I can't tell you how heavily armed they are. But the fact remains, there are twelve of them, and one of us."

So badly I can taste it, I wish we'd stayed on the island. Our mistake was trying to get back to the States. We had enough, such a wonderful life, on the island. We could have lived a long time. Ashamed, I tell myself, *you and your loved ones are going to die today, because you got greedy and wanted more. Because enough wasn't enough for you, you will make the supreme sacrifice.*

Then I take your arm, walk you into our cabin, and close the door. "Daniel. My love, and my life. I'm so sorry; I think you realize I can't get us out of this one. We are surrounded by twelve Al Ghazi warships. If we let them take us, we're not going to die well. Your experience in the Al Ghazi Hilton will seem like child's play, compared to what's in store for us. We need to talk about ending it. I figure we have about an hour, tops."

"Oh, God, Angel. How would we end it? You're right. I think we need to. We can't let them take us alive. They would make you watch everything they do to me, and make me watch everything they do to you."

"Precisely. The brutality of it would be unimaginable. I think the most humane way for us to leave this world is for me to detonate your C³D*. It'll

take us all out. None of us will feel a thing. I feel terrible about taking Ric, Mahri, Marty, and Maire with us. Our best friends. And Vee One and Vee Two. They may want to risk capture. That's up to them."

"Well, you and I have talked about wanting to die together, so that neither of us is left behind to grieve. We're getting what we wanted, Angel. I never figured it would be this soon."

"Nor did I. I hope you will forgive me for my part in trying to get back to the States. My greed."

"Yes. I forgive you, Angel. And I hope you will forgive me for the same thing. I wanted it as much as you did."

"I forgive you, too. I forgive you for everything I was ever mad at you for."

"Oh, Angel. I forgive you for anything and everything. You've always treated me so well."

"I can think of a few times I was less than kind to you."

"You were provoked. I forgive you for those times, too."

We return to the salon, and share our misery with Ric, Marty, Mahri, and Maire. "It's been another leak, I'm sure of it," Ric says. "There must have been a contract out that's still outstanding. Chances are the doers have been paid half, and based on the twelve warships coming at us, I figure half was in the hundreds of millions. And they want the other half."

"Ric, honey," I say. "What do you want to do? You want to take the Novurania and try to escape?"

"I doubt it. Our chances of breaking through the circle are slim. I would assume they would fire at us, and ask questions later. I doubt our quality of life would be any better than yours would, if they end up taking us alive. Mahri, Maire, Marty? What do the rest of you want to do?"

"I will stay, or go, with you, Marty," Maire says.

"I'm staying, I think," Marty says.

"Then I will stay with Marty if he stays," Maire says.

Mahri speaks. "I will stay, or go, with you, Ric."

Ric replies, "I'm leaning toward staying."

"Vee One? Vee Two? You're welcome to take the Novurania with plenty of gold bars, money, and supplies, and make a run for it."

"No. I'm staying with you." Vee One.

"Me, too." Vee Two.

"Well," I say. "In that case, I suggest we all go to our rooms, and go to bed. I want to die in the middle of making love with Daniel. I will wait until the last possible moment, to detonate the C³D*. Let's say goodbye now, and go to our rooms. I love you, all of you. So much."

I hug Vee One and Vee Two, and we kiss on both cheeks.

Maire and Mahri each kiss me tenderly. “We will be with you,” Maire says. “Next time around.” You hug Ric and Marty, and thank them for being your friends. I hug them, too. “Ric,” I say. “We’ve had a great run, haven’t we?”

“Yeah, we have, honey. I have no regrets. Listen, I’ll help Vee One and Vee Two batten down the hatches and lock up the companionway. We might as well slow them down, getting to us.”

“Yes. Thanks for thinking, Ric. Goodbye, my dear friends,” I say. “Please know that I will always love you, in the next life, if there is one. Danny. Sweet angel. Let’s go to bed.”

We turn, walk into our cabin, close the door, and lock it. I feel tears gathering, around my eyes. Your eyes are moist, too. I am devastated. I have let you down. I have let everyone down. Now I need to let go of you, and let go of life, in less than an hour. I will never see Miami, New York, or you, again. I take the customized iPhone out of my handbag, turn it on, and place it on top of the bedside cabinet. Silently we take each other’s clothes off, let them drop, and get into bed.

You speak. Your deep, soulful voice is soft, and resigned. There is less of your breath behind the metallic rasp. “I don’t think I can make love,” you say. “It’s a life-affirming act, and we’re both about to die.”

“I think we can,” I tell you. “Let’s love each other like there’s no tomorrow. I want you inside me, and I want to watch your face. Let’s breathe, and stay in the moment. We can do this. I know we can. We’ve lived well; we can die well together, while we’re loving each other.” *That’s right, girlfriend, there is no tomorrow. The sun will not come up again.*

With our hands, and our mouths, we bring each other to orgasm, close together, as I hear footsteps on deck, above us. I reach for the iPhone, and press my index finger on the glass. Then I look at the camera lens, and see the green flash. I take you in my mouth again, and you become hard again. Magnificent man. You enter me, and you feel so good inside me. “Dearest Dark One,” I say. “You’re so warm, and so hard. Such a strong man. I love you so much. I’ve always loved you. Always.”

“Angel,” you say. “You’re so lovely. Inside and out. I’ve loved you since the moment I first saw your face.”

“Oh, sweetie. I hope we get a chance to find each other again.”

“I’m wishing it more than anything else right now.”

I hear what must be a battering ram shatter the companionway hatch, and there are multiple sets of loud footsteps down the companionway. You and I quicken our rhythm on each other.

“I love you, love you, love you, love you, love you...” We say it together like a mantra as we stare into each other’s eyes and move faster. Our truth

makes its way into my mind and introduces itself. *You're both going to die this way. You and Daniel.*

Behind your head, my hand is holding the iPhone. I hope you don't know this. You reach down between us, and caress your favorite spot on me. "God, Angel. I love you. I can't say it enough. And your sweet, sweet girlie part is still swollen, from our marriage. I'm so lucky and grateful, to have married you twice. Let me pull out a little, so I can touch you better." You do, and you make me come, again. "You feel so good on me, squeezing me so hard, so many times," you tell me. Then you nail me with eight or ten hard thrusts, and you let go, deep into me. "You have all of my love forever, Angel."

"Oh, Danny. I feel it. I really feel it. Dear, dear Dark One. I love you so, and I want to kiss you. I always want to kiss you."

Your beautiful, smooth lover's lips meet mine, and I slide my tongue alongside yours. We taste each other's mouths for the last time, and I open my crying eyes. Yours are open and crying, too, as you're kissing me. You have the prettiest eyes I've ever seen. As I hear a battering ram crack the door to our cabin, I tap the star (*) symbol on the iPhone, twice.

Sherrill Aileen Meloney

August 30, 2013

The Gulf of Mexico

Approaching Key West, Florida

I can't say for sure what changes our minds. After Angel and Daniel go to bed, we sit for a few minutes at the salon table, quietly talking about our fate. What it comes down to is that I look the bull in the eyes and I can't give up, after all. I haven't had prior personal experience at the hands of Al Ghazi, and I have never been in the position of rescuing my lover from hours of torture. Nor have I lived through the personal, private hell of PTSD. I think that is the one degree of separation, between Angel's and my points of view.

Both Angel and Daniel are resolute, in their decision to stay aboard Wing and die in bed. We hear them in their cabin, talking and making love for the last time. Tacitly, we choose not to interrupt them in an attempt to change their minds. We know our chances of escape are slim, but the four of us—Marty, Maire, Mahri, and myself—make a run for it anyway. Vee One and Vee Two are obdurate. They think it is disloyal to desert Angel and Daniel. We swiftly pack the Novurania with charts, a portable compass, extra tanks of fuel, the sat phone, supplies, food, water, clothes, weapons, and gold bullion, and get ourselves gone. I also take this laptop of Angel's with me, so that if by chance we do survive, we can cherish the hauntingly beautiful love story and myriad photographs of our two dearest friends, who we will never forget.

I will always love Angel. She has been my best friend and confidante for many years, and over time I have grown to know and love Daniel, as well. I write the last entry (August 25, 2013) for her, in the style and words I imagine she would use. My words come from the intimate talks that Angel and I have had from time to time, about her relationship with Dan. He has been the one true love of her life, as she has been the true love of his. My words are also influenced by the events that I witness during their last hour, as well as from my intimate knowledge of the Command, Control, and Countermeasures Device (C³D*) that I have designed.

I have no clue how we slip beneath the enemy's radar, but we do. I'm sure the speed of the 90-hp Yamaha outboard is a contributing factor. We watch the enemy board Wing and shatter the companionway hatch with a battering ram. Less than five minutes after that, when all the invaders have gone below, Angel touches the star (*) on her iPhone, twice. I love her even more for taking every one of those fuckers down, along with herself, Daniel, Vee One, and Vee Two.

We hear a deafening thunder clap, and a bolt of lightning fills the sky. Zero degrees of separation. The lightning fades, and reveals a huge, dense puff of black smoke where Wing, the 102' Alden schooner, has been. A cascade of tall, short waves nearly capsize the Novurania. Then the azure sea breathes out a brisk breeze that blows away the puff of smoke, and uncovers a perfect day in paradise, with a bright blue sky, and the sun up high, its rays skating across the water.

I am guessing that right now we're about 15 miles away from Key West. From the sat phone I've set up a rendezvous there, instead of Miami as originally planned. We'll meet our plane in Key West, and fly up to Munson, Vermont. We will visit Angel's friend Kiri, and her daughter, Joely, and we'll give them duplicate copies of all the files and photos, so that they can revisit the memories of their friends, as we can. There are hundreds of photos of their trip to the island last November and December.

The four of us—Marty, Maire, Mahri, and myself—plan to stay close together, and travel around the States. We will visit the friends who loved Angel and Daniel, and we will share their story. We won't be getting over our loss any time soon. There will be a thick wall of tears for us to walk through, between now and then. It will seem endless.

Another thick wall of tears awaits our return to the island, to live in the home that Angel and John Lauria built. Angel and Daniel left many of their belongings at the house, because they had planned to live there with us for part of the year. We will slam into that wall of tears when we find their music, artwork, jewelry, clothes, and other treasures, reminding us that when the sun

comes up again, we won't be seeing their faces or hearing their voices around the next corner, as we walk through the house.

Ricard Ronveaux, M.D., Ph.D. ("The Ric")

**Note:* Smaller than a pacemaker, the Command, Control, and Countermeasures Device (C³D) is implanted in the "love handle" area above Daniel's left hipbone. Packed to the max with remote and infrared sensing capabilities, it also contains a transponder and a pod of plastic explosive. More will be revealed, in *Hearts of Fire*.