

ALL AT SEA

A DEATH ON THE OCEAN,
A KILLER BELOW DECK...

JONATHAN WHITELOW

FAO LoveReading
(C) HarperCollins Publishers Ltd

HarperNorth
Windmill Green
24 Mount Street
Manchester M2 3NX

A division of
HarperCollinsPublishers
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

HarperCollinsPublishers
Macken House,
39/40 Mayor Street Upper,
Dublin 1, D01 C9W8, Ireland

First published by HarperCollinsPublishers Ltd 2026

1

Copyright © Jonathan Whitelaw 2026

Jonathan Whitelaw asserts the moral right to
be identified as the author of this work.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

PB ISBN: 978-0-00-870594-7

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

Set in Sabon by Amnet

Printed and bound in the UK using 100% Renewable Electricity
by CPI Group (UK) Ltd

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Without limiting the exclusive rights of any author, contributor or the publisher of this publication, any unauthorised use of this publication to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is expressly prohibited. HarperCollins also exercise their rights under Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive 2019/790 and expressly reserve this publication from the text and data mining exception.



This book contains FSC™ certified paper and other controlled sources to ensure responsible forest management.

For more information visit: www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

For Isabella, Rose and Patricia

Chapter 1

‘Don’t you know who I am?’

Howie was losing his temper. Or perhaps he had never had it in the first place. He hated to fly at the best of times. Airports drove him mad and he absolutely loathed queuing. The thought of being cooped up in a tin can hurtling through the air at thirty thousand feet didn’t fill him with confidence either. However, this was the twenty-first century and his work meant he was on more flights than he liked.

If he’d thought he was going to have a restful jaunt from Heathrow, he was clearly mistaken. The grave expression on the flight attendant’s face as she hovered over him made that as plain as the nose on her face.

‘Please, Mr Temple, could you keep your voice down,’ she said. ‘We have other guests onboard.’

‘Yes, I can see that,’ he said, craning his neck. ‘I’m a guest too, you know.’

‘You are,’ she said, staying calm. ‘Just not in business class, I’m afraid.’

‘You’ve said that already,’ he replied. ‘There must be a mistake.’

‘There’s no mistake, Mr Temple.’



‘Check your seating plan.’

‘We have done, sir.’

‘Then check it again,’ he snapped.

‘It’s not going to say anything different.’

‘Have you checked it for the right name?’ he asked, now getting flippant. ‘Howie. Temple.’

If his anger was getting to the attendant, she wasn’t showing it. Instead, she was collected, to the point of indifference. Howie wondered if she had passengers like him all the time. People who used to make passers-by do a double take, who used to have a name and face that opened doors, who used to be recognised in the street. People who used to be famous.

At first he had thought she was offering him a complimentary glass of champagne, as was the style. He was settling nicely into his little pod of luxury when the tap on the shoulder had come. He, apparently, was in the wrong seat. Not only that, but indignity of indignities, the wrong end of the plane.

‘The names and seats have all been checked,’ said the attendant. ‘I’m afraid you’ll have to move.’

‘This has to be a mistake,’ he said. ‘My agent booked these flights, or at least my agent’s assistant’s assistant did. And the production company paid for them. I’m *supposed* to be in business. I’m always in business. That’s what’s *supposed* to happen.’

‘What’s *supposed* to happen doesn’t always happen I’m afraid.’ There was steel in her voice, despite the friendly smile. ‘And this is what’s happening now.’

‘So what am I *supposed* to do?’

‘Well,’ she started. ‘You could always go down the cabin to your assigned seat.’

‘But I don’t understand.’

‘It’s perfectly simple really,’ she said, now sounding like a nursery nurse talking to a toddler. ‘You collect your things, take the small stroll down the aisle to the economy section of the aircraft and take the seat that’s been designated for you.’ She clicked into delivering a speech that sounded like she could deliver it in her sleep. ‘Our economy cabin is perfect for cost-savvy passengers. You’ll find a selection of hot and cold snacks available for purchase, along with in-flight entertainment and duty-free shopping. We value all our customers, including our budget flyers—’

‘No, no, you’re not listening to me,’ he said, getting flustered. ‘I’m supposed to be in business...or first?’ he tried hopefully.

The smile on the attendant’s face was wearing thin. ‘If you’d like to get your things and head down to economy, one of my colleagues can assist you.’

The business cabin was starting to take notice. The time for politeness had passed a few moments ago. Everyone had, at first, been pretending not to notice the scene unfolding in front of them. They had busied themselves with their headphones, their inflatable pillows, the little bags of goodies that came with the expensive seats. Now the prospect of a showdown had kicked in and they wanted to see what would happen. It was the most attention Howie had had in years.

‘Do you need mobility assistance at all, Mr Temple?’ asked the attendant, stepping to one side to let him get out.

‘Mobility assistance? How old do you think I am?’

‘I couldn’t possibly comment.’ She smiled like a well-programmed robot, not quite managing to pass as human.

Howie thought about staying put. They couldn't force him to get up, after all. He could just sit there, delay the flight, get the cops involved and make a whole song and dance about it. Maybe, if he was younger, he would have. Not that this sort of thing happened when he was younger. Private jets, those were the order of the day then. Now this. A far cry from his box office glory years. Still, work was work, after all. His mentors and managers had told him that so often it was etched into his eyelids when he slept.

'Fine,' he said, pulling himself up and out of the business class pod. 'I hope you lot have good lawyers. Because you won't be able to afford a goddamn biplane when mine are finished with you over all of this.'

He was aware of how pathetic that sounded. It wasn't the attendant's fault after all. She was just doing her job. Although he detected a subdued glee in seeing him flounder and flap in the narrow aisle.

'I just hope whoever the charlatan is who's taking *my* seat here chokes on their complimentary olives.'

'You're him, aren't you?'

The voice startled him a little. He looked up, ready to give his standard gracious performance when fans recognised him.

'You're Howie Temple. You're him. The actor.'

The voice, which was unnaturally loud in the confines of the cabin, belonged to a tall, slender woman in giant sunglasses. She was chewing something, or at least looked like it, her glossed lips motoring away between breaths.

Howie looked about to clock who was witnessing his performance. But immediately an icy realisation hit him. Everyone was watching not him, but the woman who

now made her way down the central aisle. A giant handbag was slung over one arm, bumping against the seat backs with every step. Her other hand was filled with shopping bags, bottles clinking and clanking as she moved.

‘Yes, I’m Howie,’ he said. ‘And who might you be?’

The young woman looked more puzzled than offended. She straightened up, pushing her chest out.

‘It’s me,’ she said. ‘Cassandra. We’re on the show together.’

Howie’s years of training had taught him how to not bat an eyelid when circumstances demanded. This woman didn’t look anything like the grainy headshot his manager’s assistant had emailed him. He always preferred to get the measure of someone face to face, anyway. He knew something about people. He’d spent his life imitating them on stage and screen. He’d also been to enough Hollywood parties to know when someone was going to be trouble. First impressions were important in the acting world. And he’d become attuned to sussing them out pretty quickly.

Garishly dressed, covered in make-up more suited to being on camera than real life and doing a heroic job of balancing all her hand luggage while approaching in six-inch heels, Cassandra was clearly a one-woman force of nature.

‘I’m afraid I didn’t recognise you,’ he said, thinking honesty might be the best policy and also that this line was a classic test. Plenty of wannabe starlets found anonymity more cutting than any bad review.

‘Don’t worry about that, chuck, these things are always the same. Here, hold this for a minute, would you?’

Startled by her relaxed reaction, Howie obeyed her and held out his hand. She handed him the oversized handbag.

The weight almost pulled Howie's arm out of its socket as he took hold.

'Holy hell,' he said, catching his breath. 'What have you got in here? An anvil?'

'What's that my darling?' she asked, producing her phone.

'This bag weighs more than my whole luggage!'

'Keep your hair on, Howie, it's just a few bits and bobs, that's all.'

'Bits and bobs?' He rolled his shoulder.

'I'm just touching up my face, I won't be a second,' she said, liberally spritzing herself, and a few unfortunate nearby passengers, with something. 'Are you on Insta?'

'Insta?' he asked, still feeling the effects of her bag. 'I'm not *on* anything. I don't do drugs – not so much as a sleeping tablet.'

'Are you serious?' She seemed perplexed. She tapped something into her phone while she spoke, her bejewelled talons seemingly posing no problem. 'How old are you, Howie?'

'Old enough to remember when phones had wires that connected them to the ground.'

'You what?'

'Nothing.'

'Come on, give us a smile. It'll get people amped up for the show,' she said. 'I'll pop it on my socials and they'll go wild.'

'All of that social media nightmare is handled by my agent,' he said. 'I couldn't even begin to tell you how to do it.'

'Ha, lucky for you I don't need anyone to tell me how to do it. You're really not online? How do you get your news and stuff?'

'From the TV.'

‘Do they still have news on TV?’ she asked.

‘You’re not serious, are you?’

‘It’s a genuine question. I can’t remember the last time I sat down and watched the TV.’

‘You know we’re about to go and film something for television, right?’

‘Yeah, I know that,’ she said. ‘I also know that demographics have shown fewer and fewer young people actually even own a TV, let alone watch it. It’s all there, in the stats. There’s a fascinating series of TikToks on it you should really see.’

Howie was surprised that Cassandra clearly knew what she was talking about. But the attendant cleared her throat behind him before he could quiz her further. He suddenly remembered where he was – and that he was being thrown out of business class.

‘Smile for the camera, I’ll tag you anyway,’ she said.

‘What?’

Before he could do anything, she had taken a picture of them both. The phone made an artificial shutter sound and, not for the first time that morning, he was questioning his life choices.

‘Oh Howie, look at the state of you, love,’ she said, showing him the screen. He’d never realised he could manage to look in two directions at once. ‘We’ll have to take another one.’

She reached over and straightened his shirt collar. She brushed some of his sandy, grey hair from his forehead before he jerked backwards.

‘What are you doing?’ he asked.

‘Smartening you up a bit,’ she said, picking fluff from his lapel. ‘You look like you’ve not seen a mirror for a

week. Come on, give us a nice big smile or a thumbs up for the camera.'

'Mr Temple, please,' said the attendant, growing more fidgety. 'If you could just make your way down to economy, my colleagues will be able to take care of you.'

'You're in cattle?' asked Cassandra, a wry smile creeping across her smooth-skinned face.

'Mr Temple mistakenly thought he was in business class,' said the attendant.

'Eh, excuse me,' he said. 'I'm standing right here, you know? You don't have to share my business with the whole goddamn plane.'

'Is this a joke, chuck?' asked Cassandra, fluffing her hair. 'I thought you were a big Hollywood film star.'

'I am,' he muttered.

'Then what are you doing all the way back down there?'

'I could ask you the same thing.'

'I'm business, babe,' she smiled. 'In fact, that's my seat just there.'

Howie didn't want to look. He didn't have to. Even before her outstretched finger, capped with a blood red fingernail, had settled on the direction of her seat, he *knew* which one it was going to be.

Cassandra strutted and clinked her way past him, squeezing into her pod with ease. Settled, she took off her dinnerplate-sunglasses and looked up at Howie.

'I'll see you when we get off then?' she asked, perfectly innocently.

Howie didn't say anything in return. He had a terrible sinking feeling that was growing in the pit of his stomach. Like a man being led to his own execution, he felt the attendant's hand on his shoulder, gently but firmly easing him

down the gangway. The carpet beneath his feet changed to vinyl as he passed through the galley and into the maelstrom of the economy section. Hollering, shouting, thumping, laughing, crying and untamed chaos met him. And that was just the adults. The kids were all plugged into screens.

Gone was the hushed, exclusive atmosphere. In its place a theatre of unrestrained frustrations and recirculated air. By the time he reached his seat the cacophony had turned into a background buzz he'd just have to tolerate. He slumped down thinking about all the box office flops he had been part of over his career. He thought about his failed stint on Broadway, the two divorces, everything that could have gone wrong that *had*. He wished he'd enjoyed his time in business class more when he was there. It seemed so far away now, even though it was just a few dozen yards up the aisle. He looked out beyond the seat in front, longing for a little taste of that just once more. Then he felt a hard nudge in his ribs.

'You're him, aren't you?'

A large man, sweat on his balding head and bits of lunch stuck in his teeth, was sat beside him. He was nodding, looking over his glasses at Howie, expecting a response.

'You're that actor, aren't you?' he said. 'Howie Temple.'

Howie tried to summon his usual trademark smile and stock answers. But somehow, this time he couldn't.

'Yes,' Howie just about managed. 'I used to be.'