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Those in Peril

Wilbur Smith

Cayla was not certain what had awakened her. She thought she must have heard something. She sat up sleepily on the rumpled bed and listened with her head on one side. The sound was not repeated but something else had changed. Sleep slowed her mind so it took another few seconds for her to realize that the ship's engines had stopped, and she was rolling ponderously to the scend of the sea.

'That's strange.' She was unconcerned. 'We cannot possibly have reached port yet.' Then she realized that her bladder was uncomfortably full. She threw her legs over the side of the bed and stood up. She braced herself to the unusual motion of the yacht and then staggered to the bathroom. She perched on the toilet and sighed with relief as she emptied her bladder. She stood up and started back towards the bed. Moonlight was pouring in through the porthole that looked out over the owner's private deck and swimming pool. She was awake now and she paused at the porthole to look out at the starry sky and the dark sea. There was no wake pouring back behind the stern and she realized that her first impression was correct. The Dolphin had stopped. She thought that she would telephone the bridge and find out from the officer of the watch what was happening, but at that moment a shadow passed the porthole, and she realized that there was somebody out there on the private deck. Immediately she was angry. That area was strictly out of bounds to the crew. She and her mother used it for nude sunbathing and swimming. Now she would certainly call the bridge and have the trespasser castigated. But before she turned away another figure came into her line of sight. He was dressed in dark clothing and had a black Arab shawl wound around his head to cover his face, leaving only his eyes showing. They glinted as he turned towards her. He paused in front of the porthole and peered in. She shrank back in alarm. The man put his face against the glass and raised one hand to shade his eyes, and she realized that the

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moonlight was insufficient to enable him to see into the darkened cabin. His demeanour was furtive but at the same time menacing. She held her breath and stood frozen with terror. He seemed to be staring into her eyes, but after a few seconds he stepped back from the porthole. With another pang of fear she saw that he had an automatic rifle slung over his shoulder. He vanished from her view but immediately three more dark figures filed swiftly and silently past the porthole. All of them carried automatic weapons.

Now she realized that it must have been the sound of rifle fire that had woken her. She had to get help. She was terrified and shaking. She ran back into her cabin and snatched the satellite telephone from the bedside table. Frantically she dialled the bridge. There was no reply but she let it ring while she tried to think what to do next. There was only one other person she could appeal to. She dialled her mother's private line. Hazel's recorded voice instructed her to leave a message. She rang off and immediately dialled again with the same result.

'Oh, Mummy! Mummy! Please help me.' She whimpered and began to compose a text message on her mobile phone, her thumbs flying over the keys as she typed.

Terrible things happening. Strange men with guns . . .

She stopped in mid-sentence. There was somebody at the door of her cabin. Somebody was opening the lock with a pass key. She punched the send button on her mobile phone and threw the device into the drawer of her beside table and slammed it shut. In almost the same movement she sprang from the bed. She rushed to the door and threw her weight against it as it began to open.

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