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It was rising up in front of us, that black wall of water, but I knew it only because of its startling white crest of foam on top. Runnels of foam streaked down its front, too, and I could glimpse these because of the weak illumination of the lighthouse's beam to starboard from, I hoped, Dover... or maybe Hythe... or at least *somewhere* in Kent.

I had been taking no real care with navigation, only to stay relatively near the coast so as to keep out of the busiest shipping lane in the world. Was that true, I reflected? Perhaps now the Malacca Straits leading into Singapore was the biggest shipping lane in today's world. And then, too, I had recently read somewhere that the Strait of Hormuz leading into 'the (Persian) Gulf' from the Gulf of Oman had now become the world's busiest seaway. It was because of the oil, of course, if this were true.

Well, anyway, the English Channel was certainly still *one* of the biggest shipping lanes, at least, and like a highway and the Malacca Straits it was actually divided into two lanes through the Strait of Dover. I stayed as far to the right, but also as far from the coast of Kent, as possible in the hope *Jester* wouldn't be run down by an ocean freighter, giant oil tanker or container ship hurrying outward-bound south down the Channel in the darkness.

Black Channel rollers were coming directly at us, from the southwest, and *Folderol Jester*, somewhat to my surprise, lifted easily to this oncoming one as she had lifted to all the others – although her various hinges and folding joints squealed the mildest of protests. We surfed down into the trough where no lighthouse wand could reach us and where darkness ruled. Not that I greatly cared.

In these dark troughs the polycarbonate front windshield of the wheelhouse became like an obsidian mirror and my face was reflected back at me by the muted interior lights of *Jester's* instruments. It was a haggard face, and an even thinner one than just months before. I suppose this was due to the loss of weight from recovering from the Glastonbury

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injuries. It wasn't a handsome face, at least I didn't think so, but the face at least wasn't actually scared-looking any longer, not since I had learned that *Jester* rose easily to the Channel waves.

My height took up all but an inch of the 6-foot, 3-inch headroom – *Jester* had been designed that way – and so my nondescript mousy brown hair was partly cut off by the wheelhouse's frame. Only that unruly shock of hair curved down over my forehead and had to be brushed back from time to time so that the equally nondescript brown eyes could see. These eyes now gazed steadily back at me with new confidence in *Jester's* seaworthiness. The slight rippling imperfections in the plastic polycarbonate window-mirror emphasized the flatter, crushed right cheekbone and the lumpy right jaw line that the combination of a land mine and a Timor palm tree trunk had conspired between them to create. *Jester* rose out of the trough, crashing through the foam of the swell's crest.

True, at Margate after throwing Mariko O'Shaugnessey's roses overboard at Gravesend, I *had* possessed the presence of mind to fold the cutwater plates forward and I *had* bolted the pointed apex where they met firmly together in overlapping steel plates – but all this was out of sheer habit. Then I had even, for some reason, bolted the folding floor of this cutwater to the steel flanges of the cutwater's plate sides at the bottom. This triangular cutwater extension of *Folderol Jester's* bow had never been intended to be watertight. Indeed, it had round holes drilled in its floor.

I had been experimenting with a Chinese refinement when I had designed it. As I have made abundantly clear elsewhere,* I have never aspired to be a blue water sailor and I had therefore not permitted myself any lapse in weather watching to test the ancient Chinese idea.

And this was, in a word, to make the forward compartment of a vessel purposefully leakable, and drainable, to act as something of a shock absorber in serious waves. We were encountering serious waves now because I had suffered a lapse in weather watching back at Margate.

* *The Magdalene Mandala*

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No, that's not *quite* true. I just didn't want to know about the weather at Margate because that Thames-side town was much too close to London. If I had learned of a late August Channel storm at Margate, well, commuter trains to London were much too handy.

I didn't think that Mariko and I could survive a second parting on the same day and I didn't want to spend any time at all in any lonely Margate marina. I also knew, and too well, that Mariko didn't want to see me again soon, or at least not for a long time. She was revelling in her long-deserved and new found fame as a linguist, translating the Gospel of Mary Magdalene that we had supposedly dredged up somewhere, and rather vaguely, among the sunken islands of lost Lyonesse.

Given both the triumph and tragedy, the ecstasy and agony, that that adventure had cost us, I was already thinking of the summer's experiences as a parable with subtle depths. Privately, I always thought of the painful lessons we had endured because of that ancient parchment as *The Magdalene Mandala*. Something to be studied because of the perfect balance of its components, something a Buddhist might have kept spinning as a meditation prayer wheel. There had been the victory and retribution, the initial poverty and eventual comfortable financial viability, if not quite wealth, juxtaposed with such exquisite symmetry that the wheel would have spun true. And in the central vortex of that wheel, around which everything else had revolved, was a scrap of parchment – well, vellum, according to Mariko – that weighed almost nothing and yet the impact of it might change the world.

After her tearful farewell at the Thames mooring, I thought it best not to return to her very quickly, if ever.

So I had put out into the Channel without turning on the radio and without learning of the impending 'early autumn' or (very) early equinoctial storm roiling up the Channel from the unpredictable North Atlantic.

I was feeling somewhat fey – perhaps the Celtic half of Mariko had gotten to me more deeply than I realized. And

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I was feeling more than a bit fatalistic because the Oriental half of Mariko had most certainly gotten to me.

I didn't greatly care what happened to me.

Of course, *that* half of Mariko O'Shaugnessey, the Oriental half, had the reinforcement of decade-dead Mei Ling, now at the bottom of the Sulu Sea in the storm-twisted wreckage of an Indonesian *orembai* just like *Folderol Jester*.

As *Jester* rose easily to the next black wall of water – a wall I estimated at about fifteen feet high – one part of my brain wryly whispered a more vulgar version of 'folderol'. To wit, horse shit.

Mei Ling's *orembai* had been a traditional one of bamboo and teak planks held together with ages of skill but only bamboo-plaited ropes with which to express it. *Jester's* main two folding hulls were welded steel up to their gunwales and from there up she was welded in 6061-T6 aluminium-magnesium alloy. *Jester's* outriggers were of the same stuff, as were most of her internal bulkheads. Her outrigger struts were not Indonesian bamboo, but oval stainless steel pipe. *Jester* was about twenty times as strong as the Brunei *orembai* that Mei Ling had fished from and died on, maybe more.

The realization that I was infinitely more fortunate than Mei Ling – and perhaps even luckier than Mariko O'Shaugnessey, come to that – dissipated my feyness and fatalism pretty quickly.

In short, I donned a life jacket and clipped a nylon safety harness around me. Then, I climbed out of the wheelhouse and into the 'bracing' wind. It was maybe a little more bracing than the half-gale naturally made it because *Jester* was making about ten knots under steam power and almost directly into the wind, at that. All four masts were up, but the sails had not been hoisted for over two months. They were still securely furled by nylon straps.

I noted that the wind was not yet strong enough to blow the crests off the rollers, so it was not even a full gale, as blue water sailors might disdain it. But it was a strong wind, stronger in the gusts and also whenever *Jester* topped a wave. I held onto the wheelhouse hatch until I had clipped

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the safety harness to the brass knee-high rail around the rear hull that contained the cabin.

I sat on the great stainless steel hinges that held the two hulls together and let my legs dangle down into the almost empty ice-cube tray of *Jester's* forward hull. I saw that Ivory – which Mariko had first re-named Achilles and then Victory – was securely bound to the deck just below me by its stainless steel 1x19 wire cables and stainless steel snap-shackles to eye-bolts TIG-welded to the very frame of the hull. Ivory rocked forward and aft a bit with every wave, but the vehicle wasn't going anywhere soon.

I noted, with some amazement, that the flower shop's paper, in which Mariko's roses had come, and which I had wedged between the smokestack and one of the thinner whistle-tubes, was still in place. A substantial piece had folded over the hinges and all of the paper cone had apparently been held there by the sheer force of the wind. Even as I watched, this folded piece tore away and was whirled aloft into the black sky. The piece wedged between the smokestack and the whistle-tube somehow stayed in place a few moments longer. As I watched it, however, it performed a wild gyration.

It had been definitely creased in a straight line, either by the flower shop's counter edge when Mariko had bought the roses and they had been wrapped, or else – and less probably – when the conical paper container with the roses had been carried down, crushed against Mariko's chest, to *Jester* at the Thames-side quay. And now this creased paper arose, like a thing alive, and began to flap like a bird's wings along the crease-line beside the smokestack. As it flapped, it began to rotate, slowly at first, and then faster and faster. Finally it stopped flapping and closed in an aerofoil curve caused, I suppose, by some cello tape stuck length-wise inside it, and rotated even faster. Fascinated, I watched it soar upward alongside the smokestack until it disappeared aloft into the blackness.

I imagined that its strange antics were caused by errant drafts of the wind that were distorted by the smokestack and the two brass whistle-tubes flanking it. Strange things can

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happen in wind. I remembered seeing in Florida, after a hurricane, old-fashioned broom straws stuck completely through telephone poles. I doubted that the newer plastic broom bristle-whiskers, ubiquitous only a few years ago, but once again becoming supplanted by natural straw because of the energy and petroleum crisis, could pass through a telephone pole even with hurricane force behind them.

I remembered these aerial antics of the rose wrapping in the back of my mind as I looked forward toward *Jester's* cutwater.

The strength of it, and the Chinese idea, hinged, very literally, on the strength of its vertical hinges that were welded to the sides of *Jester's* steel front hull. Of course, these hinges had more than substantial stainless steel pins. And, in the approved Chinese manner, I had drilled holes in the cutwater floor that were smaller in the front and became progressively bigger toward the landing-craft type ramp-style door that, squeezing plastic-covered edges together tightly, denoted the truly watertight section of the front hull. A foot thick layer of Styrofoam under the plywood deck ensured that this rectangular front hull of *Jester* would not sink even if it were flooded. Any water in excess of about six tons would simply drain out through the screened (stainless steel) scuppers at deck level, or find its way back into the sea a bit more slowly through the doors covering the well between Ivory's rear wheels.

And these vertical hinges welded integrally with *Jester's* steel hull had held, so far, even when cascades of a comber crest had occasionally curled aboard and had splashed up against the truly watertight vertical ramp wall. The water seemed to ecede quickly enough from this strange cutwater, too.

Jester rose and fell easily to each oncoming wave, but not abruptly. I had tried to follow ancient Chinese depictions and it seemed as though I had done a tolerable job. The only thing not really done in the ancient Chinese style was to have simple rounded holes of progressively larger diameter in the cutwater's floor rather than diamond-shaped holes of progressively larger size. This would have required extra

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machining and thus extra cost and I had long since decided that the Chinese refined things beyond the dictates of sheer practicality.

As politically incorrect as I was, I attributed this to, probably, genetic inclinations of Oriental humanity. The ancient Chinese believed that the diamond-shaped fenestrations (as the French called these holes from the French word for window, *fenêtre*) created 'living water'. Perhaps they were right, but the round holes had worked very well... so far. I had left Yin and Yang at that in my design drawings intended for my Toronto welder.

Jester seemed to be working very well in conditions I had never dared (consciously) to try – like the passage from St. Nazaire to Hoedic or worse, the passage back from Hoedic to the Vilaine River, both with Mariko during the last summer solstice. The waves then had been only four-to-six footers and even so I had been a bit worried. Now, my feyness or fatalism at Margate had plunked *Jester* and me into waves three times as high, at least.

With even the last paper reminder of Mariko O'Shaugnessey's roses gone from *Folderol Jester*, as it were, I *started* to become once again my own man – as it were. I sat up there, on the break of *Jester's* poop, with the strong hinges beneath my knees emphasizing *my* reality. Mostly, I was re-running last summer's vignettes of Mariko-as-*anima*. Surprisingly, I must have thought (and didn't do it very often) of C.G. Jung, and the primal strength of the female *anima* on the male psyche. I sat there, I suppose, for some hours, not feeling much of anything, but seeing the enjoyable and also the not-so-enjoyable mental vignettes. The first stages of that oft sought, but never truly grasped, emotional closure, you see.

On the other hand, because I suppose Jung happened to cross my mind when the day had begun to lighten, maybe I had been looking in the wrong place for that elusive *anima*.

I could discern the barest smudge of land to the southeast because of a few twinkling lights. I noted that no such lights glimmered toward the northwest, so I must have been steering automatically all that time. This barest smudge of

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land must be France, assuming that I was still in the North Atlantic, that is. And I was fairly sure we were. I cautiously turned *Jester* to port, noting with satisfaction that the boat ascended the diminishing waves – greenish-looking rollers in the wan dawn and looking about ten feet high now – with her outriggers almost parallel to the waves. From my perch up on the hinges where *Jester*'s two hulls joined, I could view my boat more objectively than I had for the full ten years since she had been made.

At fifty-eight feet long with the cutwater extended and twenty feet in total width, *Jester* wasn't about to capsize even in this cross-chop on the unconscious course my mind had chosen. Not with the eight tons of free ballast on her bottom, the impeller tubes of always-moving water alongside her wide keel.

Finally, turning more to port, the wind and waves pushed me toward France just on the horizon. I guessed from the chart that the smudge must be a part of Normandy. So, since I was back to normal, more or less, I steered a bit more westerly for Brittany. Sooner or later, when I made landfall, I would find out exactly where we were. The main things were the distant horizon of land over the bow and the fact that the sonar had run out of enough fathoms with which to express the depth of water beneath the keel. The Eagle 5000 portable sonar was good for a depth of over 400 feet, about 70 fathoms, so things couldn't be all bad. In fact, things were relatively good.

And as the grey dawn light steadily became stronger, I realized that I truly felt very good too – except for some slight aching in the neck, spine and ribs that had probably truly awakened me from that pleasant miasma of Jung-and-*anima* nostalgia. I'd been told that my neck and ribs would always cause 'mild discomfort' (as doctors like to put it). So, I was not particularly surprised at the ache, but gratified to learn that it had required some hours in a cool breeze to start it up. All that physiotherapy back in London had done some good, after all.

And I had discovered, through carelessness back at Margate, that *Folderol Jester* was much more seaworthy

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than I had ever dared to test. Not that I hadn't designed her that way, but it was good to verify the theory with practice.

With my newly found confidence in *Jester* as an offshore boat, and with an ever-brightening day that promised to be sunny but blustery, I decided to take a stab at more serious navigation. After some concentrated study of the chart, and figuring that the winds had created a current of two knots against us during the night, I finally decided that the distant glimmering lights far abeam were probably Dieppe. Taking this as a reasonable assumption, I turned *Jester* a bit to starboard, heading more south and west for the tip of the Cotentin Peninsula and Cherbourg.

It, or *some* headland, duly rose above the horizon dead on the bow by late afternoon.

If I left Cherbourg and crossed the Gulf of St. Malo to coast around Brittany and Poitou down to the Gironde, it would take *Jester* about two weeks to reach Aiguillon. But with a dangerous lee shore all the way and the season turning to notorious September in the Bay of Biscay. If, once reaching Brittany, and sailing its southern shore to once again enter the inland canals at St. Malo or further east at the Vilaine River, the same trip would take about three weeks. And it would be as safe as houses. I found that with twenty-four hours between Mariko and me, I was looking forward to being 'home' – although I had no idea what awaited me there or even *precisely* where home was. Oh, Raoul and Joëlle had given clear enough directions, but I had never actually seen the place.

There, somewhere off the mouth of the Seine, with Cherbourg nestled in a headland muted with distance ahead of *Jester*, I succumbed to temptation. On a whim I braked the wheel and ran *Jester* for some minutes under unchanged power while I hoisted sail. I hoisted both mains and mizzens, and on both sides, not forgetting to rotate the port masts forward. The full-battened and vaguely Chinese-shaped sails turned *Jester* into a genuine *orembai* again, as she had not been since the summer. I also raised the Western-style jibs (or Genoas) on the fore stays – except that they, too, had full battens of carbon fibre slats, cut from sheets of the stuff.

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The three pairs of sails each were tethered together by an aluminium tube; so only three sheets came back to me atop the poop and hinges. The wind was coming out of the west; call it about 15 knots and in the gusts a bit more. When I had these six smallish sails (or three) depending on one's point of view, correctly trimmed to my satisfaction, I reached down into the wheelhouse and valved the steam engine down to 'simmer', as I called it, and de-clutched its chain drive from the impeller.

Jester had already heeled over a very few degrees toward the low coast of Normandy to port. But now she was making about 15 knots – if not a bit more in the gusts – and I was using only a trickle of fuel to keep the boiler hot enough for fairly quick usage.

As the sun sank toward the west in the late afternoon, I noted that the smudge on the horizon over the bow was becoming much more definite. I knew also, without having to look at any chart, that the harbour and town of Cherbourg must be snuggled behind this headland.

Home? How could one have a home without knowing its *precise* location? Its smells? Its trees? Its views from cozy windows?

Mariko, when she had chided me on that last – was it only yesterday afternoon? – Thames-side parting had said with too-feminine certainty that I had a perfectly good permanent address at Aiguillon with Joëlle. But Mariko had really known nothing of the seven-year relationship between Joëlle and myself.

I had never told her.

Firstly, because I had known too well that *any* knowledge that Mariko had beyond her own theft might have proved dangerous to herself, and would certainly have proved dangerous to Joëlle. Not to mention Raoul, Philippe and their wives. And secondly, because the strange relationship that existed between Joëlle and me was ours alone, not to be shared with anyone, not even with Mariko O'Shaugnessey.

Joëlle, during the seven years we had been together since I had first come into France, had gradually become more of a daughter to me than a womanly peer consort.

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And also, in some strange way that she herself had insisted upon, and perhaps *was*, Joëlle had also become a timeless Earth Mother, a spirit of the Haute Garonne. And it was simply a fact that her family had lived for, perhaps, 10,000 years where the Lot River flowed into the Garonne River, not six miles from Aiguillon where Raoul had so conveniently found the warehouse that my money had made it possible to buy. So, by some unlikely quirk of fate – or *was* it coincidence? – Joëlle was once again living at the confluence of the Lot and Garonne Rivers, just where her entire family had resided since, maybe, the close of the last Ice Age.

And, aside from securing, *almost* outright buying the warehouse itself, had I not sent some 17,000 Euros to Joëlle out of the bounty gained by the Magdalene Gospel from Stewart and Ibn Da'ud? Then, she had the motorized tricycle that I had constructed for her in Narbonne seven years before. It had been made of steel and aluminium, yes, but its major components had been infinite care and concern. It would sustain Joëlle for longer than she could reasonably expect to live, or be able to ride on it. Its driving mechanism would never wear out, it seemed. There were Velocette mopeds still running in France that had been made in 1930. Its 25cc engine had not changed at all from 1930 to 1997, when an upscale refinement to 35cc had been introduced. Even its tires would last for a decade, if cared for.

So, I owed her nothing. Except, of course, those obligations of my heart. She was, after all, *female*, and in the world as it seemed to be disintegrating day-by-day, this fact alone made her as vulnerable as little Lucy the Australopithecine some 2-3 million years ago. Once again.

As I looked aloft at the superbly-drawing Chinese sails... I realized that *Folderol Jester* was my real home, and not Joëlle and 'my' (or the communally-owned) warehouse at Aiguillon.

Could Joëlle understand that I had changed? That there was no automatic 'chivalry' or 'obligation' in my heart, beyond what I had already done for her, any more? Somehow, 'the Magdalene Mandala', as I chose to call it,

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had burned that sort of emotional commitment out of me – again – just as Mei Ling’s death had burned it out long before.

I didn’t know what Joëlle could, or could not, understand.

I did know that in the very late afternoon, almost sunset, the Cotentin Peninsula was close abeam and I steered for its westernmost tip, the Pointe de Barfleur. Long before actual sundown I doused the sails, furled them with the strong nylon straps again, and, once rounding the first headland, steamed at a stately 5 knots up past the Grande Rade breakwater into Cherbourg. I threaded the narrow channel between the Petite Rade with some care and disdained the Chantereyne Marina – more like an upscale Western-style boat city, really, since it could accommodate some 12,000 yachts – and I noticed that it was much less than half full even at the end of August.

As the sunset flared into reddish-orange in the far West, I turned past the Government Wharf and into the much more modest breakwater of the Club Nautique Sportif. It felt a little odd to be back where Mariko and I had started our Channel crossing to Weymouth and Glastonbury just two months earlier.