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## 1: Sea Cruise

“Ships that pass in the night, and  
speak each other in passing, only  
a signal shown and a distant voice  
in the darkness; so on the ocean of  
life, we pass and speak one another,  
only a look and a voice, then darkness  
and silence again.”

-Wordsworth Longfellow

(Tales of a Wayside Inn)

The heat inside the medical mavens' hazmat suits bordered on the unbearable. Compounded by a continuous film of perspiration forming on the suit's visor, it proved a constant struggle to maintain their bearings. As if trudging through a dense tropical plague infested rain forest were not enough. The SAR party braced for the worst as they slowly descended upon the unfathomable hellish sight, comparable to the carnage following a mass military slaughter by a crazed dictator. The words “abandon hope all ye who enter” resonated

loud and clear with the learned virologist The  
alleged inscription on the entrance to hell found in  
Dante's Divine Comedy. Something seemed lost in  
the translation for this was not a comedy. Nothing  
short of a divine intervention could have conceivably  
saved anyone. The bloody surreal scene  
seemed staged as if part of a macabre magic show.  
The group scoured the village carefully for any  
sleight of hand or movement. The team paused  
and perused the perimeter but the deathly still  
battlefield revealed no quarter. Their lives weren't

7

worth a plugged nickel anyway. The former captives  
either sold into indentured service or to a mad  
military war lord were expendable either way.

"Place gives me the willies" said the first  
responder as a tremor of terror resonated through  
his body.

"Well, like Willy they're all free now."

"Amen."

"When was the distress cell phone signal intercepted?"

"By the best of intel interpretation of the distinct  
dialect, ....three days."

"Three days?"

"No other written records?"

“Our presence wouldn’t have amounted to a hill  
‘o beans. They were long gone.”

“Come on...”

The commander motioned to delicately dispose

8

of the consumed corpses near a tainted watering  
hole at the edge of the small African village nestled  
near the intersection of Sierre Leone, Guinea and  
Liberia. The ‘ebola triangle’. It was the site of the  
worst outbreak of the ebola virus since it’s initial  
discovery in 1976. Thought to originate in gorillas  
because human outbreaks started after people ate  
gorilla meat. But how long had it resided in the  
majestic, at times menacing primates?

The sun beat down mercilessly upon the medical  
team as they compiled the putrid remains into the  
mass grave and hastily performed a fast and  
furious last rites ritual.

“In the name of the father, the son and the holy  
spirit...may you rest in peace.”

Will broke down as he knelt before the deceased  
woman. Always willing and able to tackle the  
toughest assignment, Will shuddered as he peered

9

into the bloody eye sockets of the victim. Her

delicate high cheekbone structure and ever so slightly curved lips reminded him of his ....fiance. He slowly, defiantly removed his mask and leaned into the female. The image was indelibly etched in his mind's eye. He jerked back and caught the corner of his suit on a protruding bone, the result of a compound fracture. He felt the sharp edges penetrate the fabric, then his own flesh and blood.

"You OK?"

Will froze, arose and arched his aching back. His weary bones the worse for wear.

The chief medical officer noticed the fear that enveloped Will.

"Reminds me of Emma."

"Don't dwell on it. It'll eat you alive."

"Thank God she's a million miles from this hell hole."

10

"Cheer up, you'll be together soon."

There was little relief in the statement due to it's ominous prophetic potential.

"You're vacay begins in less than a week. Where you headed?"

"Casablanca."

"'Heaven Can Wait' assured the commanding

officer as he alluded to the original score from the film. "But we can't, come on." The seasoned medical officer spotted the torn fabric of Will's hazmat suit as he turned his attention to the overwhelming task.

"Better let me have a look at that."

"Only a scratch."

The eagle eyes examined the laceration with a degree of concern. He attentively dressed it.

"You've been exposed. I'll have to quarantine you."

11

"Just what the doctor ordered, huh?"

"You're one of the lucky ones...this stuff's worth it's weight in gold and back ordered for months.

He removed a vial of a potent experimental vaccine produced presumably by Mapp Biopharmaceuticals and a number of new start up firms, then quickly injected the ZMapp concoction into the upper posterior gluteus maximus of the patient.

"Oww. Can't a guy get a break?"

"This is no picnic son. You know what we're up against."

The sweltering heat relented as the sun slipped below the hills. Fifty shades of pale grey filtered

through the palm fronds then transformed into a pitch black. A soothing silence descended upon the decimated village, one found in a funeral home.

“Let’s light ‘em up.”

The flame throwers lit up the night sky like tiki

12

torches at a Hawaiian luau. Several of the medics dreamt of roast boar, apples stuffed in their mouths over a steaming spit as tropical maidens’ hips swayed to a soothing enchanting beat. Their thirst quenched by an intoxicating elixir. It served as a powerful placebo to mask the gruesome reality that was and could’ve conceivably spread like a brush fire to consume much of humanity.

The medical party packed up their gear....and left the smoldering embers..... like happy campers embarking on a desperately sought escape into the back country.

The Huey helicopters whisked the team high above the battlefield like the days of the Vietnam, Korean, Afghanistan or ISIS wars. This was a fight they couldn’t lose. A wretched reminder of how susceptible mankind was to such a tiny elusive virulent invader that reared it’s ugly head regularly

13

to feast on the unsuspecting hosts like rabid  
vampires or vultures. The formation veered due  
south over the dense foliage of the rain forest.

“Good riddance. If I ever come this way again,  
It’ll be too soon.”

Will was giddy with anticipation. Coupled with  
sheer fatigue and the warm fuzzy feeling that  
enveloped him, the result of the vaccine he  
reasoned.

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Will peered into the mirror of the infirmary,  
situated near the center of the base in Capetown  
then straightened his tie and brushed his lapels. He  
examined his face, studying each aging line that  
enveloped it. Wrinkles of wisdom he called them.

Luckily, he had responded well to the vaccine.

“By the grace of God... Thank you.”