

"A brilliantly crafted page-turner full of storms, mystery, danger, humor, and even the odd pirate. . . . You can taste the salt in the air."

— RICK RIORDAN



SWIM THAT ROCK

JOHN ROCCO & JAY PRIMIANO

1

WALKING THE PLANKS

Wednesday afternoon, August 11

Presumed dead does not mean dead. They didn't find his body.

That's why I am walking down the street in the middle of a category 3 hurricane with a six-inch knife in my pocket. I'm trying to find the guy I saw this morning who used it to stab a fifty-dollar bill into our fence post. *He knows something. It can't be a coincidence that the knife had my dad's initials. There's no way.*

The signs on Main Street twist and wobble, sounding like steel drums as the storefront awnings slap and shake in the wind. The sidewalk seems to move beneath my feet while my black poncho sets sail. It's pushing me back, saying, *Go home, Jake.*

I'm not exactly sure where to look for him, but my guess is that he's sitting in Muldoon's Bar. That's where

all the fishermen go when they're not fishing. The street in front of the bar is lined with pickup trucks, and as I get closer, a couple guys stumble out, pull on their rain slicks, and stagger away. I can't see a thing as I peer through the porthole window on the front door of the bar. I push open the door and the smell of smoke and vomit blows past my face into the surging winds behind me. It's dark inside, and the only light comes from red bulbs and a flickering neon beer sign hanging on the far wall. I can see dark bodies hunched over the bar like a row of black crows on a telephone wire.

The last dark shape lifts his head from his drink. Looking over his shoulder, he nods as if he's been waiting for me.

"Water's up?" he questions.

"Yup, almost in the cellar of the diner," I say nervously. I don't know exactly what I'm expecting him to do, or what he wants me to do, but I find myself just standing there. I guess I figure I owe the guy; he did give me a fifty and the knife with my dad's initials on it. He told me to come find him when the water came up, so that's what I'm doing.

He tosses the glass of beer back. It drizzles from the side of his mouth. Wiping his face on his shirtsleeve, he gets up from the barstool, which falls backward to the floor with a loud crack.

“Get in the truck,” he says, pointing to the door.

“I . . . I don’t know.”

“Know what?” he snaps, throwing crumpled bills onto the bar.

I know I shouldn’t get in some stranger’s truck, but I figure it must be an emergency with the hurricane and all. None of these other guys are acting as if this is weird, and they must know this guy.

I’m thinking all this as I find myself in the front seat. The stranger climbs into the driver’s seat. He’s wearing black rubber boots, worn jeans, and a red flannel shirt that hangs on him like a wet blanket. It’s weird that his shirt is buttoned all the way up, like he’s hiding something. Black hair is matted across his forehead, making his pale, sharp features look like they were cut from gray marble.

“Where we going?”

“We got some business to do.” His voice sounds like a bag of rusty nails.

“My name is Jake, by the way. Jake Cole.” I’m holding his knife with the initials out for him to see. The *J* and *C* pearl inlay shine from the flickering streetlamp.

“I know your name, kid.” He glances down at the knife. “Keep it.”

“What do I call you?” I’m wondering if his initials are J. C. too.

“Just call me Captain.”

I want to ask him more about the knife and if he knows my dad and how he got the knife and why he gave it to me, but my jaw feels locked up. Stuffing the knife into my jeans, I look for the seat belt.

The stranger stamps his foot on the accelerator, and the diesel truck rattles down the street toward Charon’s Dock. The dock, or what remains of it, is attached to the old oyster-shucking house, and even on a good day you take your life in your hands just walking on it. The pilings are all crooked and worn down at the waterline, fangs biting into the water. The whole mess has been trying to fall into the river for years, but some of the local fishermen keep knocking nails into it and adding new boards so they don’t lose their access to the river.

The tires crunch to a halt on the shells at the edge of the dock, and I look over at Captain, wondering what we’re doing here, especially in the middle of a hurricane. In the beam of the headlights, with every snap of the wiper blades, I can see white foam surging over the boards, forcing them to lift and sway. Suddenly, it clicks.

“Wait, you’re not going out there. Are you?”

“Follow me!” Captain commands, and with a flick of his wrist, he shuts off the truck and leaps out. I am plunged into darkness.

I can't move. I'm frozen in the front seat. He's completely nuts if he thinks I'm going out there. I watch him as his dark silhouette bobs, limping quickly through the rain toward the dock.

Thwaak! A branch comes crashing down on the hood of the truck. Not a big branch, I don't think it even dented the hood, but the noise makes me jump right out of the seat. I grab the door handle and chase after him.

The rain lets up but the wind is still howling, and the salt spray is stinging my eyes as we walk the planks toward the end of the dock. Each step Captain takes causes the dock to lurch, so I have to time my steps with his to keep from getting tossed into the river. The five boats still tied to the dock pull and yank on their lines. To my right I can make out the forest of masts from all the dry-docked sailboats. The wind is tearing through them, moaning and wailing as it tries to rip them from their cradles.

“Ahghhh, nothing like a nice night out on the water,” Captain yells at the wind and foam screaming down the Warren River. I can feel my heart pounding in my chest as I realize that he is going to get into one of these boats. He straddles two boards in front of a dark gray twenty-four-foot boat, which looks like a shark riding high on the waves. He's lifting the stern lines and swearing as the boat swings and heaves on its two anchors. He's driving

a team of wild horses, pulling and stretching the anchor lines with arms that look like steel cables under a layer of ghost-white skin.

“Get on board, kid. Jump now!” Captain screams above the sound of wind and waves.

“What?” I say, questioning his sanity as a plank rips away and disappears into the rushing river. The dock groans menacingly and there is a spine-shaking, splintering *crack* as the boards beneath me begin to fall away.

“Do it now—just do it!”

I jump.

2

HURRICANE BOUNTY

Wednesday evening, August 11

“Get the anchor line!” Captain barks as he follows me and leaps aboard. *My first orders.*

I stumble toward the bow, grab hold of the taut rope, and pull with everything I’ve got, but the last part of the anchor line is cinched tight on the cleat by the tremendous strain of the wind.

“It’s stuck,” I yell.

Captain rushes forward, a huge machete in his hand, and slashes it through the air. The line pops like a guitar string. He races back to the steering post to goose the huge twin engines, and we blast out from the dock and into the raging river.

I look over my shoulder, and can see my family’s diner on the rising shoreline. The lights are on in the upstairs apartment, glowing like a lighthouse in the storm.

Everything is there, and I'm out here, in this boat, in this storm, with this nut job.

He motions for me to come behind the console as the boat jumps up and down in the swells. We pass a sunken sailboat at its mooring, bobbing and lifting, showing only her tethered bow and her mast leaning over at an odd angle. Captain punches the throttle forward, and the boat rises to the top of the five-foot waves, skipping along with the back end pounding like exploding dynamite. *This boat will definitely break in half.*

“I’ve seen worse!” Captain screams above the engine noise, and somehow I can’t imagine a worse storm, but at this moment I plan on believing everything Captain says because my life is in his hands.

“Where are we going?” I ask, grabbing on to the console to get my balance.

“Strap in,” he says, nodding to the metal post I’m leaning against. I look down, and there is a safety harness attached to it; I fumble with the latch, strapping in just as we lift into the sky. The engines scream as the boat catapults from wave to wave. Captain stands, holding on to the steering wheel, while I’m strapped to the post like a pirate lashed to the mast.

We find calmer waters in the mooring field at Stanley’s Marina. The docks and boats are all jumbled in a pile. Some boats are upside down and sinking. It doesn’t even

seem real. Captain is steering quickly through the flot-sam, dodging boats and debris as we fly by the yacht club and into the mouth of the Barrington River.

“Slow down! No wake zone!” Mr. Nathanson, the dock-master is waving his arm and yelling through a bullhorn. I can see his red hair and yellow rain slicks through the spray of our boat.

“He’s got to be kidding. Has he looked around?” Captain shouts. I’m a little embarrassed as we speed past, and I try to hide my face behind the console. I know Mr. Nathanson because he eats at the Riptide. When he comes in for breakfast, he’s always bragging about how athletic his kids are. *I’d like to see one of his kids out here, doing this.*

We continue to move up the river, past the cement bridge and then under the wooden trestle.

“Now what?” I yell over the roar of the engines.

“Salvaging.” Captain’s eyes are darting from port to starboard, searching the shoreline.

“Salvaging what?”

“Outboard motors. Listen, there’s tons of rich kids too stupid to take their boats in when the storms hit; you’ll see them all against the seawall and in the marsh just past Findley’s Dock. We’ll make some quick cash, and I’ll have you home in a couple hours.”

What is he talking about? Is this guy a thief? Captain

is crazy but the words “quick cash” continue to echo in my head.

The boat is running smoother now. The houses along the river are a blur, but I can see that most of their docks are all busted up. Trees and branches litter the shoreline.

The engines wind down, and I see Findley’s dock coming up in the distance, with its boats all twisted and upside down. Captain drives right up onto the marsh, lifts his toolbox from the locked cabinet, and hands me an adjustable wrench, two screwdrivers, and some large bolt cutters.

“You get the small engines. I’ll get the big ones. Just cut the wires and don’t worry about taking off the controls.”

“You want me to steal engines?”

“It’s not stealing, kid. It’s right in the book of Maritime Salvage Law. It’s called the Law of Finds.” Captain is already disconnecting a medium-size outboard engine from the nearest boat. Pronouncing his words like a lawyer now, as though he’s rehearsed this answer a hundred times, he says, “In the case of submerged and sunken vessels, when no owner exists or can be determined, title to abandoned property is given to the person who actually finds and takes possession of the property.”

“But these boats aren’t submerged or sunk,” I say,

pointing to the dozen or so boats twisted up on the marsh.

“They will be soon enough. Now hurry up!”

I look at the boats, all in a mess, and I recognize my classmate Rich Ulner’s boat. It’s a brand-new fourteen-foot Boston Whaler with a twenty-five-horsepower engine he got as a present for not getting any Fs on his report card. *What a snot.* I take my tools and slog through the marsh toward his boat. The wind and rain is whipping me. It takes all my effort to stay upright. I try to convince myself that the snot doesn’t need the engine. He hardly uses this boat. His dad owns a whole chainsaw company, so he’ll just end up getting him a new one anyway. *This is wicked wrong.*

“Let’s go, get a move on!” Captain shoots.

I start fumbling with the bolts and drop my wrench into the eelgrass. I look over and Captain has already removed two forty-horsepower engines and placed them into his boat. His arms are moving frantically, pulling and cutting stuff. *He’s a nut.* As I pick up the wrench, I see a flash of light, a searchlight, shining in the distance.

“Captain,” I yell out just loud enough to pierce the whipping winds and howl of the hurricane.

“What the hell are they doing this far up the river?” Captain stares out with murder in his eyes as he watches

a Department of Environmental Management boat, towing a small distressed skiff up the river. We both stand very still as they pass by no more than three hundred yards away. The DEM are kind of like the coast guard, except they mainly make life difficult for fishermen. Most of us call them clam cops because they spend their time pestering all the quahoggers that work out on the bay.

Suddenly the spotlight swings over to us. We must look like two deer caught in headlights, standing there in the eelgrass in the middle of a hurricane. Captain is straining under the weight of the outboard engine in his arms. The DEM boat angles toward us.

Hey, you there! the clam cop yells through his bullhorn.

Captain drops the motor in the marsh and darts to his boat, trims the engines down, and motions for me to come. *I should just run up into the woods. I could just walk home.* The engine growls horrifically, and Captain points to me like he would to a dog, dragging his finger down to the deck of the boat.

“*Now,*” he says. I drop the tools, run over, and get onboard.

The boat leaps from the marsh, then jerks to a stop as the engines hit bottom. I imagine the two stainless-steel props busting up the ground as the boat slowly moves backward away from shore. The propellers finally catch enough water to make it jump. Captain spins the

wheel around and shoves the throttle full bore. The force throws me to the stern, and I bang up against the salvaged motors like a rag doll.

“Careful with those!” Captain barks.

I crawl to the leaning post and press my back against it, lifting myself upright. We head toward the White Church Bridge. The tide is so high I doubt we are going to fit under.

“*Duck!*” He barks and I hit the deck, waiting for the boat to shatter against the bridge. Captain is laughing aloud when sparks fly from the metal bar over the console as it nicks the concrete bridge and we explode past it, out into Hundred Acre Cove.

We made it.

The rain is like cold needles piercing my face as the dark gray boat hauls butt. The DEM guys are chasing us. I can just make them out, with their lights flashing.

“Check it out, kid. We’ve got three thousand dollars’ worth of motors behind us, and you get ten percent. Hold on.”

I’m not sure what Captain is talking about, because I didn’t actually put any engines in the boat, but I quickly do the math in my head, and three hundred bucks sounds pretty great—unless I’m in jail, of course. My head throbs and I want to jump overboard.

“I’m gonna bring ’em through the Snakes. They’ll

stove a hole in that piece-of-crap boat on the second turn!” Captain laughs.

The Snakes is a section of Hundred Acre Cove that connects two bodies of water through a marshy area. I used to go blue-crabbing up there, and I know about the massive rock right in the middle. It’s covered in streaks of blue where other boats have hit it, and I’m thinking this guy is going to kill these cops, but he acts like it’s a game of tag.

We hit the Snakes at fifty miles an hour. They’re behind us now and close, and he’s right; they’re going too fast. Must be some new rookie clam cop driving, because I’m pretty sure they’re not going to make the second turn. Captain slows just enough to miss the submerged rock. The sound of cracking fiberglass fills the air behind us as the DEM boat jumps out of the water and lands in the marsh. Captain throttles back as we watch the clam cops scramble out of their boat and immediately sink knee-deep in the soft mud.

“Never should have followed me that close.” Captain laughs.

We turn around Crab Island and back up the west side of the cove to stay out of gunshot range. They may not be real cops, but they do carry guns, and I’ve heard they like to use them if the opportunity comes up. My knees are shaking. I’m wet and cold, and I feel like I’m going

to pass out. Captain is squinting into the pelting rain with a crooked smile as we head back upriver.

“Ready for home?” he asks, and I puke all over the front of my poncho. “I’ll take that as a yes!” He laughs.

I’m still in a daze as he brings us close to the little dock at back side of the Riptide Diner.

“Good work, kid.” He says as he pulls out a billfold almost as thick as it is wide. I notice it’s tied closed with a rubber band; it reminds me of my own wad of cash in the cigar box under my bed. He pulls out three one-hundred-dollar bills and hands them to me. I reach out with a trembling hand, and he quickly pulls the bills back.

“We didn’t do nothing wrong, kid. Law of Finds, remember.” He hands me the cash. I don’t say a word. I shove it in my pocket and jump out of the boat and onto the dock. Without looking back, I head straight up to the Riptide Diner. I hear the engines roar into the teeth of the storm behind me.

Swim That Rock

John Rocco and Jay Primiano

"A brilliantly crafter page-turner full of storms, mystery, danger, humor, and even the odd pirate. . . . You can taste the salt in the air."

– Rick Riordan

Buy online from
an indie bookstore 

Buy on amazon.com

BARNES & NOBLE
BOOKSELLERS [BUY NOW](#)



CANDLEWICK PRESS
www.candlewick.com