

Riding the Waves Without Getting Wet
How to Keep Your Balance as the Curl Closes Over You
Chapter One

Phillip Phelps was a man on the move. Only in his mid-thirties, he had already been a National Sales Manager, a VP of Operations and a President. But those had been small companies, no more than one might expect from a Harvard MBA. Now he stood at the apex of his career -- on board the cruise ship *Southern Siren*, at a party in his honor, celebrating his signing of the single biggest contract in the history of a billion dollar company and, he was certain, his promotion to Senior Vice President.

So, for once, Phillip ignored the pulsing in his pocket and reached for a glass of champagne offered by a leather-skinned waiter with a graying beard and ponytail. "What a loser," Phillip thought, "middle-aged and still working a teen-ager's job." Then Phillip saw the diamond studs in the man's left ear. There were so many he quickly counted them. "...and with seven ear studs and a ponytail, I can see why!" Phillip thought. "A loser by design!"

Phillip looked out over the ballroom and was generally pleased by what he saw. The serving table was spread with sumptuous fare, including lobster and caviar, his favorites. At least *that* was first class, even if the ship itself had seen better days. He thought the ice sculpture of his new client's logo was a nice touch. And the band was competent, even if their uniforms were starting to fray around the cuffs. But he found the balloons and banners wholly inappropriate for such an important occasion.

Nonetheless, it was with a smile of self-satisfaction that he straightened his tuxedo jacket and watched two of his direct reports take to the dance floor. The ballroom was filled with people who had worked on his project. But most of them really didn't deserve to be there, he thought, not when he had had to ride them as hard as he did to meet their deadlines.

And now two of them were coming over to suck up. Phillip downed his flute of champagne to brace himself for the interaction. He had always been leery of becoming too social with his reports. He felt it tended to erode their respect for his authority.

A balding man with a paunch and an almost-sincere smile suck out a chunky hand. "Congratulations, Phillip," he said, "Rumor has it that the old man may be changing your name plate tonight."

"Your congratulations are a little premature, Frank, but thanks. I appreciate the thought." Phillip replied as he shook the man's hand.

"Me too," said the other report sticking out his hand, "Congratulations."

"Thank you, Bill." Phillip replied perfunctorily.

"Listen, Phillip," said Frank, "Now that we've landed this monster account, I was thinking that if we reorganized our service teams into smaller groups and trained them to be cross-functional, we could..."

Just then Phillip's pocket started vibrating again and he had to consciously keep his relief from becoming visible. Taking his cell phone out of his pocket brought the conversation to an immediate halt. "Excuse

me, won't you?" said Phillip. And that was enough to send his reports scurrying. They knew how he was about his phone calls.

The display on his cell phone revealed that the call came from Arvin Cord, the company's plant manager, someone who definitely should have known better than to call him here. "This better be important, Arvin," Phillip barked into the phone. "This is NOT a good time!"

"It is, Phillip," Arvin replied. "We just got those struts you subbed out and put 'em on the torsion tester."

"And?" Phillip snorted impatiently.

"And they're not up to specs!" Arvin reported anxiously. "They literally come apart under maximum load. We put some of the pieces under the microscope and it doesn't look right. I don't think there's any titanium in this alloy at all. We had to shut the line down."

Phillip lost it. "You WHAT!!???" he shouted.

But before Arvin could reply, Phillip was shocked back into control by the voice of his CEO behind him. "Problem, Phillip?" the CEO said.

Phillip turned with a start, then mumbled a quiet "I'll get back to you" into the phone and put it away. "No, Roy, no problem," he said with his best aw-shucks grin, "Just a call from home. The kids painted the cat with peanut butter."

After a hearty laugh, the CEO put his hand on Phillip's back and said, "Come with me, lad. I have something to say." Then he propelled Phillip toward a small stage set up at one end of the room. There the CEO

climbed up on stage and banged his flute with a spoon to get everyone's attention.

When everyone had gathered around, he signaled toward the back of the room and waiters started filling everyone's flute with fresh champagne. "Everyone fill your glasses," he said, "Because I want to propose a toast."

When all the glasses were filled, he raised his and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are here tonight to celebrate an accomplishment that will propel our company to a new plateau."

At this everyone whistled and hooted and banged their glasses with silverware until the CEO held up his hand to quiet them.

"And everyone in this room tonight was an integral part of that accomplishment" he said with genuine sincerity. "So the first toast is to you! We couldn't have done it without you!"

The CEO drained his glass and held it out for his personal waiter to refill, and everyone else dutifully did the same, accompanied by more hoots and whistles, which Phillip found boorish.

"And now," the CEO continued, holding up his newly filled flute, "I want you join me in toasting the man who put this landmark accomplishment together. Phillip, come on up here!"

There were no hoots or whistles as Phillip took the stage, only some subdued glassware banging.

“While everybody gets a refill, let me tell you a little about this guy. When he first joined us we expected great things from this hard-charging dynamo and by golly he’s delivered. He’s our top salesman three years running, one of the Springfield Chamber’s Top Thirty Young Executives, ProSell Magazine’s Man of the Year and now our new all-time sales record-holder. To commemorate your achievements, Phillip, we’d like to present you with this solid gold business card case....”

The CEO held up the case for all to see, then opened it so Phillip could see inside.

“...filled with the business cards...
of our new Director of Business Development!”

Fighting back the expression of his shock and disappointment, the best Phillip could muster was a blank stare. There was no applause.

“*And,*” continued the CEO, taking an envelope from his inside jacket pocket “It comes with a bonus check that I believe you’ll find very pleasing.”

He handed the check to Phillip. Still there was no applause -- until the CEO pulled a whole stack of envelopes from his pocket and added, “In fact, I have bonus checks here for everybody in this room!”

Now the room erupted in hoots, whistles and the clinking together of fifty-seven flutes of champagne. Still a little dazed, Phillip held up his business card case and check like the applause was for him, clinked flutes with the CEO, gulped down his champagne and left the stage to compose himself and figure out what to do about this. What had gone wrong? Why hadn’t they given him the position he deserved? How

could he turn this around? He had to think – and answer the phone that had been vibrating in his pocket during the whole presentation.

“Hang on a second, Arvin,” he said into the phone. Then, using the phone for cover so that he could pass through the crowd with just smiles and waves, he made his way out onto the deck.

“Arvin, you’ve got to get that line back up and running *immediately!* He shouted once out on deck, “No excuses! Our contract has a bail-out clause if we don’t deliver on time!”

“The struts are not up to specs, Phillip!” Arvin pushed back, “If we put them in they’re going to fail! What does the contract say about *that?!!*”

Just then people started coming out onto the deck in twos and threes. In the still night air, Phillip could hear snatches of conversation from across the deck. He heard, “...yeah, but I’d give it back for a transfer,” followed by the sound of laughter. So he moved further away and lowered his voice.

“Look, Arvin, that tester puts a lot more load on those struts than they’ll actually be under in normal use. They’ll last for months, during which time we’ll diligently have them assayed and then, if they really *aren’t* the alloy we contracted for, we recall them before any harm is done and the customer thanks us for our diligence and our ethics.”

More conversation wafted over, someone imitating someone in a deep self-important voice. “...I don’t care *what* your personal problems are! We have a deadline to meet!” followed by more laughter.

At the same time, Arvin was saying, “Why don’t we just tell the client what’s happened, take our lumps, get some more time and do it right?”

Phillip replied, “Because that could jeopardize my...” but then snapped, “Because it’s easier to get forgiven than it is to get permission, that’s why!”

“I don’t know, Phillip,” Arvin worried, “People’s lives could be in danger if these things fail.”

Phillip caught another snatch of conversation amplified by the champagne. “...overboard?!! Good riddance! That’s what *I’d* say!” And again there was laughter.

“Trust me, Arvin,” Phillip whispered, “I know what I’m doing. And after this blows over, and I’ve been in my new position for a while, I’m going to remember your loyalty, you know what I’m saying?”

“I hear what you’re saying, Phillip,” Arvin replied tentatively, “but...”

Phillip saw some people he thought were headed his way.

“I’ll take full responsibility,” Phillip said with authority, “Just get that line back up NOW! I’ve got to go.” Then he pocketed the phone and beat a hasty retreat.

He had to think this out. This thing could get out of hand. His entire career could be at stake. Then there was the whole Senior VP thing. Somehow he had to convince the old man that he could be of more value in a more senior position. But that’s not going to matter if one of those struts fails prematurely. He had to think this out. So he slipped back into

the ballroom for one last flute of champagne, then headed for his state room.

His room was easy to spot. It was the one with the “Do Not Disturb” sign on the knob. He always left it on. He didn’t like cleaning people in his room when he was gone. He wanted them there on *his* schedule. But he had no sooner gained his retreat then his phone started vibrating again.

“NOW WHAT?!!!” he screamed internally. “IS NOBODY IN THIS COMPANY COMPETENT BUT ME?”

All of a sudden there was no air in the room. It was hot and stultifying and he was starting to sweat. So he gulped down his last glass of champagne and headed for some fresh air.

By the time he reached the deck, his head was spinning. So he leaned against the railing to fish the phone out of his pocket. The night was cool but he was sweating profusely. His vision kept going in and out of focus. He could hear voices but he couldn’t tell how far away they were. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

Then something happened.

He wasn’t sure what, exactly, had happened, but something had definitely happened.

Something bad.

Because all of a sudden he was falling in slow motion. “How odd,” he later remembered thinking while simultaneously feeling that he was actually still on deck. And he sort of *felt* himself thinking that if only he could open his eyes...

then he hit the water.

In a panic, he instinctively fought against his downward motion and, after what seemed an eternity, he arrested it and started fighting his way back up. When he surfaced, he was almost even with the ship's stern. "Help!" he shouted. "Someone help me!" But all he heard in response was faint laughter and the roar of the ship's engines. He continued to shout, but his shouts were soon drowned out by the engines.

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Back on board, the waiter with the ponytail was on the lifeboat deck making his final rounds for the evening, looking for the champagne glasses that people tended to leave all over the ship on occasions like this, when he heard a faint splash – and an even fainter call for help. Rushing to the port side railing, he looked and saw someone in the water. It looked like a man in a tuxedo. The waiter looked around for a life preserver to throw but there were none within reach. And by now the man was astern and rapidly being left behind. With no one close by to help, the waiter acted without thinking.

He instantly activated the self-launch mechanism on one of the lifeboats and jumped on as the mechanism lifted the boat over the side. Hanging on to the rigging that secured the boat's canvass cover, he fell with the boat and landed with a splash. Then he immediately started loosening the rigging and pulling back the canvass to get to the boat's controls. Once in, he uncovered the helm and pushed the ignition button for the motor – but all he got was a sickening click.

Phillip, meanwhile, had sobered up in a hurry. Something about the sudden realization that he was alone in the middle of the South Pacific,

watching his ship get smaller and smaller each time the chop allowed him to catch a glimpse of it, had cancelled out the effects of the champagne in short order. But just as real panic was about to set in, he thought he saw something fall from the ship. And although he couldn't see anything at all over the waves, he thought, almost out loud, "It's about time! Now get your butt over here and rescue me!"

Then he started thinking about how he would handle this PR-wise. He figured that almost losing him would make his CEO appreciate him even more and he didn't want to dilute that. But milking it might backlash on him. So he decided he would play it with macho bravado, as just a funny thing that happened on the way to Tahiti, something to laugh about when he and the CEO were taking steam down at the club. And he could almost hear the water-cooler conversation about how brave and self-effacing he was to react like that. He could definitely spin this to his advantage – only where was that stupid lifeboat?

The stupid lifeboat was dead in the water. But the waiter took the situation philosophically. After all, what can you expect from a battery that's not used for months on end? The boat was equipped with oars, but there was no way he could both row and keep a lookout for someone in the water. So he did the next best thing. He started yelling.

With the sound of the ship's engines now just a distant hum, Phillip had no trouble hearing the waiter's call. "Ahoy! Ahoy! Over here! Follow the sound of my voice! Ahoy!" He just had trouble understanding. Figuring that only one of the crew would know how to launch a lifeboat, did they really expect *him* to come to *them*? *They* had the boat, not him. *They* were the ones paid to do this, not him. That kind of service would earn *somebody* a very nasty phone call to the head of the cruise line.

That was for sure! But as he was already growing weary fighting the waves, he started swimming toward the sound.

After five minutes that seemed like fifty, Phillip reached the boat and the waiter pulled him aboard with a genuine sense of relief.

"Whoa, Dude! Am I glad to see you! I thought you were a gonner! "

"Well I would have been if I hadn't known how to swim, now wouldn't I?" Phillip replied with irritation. "Don't you know how to operate this boat?"

"Battery's dead, man," said the waiter with a grin. "Manual start doesn't work either. Must'a been a while since this baby was maintenanced. There was nothing I could do but hope you could hear me – and I'm sure glad you did!"

"I'll bet you are! It saved you from a BIG lawsuit. Now get the ship on the radio so we can get out of here!"

"No radio, man. Not even a flare gun. I checked."

Phillip simply could not believe this was happening. This sort of thing did *not* happen to *him*. He did *not* permit it. So watching the lights of the ship disappear over the horizon infuriated him – and he found himself yelling.

"Are you trying to tell me that we're adrift, in the middle of the ocean, with *no motor* and *no radio*? What kind of incompetent fool are you?!!"

"The kind it took to rescue *you*, pal. I work as a waiter. I don't maintain the lifeboats. But I was the only one who saw you go over. If I hadn't launched when I did, you'd be shark bait now."

As that sank in it gave Phillip pause, as he grudgingly admitted – to himself – that he *was* glad to be in a boat instead of in the water. And the perplexed look on Phillip's face put a huge grin on the waiter's.

"But, hey, man, we do have a beautiful night for it! I never get tired of looking at the stars out here."

Phillip stared back in disbelief. Here they were in a life-threatening situation and this aging hippie was acting like he was on vacation. "I'm not only adrift," he thought, "I'm adrift with an idiot!"

Then the idiot stuck out his hand like a salesman at a buyers' convention.

"I'm Foot."

Chapter Two – The First Wave

Although he could barely see him in the light of the half-moon that was out, Phillip took Foot's hand and shook it halfheartedly. "Is that your first name or your last name?" Phillip asked disdainfully.

"It's what people call me." Foot replied. "And you?"

"Phelps. Phillip Phelps." Phillip replied, then sarcastically added, "Director of Stinking Business Stinking Development for..."

"Why do you say it that way?" Foot interrupted.

"Because it's *not* the position I should have after *all I've done*, that's why!" Phillip said bitterly. Then he pulled the gold business card case out of his pocket and held it so the moon light glinted off its surface. "I just landed them the biggest single contract in their frigging history and all I got was a mediocre party on board a discount cruise line, a meaningless new title and this... trinket!" And with that Phillip drew his arm back to heave the case into the sea – but all of a sudden Foot was on top of him grabbing at his arm.

"Whoa, man! What are you doing?!!" Foot shouted.

Even in the dim light, Foot could make out a look of total incomprehension on Phillip's face. "We don't know how long we're going to be out here," he explained patiently, "or what we're going to have to do to survive -- and we can't afford to waste or loose any material resources we have. Like the man said, 'You don't miss your water 'till the well runs dry,'"

“Alright! Alright!” Phillip protested. “Get off me and I’ll give it to you.”

“Sorry, man,” said Foot climbing off Phillip. “Just a gut reaction, you know?”

“Here,” said Phillip, handing Foot the case.

Foot took the case and put it in his pocket. “I’ll take good care of it. You might feel differently about it later.” Then he quickly added, “Hey, you need to get out of those wet clothes!” and started rummaging around under the canvass still covering the bow of the boat, emerging with a blanket. “I thought I felt a blanket under there!”

He handed the blanket to Phillip who took it gratefully and began to disrobe. “You didn’t feel a flashlight in there, did you?” he asked.

“Yes, I did!” Foot responded cheerfully.

“Then how about a little light here?”

“Dead batteries.”

“You get what you pay for.”

While Phillip took off his clothes, Foot groped around in the stern of the boat until he found the sea anchor and threw it out. The splash alarmed Phillip. “What was that?!”

“Sea anchor,” Foot responded. “It’ll keep us turned into the waves in case the wind comes up tonight.”

“We’re not going to be here that long,” Phillip arrogantly assured him.

“What makes you think so?” Foot asked.

“Because someone will see the missing life boat or realize one of us is gone and they’ll come back and pick us up,” he said, with his customary iron-willed self-confidence returning.

“Well...,” Foot said thoughtfully, “Maybe. But, unfortunately, these particular self-launching life boats have been known to short out and launch themselves. They lost one about six months ago that way. And as for being missed, tomorrow’s my day off and I usually spend that reading. They won’t miss me for 24 hours. How about you?”

Then Phillip remembered the sign hanging on his stateroom door. “Oh, no,” he realized, “There’s a ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign on my door. They won’t miss me either.”

“Well, then,” Foot said quietly, “I suggest we get as comfortable as we can – because we’re going to need all the rest we can get.” Then he looked up at the sky and added, “But don’t we have a great night for it!?”

They floated in silence for a while after that, each lost in his own thoughts, Foot thinking about what lay ahead, Phillip thinking about what lay behind – and how to get out of being blamed for it. He had to stay out in front of this thing with the struts, he thought. He had to be the one to discover the flaw. He had to be the one to initiate the recall. He knew he could baffle the client into believing it was just an inconvenience. He needed to make sure Arvin didn’t lose his nerve but

the cell phone was at the bottom of the ocean. So he *had* to get back quickly. Surely, *somebody* would...

“Why did you fall overboard?” Foot asked out of nowhere.

Defensively, Phillip snapped, “*Why?* What do you mean *why?* It was an accident. Obviously.”

Foot issued a skeptical, “HmMMMM.”

“What does *that* mean?” Phillip asked impatiently.

“I just don’t believe in accidents, that’s all,”

“What do you mean you don’t *believe* in accidents? What’s not to believe in? You step on a banana peel and you go down. Cause and effect. It’s simple,” responded Phillip indignantly.

“Look out there on the water,” Foot said quietly.

“What?”

“Look out there on the water.”

Phillip looked out over the quietly rolling sea.

“OK, I’m looking. What am I looking at?”

“See the reflection of the moon on the water?”

“Yeah. So?”

“Is it caused by the moon or by the water?”

That gave Phillip a pause, but not a long one. “It’s *caused* by the light from the moon bouncing off the water and into your eye. And you can parse that any way you like.”

“Isn’t it also caused by the light-sensitive cells on your retina?” Foot queried, “and the gravity of the earth that keeps the moon in orbit – and the nuclear fusion on the sun that provides the light – and the rotation of the earth that creates the night – and...”

Now Phillip became really irritated. “So what? What’s your point? How can you not understand what an accident is? You think I jumped over? Is that what you think? You think I did it on purpose? Just out for a midnight swim? Is that it? Or maybe you think...” and there Phillip stopped abruptly, suddenly as pale as the moonlight. “Oh my God!” he whispered as he remembered the snatches of conversation he’d overheard on board the ship. “Is *that* what you think? You think somebody *pushed* me overboard?”

Foot paused a second, then answered very clearly, “No, I didn’t think that at all. But you did. What made *you* think of it?”

Phillip was at a loss. “I... don’t know.” He wasn’t about to tell this idiot that his people hated him. Besides, the whole idea was crazy. “But now that I think about it, that *couldn’t* have happened.”

“Why not?”

“It just couldn’t, that’s all.”

“So how *did* it happen?”

“I’m...not sure. I don’t really remember. Probably a post-traumatic stress reaction.”

“Hmmm.” Foot replied skeptically. “What *do* you remember?”

“I was out on deck, alone, so that I could have a private and very urgent telephone conversation. I remember leaning against the railing to get out my phone... and I remember taking a deep breath to clear my head and... then I thought I heard voices... and then... all of a sudden I was falling in slow motion. I must have gotten dizzy or lost my footing or my balance or...” Now Phillip’s face lit up. “...or *probably* the railing on that rotting tub of a cruise ship broke!” Phillip was elated to have found a plausible explanation. “*That’s* probably the *real* cause! An *accident*, just like I said, probably the result of criminal negligence. We’ll let the lawyers sort that one out,” he said with self-satisfaction.

“Why didn’t you make the call from your cabin?”

“It was stuffy in there. I couldn’t catch my breath it was so stuffy. That’s *more* grounds for a charge of negligence.”

“Why not make the call from the ballroom where the light’s better? Everybody was cleared out by then.”

“I told you, the call was *private*.”

“You also said “urgent.” What was so urgent about it?”

“You wouldn’t understand. It has to do with the operation of a manufacturing plant that covers the better part of a square mile.”

“Try me. You might be surprised.”

“Well, if you must know, my plant manager had shut down our production line due to a minor problem and that threatened to jeopardize a huge contract – *my* contract. And I couldn’t let that happen.”

“What was the minor problem?”

“A sub-contractor supplied some parts that the plant manager thought weren’t up to specs. It happens all the time.”

“Who contracted the sub-contractor?”

“I did.”

“Why did you choose *that* supplier?”

Now Phillip was becoming irritated again. “Lots of reasons,” he snapped.

“Like what?” Foot persisted.

“Cost, quality, delivery time, lots of reasons.”

“Everybody says they provide those things. Why did you give *this* supplier the contract?”

Now Phillip became defensive -- and angry. “Hey! I don’t have to answer to you. This is none of your business. I had incentives to go with the company I did (one of Foot’s eyebrows went up at that) and it was *my* decision to make and that’s all there is to it. Understand?”

“Whoa!” Foot said soothingly, “I didn’t mean to get you all exercised. I was just curious about why you fell overboard because *your* going overboard caused *me* to go overboard. And now, as the saying goes, we’re both in the same boat, you know?”

“Well I hope you got your answer.” Phillip snorted.

“ I think I did.”

“Good,” Phillip said with finality. But then curiosity got the better of him and he added, “What might that be?”

“Well, correct me if I’m wrong, but, if I understand correctly, you were out on deck, all alone, because you needed to make a call that you couldn’t afford for anyone else to hear and you couldn’t make the call from your room because you felt un-well. You felt *so* un-well that you needed to lean against the railing to steady yourself, a condition that might be explained by the champagne you drank or extreme fatigue or, just possibly, from the enormous stress that comes from having taken a kick-back from a supplier also was also unscrupulous enough to double-cross you and supply sub-standard parts. And...”

“YOU’RE AN IDIOT,” Phillip shouted.

“And,” Foot persisted, “the thought that you might have been pushed seems plausible because you probably stepped all over the people who work for you in the process. But...”

“YOU’RE A JACKASS!” Phillip screamed, “If you *ever* repeat *one word* of that ridiculous inference to *any living soul on this planet*, I will *sue* you for everything you ever *thought* about having! You understand me?”

“But...” Foot continued with complete equanimity, “ I think...”

“I DON’T CARE *WHAT* YOU THINK. DIDN’T I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?”

Foot sighed contentedly as he settled back into a fold of canvass.

“I think you threw *yourself* overboard.”

Chapter Three – The Second Wave

The next day took Phillip by surprise. He was certain he had not slept at all. His mind had been much too busy, trying to crisis-manage all the potentially damaging situations he suddenly had to contend with. Yet the sunlight in his eyes woke him abruptly.

Foot met Phillip's awakening with an open grin that held no memory of the rancor Phillip had expressed the night before. "Good morning, sir!" he said, playfully, "How about some eggs and hotcakes, with a side of bacon and a cup of steaming hot coffee?"

Phillip was not amused. "Are my clothes dry?" he muttered, as he felt his trousers.

"Yes, sir!" Foot responded, "All laid out for you just where you left them!"

Phillip found his trousers and shirt just dry enough to put on and did so. Foot was dressed only in a pair of cheesy boxer shorts printed with surfers and palm trees. He was sitting in the bow of the boat, fiddling with something in a small plastic box. "Is there *anything* to eat?" Phillip inquired.

Well, we have good news and bad news in that department," Foot said matter-of-factly. "The good news is that this boat came equipped with stores for 10 people for a month. The bad news is that rats ate most of it – and I suspect that the crew has been helping themselves to it for a while as well. All that's left is four cans of peaches, a swollen can of Spam two years out of date and two liters of bottled water."

“That’s all!??” Phillip complained. “What kind of a...” Phillip started to tirade but stopped himself when he remembered that he had decided the night before to try to schmooze Foot to keep him from spouting wild theories about kickbacks when they were rescued. So he abruptly changed the subject. “Why do people call you ‘Foot’?” he said, in his best simulation of sincerity.

“Because I’m goofy-footed,” Foot responded.

Phillip looked at Foot’s feet but saw nothing out of the ordinary. “Your feet look perfectly normal to me,” he said.

“I’m a surfer,” Foot replied, “and I’m left-handed. That means I surf with my left foot forward instead of my right. Surfers call that “goofy footed.”

“Oh, I see,” Phillip said, spotting an opportunity to advance the schmooze, “They’re ‘*goofing*’ on you, is that it?”

Foot raised an eyebrow and smiled slightly, a good sign.

“Maybe, he said “but I don’t mind. Being goofy footed gives me a different look at the beach than most of the rest get, a little different perspective, you know?”

“How long have you been a waiter?” Phillip continued, sensing that Foot was going for it.

“I’m *not* a waiter,” Foot said patiently, “I’m a surfer. Waiting tables is what I *do*, not what I *am*.” Then Foot held up what he had been fiddling

with, a length of fishing line with a hook and small weight attached.

“Are you a fisherman?” he asked.

“Where’d you get that?” Phillip asked.

“Ship’s stores. We’ve got line, hooks, weights, even a Swiss Army knife, everything we need to catch our breakfast except bait. But I think a bit of rancid Spam might just do the trick.” And with that Foot tore the top off the can of Spam and slipped a hunk of it onto the hook while holding his breath and keeping the spoiled meat as far away as possible.

Once the hook was baited, Foot threw it overboard and played out line until he felt it was enough. Then he handed the line to Phillip.

“Oh, no, I couldn’t,” Phillip said, “I’ve never...” but Foot left the line in his hands.

“Give a man a fish and he eats for a day,” Foot quoted.

“No, you don’t understand,” Phillip protested, “I don’t, ah...” This was not going well. They were getting too far afield and Phillip didn’t want to be distracted. “I mean, isn’t this more your area of responsibility?” he said as diplomatically as he could.

“Why? Because I work as a waiter? Since I serve fish it should be my responsibility to catch them? Is that it? Well I’ve got news for you, shipmate. At this particular point in time, by maritime law, as an employee of the cruise line and a card-carrying member of the seafarers union, I am now *Captain* of this vessel and *you* are the crew! I can make you walk the plank if you don’t help out.”

Phillip stared at Foot blankly as he weighed his options. He decided this was not the battle to fight. There was still the kickback thing to take care of. So he said, “Ok, what do I do?”

“Just wrap the line around something to make a handle and hang on to it. When you feel something tug, tug back hard and then pull it in. I’ll cut you a couple of pieces of canvass to use as gloves.”

Not finding anything else at hand, Phillip tied the line around one of his \$400 Gucci loafers, counting on his sacrifice for the cause to not go unnoticed.

But Foot just busied himself with the boat’s canvass cover, first cutting Phillip’s “gloves” and then cutting a much bigger piece. Phillip felt the gentle tug of the waves on the line as the bait was washed astern of the boat. He watched the sunlight play on the water as the line played out and for a brief moment allowed himself to be mesmerized by the gentle roll of the boat, the soft breeze and the water washing over the line. His mind relaxed...

...but he roughly yanked himself out of it and got back to business.

“Listen,” he said contritely, “about last night... I hope you didn’t take what I was saying personally because I was really stressed out and may have said some things that...”

“You mean about my being an idiot and your plans to sue me? Why should I take that personally?” Foot teased.

“Yeah, well, like I said, I was... not myself last night. And, by the way, just for the record, I *did not* take a kickback.”

“Then what was the “incentive” you mentioned?” Foot asked with a twinkle in his eye.

For reasons he could not have explained, Phillip found himself telling the truth. “It was just the use of a condo on Oahu and a hunting lodge at Jackson’s Hole, that’s all,” Phillip confessed, “No big deal, really, just normal business perks.”

“But enough to tempt you into making a bad decision, huh?”

“Look, you just don’t understand how business is...”

“You take a little advantage, he takes a little advantage and the cost has to be made up *somewhere*. Isn’t that about it?”

“Hey! I still don’t know *for sure* that those struts are a bad alloy and, besides, I had *no way of knowing* that he might...”

“No way of knowing? Are you sure? When you throw a stone into a pond what happens? The stone makes ripples in the water that will spread out until they wash over your feet if you just stand there. You know that when you throw it in. And when you decide to accept a little personal “perk,” you throw a stone into a pond. So you shouldn’t be surprised when the ripples come back and soak your Gucci’s. What goes around comes around, you know?”

All Phillip could muster in response was to weakly repeat, “I didn’t take a kickback.” Then they lapsed into silence, Foot absorbed with his canvass and Phillip wondering how this itinerate waiter kept getting the

better of him -- and trying not to think about the growling in his stomach.

At high noon, Foot put down his canvass, took a sextant out of a storage compartment and started taking a sighting.

“What’re you doing?” Phillip asked.

“Calculating our latitude,” Foot responded.

“Why?”

“Because no matter where you want to go, you’ve got to start from where you are.”

“Go? What do you mean ‘go?’ Shouldn’t we stay put so they can find us?”

“By the time they discover we’re gone, the ship will have gone more than a hundred miles. Factoring in wind and currents, they’ll have more than a thousand square miles to search. Pago Pago is the nearest port with a rescue plane, so they’ll use most of their fuel coming and going from the search area. And with our limited stores, we’re not going to last nearly as long as it might take them to find us.”

“So just where do you propose we ‘go?’”

“South.”

“Why south?”

“Two reasons. One, according to the reading I just made, we’re north of the commercial shipping lanes. That’s where we just might get spotted by a passing freighter. And two, look out over the water and tell me what you see.”

“I see water, endless water. What am I supposed to see?”

“Well, first, you might see the direction of the chop. That’s caused by the wind. But then, if you look at the sea as a whole and kind of watch it for a while, you can see that there are big swells moving under the chop from west to east. They’re caused by the spinning of the earth. See them?”

Phillip looked and sure enough, after a while he saw them. “Yes! I see them! But so what?”

“Well, if you look very carefully, you can also see a set of smaller swells, running at an angle to the big ones. Do you see them?”

Phillip looked as hard as he could but still could not see the swells Foot was talking about. “No,” he said, “I don’t.”

“Well, it takes some practice. But what those swells are telling us is that there’s an island somewhere to the south. The smaller swells are ripples made by the big swells bouncing off.”

Phillip looked again, amazed that Foot was able to see an island somewhere over the horizon. “ I still can’t see what you’re talking about” he complained.

“Like I said, it takes practice,” said Foot, “but I recommend that you keep trying because sometimes the most important ripples are the ones that are hardest to see.”

Phillip was impressed, but unconvinced. “Ok, let’s suppose there *is* an island somewhere ‘over the rainbow’ to the south of us,” he said cynically. “How do you propose we get there, by rowing? How long do you think we could keep that up? Probably just long enough to get out of the search area! No. I say we stay where we are and wait to be rescued.”

“No good,” said Foot with finality, “As Mr. Zimmerman once said, ‘He not busy being born is busy dying.’ If we stay, we die. If we go, we at least stand a chance.”

Phillip considered this but it still seemed nonsensical. “No,” he said with equal finality, “You may consider yourself the ‘captain’ and all but I’m the customer! And I say we stay!”

“You don’t adapt to change very well, do you?” Foot chided. “So let me put it this way, Matie,” he said, dropping into an impersonation of Long John Silver, “any member o’ me crew who don’t do what his kindly old cap’n asks don’t get no rations t’night! And don’t be forgettin’... *I’ve* got the knife!” Then he whipped out the Swiss Army knife with the can opener extended and waved it about menacingly while laughing like a maniac.

Phillip decided this *was* the battle to fight. “Well *I’m* not rowing anywhere,” he declared defiantly.

“Well, fortunate for you,” Long John Foot replied cryptically, “I ain’t asked you to, has I, Matie?”

“So what was all *that* about?” wondered Phillip, since the end result was staying where they were just as he had insisted. But Foot had quickly gone back to doing whatever he was doing with the canvass, so Phillip decided to be a gracious winner and let it lie.

They drifted along in silence then until around 4pm, when the breeze died away and the sun beat down unmercifully. Phillip had determined to hold out as long as Foot but this was too much. “How about a drink?” he said, finally.

“Not ‘till tonight,” Foot replied, “We’ll retain more of it then.”

Becalmed – and thirsty --as they were, time seemed to stand still and Phillip decided some idle conversation would help pass the time – so he asked the question he had been wanting to ask all along.

“Mind if I ask you a personal question?” he inquired.

“Go for it,” Foot replied amiably.

“What’s with those seven ear rings you wear? Doesn’t that sort of... limit your possibilities?”

“As a surfer? No way, man. I wear seven earrings because waves come in sets of seven, when the swells I showed you reach the shore. These earrings identify me as a serious surfer, a life-surfer, you know? They’ve gotten me free drinks, places to stay and, shall we say, ‘good company of the fairer kind’ all over the world.”

“I always thought of surfing as a young man’s game. How long do you think you’ll be able to be “a surfer?”

“Hey, man, you can be a surfer from shore. It’s more in the head than in the water.”

That caught Phillip by surprise. In fact, he had to admit, this guy was *full* of surprises. “Oh, yeah? How’s that?”

Now, for the first time all day, except when he was using the sextant, Foot put down his canvass.

“I’m from Joplin, Missouri,” he said, “so I didn’t start surfing ‘till I was 22. I was a graduate student at Stanford, in the MBA program, no less, when a friend talked me into trying it. I didn’t get up for more than a few seconds at a time that first day but there was something about it, something more than just the rush, that made me want to do it again. So I kept at it and, a couple of weeks later, I rode my first wave all the way to shore – and when I did...”

Now Foot got a far-away mystical look in his eyes and seemed to be talking more to the ocean than to Phillip.

“...the feeling I got was like nothing else I had ever felt. If religion is the way we relate ourselves to the rest of the universe, then it was a sure-enough religious experience – because I never felt more alive, more in tune with the world around me or more deeply and profoundly connected to the whole miraculous universe than I did out there on that wave.”

Now Foot's voice took on a soft, reverent quality, like someone speaking in church. "See, you can't surf and think at the same time. If you do, you'll wipe out. The wave has the power of a freight train and it's changing constantly. To keep your balance, you have to change with it, making so many tiny adjustments to your balance and position so fast that you can't possibly do it consciously. You have to become one with that wave, feeling it, sensing it on a deeper level than your conscious mind can go. You have to react spontaneously, maintaining perfect balance at every instant, faster than you can think. And when you do, the most incredible thing happens. The barrier between you and the rest of the universe dissolves away and you experience life directly, without the constant stream of internal dialogue, thoughts, fears and expectations that are always there, in between us and life, coloring our sensations and altering our perceptions until we only experience life 'through a glass darkly.'"

"And I've found it to be true not only for waves of water but for waves of other kinds, too," he continued, "like the waves of success and failure, love and hate, ignorance and knowledge that have the power to wipe us out at any minute. It's all about keeping your balance, you know? So I'll be a surfer as long as I live. It's the way I relate."

Then Foot looked over at Phillip and asked, "How about you? How do you relate?" And Phillip found himself in the unfamiliar and uncomfortable position of not knowing what to say, so he dodged by being droll.

"Me?" he said, "I'm a fisherman."

At that Foot smiled a huge smile and said, "That's the spirit! There may be hope for you yet!" then went back to his canvass.

That evening they dined on six peach slices and a cup of water each. Foot said at that rate they had 3 more days' rations. Then, he said, they would have to start drinking their own urine – and when Phillip heard that, he fully realized, for the first time, really, the reality of their situation – and experienced, also for the first time, what a panic attack feels like.

