

# Memorial Day

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# ONE

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## FLORIDA STRAITS, INTERNATIONAL WATERS

**T**he forty-four-foot Italian-made Riva Rivarama power yacht thundered its way through the calm morning water at twenty-five knots. The boat had left Havana at sunrise for Grand Bahama. The northeasterly heading put the boat on a course that would skirt U.S. waters for most of the journey. Thomas Scott was the captain of the vessel, and as per his days in the British Royal Navy he was dressed in starched white shorts and a matching shirt. Scott took his duties very seriously, especially when captaining a boat as expensive as the one beneath his feet. He stood behind the wheel looking out over the windscreen at the open expanse of blue water.

Scott had left his home port of George Town on Grand Cayman the day before. It was only the second time he'd captained this specific vessel, and he'd jumped at the chance when asked. The Italian-made boat was a true example of expert craftsmanship. Its lines and materials harkened back to a time when boats were made by hand rather than machines. The shape of the body and the twin 700-hp diesel engines made it look and perform more like an oversized speedboat than a

luxury yacht. With a top speed of forty knots the boat was very fast for its length and beam.

On the trip from Grand Cayman over to Cuba, the water had been a little too rough for Scott to open up the twin diesels all the way, and although the seas were nice and calm this morning, he did not want to push the engines to the stops until first discussing it with his passenger. Even in calm seas forty knots could be very alarming and jarring to a person who was not used to being on the water. One small roller caught the wrong way could send a novice overboard without so much as a scream for help.

Scott had great respect for the water. Accidents by their very nature were unexpected. In a car, if you wore your seat belt and had an airbag, your chances of surviving an accident were extremely good. In a boat, if an accident occurred and you weren't wearing a life jacket your chance for survival was low. It didn't matter how good a swimmer you were, if you were knocked unconscious you were going to the bottom.

That's why Scott wore a small harness around his neck and strapped across his chest. The tiny personal flotation device was no thicker than a bicycle inner tube. It was so small really that Scott often forgot he had it on. But if he went overboard, the device would inflate in less than a second and turn into a full-size life jacket. The harness also contained a small emergency beacon, which in certain respects was every bit as important as the buoyancy of the device. To the uninitiated the harness looked nothing like a life jacket.

Scott always made sure to show his passengers where the regular life jackets were stowed, but rarely did they put them on. The guy he was ferrying today was so rude he hadn't even had the chance to give him the safety

lecture. The dark-haired man had showed up at sunrise with a single bag and in clipped English told the captain to get underway. There was no greeting, no introduction, and he declined Scott's offer to help him with his bag.

The man had gone straight down to the cabin and closed the door. Now, an hour and a half out of port, Scott was beginning to wonder if he planned to stay below for the entire voyage. The passenger was either an incredible snob, which in the world of luxury yachts was very possible, or he was so hungover he couldn't even muster basic good manners.

Scott scanned the bright horizon. It was too nice a day, and he was captaining too fine a boat, to let the rudeness of his passenger ruin the moment. The Brit reached out with his right hand and placed his palm on the twin chrome throttles. In a tempered gradual motion he pushed them all the way forward, the diesels roaring to their full power, the wind whipping through Scott's sun-bleached hair. He grinned to himself as he stood gripping the wheel, and thought that it might be a very nice trip indeed if his passenger stayed below.

MUSTAFA AL-YAMANI was prostrate, his arms stretched out in front of his head, in a near trancelike state as he supplicated himself to his Creator, asking for guidance and bravery. It had been more than a week's time since he had prayed, and for al-Yamani, who had communed with his God at least five times a day for as long as he could remember, this self-imposed exile from Allah had been the most difficult aspect of the trip. With the boat's engines droning and the door to the private cabin locked, this was quite possibly the last chance he

would have to pray properly before he became a *shahed*, a martyr for his people.

Al-Yamani had worked diligently to avoid the counterterrorism net of the United States intelligence community and its allies. He had first flown to Johannesburg, South Africa, and from there to Buenos Aires, Argentina. He stayed one day in Buenos Aires, changing his identity and making sure he wasn't being followed, and then it was on to Caracas and a short hop to Havana. That was where the boat had been waiting for him, along with provisions and a captain whose only instructions were to ferry the passenger to Grand Bahama. As for the boat itself, a wealthy sponsor had arranged for the use of it. The owner did not know the full intent of the group he was lending it to, but he was sure to have guessed it wasn't for a simple pleasure cruise. In the end it would be all that much better if the man was implicated.

The physical journey to this part of the world had taken only five days, but in a metaphysical sense the journey had taken a lifetime. The forty-one-year-old Saudi Arabian had been preparing himself for this mission since the age of nine when he had been sent to a madrasa in Mecca to study the Koran. By the age of fifteen he was fighting in Afghanistan against the godless Soviets and honing his skills as a mujahid, a warrior who fights for Islam. Every cause needed its fighters, its mujahideen, and for al-Yamani there was no more noble cause than that of Islam.

Al-Yamani finished his supplication and moved into a sitting position, placing his hands on his thighs. In a voice not much more than a whisper he proclaimed, "*Allahu Akbar.*" *God is great.* Al-Yamani repeated himself two more times and then rose to his feet. It was

time. He walked over to the bed nestled into the prow of the boat and retrieved an object from the side pocket of his bag. Al-Yamani lifted up the tails of his loose-fitting silk shirt and slid the object into the waist of his pants. He looked every bit the wealthy vacationer, from his floral patterned shirt, to his khaki pants, to his sandals. He'd even donned a wedding ring and a fake Rolex for the trip, and the most difficult thing of all . . . he'd shaved his beard for the first time since puberty.

Al-Yamani took one last look at himself in the mirror to make sure nothing would tip off the captain. With a deep breath he straightened his shoulders and headed for the cabin door. He would make this quick. No games. The captain was a nonbeliever. He meant nothing. Al-Yamani unlocked the small door and slid it up into the open position. He was instantly greeted by the blinding daylight of the Caribbean.

He paused for a second, shielding his eyes from the sun with his left hand, wondering if he should give himself some time to let his eyes adjust to the brightness. He decided to press on and climbed the three steps quickly. Under his left hand he could make out the silhouette of the captain standing at the helm.

Al-Yamani could hear the man talking to him but couldn't make out what he was saying. They were going much faster than he'd realized, and the wind was howling over the bow of the boat. Al-Yamani made no effort to try and understand the man. He had surprise on his side, and everything would be over in a few seconds. Moving past the helm, al-Yamani slid his right hand under his shirt while he brought his left hand up and placed it on the shoulder of the captain. He leaned in as if he was going to ask a question, and as his lips began to part, his left hand clamped down tightly on the captain's

shoulder. His right hand came thrusting upward, sending a six inch stainless-steel blade into the man's back.

Thomas Scott arched his back in pain, his hands instantly gripping the wheel, his mind scrambling to comprehend what had just happened. Suddenly, he was yanked away from the helm and spun across the deck. Frantically he tried to reach behind himself to get a grip on whatever it was that was causing him such pain. Before he had time to react, he was up against the side of the boat and losing his balance. He could feel himself going overboard. Blue sky filled his vision and then he hit the water hard.

Al-Yamani watched the Brit disappear under the boat's churning wake, and then scrambled to the helm. He looked down at the high-tech dashboard and squinted to read the dials and digital readouts. Bending close, he noted his speed, heading, and GPS location. He'd spent a week studying the owner's manual and knew the controls well enough to do what needed to be done. After scanning the horizon quickly he began slowly turning the wheel, bringing the boat around on a new northerly heading.

With the vessel pointed in the right direction al-Yamani relaxed a bit. He turned around and looked at the boat's long curving white wake. Bringing his hand up to shield his eyes from the bright sun, he strained to see any sign of the man whose life he had just taken. He thought he saw something for a second, but then it vanished. Al-Yamani wasn't worried. They were thirty miles from the nearest piece of land, and he had stabbed his victim in the heart. If by some miracle he wasn't already dead, he would be shortly.

Al-Yamani turned his attention to what lay ahead, a

confident look of anticipation on his face. He had waited his entire life for this opportunity. It was his destiny to come to America, and it was his providence to strike a blow for Allah. Al-Yamani was not alone. There were others, and they were at this very moment converging on America from all points of the compass. Before the week was over, the arrogant and hedonistic Americans would be dealt a crippling blow.