

Charlies Journal

-Book One-

The Making Of A Cheesecakeologist

By

Julian C Corbett

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**Smashwords Edition**

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## Chapter One - Leaving Home

The week had been a hectic one for Charlie and Claire. The arrival of their daughter and grandchildren for the holidays was such an exciting and busy affair, the days passing joyfully. So with their time left together growing short now, a sense of enjoyment in their shared company... a quiet contentment seemed to bind them together as it grew dark outside and the winter's late afternoon gathered in.

Charlie tended the blazing fire he had prepared in the lounge, as Claire finished up in the kitchen after another wholesome winter's meal had drawn to a close. Charlie returned the poker and groaned as he straightened himself. Now satisfied with the intensity of the fire, he returned to the comfort of his favourite armchair. His daughter was resting, snuggled deep into one of the sofas.

Savannah, the youngest of the grandchildren, had made herself comfortable by the fireside. Seeing that her grandfather was now settled, she turned towards him with childish enthusiasm and asked, "Grandpa... could I please hear the story again?"

Leaning forward slightly in his chair, he smiled lovingly toward the bright-eyed face peering at him expectantly. Feeling her father's weariness from the stresses of the day and wanting to rescue him from any further retelling of the tale, Charlie's daughter asked, "Don't you ever get tired of hearing about grandpa's adventures when he was a younger, Savannah?"

"No, never," came the loud reply from the youngster.

"Well... perhaps... if you really need to hear the story again, maybe I could tell it this time!" said her mother.

"Come on you two," Savannah called excitedly to Charlotte and Michael who were pestering Claire in the kitchen. "Moms going to tell us the story this time!"

After a moments silence, a loud "yay" was heard as two very enthusiastic children raced in from the kitchen, evidence of chocolate around their mouths. They were closely followed by Claire who carried a large tray, heavily laden with mugs of hot chocolate and a plate of Canelles for them all to share.

She placed the tray on the wooden coffee table; the children all gathering around, enjoying the delicious aromas and the anticipation of the beautiful treats that now sat before them. She then passed around the steaming mugs and was met by welcoming hands and murmurs of contentment.

Pleased with the atmosphere in the room, she walked over to the bookcase and removed the first of the bound journals. She paused for a moment in thought, before handing it to her dear husband as she rested her hand lovingly upon his shoulder. She then leaned over Charlie and whispered in his ear, "Just in case she forgets anything."

Then settling back herself, steaming hot chocolate in hand, she pulled a thick blanket over her legs and smiled warmly at her husband. "If everyone is ready then, shall we begin?" their daughter suggested as all the family members settled themselves down, mugs of hot chocolate in hand.

The day started like any other... Charlie was up early, chores done and room tidied... now time for breakfast! To the casual onlooker this would seem like any other day, but for Charlie, this was the day that the adventure began... "Right, time for breakfast I think," he said as he hurried downstairs to the kitchen, joining his parents who already sat at the large rectangular table, plates piled with a hearty cooked breakfast. "Just what's needed before an adventure," Charlie thought, as he got stuck into devouring this delicious feast.

He rushed through his breakfast with thoughts of what lay ahead. "Where would he go? Who would he meet along the way, and just why was he doing this again?" he thought to himself.

Charlie's daughter paused the story as her children moved restlessly, jostling to find the most comfortable position, anticipating the journey they were about to take. Finally seeing that her children were finally settled, the story was continued.

By now, breakfast had finished, so being the ever so tidy person that he was, he cleared his plate, washed it up, and put it away. He then wiped the table clean; well, where he had been sitting anyway. In all the excitement, he had been oblivious to his mother and father still working their way through their own plates of food, so he returned to the table and once again sat back down, this time even more deeply in thought. He paused for a moment to look at them, both still sipping their morning tea. He wondered when he would see them next, a little sadness in his eyes, as he noticed his mother staring back at him with a loving smile.

"Charlie, Charlie, do you have everything packed?" she asked, which snapped Charlie out of his moment of contemplation. He replied by saying that he had, but before he could finish what he was saying, his father interrupted.

"Good lad, always good to be prepared," he said, and then added that life might be a journey of unplanned discovery, but that it was always good to be a little prepared.

There was a moment's silence followed by everyone bursting into laughter. Charlie's mother pointed out that her husband, however adorable he might be, had never prepared for anything. Joking she added that if it wasn't for her, he would leave the house still wearing his slippers and not more appropriate footwear, at which point the room filled with hysterical laughter once again.

Charlie's father, wanting to defend himself, quickly replied by informing his lovely wife that on this special occasion he most certainly was as he reached into his large cardigan pocket and pulled out a small wrapped package. He leaned forward over the table; he handed it to Charlie saying that it was just a little gift for his travels.

"Thanks dad," Charlie said, as he took the gift from his father, who went on to explain that he was not to open it until later that day. Not stopping there, Charlie's father continued by handing him an envelope. Charlie questioned what this was, and his what this was, his father responded by explaining that the envelope contained a letter which he wanted Charlie to hand deliver to Monsieur Luc. He then proceeded to hand his son a scrap piece of paper with the address on it. Charlie noticed that there was a slight look of sadness in his father's eyes, which he found intriguing. He had always known his father to be a free-spirited, happy-go-lucky sort of chap, always with a sense of adventure... but that's a whole different story.

Charlie pondered on this request briefly, as his father had never previously mentioned Monsieur Luc, and he wondered who this person was and why he must deliver this envelope to him. With little hesitation, Charlie agreed to do as his father had asked him as it surely must be important, he decided.

"Time I was leaving," he thought to himself as he ran upstairs to grab his backpack and to take one last look at his room. "Yes, everything is immaculate, just how I like it, everything neatly sorted and in the correct place," he thought as he took one final look at the long mirror on his wall. Before him was the reflection of a young man of above average height with an athletic build, fair skin, blue eyes, and short dark brown hair which had a natural glossy shine. The reflection he saw was dressed in cargo pants and a fleece top, with sturdy walking boots upon his feet. It happily reminded Charlie of his father's early adventuring and days of travelling.

He took this moment to sit on the edge of his bed, looking at his room one final time and recalling childhood memories. Gazing around, his eyes eventually fell upon his backpack which was propped up against the wall next to the bedroom door. For, this backpack was no ordinary backpack... it had been his father's, steeped in much mystery from the many adventures they had once both shared. But now it belonged to Charlie.

The backpack was still surprisingly in good condition, partly due to his mother's ability with a needle and thread. It had one main, large compartment, a smaller internal pocket, and at the front, two smaller and not-so-wide pockets. The right side had a further two pockets with one single longer pocket on the left.

Charlie unzipped one of the side pockets of the backpack and slipped the small package and envelope that he had just been given inside. Quickly, he closed the zipper, and picking up the backpack, he swung one of the thick straps over his shoulder. Looking around his room had brought back the fond memories of growing up and the adventures that he had dreamed about having himself one day. This due mainly to the stories that he had grown up listening to that were told by his mother and father as they recounted their own travels. But now it was his turn to create his own memories, he decided. He made one final scan of the room, double-checking to see if he had forgotten anything!

"No, nothing forgotten, and if I have, it couldn't have been important anyway," he chuckled to himself. "Adventure waits for no man," he shouted out loud, and with that, walked out of his bedroom for what might be a long time and closed the door behind him.

There, waiting at the bottom of the stairs, his mother and father were watching as Charlie descended. Their only child was about to leave home on a journey that would change his life forever. His mother reached out her hand as Charlie reached the bottom step. Her voice sounding a touch emotional, she said to Charlie that he would not get very far without his passport, which she clutched tightly between her fingers. She was a little concerned that he hadn't remembered this himself, but just sighed as she thought, "Like father, like son." His mother, being the avid organizer before any grand adventure, wanted to make sure it was kept safe until the very last moment before he left. Which was also the very same moment she knew it was time to let Charlie go as he ventured out into the world.

"Mom, Dad, thank you. I love you both so much," Charlie said, and with that it was too much for all of them, tears welling up in their eyes. But before everyone became a blubbing mess, Charlie opened the front door, stepped through, and walked boldly to the end of the path. He stopped one last time, closed his eyes, and felt the warmth of a spring morning on his face. He was about to take his first steps away from home and into an unknown world.

He turned around one last time to look back. Smiling, he stepped over the threshold of the family home, turned to his right, and was on his way. "The train station and adventure awaits," he shouted back to his parents, who watched him disappear out of sight. An excitement brewed within him with every step he took as he made his way down the paved streets of Poxwold, a quaint little town set in the heart of central England.

Once Charlie was out of sight, his mother and father went back inside and closed the door behind them. Looking around arm in arm, they both noticed their home already felt very different, a little more empty and quite. For in that moment, their lives had changed forever. Just when would they see their beautiful son again? Sitting down in the kitchen, Terrence reached out his hand to hold his wife's tightly, the other hand being used to brush a tear from the side of her face.

“He’ll be just fine, Jacque,” said Charlie’s father, giving her hand a gentle squeeze. “He’s a sensible lad and has more of your level headedness than my free-spirited nature, so he shouldn’t get into too much trouble,” he continued to say.

Charlie’s mother smiled back at her loving husband while saying, “Thank goodness for that, Terrence.” With this, the mood lightened, and easy laughter filled the air.

“Think I’ll go and potter in the garden for a while, and try to occupy myself,” Jacque quietly said as she rose from the table and went outside. She was a small woman with pale porcelain looking skin and soft brown eyes. Her light brown hair slightly curly, gently touching her shoulders, when not in a pony tail. When she was not helping to write, she could be found tending to her beautiful garden or tucked away in a corner in moments of quiet contemplation. This was helped by valuable techniques she had learned while on one of her many travels.

Meanwhile, his father who was now left on his own sitting at the table, had time to reflect on the journey that his son had just embarked on, the letter that he gave him before he left, and the times spent in this same kitchen with Charlie. This had been special time for them both... making gouramy pastries, laughing together, then presenting Jacque with their latest creations for her to try.

Charlie’s father was of average height with an athletic build, honed from the years spent travelling. He had bronzed skin, brown eyes like his wife’s, and very short, messy, dark brown hair. It wasn’t actually messy as such, as it did get a comb through on occasions. It was more of a natural look... well that’s how he liked to describe it anyway.

He had spent much of his life writing books about his own travels and adventures, mainly travel guides with the occasional personal story thrown in for good measure. He never really talked about his early life, preferring to change the subject quickly when anyone asked him questions about his past. Returning to the present moment, his father stated out loud, “Okay, where’s that recipe book of mine?” as he moved his seat back and then opened the small draw under the bench. Pulling out a rather battered looking cookery book, he flicked through until he found something that he wanted to bake in honour of his son.

Charlie had now arrived at the station, made his way through the crowds of people, all of which were going about their mundane daily lives, and finally arrived at the ticket desk. Looking at Charlie, the ticket master enquired as to the destination he would like.

“Oh, gosh, I don’t know,” announced Charlie. For in that moment, he realised in all the excitement he had not even decided yet where his first stop would be.

Quickly, he turned to the ticket master and asked for a one-way ticket on the first train leaving that would end at the big shipping port. Hearing such a request left the ticket master momentarily speechless. This in itself was a shock, as the ticket master was well known for being a somewhat talkative chap indeed.

“Leaving our little town are we?” enquired the ticket master once he had regained his voice. Charlie replied by saying in an excited tone that he most certainly was. The ticket master responded by informing his young customer that he would need to hurry to platform three as the train would be leaving quite soon. Charlie then paid the ticket master who handed over the ticket stating that he would not wish for the young adventurer to miss the train. He bid the ticket master farewell and raced off towards platform three and the waiting train.

It was not far to the platform, and Charlie could see the waiting train preparing to get underway. The conductor observed the crowds and checked his pocket watch anxiously as the last few passengers said their farewells to family or friends who had come to see them off. While



waiting, Charlie noticed the smell in the air of oil and engine fuel, all wrapped up with the clatter of metal wheels on train tracks from the passing trains.

Rushing up to the side of the train, Charlie heard the conductor shouting for all passengers to board the train in a very loud voice as he quickly hoisted himself onto the train by the handle just as the door closed behind him. "Made it," he muttered as he took a moment to catch his breath, now looking to find a seat as he felt the train jerk forward and slowly gather speed as it began to move.

Finding a seat by the window, he slipped his backpack off. He sat back into the softly padded seat and put his bag on the empty seat next to him. Staring out of the window, he soon realised that he didn't even know the destination of the train. He laughed to himself and tried to decide whether to look at the ticket or wait to be surprised.... "Although at this point, it doesn't really matter," he thought.

Soon, the train increased in speed until it whizzed past small villages and beautiful countryside, making its way to its final objective. Charlie relaxed back in his seat and thought about the adventures that awaited him. He opened the side pocket of his backpack and looked inside, then grabbing the small package that his father had given him earlier that morning, he gently opened up the sides of the rather crumpled paper. Inside it was a most beautifully bound journal and pencil. Charlie lifted the front cover and saw an inscription left by his father. The inscription read, "Death is more universal than life. Everyone dies, but not everyone truly lives... so live the adventure!" It was signed "Dad," so Charlie decided then and there that he would keep a record of his experiences.

This was indeed a special day for Charlie. Not only was it the day he left home, but it was also his birthday, but to Charlie, it was just another day like any other. Although before he left home, while having one of his mother's famous squishy hugs, he remembered her whispering in his ear, "Charlie, when you get on the train, look inside the top pocket of your backpack...." With that, Charlie unclipped the buckle and lifted the flap. There, inside the top pocket, were two little packets, all neatly wrapped. He smiled and wondered what these could be.

He reached in and pulled out one of the packets, smiling at how precise the paper had been folded and tied with string. His mother was quite a meticulous person in that way, quite a contrast to his father. He reflected on how much he was like both of his parents... his mother because of her meticulous attention to detail, and his father for his carefree nature, which at times made for interesting moments for Charlie as he learned to balance the characteristics within himself.

"Tickets, please. Have your tickets ready for inspection," came the booming voice of the conductor as he entered the carriage. Charlie put the small package that his mother had put into his backpack to the side of him and waited for the conductor. As the conductor reached Charlie, he handed his ticket over for inspection. "And where might you be heading?" he asked.

"I'm not actually sure, sir. When I purchased my ticket, I asked the ticket master for passage on the first train leaving the station that was heading to the port," Charlie replied. The conductor looked at Charlie's ticket and asked whether he would like to know his destination. Charlie thought for a moment and replied, "No sir, this is an adventure, and I'd like to wait until we arrive to find out where I am."

"Very well young man," said the conductor as he passed back his ticket, which Charlie carefully put back into his coat pocket for safe keeping. Just as the conductor was about to continue his ticket inspection, Charlie enquired as to how long the journey would take. The

conductor replied by informing him that it would be a couple of hours yet. Charlie thanked the conductor who then proceeded to quickly moved on to check the next passenger's ticket.

Settling back into the soft padded seat, he allowed himself to become comfortable once more, looking out of the small window at the ever changing countryside and quaint villages that the speeding train passed by. Charlie sat in the corner of the carriage and decided that there were not many people travelling, but perhaps more people would board the train along the route.

Remembering the small packet that his mum had lovingly surprised him with, he turned to look for it. Having placed it on the seat next to him when the conductor came along, he reached for it, but it wasn't there! Momentarily stunned, Charlie wondered where it could have disappeared to! In a panic, he wondered if it might have fallen onto the floor with all the movement of the carriage. He then shuffled forward in his chair and leaned over, looking under the seat, and yes there it was. Reaching down, he picked it up, relieved it was safely back in his hands once more.

Holding the package again, he began to wonder just what might be inside, as the corner of his mouth gently curled to offer an ever so slight grin, for he had a good idea what it was as he gave the packet a very small squeeze.

"It's one of mother's famous 'travelling sandwiches.' That's what it is," he concluded, as he chuckled to himself.

"Nom, nom, nom, I will enjoy that later," he mused, his mouth beginning to water ever so slightly at the thought of it. Returning it to the top pocket of his backpack, he zipped it back up, keeping it safe. "No losing that again," he quietly whispered to himself.

Everything sorted... sandwich secure, ticket inspected... Charlie settled back into his seat once more and closed his eyes, relaxing to the clattering sound of the train wheels on the track, thinking of what the future may hold. Charlie thought about the types of people he might meet along the way and the places he would like to visit, thinking that he didn't really have a plan, being the impetuous character that he was, very much like his father in this way. For now, he would sit back and gaze out of the window without a care in the world.

While sitting there, quietly drifting to the hypnotic sound of the train, Charlie thought back to the times spent in the kitchen with just his father. He cherished those moments, as they both loved to create a dish from scratch, taking ideas from different recipes and combining them, often mixing an assortment of different ingredients together, trying to create something delightful that they would all share. He often wondered how his dad had become such a good baker, putting it down to him learning due to the many countries he had visited, picking up recipes here and there. Though one thing was for certain, he did like to bake when at home. They spent many hours in the kitchen, flicking through cookery books and looking for things to try. Charlie had picked up many odd tips here and there from those times.

Knowing he'd have to earn money along the way to cover his travelling costs, he'd thought about looking for work in a café or coffee shop. But as he now sat there, his imagination running away with him, he thought, "Better still, perhaps a bakery." Drifting deeper, he began to envision himself dressed as a chef, controlling a brigade of chefs, much like a conductor controlling an orchestra. Or maybe standing behind a coffee machine, making a variety of cappuccinos, lattes, and macchiatos for the long queue of coffee loving addicts. But he decided there and then that he would only look for work in places that served baked goods or coffee, or better still, both. And with that final thought, Charlie drifted off into a deeper sleep with a smile on his face.

Charlie was woken by a sudden jerk of the train as several carriages bumped together. Opening his eyes, he looked out of the window, and to his surprise the train was slowing, and the ever changing countryside had started to transform into a coastal town.

"We must be almost there," he thought, gently patting his face to wake up. He then turned to sort through his backpack, making sure everything was zipped up or clipped. The train rattled as it started to slow even more. The conductor's voice could be heard over the tannoy.

"Last stop ladies and gentlemen. Please make sure that you take all of your belongings with you."

Charlie arose from his seat, double-checked that he had not left anything, kneeling down to check underneath the seat. No, nothing else had fallen off while he had been snoozing.

He then grabbed his backpack and threaded an arm through one of the straps. He swung it around and then slipped the other arm through. Secured on both shoulders, he turned and started to walk towards the carriage exit. The conductor was standing by the carriage door, waiting for the train to stop. Charlie tried to take a peek out of the window and could see that the train was now slowly edging along the platform. As the conductor pulled down the door window in preparation, he turned his head towards Charlie and wished him well on his journey. Charlie thanked the conductor, just as he opened the door and stepped down onto the platform.

Excitedly, he began to make his way along the platform, following the sea of other passengers who had also alighted from the train.

Making his way along the platform, then through the station concourse, he exited through the main station doors, the smell of the sea air hitting his nostrils. He stopped, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath.

"MMMMMMM, that's the smell of adventure" he said out loud, forgetting for a moment where he was.

"The smell of adventure?" he heard someone say, and with a start, Charlie opened his eyes.

There in front of him stood a local cabby, leaning against the side of his shiny vehicle.

Charlie replied by saying he "knew" that it was, and went on to say that not only was today his birthday, but it was also the start of a great adventure.

"Well then don't let me hold you up any longer" replied the cabby, with a cheeky smirk, whom then went on to ask if he needed a lift anywhere. Charlie replied to the rather scruffy looking cabby driver that he didn't, but if he would be so kind to point him in the direction of the port. Thinking for a moment, as he was used to driving and not walking, he then proceeded to inform Charlie that he needed to cross over the road, turn right and walk about half a mile, turning left at the junction. Then follow the road for about another mile or so until he could not go any further.

Charlie thanked the cheerful cabby for his help and headed off in the direction he had been told, hearing the cabby's voice in the background touting for business.

Thrilled to be on his way, Charlie rushed along having to then stop and think what the cabby drivers directions were again. Before long, however, he was there, amazed at what his eyes saw. Standing at the port gates, lorries whizzing by, both entering and exiting the port, some with containers, or cargo, and some empty. Charlie remembered what his father had told him. That an avid adventurer, whether a seasoned traveller or first time novice, could always find passage on a cargo ship if he asked at the harbourmaster's office.

"So now I need to find where the harbourmaster's office was," he thought, and made his way through the side entrance of the main gate and into the port, being ever mindful of the traffic. He

walked over to where he could see a small group of dock workers standing chatting, and as he approached them, they all seemed to turn in unison toward him.

“Are you lost young man? Not the type of place to be aimlessly wondering around,” one of the group asked Charlie in a rather gravelly gruff tone, which his father had said was generally associated with the working environment of the docks.

Greeting the group, Charlie politely replied by saying that he was looking for the harbourmaster’s office and could they help. This prompted another member of the group to step forward, signalling with his hand for the others to stay back. This younger man, seeming to be friendlier than the others, asked again if it was the harbourmaster he was looking for. Charlie affirmed that was the case, to which the first dock worker suggested that he had better follow him as the docks could be a very hazardous place in more ways than one. As they walked away, he discretely gave a slight nod back at the group of workers left standing together, to which Charlie grinned back.

He followed the dock worker, trying to stay close-by as not to get in the way of any of the trucks or forklifts that were whizzing around in some sort of synchronised, choreographed dance. That thought made Charlie chuckled to himself, and he was unable to muffle the sound emerging. The dock worker, who momentarily lightened his own mood, asked Charlie what he was chuckling about.

Charlie explained that the trucks and forklifts looked more like a ballet, at which the dock worker looked at him with a bewildered look, but then realised that was actually the case and burst into laughter.

It was not long before the two of them had reached the office of the harbourmaster, the dock worker then knocking firmly on the door which was brown with dirt. They didn’t have long to wait until a loud voice rang out telling them to enter. Once inside the office, the dock worker explained to his boss that Charlie was looking for him, but was not quite sure why, having himself forgotten that important question. The harbourmaster suggested that he had better show Charlie in then so he could find out.

The dock worker gestured for Charlie to enter the office and introduced him to the harbourmaster, who then swiftly turned, closing the office door behind him as he left.

“Wow,” Charlie thought as he looked around at all the maps and charts lying around on desks or pinned to notice boards on the wall. The harbourmaster greeted Charlie and suggested he take a seat for a minute while he returned to the conversation that he was conducting over a hand held radio.

He sat patiently in the visitor’s chair and couldn’t help but notice all the dust and piles of seemingly unorderly paperwork that was lying around on various surfaces. This made him feel slightly unsettled as his compulsion for tidiness was starting to take a grip. Charlie became very fidgety where he sat, his right foot starting to twitch in order to settle his nerves.

Several minutes later, the harbourmaster swivelled around in his chair muttering under his breath that it was sorted, then asked Charlie how he could help him.

Charlie began to recount his story so far to the harbourmaster, telling him about his father, and once his story had finished, added that he was looking for passage on a cargo ship, and his father had told him to come and speak to the harbourmaster.

Having patiently listened to the story, the harbourmaster asked Charlie if he knew where he wanted to travel to. Charlie then replied that he was not sure but quickly remembered the scrap piece of paper with an address written on it that his father had given to him earlier in the day.

Charlie slipped off his backpack, unzipped the side pocket, and reached in to get out the paper, offering it to the harbourmaster who then took the scrap of paper from Charlie. Puzzled, the harbourmaster rose out of his seat and walked over to the map to take a look, commenting that he was not sure where that was.

He then glanced at the map for a short while before he jabbed his finger towards it. Then, with a hint of excitement in his voice, he announced to Charlie that he had in fact found the town of Villejacques. The harbourmaster explained that it was inland a little way, but there was a port not far away. He gestured for Charlie to come over so he could show him the location on the map. Leaving Charlie staring at the map for a moment, the harbourmaster then said that he would check to see if any captains were heading in that direction. Just as he reached the day's dispatch sheet, then adjusting his voice to sound a little more official, he turned and said he first needed to make sure Charlie had a current passport to be able to travel. Charlie responded by saying that he had, then patted the side of his backpack while thinking to himself that if it wasn't for his mom, he would have left it at home, and with a sense of relief he brandished a wry grin.

Charlie had been well prepared for his travels, as his mother had always taught him to be organised, he explained. At which point the harbourmaster commented by congratulating Charlie in a more relaxed manner, and said that he would now see if he was able to be of help. He then returned to his seat and started to look at the days dispatch sheet. Charlie heard all sorts of sounds coming from the direction of the harbourmaster until finally he declared that there was, in fact, a ship heading that way, but it would not be the first port of call but would take a few days. He then asked Charlie if he would like this, to which Charlie eagerly agreed, keen to get on his way. The harbourmaster, seeing Charlie's excitement, said he would speak with the captain and find out if he had a berth available.

After a short phone call to the ship, he turned back and informed him that the captain of the ship was more than happy to offer passage if he didn't mind mucking in.

Charlie thought for a moment and said that he would be more than happy to give a hand only to be told that, in fact, that particular captain said that to everyone but never meant it. The harbourmaster then confirmed that it was all sorted and handed him back the scrap piece of paper with the suggestion that he keep it safe. Charlie smiled as he took the paper from him and returned it to the safety of his backpack. The harbourmaster informed Charlie that it would take him a few minutes to collect together some necessary paperwork and suggested that he wait by the jeep that was parked just outside. He would then give him a lift to the ship and introduce him to the captain. Charlie thanked the harbourmaster and left the office, casually making his way over to the jeep that was parked just a few steps away. As Charlie stood patiently waiting for the harbourmaster to join him, his attention was drawn to a payphone on the wall of the office wall. Rummaging through his trouser pocket, hoping that he might find sufficient loose change, enough just to call home anyway, just to let his parents know he had found passage on a ship. The call was brief, as he was interrupted by the arrival of the harbourmaster, but he let his parents know that he would call them again once he had arrived in Villejacques. The harbourmaster now standing beside his jeep, gestured for Charlie to end his call and jump into the passenger side.

Call finished, they both climbed into the jeep, the harbourmaster quickly having to rescue the documents, as Charlie climbed in, that he had just habitually deposited onto the passenger seat. Now seated in the jeep, Charlie thought it looked just as untidy as the office, with dirty seats, a dust covered dashboard, and a pile of crumpled up wrappers in the foot well. A turn of the key and the motor came to life, the harbourmaster now weaving in and out of all the other machinery.

Several minutes later they arrived at the dock side of Pier 8. Charlie jumped out, glad to once again smell the fresh sea air. There was quite a strong odour coming from what Charlie thought must have been some rotten food maybe under a seat.

The harbourmaster gestured for Charlie to follow as he headed towards the gangway of the ship. Stopping at the bottom, he let Charlie know that the captain would join them in a moment. Charlie looked on at the long, thin railing that led to the ship. It looked rather old, rusty, and well worn... weathered by many years at sea, he thought. Before long, the captain appeared at the top of the gangway and slowly made his way down. When close enough, the harbourmaster introduced Charlie, who kindly thanked him for allowing him board his ship. The harbourmaster handed over the paperwork to the captain, saying that these needed urgent attention, who sighed at the sight of more forms. Before the harbourmaster turned to walk away, Charlie thanked him for his kindness, and with that he wished him a bonne voyage and left.

The captain then turned to Charlie and said that he had better follow him on board as they then made their way up the rusty looking gangway that led up to the opening of the ship. He looked back at the busy port one last time and smiled before he turned to follow the captain.

## Chapter Two - Captain Macrina

Having now followed the captain through a maze of small narrow corridors, they eventually arrived at a row of doors. Stopping in front of one, Charlie soon realised these were doors to individual cabins. The sign on the wall that read "Passenger Cabins" in big black letters might have also given it away. The captain opened the door to cabin number four, stepped over the raised step and entered while Charlie followed behind.

"Here you go young fellow, you can stow your backpack here," the captain said in a slight haste. Gathering himself ready to leave, he quickly explained that the ship was due to leave port in less than a couple of hours, once all the cargo had been loaded and secured. The ship also must be ready to leave with the high tide for a safe exit. This being a whole new experience to Charlie, an excitement welled within him at the thought of seeing all this first hand. The captain walking backwards, dispatch papers at the forefront of his thoughts, bumped into the open door while attempting to finish his final words. Lastly, he suggested that Charlie make himself comfortable and come and find him on the bridge a little later.

As the captain rushed off, Charlie shouted a thank you for offering passage before turning around slowly to inspect his new home for the next couple of days. He was now very much aware of the weight on his shoulder, so he felt relief as he slipped off his backpack, placing it on the ordinary looking chair in the corner. His attention was caught by voices outside on the corridor, so he walked over and closed the cabin door.

Charlie took a deep breath in, sighed, and took a seat on the edge of the bunk. He had never been on a boat before, unless you were to count the time spent on a barge during one summer holiday when he was younger. So he was pleasantly surprised by the cabin. He was expecting something resembling a broom cupboard, but instead found himself sitting in what he thought was quite a spacious and almost luxurious room.

The cabin had its own bathroom and a comfy looking bed... a kettle with the usual teabag and sugar selection. There was a big couch along one wall, a coffee table, and a tall cupboard in the corner for hanging clothes. There was a lot of storage space under the bunk with several smaller individual lockers. Charlie giggled to himself as the thought struck him that he could even run around in circles, the cabin was that big. It certainly looked bigger than their guest room back home in Poxwold. But as the captain had pointed out that he was free to roam around the ship, he would not need to run around in circles in the cabin.

"I'm going to make the most of the time before the ship is ready to depart," Charlie thought to himself, and with that he decided it was time to begin his journal. He grabbed his backpack, unzipped the lower pocket on the right hand side where he'd put the journal earlier for safe keeping, removed it, then made his way over to the sofa now feeling more settled. Opening the journal at the first page, pencil in hand, he began to write about his adventure so far.

It didn't take him long before he had filled two sides and excitedly looked down at his watch thinking, "It must be close to leaving," as he sprang up from the sofa to look out of the porthole. It was now getting close to sunset. The sky was beginning to change from the blue hue of the daytime sky, morphing into shades of burnt orange which reflected in the rippling water. Even though it was a busy working environment, with lots of cranes, trucks and noise, smells lingering in the air of fuel and grease and then there were those that he could just not recognise, and perhaps would prefer not to discover, he thought it was still a very magical place.

Gazing out of the porthole, Charlie was suddenly brought back with the sound of the ships horn which reverberated throughout the vessel.

“We must be getting ready to depart,” he suddenly realized, panicking slightly, not wanting to miss the ship leaving the dock. He replaced the journal into the safety of the pocket of the backpack. “Time to attempt to locate the captain on the bridge,” he thought.

Opening the solid cabin door, the ship suddenly sounded more alive in his ears. He heard the distant sound of loud voices trying to be heard over the banging of what he assumed were the last few items of cargo being secured prior to departure. Charlie decided to try to re-trace his steps back to the gangway where he first boarded. He remembered seeing a large sign on the wall next to the main stairs showing the layout of the decks.

He arrived back at the stairs by the gangway entrance, which was now secured, and looked at the sign on the wall. Charlie, in amazement, was surprised at how many decks there actually were... certainly more than he had thought. Having scanned the sign out of curiosity, he found out that the bridge was on the top deck. His heart raced with enthusiasm as he began to climb the steep and narrow stairs, remembering to make a mental note as to which deck his cabin was on. “Note to self, Deck D,” he muttered under his breath while making his way upwards.

While turning a corner on one flight of stairs, Charlie came face to face with one of the ship’s crew.

“Who are you?” demanded a loud grumpy Italian voice.

As he looked up from staring at the belly, Charlie noticed a name badge which read “Federigo Romano - Chief Engineer.”

“My name is Charlie. I’m a passenger, sir,” he replied, trying to appease this man’s tone. Looking up at the face of the crew member, he added that he was looking for the captain. The officer demanded to know just why he wanted to see the captain, adding that it’s normally mid-cruise when that usually happens, asking whether he had a complaint already.

A little puzzled by that last statement, Charlie politely replied by informing the officer that he had been invited by the captain to join him on the bridge, that he had been offered passage for helping with duties on board.

With a look of relief on his face, the officer suggested that he hurry as they were preparing to leave and instructed him to keep going up until he ran out of stairs. He then finished by demanding that he now move out of his way as he had work to do and didn't have time to stand around chatting.

Charlie moved against the side rail as far as he could, and with that the officer brushed passed him and continued to descend the stairs. Before Charlie could thank him, he was gone.

After that he did hope that the rest of the crew were not as grumpy as that person was, otherwise it was going to be a long couple of days.

He then continued to climb the steep sets of stairs, and it wasn’t long until finally he had reached the very last step. “Wow, thigh burn,” Charlie thought as stood on the top deck looking along a short corridor with a door straight ahead. He noticed that there was no handle on this side, but a sign in large bold letters stating, “No Entry to Unauthorised Personnel.” Now Charlie didn’t know what to do, but being the cheeky chap that he was, he decided to knock anyway.

Charlie knocked on the door three times and waited. It was not long before he could hear footsteps getting louder, and suddenly, the door opened. There, standing before him was a smartly dressed female officer.

“Yes, what do you want? Can’t you read the sign?” snapped the crew member.

“Sorry, mam”, replied Charlie, “but the captain invited me to join him on the bridge.”



She told Charlie to wait there, closing the door, disappearing back into the room. Charlie tried to catch a glimpse through the door before it closed and could just make out several crew members busily going about their duties.

Moments later, the door reopened, and this time it was the familiar face of the captain. "Charlie, my boy, welcome to the bridge of the Pierre Tristran," and with that the captain invited him in and formally introduced himself. "My boy, my name is Captain Macrina, and I've been looking after this beauty, as both man and boy, now for near on thirty years."

Charlie was now standing on the bridge, and the captain introduced him to the other crew members who were on duty. It wasn't long before he was explaining, in quite some detail, how the Pierre Tristran was classed as a freighter that, at its maximum, could carry about 4,500 containers and was 65,000 D.W.T.

"D.W.T, what does that mean?" Charlie asked the captain.

"Sorry, my boy," chortled the captain. "Without being too technical, it means Deadweight Tonnage. It's a measure of how much weight a ship is carrying or can safely carry while out at sea."

Just as the captain was about to continue his explanation, he was interrupted by the first officer who announced that the ship was ready to depart and that they were just waiting for the tugs. The captain acknowledged his first officer and turned back to Charlie, saying in an almost excited tone, "Time to go to work! This is the second favourite part of my job, Charlie."

Looking a little bewildered, Charlie responded "The second, Captain, so what is the first?"

"The first, my boy, is when we arrive at our destination. That's my favourite part of my job." And with a broad smile, the captain then instructed Charlie to stand over to one side so he could watch out of the port side window.

It wasn't long before the tugs were in place and the heavy grease covered mooring lines were released from the dock cleats and hauled back on board the ship. The bridge had now come alive with activity as the tugs started to manoeuvre the ship away from the dockside. After about twenty minutes or so, the tugs had positioned the ship so that the engines could be started. After several heated exchanges between the captain and chief engineer over the internal intercom, the engines finally sprang into action. This allowed the tugs to release their ropes, and once at a safe distance the engines were increased and the ship juddered forward. As they took hold, the ship finally made its way slowly out of port.

The phone on the bridge rang and the captain answered. "Yes, permission to come aboard," he replied then promptly hung up.

Charlie wondered just who was coming on board, but before his mind could wonder through all the different possibilities, there was a knock at the door. The first officer opened the door tipping his hat as a sign of acknowledgement, and in walked a very official looking person. The captain looked over to Charlie and explained that this was the pilot. His role was to navigate the ship down the channel and out into open water.

Charlie was watching everything that was happening on the bridge, and it did not take the pilot long before he had masterfully steered the ship into open water and handed control back to the captain. Papers were signed, and with a quick handshake, he left the bridge and made his way back to the waiting pilot boat, which would take him back to port.

Elation and intrigue raced through every fibre of his being, thrilled to witness such an event. Taking a breath now to settle himself, he gazed out of the window... out across the open water, the coastline now beginning to fade into the distance and the sky darkening.

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