

For a fourth morning in a row, ominous, dense fog crept over the New York Harbor. It overspread the docks in a treacherous, slippery sheet. Water swirled around the algae-covered pilings. An inky black sky revealed no cracks of sunlight.

Longshoremen coiled thick lines into neat, damp circles. A woman stood on one of the slick docks wearing a black wool captain's hat atop her spiky dirty-blond hair. Her red, all-weather coat laid over heavy yellow fishing coveralls. The woman, Lindsey Johnson, surveyed the conditions, her lined, bright blue eyes scanning the horizon. Smoke from the Tiparillo cigar clenched between her teeth swirled into the black sky.

Gazing out at the ominous morning, she felt her scalp tingle and an icy shiver ran through her. *Tired of this fuckin' fog. Makes my skin crawl. But me, Boston Babe, and the boys got a job to do.* She pushed aside the unease, took one last drag of the Tiparillo, and tossed it into the trash.

Pulling her hat down over her ears, Lindsey sent a silent prayer for a safe and successful day. As was her custom, she kissed her left hand and patted the starboard side of the *Boston Babe* before boarding. Lindsey had bought the boat over thirty years ago and cared for it like it was her child. As the only woman tugboat captain in New York, Lindsey had earned the reputation of one of the most skilled and knowledgeable captains in the maritime field. Many a cargo ship's captain requested her and hoped she would be assigned their captain to guide them to port.

In the tight galley, her four beefy crewmen sat around the round white table, sipping coffee.

"Mornin' boys," she said.

The Fab Four—Brett, Jeb, Leon, and Geo—grunted a good morning.

"Is my Fab Four ready? It's gonna be a tough one today, gents, so I need you all focused."

"Yes, Cap'n Tips!" Leon used the nickname only the crew called her in a nod to her love of Tiparillos. "We're ready."

Three of the four men had spent over two decades with Lindsey. Geo was the relative newcomer at three years. Word among the crews of all the tugs was that no one respected and revered their captain more than they did. Attempts to lure Lindsey's crew away by other captains promising higher pay always failed. They loved her like a sister and expertly performed their jobs.

"Damn fog is thickah than yesterday. We need all eyes shahp when we pull out. You know the drill." She nodded at them and retreated into the wheelhouse.

The four crew members tossed amused looks at each other. After rinsing their mugs in the tiny sink, they ducked up the three steps to the main deck and took their positions.

After radioing the harbor master for clearance, Lindsey fired up the engines. The familiar, comforting vibration from the twin diesel engines emanated up through the main deck, and the churning of the water fueled by the powerful engines broke the stillness of the morning. Jeb and Leon undid the lines and tossed the sodden ropes back onto the slippery deck. Geo and Brett manned the bow and pushed off from the dock. Lindsey gripped the helm, turned the tug into the cold morning, and chugged into the darkness.

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Up in the wheelhouse, Lindsey slipped on her glasses and alerted the captain of the idling Chinese cargo ship waiting in the Hudson, “This is *Boston Babe* heading out to point 34J. Do you read?”

The response was quick and clipped. “Yes, roger that. We are approaching 34J now. Fog lights running.”

“Roger. ETA is twenty-two minutes,” she replied.

Away from the docks, the fog thickened like a bowl of overcooked oatmeal. Wipers going at full speed, Lindsey double-checked that all running lights were on, and the bow was manned. Her eyes lasered in on the fog-covered water, Lindsey gripped the helm with experienced hands and steered the *Boston Babe* toward the imposing, fully loaded cargo ship. *Damn stuffy in here*, she thought and opened the small side window. Crisp, cold air whooshed into the wheelhouse. Inhaling deeply, Lindsey filled her lungs and opened her ears. After thirty years on the water, the churning of the engines, the slap of the water on *Boston Babe*’s hull, and voices of her crew were Lindsey’s lifeblood.

She hummed one of her favorite Irish drinking songs as the tugboat chugged into the morning. A low rumble from the starboard side made her stop. Stealing a fast look over her right shoulder, Lindsey saw nothing but fog. The rumble grew louder. *What the hell is that?*

Seizing the radio, she called down to the bow. “Jeb, you guys hear or see anything down there? Starboard side?” Lindsey doubted they would. The noise from the engines drowned out all other sounds.

“No, Cap. Why?”

“I heard a rumble on the starboard side. Please check.”

“Aye aye. I’ll radio back.”

“Roger.” As Lindsey hung up the radio, the rumble swelled to a roar. Caught off guard, she was temporarily blinded by a powerful light filling the wheelhouse. “What the *fuck?*”

Jeb's panicked voice replied, "Jesus, Cap! From what I can see, it's another boat headin' straight at us!"

"How far out?"

"Only about fifty yards!"

Lindsey's heart hammered in her ears. Steering the tug aside was out of the question. She reached for the horn and blasted it—one long, loud blast. *Please God! Let them hear it!* The blazing bow light of the unidentified boat illuminated the entire starboard side of the *Boston Babe*.

"Seek safety *now!*" she barked at her crew into the radio.

Closer and closer the boat sped, slicing through the fog-covered water. The space between the two vessels shriveled by the second. From the potent roar of the engines, Lindsey knew it was a new, powerful boat. She blasted the horn again and flashed her running lights. Fear gushed through Lindsey as she watched the boat bear down on them. Lindsey shrank back from glaring light. Blasting the horn one more time, she braced herself for impact.

Just as the bow of the rogue boat was about to T-bone the *Boston Babe*, the boat cut sharply away, but not before briefly sideswiping Lindsey's vessel. A tall, wide wall of spray shot overboard the *Boston Babe*, obscuring Lindsey's ability to identify the vessel. She pulled open a cabinet and yanked out a pair of binoculars. All that was visible were two enormous outboard motors retreating into the dark. *Son of a bitch!*

Seizing the radio, she checked on her crew. "Jeb! Everyone okay?"

No answer.

"Jeb!" She waited a few more seconds. "Please respond!"

"We're okay, Cap."

*Thank God*, Lindsey thought. With shaking hands, she lifted the radio to call the port authority.

"Captain! Something's stuck on us!" Jeb yelled. "I think it's from that boat!"

"What? You gotta be kiddin' me! What is it?"

"Tough to tell. Maybe some trash, can't tell. It's kind of latched on the bumper!"

*For fuck's sake*, she thought and throttled back the speed. From the wheelhouse window she saw the crew pointing over the starboard side.

"Cap, it's stuck in front. What do you want us to do?"

Lindsey had seen enough water pollution in her day. *I'm not leavin' any more shit in the river*. "Use the poles and grappling hooks and hoist it up." She watched while the crew lugged the object on board. It thudded onto the deck. Water slid from it and trickled around the crew's booted feet.

Jeb's head snapped in her direction. He urgently waved her to come down on deck.

"Ah shit!" she muttered and put the tug on autopilot. Lindsey marched out of the wheelhouse.

On the deck lay something, roughly five to six feet in length, wrapped in black plastic tarp and knotted at both ends. Slick rope resembling a large stretched-out slinky was wrapped around the middle.

Yanking on her gloves, she reached down to feel the object. The churning in her stomach grew to a tsunami of fear. *Oh no. That doesn't feel like a log.* A tightness formed in her chest as her stomach churned like an angry ocean.

"This is not good."

Lindsey saw the anxious glances bounce between her crew. The fear she saw in their eyes pulled at her.

"Everything will be fine, fellas. But I need your help. Put your gloves on and use the poles to roll this against the base of the wheelhouse. Grab some extra lines and secure it to the cleats."

"Yes, Captain," they answered, but no one moved at first until Jeb stepped forward.

"Thanks fellas. I'll go call the port authority."

As she waited for the port authority boat to arrive, Lindsey pulled out a Tiparillo. Cupping her hands around her mouth, she lit up and inhaled deeply. *I don't want to look, but it's hard not to.* She blew the smoke into the wind. Her instincts told her the undeniable, awful truth: Inside the black plastic tarp was a body.

The blue and red lights from the port authority boat grew closer. *Thank God.* She inhaled deeply and took a tentative step toward the tarp. She knew it had been submerged for a long time as the once-white ropes were slick with green algae. Based on the diminutive size of the object, she deduced it was a woman. *God forbid it's a kid.*

"Permission to come aboard?" a voice called.

Lindsey waved to her colleague from the port authority, George Peck, and a female police officer with him. They came aboard and exchanged abbreviated pleasantries. The officer, who introduced herself as Captain Carol McLoughlin, agreed it was in the shape of a body. She squatted down, and with gloved hands, untied the top rope and placed it in an evidence bag.

Lindsey briefed Peck and McLoughlin about the rogue boat. She added, "I think the boat stirred this up from the bottom."

McLoughlin nodded. "I need to see our victim to start procedures."

Carefully, she folded back the tarp to reveal a body. Dark, matted hair covered the woman's face. As she reached to carefully push back the hair, Lindsey's heart throbbed and her stomach sloshed. Prickles of trepidation dotted her skin.

Captain McLoughlin gingerly brushed the woman's hair aside and sighed.

"Oh my God," Lindsey gasped.

"Do you know her?"

Lindsey glanced down at the blue, bloated face. Everything stopped. The question was not processed. Lindsey felt the blood rush from her face. Her knees threatened to buckle.

She swallowed bile and nodded.