



The finger tapped the green felt once. The dealer dealt a 5. The young man slouching at the table waved his hand back and forth -- no card. The dealer turned up his cards -- 20. The crowd, watching the play action at the Grand Hotel and Casino in Paradise Island, Bahamas, murmured with enthusiasm watching this young man with the wavy black hair play his cards. He hadn't lost a hand of 21



in twenty five minutes. The young man turned up his cards. "21". "A winner" cried the dealer. Red, green and black chips were scattered in a heap around the player. The crowd roared with approval. Another hand won by this sunburned man with the piercing hazel eyes. A young man approached the seated player - a shorter, stockier fellow with sparkling blue eyes. He bent down and softly said "Drake, who's chips are those." I turned and looked my friend Mark right in the eyes, smirked and said "Guess" and went back to focus on the game. The crowd and Mark watched as I never lost a hand for another 20 minutes. The pit boss changed dealers seven times and reshuffled the shoe four times. Finally a hand was lost. Mark

said, "Is it time?" I responded, "One more hand". Lost. I stood up and spoke to the dealer, "Rack 'em". The dealer filled the rack with 100 black chips. I peeled two off and tossed them towards the dealer. Mark and I went to the cage to cash out.

Let me tell you the story about how we got to the Grand Hotel:

Mark had his boat, *Jahoma*, a 30' sloop berthed at Dinner Key Marina in Miami. We would meet in December to sail the Bahamas for adventure and fun. This year our good friend Jay joined us and we set sail for Bimini once again with our final destination, Nassau, specifically, Paradise Island. We had a smooth sail to Bimini and checked in at immigration. Mark and Jay wanted to shop and check out the "tchotchkes" around town. I decided to explore the rest of the island and we all wandered off on our endeavors. I wound up outside of town amongst a grove of Australian pine trees that grew to the edge of limestone cliffs which gave way to a deserted beautiful white sand beach that spread for miles. I heard an organ playing church music and at the edge of the cliffs was a small chapel, doors open, stained glass lit up by the sun and organ music but not a soul around. I approached the chapel and spied two locals smoking some ganja and they offered me a hit -- very nice weed and I meandered down the cliff to walk on the beach.



It was one of those exquisite Bahamian winter days, a balmy 75 degrees and the azure water was crystal. You looked out to two small islets off shore and the horizon -- no people, just the sound of the ocean lapping on the shore. The beach was loaded with shells of every type. The 20' limestone cliffs framed the beach and undulated to form coves. You could have your own private beach if populated. There were so many shells that I wanted to collect. I took off my shirt to make a basket to hold them. All at once I saw a piece of shell sticking out of the sand just at the water's edge. I put down my shirt filled with shells, dug into the sand and uncovered a perfect Queen's Helmet without its occupant. I have that shell to this very day. Excited, I raced back into town to find my friends and share with them my discovery.



After locating them, we all grabbed a cab and I explained to the young, good looking black driver about the beach and he drove us to the exact spot. We got out and found our individual coves on the beach and had our private experiences. It was exceptional. On the way home, the cabbie, as he dropped us off, turned and said, "If you need anything, just ask for the Night Rider, mon."



Two days later found us sailing towards Chubb Key. The weather had deteriorated and the seas across the Great Bahama Bank were lumpy. Jay was not having a good time as he came down with a good case of "mal de mer" -- seasickness. We arrived at Chubb Key Marina, checked in and rested after a 24 hour crossing. The engine was not working properly and a short developed which depleted our batteries.

Jay decided that enough was enough and flew out the next day via light plane to Miami and then back to San Francisco Bay area where he lived. It was up to Mark and I to sail back or continue on to Nassau. Owing to the plight of the

boat and the change in the weather, we opted to head back. The sky turned ominous as we sailed back. Winds and seas kicked up. As night fell we anchored out on the bank that we just crossed. The Great Bahama Bank is all sand lying in 14 to 18 feet of water. We looked out of the port and watched as the sky turned black. Great clouds were bearing down on us and the rain started. We curled up in our sleeping bags as the temperature plummeted into the 40's. Awaking in the early morning, we found ourselves adrift as the anchor had parted from its rode. We didn't know exactly where we were (this happened before GPS was operational for pleasure vessels). We knew the mainland was west and we had the compass so we headed that way.

6 hours later we saw Cat Key and sailed across the Gulf Stream to Miami. It was cold, big seas, 25 knot wind. We were reefed and all bundled up. The glow of the halogen lights of Miami were reflected by the low clouds. We hit Dinner Key head on. However, Biscayne Bay is very shallow in that area, so we had to tack up the narrow channel to get to the marina. It was the dead of night, The wind was crankin'. It was colder than a "witch's tit". Mark was at the helm and I was hauling the lines as we maneuvered up the channel. We must have tacked 50 times as Jahoma zigzagged to her home. My muscles were aching but Mark glided his vessel right into the slip. We tied her up and went down below and crashed. In the morning, we showered, had a hearty breakfast. Mark said why don't we fly Chalk's Airline to Paradise Island and stay at the Grand Hotel. I was up for that so we drove to the Macarthur Causeway and flew to Paradise Island via seaplane.

The rest of the story you know. -- Drake Regent