

A photograph of a pond with reeds and trees in the background. The reeds are tall and thin, with some green and some brown. The trees in the background are dense and green. The water in the pond is calm and reflects the reeds and trees.

The Butcher, The Baker, The Candlestick Maker

By F.J. Fullhouse

The Journey Begins

The Volvo Penta D9 purred to life without hesitation, all 575 horses of it. The cabin was illuminated by the wheelhouse's red dome lights. It was nautical dawn. They pulled out of the slip effortlessly. At the helm, The Captain, usually called Cappy, was the boat's owner. On nav watch was Gentleman Jim, simply known as The Gent. The third crew member and the cook, getting in as much nap time as possible, was a guy called Dirt. Strictly adhering to the No Wake rules, Cap eased the boat slowly into the Gulf of Mexico and headed south.

The day before began with The Gent and Dirt driving to the airport in Ft. Myers to pick up Cappy. They got there early so they spent some time at the Bass Pro Shop. The boating and even some of the fishing stuff was familiar, but the hunting, archery, guns and camo departments provided some good entertainment for a while. Dirt was particularly intrigued by the bait aisle; huge feeders, salt licks, and all kinds of bait for deer. Flaming Doe - "Bring in the big bucks and bring 'em in aroused!" Hog Heaven, Pig Pie, Rut Incense and many more. The Gent was particularly interested in the 3D camo suits. They picked up Cappy from the airport right on time. Drove an hour or so to the boat that was docked in Marco Island, provisioned up, got to bed early and dreamed of what might lay ahead.

These three jamokes had worked together before. They knew what to expect from each other by now, so leaving the slip was almost wordless.

These runs "on the outside" were a little boring. The seas weren't rough enough to really get anybody's attention. Every once in a while, someone would say something. "Some of my best work was done out here past the Colregs" said The Gent.

"The Colregs?" said Dirt

"Yeah, you know, the demarcation line..."

"I know what the Colregs are. I'm just wondering why you'd use them as a description like that."

"You giving me a hard time?"

"No. I was just..."

"Cause if you're giving me a hard time, I could take offense at that kind of thing." The Gent turned away and looked out toward the horizon. Dirt had learned by now that you really didn't want to offend The Gent. Nothing else was said for a while.

Miami Beach

After nine hours in The Gulf, there was Government Cut. Miami Beach! Dirt said "The Miami Beach audience is the greatest audience in the world!"

"Whatta you mean?" asked Cappy.

"It's what Jackie Gleason used to say at the end of The Jackie Gleason Show when he was filming it down here." said Dirt

"In the world?! Really?!" questioned The Gent. Here we go again thought Dirt.

"Are you calling Jackie Gleason a liar?"

"I never knew the man personally. I think that there's a lot of audiences in the world. And to think that these people here in Miami Beach..."

"It was a different time I guess." interrupted Cappy trying to avoid an escalation. He knew that if this job was to end successfully, they all had to get along, at least for the next week or so.

They docked at the Miami Beach Marina, fueled up and moved to their slip. Dirt cooked up some grub.

"You two better get going" said Cappy. The Gent and Dirt had to head down to The Delores Hotel on Collins to get some important information about the next few legs of their trip north. Just as they had been told, there was a guy, he looked like a homeless guy, sitting there on the

front porch of The Delores. Dirt walked up to him. "Got a light?"

"What'r you smokin?" asked the homeless guy.

"Serafin De Cuba torpedo. Habano wrapper"

"Yeah. Here's a pack of matches. Keep 'em".

"Thanks" said Dirt. He lit up his cigar, slipped the matchbook into his pocket and crossed Collins.

Dirt and The Gent walked the couple of blocks east over to Ocean Drive. "Didn't Eric Clapton put out an album called Ocean Drive?" asked The Gent.

"The album was 461 Ocean Blvd. But that's a little north in Golden Beach." said Dirt. They walked the length of Ocean Blvd. here on Miami Beach. Passed Versaci's, The Clevelander, and all of the various hotels, restaurants and bars on Ocean Blvd. The sidewalk was packed with a constant flow of tourists, locals, singles and families. Within a block you could hear people speaking Spanish, German, Dutch, Swedish.

And the smells were interesting. "You smell that?" Dirt asked The Gent.

"No. What?"

"Right back there past that restaurant I'm sure I smelled a strong hit of garlic in Shrimp Scampi. Then, at the same time a group of kids passed and one of them had way too much cologne on. "It was just a huge assault on my nose" said Dirt.

"Speaking of an assault on my nose, what the hell kind of cologne do you have on?"

"I picked up some of that Hog Rut bait at the Bass Pro Shop. Thought I'd see how it worked on the ladies."

"You're sick".

"Yeah. Sick like a fox, brother. Sick like a fox".

"I'm pretty sure it's "crazy like a fox" said The Gent.

3, 2, 1... Lift-Off

When they arrived the next day at the fuel dock at the marina in Cape Canaveral, they were the only ones there except for the workboats that were bringing guys to and from the offshore dredge operations on twenty-four hour shifts. Cappy kept opening and closing the match book that Dirt and The Gent picked up at the Delores.

Shortly after they arrived a small, well-worn fishing boat pulled in. The name of the boat was *How You Doin*. It came in with three crew; Toofis, the captain, Junior, his young helper and Big Red, a mixed pit/bull dog.

As the boat was tying up, Dirt went up to check out the facilities. The Gent and Cappy went over to help the *How You Doin* tie up. "How you doin'?" asked Cappy.

"How you doin'?" responded Toofis

"How you doin'?" chimed in The Gent

"No, how you doin'?" said Junior. Big Red never moved. He just remained dozing on the engine cover.

"Any luck out there?" asked Cappy.

"Yep. Mighty lucky. You interested in some mackeral?"

"Sure. That would be great. said Cappy. Junior dug around in the cooler and pulled out a package wrapped in brown paper. The Gent took it. Just then Dirt returned to the dock. He walked up to the group. Suddenly, Big Red's ears shot up. He immediately sprung off the engine cover and in a single leap cleared the transom. He barreled into Dirt and knocked him down. "What the....?!" was all that Dirt was able to get out. Big Red started humping any and every part of Dirt that he could get to. "Junior! Pull Big Red off that man will ya!". Junior jumped onto the dock with a line and snagged Big Red and with great effort pulled the highly

aroused dog off of Dirt. "Well, usually Big Red's as quiet as can be. This is certainly unusual."

"Hey Dirt. It looks like that Hog Rut bait works on dogs too. I thought that you took a shower." said The Gent

"I was about to..." Dirt said shakily as he staggered back to the facilities to take a shower.

"Well, Toofis, thanks for the package. I understand that payment's already been made." said Cappy

"Yessir. That indeed has taken place. Pleasure doin' business with you."

"Same here."

"Well excuse us, but we gotta start working on making a tuna door in our transom. We're heading up the coast to do some big tuna finshin".

"OK. Well, good luck with that." said Cappy.

Both crews of the only two boats in the marina spent an uneventful night. Although each kept an eye on the other throughout the night.

The next morning Dirt made breakfast. "What the hell is this?" asked Cappy.

"Scrambled eggs, fruit and a mini bacon weave." said Dirt.

"What's this glob of meat?" asked Cappy.

"It's the bacon weave." said The Gent. "Personally I wanted to see the full pack weave."

"I need the rest of the bacon for Pasta Carbonara later in the week." said Dirt.

"I can't eat this glob of bacon." protested Cappy.

"It's just two slices of bacon cut in half and woven together."

"Why can't I just have two slices of bacon?"

"You do have two slices of bacon."

"No I don't. I have this glob thing here."

"Sorry Cappy." Dirt reached over, disassembled the weave and arranged the four pieces back into some facsimile of the two original pieces of bacon.

"Thank you." said Cappy.

"I like the weave." said The Gent.

The Baker

Docked in Fernandina Beach. Cappy and The Gent called it an early night. Dirt went to do some laundry. While waiting for the dryer he decided to go get a beer at the Palace Saloon. The Palace had been recommended by The Rev who they had met here last year. As Dirt approached the Palace, the guy at the door said that they had a three-dollar cover charge. Dirt wasn't going for it. "Where can I just get a beer?"

"Try up the block at O'Kane's. It's an Irish pub." Dirt took the short walk and went into O'Kane's. It was packed. Sort of like the Roland and MaryAnn Martin Tiki Bar of Irish pubs. What a crowd. Mostly young college age kids. A few old guys like Dirt. Dirt took a seat at the crowded bar. A guitar player was playing an acoustic rock version of a Zeppelin song that Dirt couldn't quite figure out what it was.

A couple of young blond girls were dancing together in the middle of the crowd. A guy on the dance floor looked so much like Ben Affleck that Dirt really started looking around for Matt Damon. The bar tender brought over a pint of Guinness and a shot of Jameson for Dirt. He gave her a ten and asked for change in ones so that he could tip her.

She never smiled and gave him a look like he was bothering her. He still gave her a couple of bucks tip anyway. So, there was Dirt. Sitting there, sipping his Guinness, looking at his watch to see if his clothes were

done yet back at the marina laundry. He was just minding his own business when a wiry young kid in a Hollister t-shirt stepped on Dirt's foot. Dirt was wearing his made in the USA Okabashi flip flops, so it kind of hurt. "What the...??!!" blurted Dirt.

"Oh, I'm sorry sir." the kid said.

"Sir?!" said Dirt indignantly.

"Sorry, dude." said the kid.

Dirt let it go. The kid reminded him of The Mooch. That's what riled up Dirt a little more than it should have. The Mooch was the reason that Dirt got one of his nick names, The Baker. Quite awhile ago, The Gent and Dirt had enlisted The Mooch for a little job out on Reddington Beach. They were staying at a little run-down beach house. There was a lot of downtime. And of course, Dirt did the cooking. One night for dinner, Dirt cooked up this seafood dish; some shrimp and scallops with a béchamel sauce wrapped and baked in a puff pastry wrap.

Dirt served this dish with an inexpensive Henkel Troken sparkling wine that, even though it didn't cost much, really complimented the dish very well. Dinner was over. Dirt felt pretty good about how the meal turned out. The Mooch felt otherwise. "Yeah, it was pretty good, but the puff pastry was a little dry."

"I made that puff pastry from scratch." said Dirt

"Whatever. I thought it was dry"

"Gent? What do you think?"

The Gent was not going there with Dirt, " Good, Dirt. Everything was good."

"See Mooch. What the hell are you talking about?!"

"Hey man! The damn puff pastry was dry! What can I say?" The Mooch was getting agitated.

"Mooch, here's what you can say. Keep your damn mouth shut when you don't know what the hell you're talking about!" Now Dirt was getting agitated too.

"I'm going for a walk" said The Gent. As he left the beach house he could hear The Mooch and Dirt yelling at each other with increasing hostility.

Detective Connor was standing over the body that behind a dumpster near the putt putt golf course. "Look at this Phillips. What does that look like to you?"

Phillips crouched down and looked closely at the dead man's face. "It looks like someone shoved pastry or something up this guy's nose and down his throat. And it almost seems like it baked after it was in the guy. Smells like olive oil and lighter fluid."

"I never saw anything like this." said Connor.

"Must have been one sick guy who did this. One sick guy."

"Yeah. Sick like a fox." said Connor

Socastee

"You better check that mackeral." Cappy told Dirt.

"Will do" Dirt opened the brown paper wrapper of the package of Spanish mackeral that they had been given by the crew of the *How You Doin*. Nice, thought Dirt. This would go great with that Linguine Frutti di Mare that he was preparing for tonight's dinner. He took the fish and gave the brown wrap paper to Cappy.

Cappy looked carefully at both sides of the brown wrapping paper. There, near one of the corners was a triangle with the number "86" in the middle of it and the words "Mac Riv. But Isl.". Now they knew what their next pickup point would be.

They continued heading north for a couple of days. This particular stretch on the Waccamaw River in South Carolina was beautiful. Tree lined, green, classic

old houses all along the way. They had finally made it to channel marker "86" marking the southern end of Butler Island. Cappy eased the boat to a stop. From the deck, The Gent looked around with a pair of binoculars. Dirt, in the aft cockpit also looked around. "I think I see it" said the Gent pointing at a spot near the shore of the island while still looking through the binocs. "Yep. I think that's it."

"What is it?" asked Cappy from behind the wheel.

"I see the end of a coil of line about a foot under the water."

"I'm in." said Dirt. He gasped as he slid over the side into the chilly water. "Woooo! It's a bit nippy!"

"Quit your whining." said The Gent. Dirt waded over to where The Gent pointed. He grabbed an algae covered line and pulled. The line led to something that was buried in the muck of the shore. Dirt muscled it out of the muck. It was a shoe box sized package that was tightly wrapped in a black garbage bag and secured all over with at least a couple of rolls of gray duct tape. Somebody knew what they were doing. Dirt cut the line with his Gerber and brought the package onboard. "Put it in the starboard lazarette." said Cappy as he backed the boat out and turned back onto the ICW. "Glad that's done." he whispered to himself.

It was The Gent's turn at the wheel as they approached the Socastee swing bridge. "What's the name of this bridge?" asked The Gent.

"The Socastee" said Dirt.

"Socaskee?" questioned The Gent.

"No. SOCAST-TEE" Dirt responded.

"Oh, OK. Socaskee." said the Gent. Now Cappy joined in, "SO CAS TEE!"

"OK. Alright. Socatspee. I got it."

"You know when you go fishing," said Dirt, "and you CAST your line? SO CAST TEE!"

"Yeah, yeah. So scalp me."

"Don't tempt me," said Cappy, "Don't tempt me."

After an uneventful passing of the Socastee swing bridge, the boat headed for the Marina at Grande Dunes in Myrtle Beach, SC. They were the only transient boat in the marina. The dock hand helped them dock, fuel and pump out. However, on hand to watch the arrival of the boat at the slip were a gaggle of geese. No, really. A bunch of Canadian geese seemed to have adopted the berm that separated the ICW from the marina docks as their nesting ground. They honked and hissed and flapped their wings wildly in a great commotion. "This won't do," said Cappy eyeing the geese as they approached the dock. "Hey! Shut up!". Not surprisingly the geese continued to bark and howl at these intruders into their habitat. Two large ganders were definitely in the lead. "I swear, if those things don't quiet down soon, I don't know what I'm going to do," said Cappy through gritted teeth.

Dirt and The Gent went for a short walk to a local grocery store for re-provisioning. When they returned about an hour later, Cappy was napping in the salon. It seemed that the geese and Cappy had come to an understanding. The geese had totally quieted down. Dirt went down into the galley to stow the provisions. There on the cutting board on the galley counter were two large, fat, juicy goose livers. They didn't call Cappy 'The Butcher' for nothing. Cappy had owned and ran a few very successful delis near Baltimore. Even though he hadn't been in that business for a long time, he did still have his prized kitchen knives; Damascus steel, ivory handles, gold outlined mother of pearly inlay designs; from cleaver to paring knife and everything in between. "Saweeeeeet!!! exclaimed Dirt. "We're having Foie Gras tonight, baby!!!!"

Hep me! Hep me!

They were cruising along the Albemarle Chesapeake Canal nice and slow. Taking in the scenery. Beautiful Pine and Hazelnut trees lined both sides of the canal. Cappy was at the helm,

Dirt was on nav watch, and The Gent was on his off shift. He was standing in the aft cockpit just taking in the sites when he thought that he saw something in the trees onshore. "Hey Cappy. Hold on! Slow down."

Dirt went back to the cockpit. "What's up Gent?"

"Look over there." Barely discernable was someone in what appeared to be a 3D camo suit.

"Is that a lady?! Hey Cappy hold on.". Cappy put the boat into idle.

"What is it?"

"We think there's a lady over there." It was. She seemed to be in her early fifties, in a well-worn billowy camo suit. Cappy turned the boat around and eased it over to the right bank where the woman was standing. She seemed anxious and excited. It almost seemed like she needed to pee really bad the way that she was sort of jumping up and down. She had both of her hands clamped over her mouth as though she did not want to make any noise. The boat got within ten yards of her. "Hep me mister! Hep me! He done took my little baby!" She was whispering and screeching and crying all at once.

"Who took your baby?" asked The Gent

"My mean ol' ex, Henry."

"Well if it's within the visitation agreement..."

"Mister we aint got no visitation agreement! Henry does anything he wants. Oh he's 'specially mean when he's had a few drinks!" The woman began to sob.

“OK. OK. Now just calm down. Where's Henry and your baby now?” asked the Gent

“They're up to the fishin' camp through the woods apiece.” she managed to get out between gasping sobs.

“And he's not supposed to have your baby?”

“No! No! He's so mean to that poor little child. I just got to get my baby back!”

The Gent looked at Dirt and Cappy. Dirt shrugged. Cappy rolled his eyes, “Here we go again.”

“Well what are we supposed to do?!” The Gent said with mild irritation. “I'm going to go check this out.”

“Suit yourself.” said Cappy. “But, you have thirty minutes. More than that and we're leaving your ass with Miss Camo there. I'm sure you'll be very happy together out here in the woods.”

The Gent went below and packed a few things in his back pack, sprayed himself with Deep Woods Off, hopped in the water and waded to shore. “Oh thank you Mister! Thank you for heppin' me! God bless you mister!” Camo Girl pawed at The Gent with one hand while trying to muffle her excited sobbing with the other.

They walked for a half mile into the woods until the trees began to thin a little. In a clearing was an old, grey shack. A faded and rusted out Ford Fairlane was parked about ten yards from the shack. “That be the fishin' camp.” Camo Girl said in a hushed, broken voice. Then she gasped.

A man came out of the shack walking behind a small, frail looking boy who seemed to be about eight-years-old. The man was tall and muscular. He was unshaven, but didn't have a beard. He wore overalls and no shirt or shoes. He pushed the little boy in the back and the boy stumbled and fell. “Get up girly girl!” the man growled. “I'll teach you how to be a real man cause the only thing your mamma gonna teach you is how to be a little girly girl.” The little boy scrambled to his feet. The man pushed him along to a nearby wood pile, picked up an ax and split a log in two with one quick blow. “There!” said

the man. "You finish that pile and then we can talk about you having sumpin' to eat."

"But Pappa..." squeaked the boy

"Don't you Pappa me!" The man gave the boy a smack to the side of his head that knocked the boy down. The boy began to cry. The man grabbed the boy by the back of his neck and yanked him to his feet. He put the ax in the boy's hand and screamed at the boy "Now unless you want a good wuppin', you split these logs like I tell ya!". Camo Girl could barely control her crying now. Her big, fleshy hands were pressed against her face so that she could not see, and so that no sound came from her. The Gent's eyes went cold. "OK now ma'am, you come with me." he whispered. They stayed in the woods and circled around so that they were facing the back of the shack. The boy was trying to split logs to their right. The car was barely visible as it was parked near the front of the shack. "OK ma'am." whispered The Gent. "You stay here and be ready to take your boy and run as fast and as far away from here as possible when I give you the sign"

"What sign?" asked Camo Girl

"Oh, you'll know. Just be ready to run with your boy." The Gent fell back into the woods and disappeared from Camo Girl's view. But now, the man came out of the shack and began yelling at the boy, "Didn't I tell you to split these logs?! How many'd you do? One?! You worthless shit! Get your ass back in that shack and get ready for a good wuppin'!" The man grabbed the boy's arm, lifted him off his feet and dragged him into the shack

A moment later, the Ford Fairlane exploded in a huge ball of flames and began to billow thick black smoke. The force of the explosion broke out the windows of the shack. The man and the boy came out. The man ran over to his burning car. He was frantic. He was yelling "What in god's holy name?!!!" The little boy staggered back and away from the flames and was now at the side of the house.

The Gent sprinted out from the woods near the side of the house, scooped up the boy, and tossed something into the open window of the shack. He then ran at full speed

with the boy into the woods where his mother waited. The man looked around and caught just a glimpse of The Gent and the boy heading into the woods. Stunned, he ran into the shack to get his gun. Nobody knew these woods better than him. He'd get this straightened out pretty quickly. Well, on any other day that's what might have happened. But, not today. Within a moment of the man entering the shack it was blown to bits by another larger explosion. What was left of the shack was ablaze, but most of it, including the man, were now just rearranged atoms zooming skyward.

Back at the boat, Dirt and Cappy heard the two explosions and saw the smoke. "Shoulda known this was going to happen." said Dirt. Right about thirty-five minutes from the time he left, The Gent came out of the woods and hopped into the boat. He was red-faced, sweating and out of breath. "Go." he coughed out as he waved his hand north. Cappy pulled the boat back out into the canal and brought it back up to speed. Dirt opened the cockpit refrigerator, took out an ice cold Natty Boh and handed it to The Gent. "Here buddy. Something tells me I think that you earned this."

The Gent, a.k.a. The Candlestick Maker, didn't go for the usual 'sawdust soaked in nitro' dynamite sticks. No, he made his own using nitroglycerin, nitrocellulose and ketone. This produced a stabler stick. Plus, he could size them up to whatever strength the job called for.. The car took a standard one inch diameter, eight inch long stick. The shack, took a bigger stick, one The Gent liked to call a Churchill. It was a good two inches in diameter and a foot long weighing in close to a pound.

Sometimes, even bad guys do good deeds.