

Chris had to restrain himself from glaring.

The man sat in front of him was indeed someone he remembered very, very well. He'd only met him once, but once had been enough.

"Mr. Charles, I'm Jacob Cain," said the man. "Welcome back to the islands. Would you like a drink?"

"I'm alright thank you," replied Chris, clearing his throat.

The bartender reached over the bar, extending his fist. "You made it back to paradise," he said.

Chris bumped his fist, and smiled. "Yep, I'm back Laud. How are you?"

"I got no complaints."

Jacob gave Laud a stern look. The Caucasian American bartender with his distinct gelled-back hair like a Wall Street investor, retreated. He moved to the other side of the octagon-shaped bar to serve another customer among the dozen holiday-makers that surrounded the place. His short-sleeved red shirt with a pattern of white flowers, added to the paradisaical appearance of the bar.

Around the bar were garden stool-chairs, that elevated seated customers to the height of the bar itself. Inside the bar area was an 'island' where bottles of alcohol were stacked up in order of expense. On top of the centre island were the most expensive whiskeys, rums, vodkas, and gins.

A musician played guitar in the corner of the area outside the bar with a sound system supporting his vocals, and a few eager tourists dancing a circle in front of him. Chris remembered the music track from the last time he was there, singing about vacationers, "letting go, having fun, and setting their souls free."

It was the perfect background melody for returning to the island, compelling Chris to inhale his surroundings again. The entire complex of Five O’Clock Somewhere—or Fives as it was referred—was in many ways like a secret jungle garden with a cosy tree house atmosphere. Across from the bar, the wooden planked floor of the restaurant area housed about thirty round tables with garden chairs circling them. It was an open-air establishment with no walls and the second floor above the restaurant held the hotel rooms.

A huge platform stage lay at the back of the restaurant for nightly performances. There was the kitchen tucked away in its own building up a ramp beside the bar, and the barbecue booth stood adjacent to the bar for all the hungry patrons to witness their orders in production.

Beyond the restaurant on a lower level was the beach, paralleling the entire establishment. The view beyond was incredible—the white sand, the sparkling sea, and the sun shining bright against the perfect blue sky with neighbouring islands far off in the distance.

Chris took a breath and turned to Saul, who had a big grin on his face. His small head was hunched over his broad shoulders as he sucked what looked like Cranberry juice through a straw in a tall glass. He wore a blue and white striped shirt over his huge upper body and brown shorts, revealing his stick-like legs. His stature reminded Chris of a movie mob-boss henchman.

“Now, I understand you’re looking for a writing role,” said Jacob, nestling back in his chair with his fingers pressed together in prayer position.

“Yes, I am,” Chris replied.

“Good. Good. I’ve recently started a news site. You might have heard of it. Simple Island Network News or SINN as we like to call it.” He chuckled.

Chris smiled. “No, I haven’t heard of it actually.”

“We think it’s a clever name and essentially, we’re aiming to be the number one news site in the Pharisee Islands.”

Chris shrugged his lips. “Saul told me a little about the role, so I’m really interested.”

“Good, good. There are two competitors on the island who are in the lead at the moment,” continued Jacob. “But my goal is that in a month-” He pointed at Chris. “You’ll make our site number one in the Pharisee Islands. And then we go regional. Take the the number one spot in the Caribbean.”

He had a strange tone, just like Chris recalled from that one meeting. Almost high pitched. He instantly reminded Chris of Draco, his old manager.

“This is what you’ve been looking for dude,” said Saul with an American accent, his grin growing even wider. “Didn’t I tell you I’d hook you up?”

Chris nodded and smiled. “This sounds great Mr. Cain, but there are a few issues I wanted to express.”

“Shoot,” said Jacob, again leaning back in his chair with his fingers poised together.

“First, I don’t have a driving license.”

Jacob appeared unmoved and his round glasses reflected the light, making it hard to see his eyes.

“I’m planning to get one as soon as possible,” continued Chris. “But I’ve got to

organise myself with other things as well.”

“Okay, okay,” replied Jacob “No challenge there. Next?”

“Second, I need to buy a car and I haven’t got any money at the moment.”

“Well we can sort that out. Get you a nice affordable company car. Take out repayments from your monthly salary, no problem.”

Chris winced. “Alright,” he said wondering why he would have to pay for a vehicle that would belong to the company. “The other thing is that my Work Permit is for this bar. I’m sure you’re aware that I can’t legally change that and I’ve been told it’s pretty hard for an ex-pat to obtain two Work Permits. I mean, that’s what I heard when I was here before.”

“Don’t worry about any of that. We can take care of all of it. In fact, if you want, you can switch your Work Permit over to us.”

“Can I do that?”

“Yessssss,” he emphasised, almost singing the word in a laid-back way like it was nothing at all. He sunk deeper into his chair, twirling his hand as if mixing the air. “We can sort that out for you, no challenge. No challenge at all.”

Chris looked across the bar and caught sight of his new manager to-be, Larry, who came speeding around the outside of the octagon. “So you made it back! How are you doing?” Larry said, and his eyes darted between Jacob and Saul.

“I’m well thanks Larry, good to see you,” said Chris. “And-”

“Excuse me,” Jacob interrupted, looking down at Larry. “We’re having an important conversation here.”

“Yeah,” agreed Saul. “A, b, and see you later.”

Chris narrowed his eyes in surprise at Jacob and Saul's dismissive comments, but didn't look at them.

Larry sniggered. "Sorry I said anything," he replied before walking speedily off toward the restaurant area with the beverage glasses he was carrying.

"Stupid white men," said Jacob, whose accent changed strangely into a more Caribbean twang. He looked directly at Chris. "You got a lot of the 'white-man' coming through this bar here. I suppose you're going to be serving dem?"

"They won't be here for long," interrupted Saul, also morphing into a Caribbean accent. "P.I.P for real meh-son!"

"Indeed," said Jacob, whose accent had returned to his high-pitched voice. He stared at Chris. "You like white women?"

"Yeah," replied Chris. "I like all kinds."

"Can't stand them myself," replied Jacob. "Give me black any day. Saul, you like dem white women, don't you?"

Chris noticed it again. The change in accent.

"White woman is easy," said Saul. "White woman don't give you no grief. No headache. Black woman be trouble meh-son."

Jacob laughed. "Nah, not for me. Black is black. Anyhow, Mr. Charles, we can sort the permit issue. No challenge at all."

"Brilliant, that's great," muttered Chris. "Well, if you guys could give me some time to think about it and sort things out with Fives, I'll get back to you A S A P."

"Sure. How about you come into my office tomorrow and let me know your answer." Jacob rose from his stool seat.

“Well, I was thinking a few days, if possible. I’ve got a lot of things to sort out with-”

“Mr. Charles, we can’t wait on you. We’re going to be number one. No time for slacking. We need your commitment and we need to move fast. You want to be on the winning team don’t you?”

“Okay Mr. Cain,” said Chris while nodding. “Where should I meet you tomorrow?”

“You know the central Administration Complex?”

“Yeah, I know the place.”

“Come by there to my office - just ask reception for me. What time do you think you’ll be there?”

“Umm, shall we say one o’ clock”

“Yeah...okay. I will make the time for you. Don’t be late.”

“No definitely not. I’ll be there for sure. And thanks very much for the opportunity.”

Chris extended his hand and they shook.

“Cool dude,” said Saul and fist-bumped Chris.

“See you later,” said Chris. “And thanks very much Saul.”

The two men walked out of the bar area, into the garden.

“Good to have one of ‘dem’ working for you,” chuckled Saul as they disappeared out of sight.

Chris shook his head, fully-knowing he wasn’t supposed to hear that.

“Those are some creepy characters,” said Larry as he emerged at Chris’ side.

Chris turned to see his short, plump future manager standing beside him. His friendly American accent and kind eyes reassured Chris that things were going to be

okay, even though it felt like he was being ensnared.

“Yeah,” mumbled Chris. “They are a little creepy.”

Larry chuckled. “Shall we go inside the office and talk about you getting started?” he asked.

“Great—let’s do it.”

They walked past the garden area complex entrance to a wooden block building that seemed to blend in with the jungle garden surroundings. The air-conditioned office was cooling on the body as Larry swung the door open and Chris followed in.

“Reception staff are usually here, but they’re out today,” said Larry. “So I’m running the show all on my lonesome.”

“Cool.”

“So,” he said as he sat at his desk and wheeled an office chair over to Chris.

“So, what happens next?” replied Chris as he sat.

“You have to pick up your permit which I believe costs -” he grabbed a sheet of paper from his desk. “Four-hundred dollars.”

Chris’ eyes widened.

“You may want to get yourself a cocktail mixing book and a few other props,” continued Larry. “But Laud will help you with all the additional stuff.”

“Okay, wow,” Chris began. “Um, I thought all the permit stuff was done and paid for, wasn’t it?” Calculating it in his head, the move from London had now cost him \$3200 including the air fares. But it would be worth the trouble. It was paradise after all. It’s got to have a cost.

“Nope, you gotta pay for the permit,” said Larry. “And then you need to take your

Food Handler's Test."

"Huh? Okay. What's the Food Handler's Test?"

"Nothing too serious. Just a silly tutorial about basic easy things and then a little exam at the end. Very simple. Nothing to worry about. I think you just missed one and the next one comes up in two weeks."

"Oh really? So I can't start work till that's done?"

"Nope, but don't sweat it. You've done the hard stuff. The whole thing is a long, drawn-out process, but you're almost there."

"Yeah, that stools test was revolting. I can't believe how much loo water holds the stink back. I almost vomited."

He laughed. "They still make you do that, huh?"

"Yeah. It was disgusting." Chris paused as Larry shuffled through some desks, looking for something.

"How long have you been here for then?" said Chris.

"About fifteen years now."

"Really? Wife? Kids?"

"There back in the States." He chuckled.

"Okay."

"Yeah. Best all round setup really."

"Right." Chris nodded feeling awkward, like his question had taken him past the 'no trespassing' sign of Larry's mind.

"Yeah," continued Larry. "So as soon as you've paid for your permit with your Food Handlers Test completed, you can start. And believe me, I'm looking forward to it."



“Oh really.” Chris breathed a nervous chuckle. “Why?”

“Customer service needs improving, big time! And from talking to you, let’s just say your kind of character is needed. I know you’re probably a little anxious, but the rest of the bartending stuff, you’ll just learn it as time goes on. It’s easy. What I told Sandra in recruiting you is our need to boost our relations with customers.” He handed Chris the signed and approved Work Permit document.

“Who’s Sandra?”

“She’s the owner.”

“Okay. Well, brilliant,” said Chris, reviewing the signed and approved papers. “I’m truly looking forward to starting too, but um.” He breathed a heavy sigh. “There’s one major surprise that’s come up.”

Larry’s jovial expression firmed up.

“Do you remember when I told you that my main purpose for coming here was to get a writing job?” said Chris.

Larry remained still. “Yeah,” he droned.

“Well, I um. I just got head-hunted for a journalist role by those guys. I was wondering if we could find a way to work with me having a second job? I was thinking I work the bar on night shifts?”

“Sure, I don’t see that as a problem per say. We can work around it. Only thing is, for the first two weeks, we have to train you in the day. Can’t have you on the night shift to start. No way.”

“Oh. I see,” Chris replied. “Is there no way that can be shorter.”

“Sorry Chris. It’s got to be at least a fortnight of day shifts to get confident with

making the main drinks. Then I can put you on nights. Lisa will be training you during the day. She's really nice. Also—forgot to say—you're going to need a social security card and a bank account as well which can take a few weeks to sort."

"Right. Okay."

"You know if you're quick enough, you should be able to get the permit sorted and put in applications for the social security and bank account today. As for the Food Handler's Test, like I said before, I think the next one is two weeks from now."

"Okay. Okay. May I have a pen and paper? I need to write all this stuff down."

"Sure."

He tore a piece of paper from a memo pad and passed across a pen.

"Thanks. Okay, so I've got to get a bank account, social security number..."

Chris added 'going to the medical unit' and 'returning to the airport to collect his passport' to the list as well.

"...collect my Work Permit and pay four hundred dollars," he continued and jotted down more tasks that came to mind so the list broadened.

**Get Bank Account**

**Get Social Security Card**

**Go to Medical to get tests confirmed**

**Return to Airport to collect Passport**

**Pay \$400 for Work Permit**

**Go to job interview with Jacob Cain**

**Get information about Driving Test**

**Get a vehicle**

**Get a laptop**

“Brilliant. I’d better get to it,” said Chris. “One more thing. Do you know where the government medical unit is? I need to confirm some of my medical documents from the UK. They confiscated my passport at the airport.”

“Wow. They still do that too, huh? Ridiculous. You know it’s illegal, right?”

“No, really? I had no idea.”

“Yeah. You’re gonna find a lot of that kind of thing here.”

Chris frowned, unsure of what Larry meant.

“Government medical is in the same complex as the Labour and Immigration department,” said Larry. “You know where that is?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“They should be able to sign off the documents you have. If you’re really lucky, you might be able to make it in time to get your Work Permit today, but you have to be quick.” He chuckled. “But you still have to wait for the Food Handler’s Test in two weeks.”

“Cool,” Chris said, getting up quickly. “Thanks very much for all your help Larry and I suppose I’ll see you soon.” He took a breath.

They shook hands and Chris left the building. He stepped up to the bar where Laud was serving three cheering women, likely in their early forties. From the opposite side of the bar, Chris looked past the women to the beach and sun shining into the bar—a new start. *The new start. Paradise.*

“So you made it back!” said Laud, laughing and pouring drinks. “When do you start?”

“In two weeks. Got to do the Food Handler’s Test and sort some other details out, but, this is it!”

The women smiled and Chris waved.

“You’re gonna have the women lining up when you get in here. You best be ready!”

Chris smirked and caught three islanders he recognised, staring at him from another side of the bar. One was a tall, bald-headed man with a stud earring, black T-shirt, and blue jeans. His face was fierce. Chris recalled his name was Rich. People called him the local know-it-all man. Others said he was the crime-kingpin of the beach and that his friendly attitude toward the tourists was his cover. His regular drinking partner—who was just as tall as him—was called Raid.

Chris remembered meeting Raid in the one of the local nightspots in the centre of Town called The Fortress of Solitude. Raid’s response to Chris when he’d introduced his identity as the nephew of Vernon Stern, was the first time he felt threatened about being related to the Pharisee Islands’ Police Commissioner.

“You’re the Commissioner’s nephew?” Raid had said, towering above him. “The Commissioner’s a wicked man.”

Raid was a six-foot four, lanky guy and his face drooped as if he was always tired. His yellowing eyes proclaimed that he had no cares in the world. He wore a hat that somehow maintained his huge dreadlocks neatly inside.

Then there was their other partner, Lucian. He was shorter than the other two,

with thin arms, and thin legs. He was a man whose large head and mouth were only surpassed by his immense, protruding belly that he could easily use to rest a drink on. He would often scream, "Waaaaaa," when something surprised him. He always looked like he'd been sleeping in a barn, wearing T-shirts and shorts that appeared dishevelled around the edges.

Chris put his thumb up to them and they in turn nodded their heads, then whispered to each other.

Raid approached. "Commissioner's nephew," he said. Chris could smell his strong breath, like a dose of blue cheese. "You back in paradise?"

"Yep. Gonna be bartending right here."

"Man's gonna be swimming!" he said, his voice elevating. "Right Laud! He's a handsome man! Gonna be eating a lot of food. You make sure to share."

Laud laughed and his American accent turned Caribbean. "A regular sweet-boy."

Chris nodded and smiled. "Well guys. I've got to head off. A lot of things to do."

He could see Vernon far off in the garden area, hidden by the trees, but looking in his direction.

"Catch up with you all soon," Chris added as he turned and left.

Reaching the exit of the Fives' garden area, Chris forced out the request he was loathed to say. He detested asking anyone for anything.

"Everything good?" said Vernon.

"Yeah." Chris paused. "Vernon, um. I've been told the Work Permit costs four hundred dollars."

"Okay," replied Vernon.

Chris took another quiet breath. "Is it possible I can borrow the money?" he said. "I only came here with a few hundred in my pocket and had no idea the permit was going to cost me."

Vernon's face was stern as they walked back to the car and got in.

"Okay," he said. He pulled out a wad of hundred-dollar bills and handed Chris the money.

Chris' stomach sunk as he stuffed it into his wallet. He really hated being in debt to anyone. "Thanks so much for this," he said. "I'll get the money back to you as soon as my first pay cheque comes in."

"Yeah, okay," said Vernon. "What did Cain say?"

"Well, it seems like I've got the job already from the way he was talking. He's asked me to come in to see him tomorrow, but yeah...he was speaking like things were concrete and I was going to get started soon."

"Good."

"If you could drop me by the Labour Department, I'll make my way home from thereafter."

"Sure."

They began the drive back to town.

"I'm back at work tomorrow," said Vernon. "You should be able to take care of yourself with everything else?"

"Yeah, shouldn't be a problem. I remember where most things are."

"What was that guy saying to you?"

"Which guy?"

“The tall rasta.”

“He was just saying hello. He’s that guy that I met last time who’d said ‘you’re a wicked man.’” Chris laughed, but Vernon remained silent.

Chris recalled the first time he’d told Vernon about that interaction. Vernon had chuckled before, but he didn’t this time.

The journey across the bay, then back through the mountains seemed quicker on return. Chris was getting used to the navigation.

At the pinnacle of the mountain was a clear view of Street Village down below with its various, vibrantly-coloured buildings dotting the terrain. Then the magnificent sea and sky spread out after the island to other isles around in the distance.

*What a view*, Chris thought.

They reached the bottom of the hill, that took them straight into town. The roads were busy and slow, with congestion catching them by the traffic lights at one of the major junctions before the roundabout.

“Right,” said Vernon as he parked up on the side of a main road with cars rushing by.

“Okay,” Chris replied. “I’ll see you back at home.”

“Yeah,” said Vernon. “Any trouble—call me.”

“Will do. Thanks very much.”

Chris felt his stomach punch out as Vernon drove off. He was asking too much. Staying at his uncle’s place made him uncomfortable already. Now borrowing money too. He didn’t like it at all and deliberately neglected to tell Vernon that he was going to the medical unit first, then find his own way back to the airport before he could deal with

the Labour Department and finalisation of his Work Permit. It wasn't right to ask anymore of him.

He crossed the busy main road, looking ahead at a huge building complex housing Government departments. Like most buildings in the Pharisee Islands, it was painted a bright colour—light orange in this case. Jogging the black asphalt steps, he entered the sheltered pathway that had signs pointing directions to the various Government sections.

He followed the one to the medical unit, taking some switch-back stairs up a narrow alcove. He found himself on a chrome balcony—the breeze coming in—and pushed open the glass door labelled *Medical*.

“We’re just closing up!” shouted a man with a strong Caribbean accent as Chris perused the white-walled waiting room. He saw the receptionist who was typing at his computer. He had a slim-fit white shirt, tight black trousers, and a hairstyle that represented the black man’s version of a Mohican that Chris had noticed was becoming prevalent in the UK. It seemed that the Caribbean had taken to it as well.

*It was early afternoon, thought Chris. How can they be closing now?*

“I just need something checked, please. It’s of the utmost importance.”

“Oh so just because you say it’s important, I should stop closing up should I?” said the man.

Chris remained quiet.

“It’s not of importance to us,” he continued in a mock British accent. “Do you think that because it’s of importance to you, that we’re to drop everything for you? We’re closing.” He laughed.



A woman came out from a room behind the desk. She was in her thirties, fair skin, with blond hair, and firm facial features making her striking to look at. “Hi sir, how can we help you?” she said.

Chris’ eyes flicked between the islander who had spoken and the blond woman, whose accent was American.

“Hi,” said Chris, reading her badge that said Dr. Lena. “I had some issues coming in through immigration today with these.” He handed her the medical tests.

She scanned the documents. “Yeah, they really prefer the official forms. Not copies.”

“Did you go through the same trouble when you came here? They even took my passport, which I hear is illegal.”

“No,” interrupted the man. “She’s PI born and bred, for real.”

Chris kept his eyes on the doctor.

“If you don’t like how we do things here,” continued the receptionist. “Leave.”

The physician smiled. “We could contact your doctor and get the originals sent via fax? But I assume they’ll be closed. Four hours ahead, right?”

“Yeah,” said Chris.

“Let me look again.”

Chris handed the paperwork back to her.

She reviewed them. Chris kept his eyes on her, hoping.

“Yep, I can approve these,” she said. “It’s going to cost fifty dollars, but I can stamp-approve these right now and then you’ll be able to get your passport back.”

Chris nodded and slowly pulled out his wallet, handing over the money. His jaw

tensed at the idea that he may have to ask Vernon to borrow more money before he got his first pay cheque—a detestable action in his mind. He absolutely hated borrowing off anyone. It was a last resort, yet he'd already done it on his first day. Sweat trickled down his head.

“May I have a paper towel?” he said, noticing a roll on the desk.

“What do you say?” said the man.

“Sorry,” said Chris. “Please.”

The doctor rolled her eyes and pulled a paper towel, smiling sympathetically at Chris. “Here you go.”

Chris patted down his head. “Thanks very much for your help.”

He looked at the time on the clock and saw that he might have enough to make it to the airport and back to the Labour Department to collect his Work Permit card.

“Alright, have a nice day,” she said.

“See you later,” he replied as he breezed out the door.

Chris knew his next step wouldn't be easy. Hitching.

He darted down the staircase, back through the outdoor corridor, and down the stairs. Pacing across the main road to the side with motorists heading in the direction of the airport, he put his thumb out.

This was another aspect he remembered well and hated from last time he was in the PI; relying on the generosity of strangers to get him from point A to point B.

Minutes began to drop off the clock as the ever-blazing heat hit him. Sweat poured out of him so much, it looked as if he had some deficiency.

Got to avoid wearing a black T-shirt in future, he thought.

The heat didn't stop and cars passed by. He could swear he saw islanders pointing and laughing from their cars; big, garish smiles of mocking. The more he saw, the more his face became serious, and the more he felt his chance decreasing of appearing like a friendly person in need.

Why was it taking so long to get a ride? Wasn't this island supposed to have village mentality? Friendlier? Safer? Trusting of newcomers?

He tried to breathe slowly to control his heat receptors, but the sweat kept pouring out—embarrassingly so. He looked terrible.

Twenty minutes had gone by easily and his chances of getting to the airport and back to the Labour Department in time, were looking slimmer.

His frustration grew in the creases on his face. It was hard not to frown. More smiling faces of drivers irritated him further. What was so damn funny?

A tiny four-by-four pulled up—the kind that had a conspicuous feminine look. The vehicle was baby blue and inside, a small Filipino man waved Chris in.

Chris moved quickly as he ran around into the street to jump in the passenger side.

*American cars on British streets—what idiot thought this up?* Chris' mind mumbled.

"Hello," said the man.

"Thanks very much," replied Chris.

"No problem. No problem," he said handing Chris a paper towel from a roll in his glove compartment. His voice was light and airy—almost squeaky with a brokenness to his sentence construction.

He giggled, then left a strange silence permeating the car's atmosphere. "You new here?" he said.

"Yeah. Just got in today." Chris patted himself down and scrunched the towel up in his pocket.

"Yes," replied the man. "I haven't seen you before. You look fresh. Brand new," he added with a slur.

Chris nodded and his eyes receded.

Another silence.

Chris observed something a little odd about his car dashboard. Fixed in the centre was a small stuffed imitation of a large black gorilla cuddling a small brown monkey. Chris's eyes peered to his side at the little Filipino man.

"What do you do?" the man asked .

"I'm a writer, but will be a bartender soon. Just getting my Work Permit sorted so I'm headed to the airport. Are you going near there?"

He chuckled. "That's exactly where I'm going."

Silence yet again.

"So, where you from?" he questioned.

"London."

"Oh wow. London's very nice. Very big. Really good money. Lots to do." He paused. "Why you come here?"

"Looking to build my writing career really. Less competition here for writing jobs, so just hoping I get something soon."

"Hmmm, okay, okay."

The silences made the discussion more of an interview than an informal conversation.

“You a strong a man?” he said as a mixture of a statement and question. “You work out?”

Chris smiled with tight lips. “I do my best.”

“Yes, very strong. Very strong. We should go for a drink.”

Chris’ eyes narrowed as he looked at the happy, little brown monkey on the dashboard, being hugged by the huge black gorilla. “Sure mate. Sure.”

“Yeah. It good to know more people around. Where you live?”

“I’m going to be living with my uncle. He’s the Police Commissioner.”

“Oh wow. Big position. Big power. Wow. So your uncle Police Commissioner?”

“Yep.”

“Wow. Okay. Okay.”

Chris looked out the window. The silence held for a lot longer this time.

“You married?”

“No,” said Chris, now longing for the airport to arrive.

“Girlfriend?”

“Not yet. But hopefully soon.”

“Oh. Oh.”

The longest silence yet pervaded. They arrived at the airport and Chris was opening the door before the car had pulled up. “Thanks very much,” he said.

“See you and good luck,” said the man.

Documents in hand, Chris walked straight to the immigration booth inside the

airport.

He recognised the man at the booth, who's face looked stern, as if he hadn't expected to see Chris again so soon.

"Hey, I got that approval," said Chris handing over the documents.

The man glared at the documents. He disappeared underneath his desk and returned with Chris' passport, adding his own immigration stamp to the documents. He didn't say anything.

"Thanks," said Chris.

"Yeah."

Chris stepped out of the airport. The heat hit him again and the idea of waiting to hitch a ride disgusted him.

He flagged a taxi driver—an islander with a thick head of white hair contrasting his dark skin—standing up eating from a polystyrene box. The driver moved slow, putting the plastic fork back in the box, shutting it, and waving Chris over to his minibus, out of the few lined up.

He pointed to the side door. Chris opened it and jumped in. Before he knew it, the man was driving them out of the airport.

"Where to?" he said.

"Street Village," said Chris.

"That's gonna run you twenty-five."

"Yeah—fine."

The taxi driver's face was miserable—pure vexation with something or someone. He didn't speak the whole journey, which suited Chris as this journey was costing him

considerable money he did not have.

They reached the Labour Department and Chris handed him the twenty-five dollars, feeling a pang of anxiety at his deteriorating funds. The taxi driver didn't say anything nor even look at Chris.

Chris walked into the complex and followed the sign that said *Labour* this time, keeping him on a path on the ground floor that meandered to the other side of the entire building. He pushed open the glass door and entered the air-conditioned seating space.

Windowed booths lined one wall, the centre was aligned with four rows of firmly planted plastic seats, and the sides had a water cooler, magazines on a table, and a ticket machine. He pulled a ticket—a small blue slip with fifty-nine in bold black font—picked up the smoothest-looking magazine of the pile titled *Pharisee Island Lifestyle*, and sat down.

The magazine looked professional and clean with a hard binding. There were photos of two editors in the front—a male and a female in their late thirties, early forties.

He looked up and nodded at one of the three people seated with him; a man of about sixty with a walking stick. The man turned away.

Chris shrugged and flipped through the magazine. He was drawn to an interview piece with an islander artist. He read and his eyes narrowed. The photos were attractive and the overall layout was pleasant, but there were huge grammar and punctuation mistakes. Really long sentences without commas. And even a spelling mistake. He searched through more pages of the publication. The layout was smooth, but he kept seeing little errors; the sorts of mishaps that only a person with an eye for English language would see.

He continued reading another article about the yacht industry and the growing attraction of catamarans over monohulls.

“Calling Fifty-Nine,” said the automated announcement.

Chris got up and walked to the booth with his Work Permit documents in hand.

“Hi, I’ve come to collect my Work Permit please.”

Chris handed the large woman all his documents.

“I’m sorry, what?” she replied. She looked sincerely annoyed by what Chris had said.

“I said I’ve come to collect my Work Permit.”

“And ‘good afternoon’ to you too,” the woman said in a tone that sounded as if Chris were to know why she was angry.

“Um, good afternoon?”

“That’s better. Round here we use manners.”

Chris raised his eye brows. This and the other things he’d experienced today weren’t the relaxed Caribbean demeanour he’d anticipated.

“Your passport as well,” said the woman as she reviewed all the paperwork.

“It’s there,” replied Chris.

She pulled it out from the plastic wallet.

“Okay,” she said. She got up with great strain as if detaching herself from the seat for the first time in weeks. She waddled through the office where Chris could see other employees, typing away at computers, filing documents in cabinets, and talking on phones. It was a medium size office and the few workers there looked very unhappy. At intervals, they peered at Chris in a manner that seemed unwelcoming, then got back to



what they were doing.

The woman tottered over; one hand carrying the paperwork and the other hand loosely swinging around her large waist.

She still didn't look at Chris. "Okay, come inside."

She pressed a button underneath her desk and a door to the side buzzed, with a LED turning green.

Chris walked toward the wooden door and pushed it open.

"Just sit there," she said.

Chris observed an unusual machine connected to a computer and a camera facing in his direction.

The woman walked over to the desk with the peculiar computer and began tapping at the keyboard.

"Face the camera," she said. "Keep your head up. Look in this direction. That's it."

She typed at the keyboard some more and the unusual looking machine began to murmur.

A dispenser beside the machine, pushed out a card.

Chris' eyes revealed awareness as he realised what it was.

"Okay. You're done."

"Thanks very much," said Chris. She handed him his paperwork.

As she walked back to her desk, he looked at the time knowing the bank and social security offices would be closed now. One more establishment popped into his head as a place to visit.

He walked out of the Government building and down the street. The roads were busy with motorists and very few pedestrians—likely because the heat was relentless. His skin started to become moist within seconds as he passed detached buildings housing retailers, then a huge bank, an immense glass building where he could see the employees getting ready to close up. He continued walking across a pleasant park with a statue in the centre of a man who had been commemorated for his philanthropic dedication to the PI. He reached a dock where his destination lay—The Fortress of Solitude Restaurant and Bar. He walked into the open-air restaurant with its standard layout of wooden tables, some with four chairs, some with two, and caught sight of the woman he was looking for.

He smiled and she smiled back.

She was a petite, slim American woman of about fifty. She had bright blue eyes and brilliant, straight white teeth. She was clearly a woman who would've had to keep her own mace to shun the men a few years back, but the beginnings of ageing had commenced with strokes of grey in her brown hair, and wrinkles around her eyes and mouth.

"May," said Chris. "How are you?"

"Chris—welcome back." They hugged. "I'm good. How are you?"

"I'm okay. Just stopped in to say hello."

"Well you made it."

"I know. This is it."

"What's that?" she said pointing to the plastic wallet of papers Chris held.

"Oh this—it's all my documents and a list of things I've got to get done here."

“Oh,” she said with her eyebrows raised. “Take my advice. You’re lucky if you can get one of those things done a week, let alone in a day.”

“Really?”

“Things are slower around here. Something you will have to get used to.”

“Hmm. How have you been?”

“Well, we’re coming into the slow season soon, so trying to make the most of the cruise-ships coming in.”

“Okay, okay. Is business going well?”

“Well we get slammed on our Friday nights—absolutely packed in the bar upstairs. The restaurant’s not doing so well, but we’re getting by.”

“That’s good. Well it’s good to see you May. Sorry, it’s a short visit, but I’ll catch up with you soon.”

“Okay Chris, will see you later.”

The walk home was almost a straight path from the Fortress of Solitude bar on the dock, through the main hub of town. Sweat dripped relentlessly from Chris, making him wonder how he would ever get used to this.

Arriving home, he heard the dogs bark a bit before going quiet again.

The air conditioning of the ceiling fans was a welcome relief. He went straight to his bedroom and lay down on his bed.

Cupping his hands behind his head, he retreated inside himself. There were so many thoughts and emotions travelling through his skull, it was difficult to focus.

Was Vernon still okay with him staying there?

Borrowing money made Chris feel even lower and reminded him that this

relocation was his last ditch effort to salvage his life; like a man full of despair, clinging to a the edge of a cliff, and at the mercy of anyone around him who could help. Emotions of weakness, sapped his confidence to lower regions.

Why did it seem like the people he'd seen today were subtly saying he'd made a big mistake? No one had said anything of the sort, but there was a silent, strange air in the atmosphere, like he'd made a huge mistake in coming to the islands.

The people in the administration processes - why were they so rude? It wasn't just lack of education. It was a clear, shocking, deliberate coarseness to their tone—like some form of defiance to an authority figure.

But one thought trumped the rest.

Working for Jacob Cain—what would it be like?

It appeared like the job was Chris' already; no problem at all. He would have his dream job to be a published writer and that the meeting tomorrow was just a formality. So why did it feel like he was walking into a trap?

He'd only met Jacob Cain once before, but this man had stapled his impression on Chris; oh, he remembered. He remembered it well.