

# The Lee Shore

*A Parable of Apocalypse, Carnal  
Knowledge & Quantum Theory;  
a Sailing Primer . . .  
& a Love Story*

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*All characters appearing in this work, whether somehow living or dead, are inventions of the author's imagination—yet real enough to him, nonetheless. Although several of the locales depicted may be real, their condition is so altered as to render this beside the point. Meanwhile, any disparaging references to the current (and all too real) state of things, which foreshadows the premise, is less than coincidental. But that, fortunately, is not legally actionable.*

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*To the Lady*

*... whose children we are. She conceives of possibilities and gives birth to worlds – which are our siblings.*

*&*

*For my wife*

*... the lady who shares my bed and reads dreams in rough draft.*

*Always*

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## Prologue (& Reprise)

The leading edge of the squall soon encompassed the vessel; and—as its first gust tore the tops off the waves, then flung them at us in splattered, stinging pieces—I heard the high-pitched calm of Carina’s voice recommend, “Hang on,” before we heeled over and our rail went under. No longer able to ease the main, or even reach the jib sheet, from my position—nearly flat athwart the cockpit, but almost vertical now, standing lodged against its opposite side—I held the tiller in both fists and watched water rush past my feet.

Between the tiller’s refusal to come toward me (or admit so much as the possibility of falling further off the wind) and my unwillingness to have it pulled entirely from my grasp (which would have indulged the wind in heading us up completely . . . trading our momentum and means of escape for a few seconds without pressure), there was little else to be done but wait for this to subside—hope it would subside—and take her advice. I hung on.

As we came slightly upright, I glimpsed the jagged silhouette of the Sierra Nevada, still a mile or more off our quarter. We’d been taught from childhood,

Carina and I, that any trifling breeze in these waters was liable to drive you onto that unforgiving coast for want of something better to do. The district behind us was littered with past diversions which ceased to furnish amusement once their hulls had been smashed on the crags and gnawed by the undertow.

Across the cockpit, Neona still clung by one hand . . . yet unemployed fingers of the other began casually sifting strands of long hair out of her smile. There's always that trace of resonant madness when you look into someone else's eyes during a storm—visible with every lightning strike, reflecting shards of it.

Though dampened somewhat, as a general rule, and seldom viewed as a catalyst . . .

If I could have let loose the helm for a moment, I might well have thrown her over the side.

But I couldn't tell if the wind was done clocking (*counterclocking* actually), churning waves into confusion; and it sucked my attention away. Its singing in the rigging rose to some ancient shriek of a siren song about rocks and rest as it chose a direction, until all the waves gestured finally toward the shore.

And while one hand of mine was engaged in compensating our heading, the other busy adjusting the mainsheet, I began to pray . . . after my fashion (which is to visualize the reality I live, not as a nightmare accidentally misconceived or raw material for gratification, but an undeniable condition of growth within its own internal balance). I attempted it, at least—which implies enough uncertainty to upset the equilibrium.

In that momentary splash of cold doubt, I felt as if a turnbuckle failed in my mind; and the structural components of my personal history tore away in a tangle of memories, like standing rigging stretched past its limits by spars too proud to bend to a full gale.

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# Chapter 1

Our household gods were those of wind and water; and some of my earliest memories are of my mother deliberately pouring that liquid over the worn-smooth altar stone outside, embedded in the porch, before a window that remained open in all seasons and most weather. She was always careful not to splash any on the archaic laptop computer, which sat indoors but nearby.

My parents called themselves unorthodox pagans—if they had occasion to call themselves anything—explaining that the languages we used to express ourselves in our home were too biased to stock any precise expression for their ideas. They laughed candidly at all types of pious fundamentalism and considered their spiritual behavior to be an effective, simply more liberal, branch of physics.

Born sometime in the period of complacent decay referred to as “latter half of the twentieth century” in the old reckoning, their specific chronology was vague. I was told history had been diverted and leveed by that time, and ran in a murky trickle—polluted, like so many contemporary streams. A handful of good questions seemed to be the sole legacy either had received from grandparents I never knew.

The two of them met in an altogether different age of the world, while searching for something that was all but gone; and each provided the other with a few of the answers they'd previously lacked. Mutually engaged in saving what little they could, they fostered a passionate conception of what their world *might* have been (and, naturally, invested some of that infatuation into the partnership) . . . but wouldn't conceive children without being able to offer them more of an inheritance than they'd been given themselves.

Consequently, though no one was ready for the changes that came, my parents were at least predisposed. Their stubborn intention of being present at the rebirth helped them through the long labor. Then, one day, they knew there'd be an inheritance after all. Mama always smiled when she said that bearing me hadn't been half as much trouble as playing midwife to the era.

Since I was the only child of their later years, my arrival was far from being the central episode of their lives and happened several chapters afterward, but this postponement made us closer. No longer startled by every plot twist, they'd had ample time to compare values, and learn how to love. The seeds from which our family germinated blew in from all directions, sown by circumstance as much as design; but the roots ran deep, into land that'd once been barren, to nourish some remarkable fruit.

Our community was a collection of migrants and mystics, dreamers and defrocked technicians, salvagers and sailors who managed to share a harbor by recycling their objectivity. While others had lost their hope when existence itself fell in on them, those who

came to Nada Más had only been hoping for so much clear space. An eclectic bunch, they took what made basic sense from any source they chose, kept what worked, and did as they saw fit with it. Our customs were tolerant, and peculiarly our own.

I was taught to feel the energy flowing through all things, and perceive only a difference of form between that which we drew from our geriatric generator and that drawn, through water bowl and open window, from our altar. Neither device actually created energy, merely gathered and shaped it. So I was given to believe.

And we welcomed both varieties to our benefit, although either is capable of violently shocking the thoughtless. Yet—for good or ill, my parents told me—most people are insulated, especially from notions such as those. Our personal deities were simply the aspects of this flow which were closest to our lives.

Handy avatars, really, eternity used because the attire was seductive to us . . . and She knew it, like a paramour at carnival, seeing if you'll recognize Her contours through a costume. (If you'd like to make Her acquaintance and haven't been introduced, She'll answer to Shakti—but the Lady employs nearly as many designations as disguises . . . and my kin generally dispensed with aliases when mentally undressing Her.) Of course, the costume we liked Her best in was translucent as a chemise: just a gentle breeze on accommodating ocean.

What else would you expect from a family whose business consisted of charting a coastline that was still a squalling infant?

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In view of my education, perhaps I should have been better prepared for events. Or perhaps I have too little insulation. My life has certainly been worn smooth as that altar by the actions of water and wind.

I was no more capable of insulating myself from lovers, for instance, than from the surf I played in as a child, and raised to have as little desire to do so—unable to grasp the point or process of taking one into my confidence and bed unless it was to gradually remove every barrier between us, whether prejudice or clothing or something less defined. Though I still can't find the fault in this, my relationships with the women I've most loved were both flawed. A physical gulf opened between me and the first, slowly widening in spite of all our efforts to bridge it. And after the second unlaced her most intimate revelations, let the last suggestive swatch of her mystique slip away, I found her less attractive than when it had clothed her.

While hiking through the hills around us, I never discovered the subtle beginnings of a geologic fault either, though I've often gone miles to cross a rift where the land once split apart.

## Chapter 2

I'd loved Carina from infancy and realized it since adolescence, but the course our lives took fetched us up on an afternoon in late spring when our interlude between storm seasons was nearly done. The last was well behind us, the next undecided whether to commence. Broad patterns are easy enough to discern; if conditions are more localized, they're less predictable. Usually, you'll feel the change coming, but—either way—you weather it as best you can.

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I knew where she'd be . . . leisurely floating on our private patch of salt water, displacing enough density to offset her solitary meditations. On my approach, I kept my tread as soft as possible so she wouldn't hear the creaking of the old wooden dock . . . then sat on the dock box, just watching her glisten—exposed to the elements, sunlight fondling fair curves—and thought the shape of her, as she moved side to side amid spreading ripples, the most heartbreakingly beautiful vision I was ever likely to see again.

Casting back in my mind, I find I still do.

*All right*, I was in love with a metaphor. If you've never been romantically involved with one, you

probably wouldn't understand. I'll admit we had our differences . . . Despite them, I could feel a carnal reaction rising through my flesh. The mind, in any case, is the real location of erotic activity, no matter what bedding might ultimately cushion the results or muffle the urgings. I ought to know. From where I was situated, that much was evident. There was nothing obscure about the image of her that day, until a salt mist rose, along with everything else, and blurred my sight. Wiping it from my eyes, I squinted through the residue.

While waiting for the mood to settle, I concentrated on the comparatively thin lines that tethered her to any affiliation we still had, carefully inspecting them for chafing—which could mean I'd lose her altogether. That familiar anxiety soon tugged my focus involuntarily along them, back to her. As always.

She was finer looking than any in our harbor, or up and down the coast for three hundred miles. There's scant competition these days, but she would have been eye-catching had there been a good deal more. So I spent the bulk of my time tending her whims and genuine needs, and we had annual arguments over what sort of cosmetics she'd wear. It's true she carried a few scars, and that these could have been concealed fairly easily; but resin was scarce, and I preferred to save what we had for more serious injuries. Otherwise her body was in excellent condition, showing its age solely in character and self-assurance. It was an heirloom, after all—having belonged to her grandfather before her—yet agile and graceful still. Built of the early fiberglass a generation before the Fall, from a design even older,

it was molded into a twenty-nine-foot sloop . . . the like of which, although not uncommon in its day, may never be produced again.

Carina was responsive; that much hadn't changed.

"Darling, is that you?" Her transom wriggled sideways again in another vagrant wave, and I remembered making love to her atop several layers of blankets on some gravel beach I couldn't quite recollect. Of the many, above or off to the east of the place where Point Reyes had last been seen, we'd spread those frayed blankets on more than a few. Certain details, however, remained sharp as the pebbles left scattered across them all when the bedrock stopped falling away.

I nodded, then recalled her blindness to most things in this world and said, "It's me, *guapa*. How'd you like to go out tonight?" Her throaty laughter mingled with the lapping of waves against her hull. She couldn't help the maddening wiggle, of course. Carina wasn't a tease in that sense; she'd never learned to be, never had the need to.

So I tugged on the courtesy line and pulled her to me. Once aboard, I patted her cabin house as tenderly as I possibly could and still be sure that she'd "feel" it. When she let out a couple of subdued (if exaggerated) amatory moans, I reckoned she had. "You've absolutely no shame, *morena*."

"No well-adjusted girl does," she replied.

As I removed her sail covers, she started humming a quaint bump-and-grind burlesque theme once universally associated with a stripper's imminent lack of apparel (long since meaningless to anyone else, I guess . . . unless they'd been enrolled in a curriculum

of classical studies permissive as ours was)—and even “*Basta ya, mamacita*” didn’t stop her—then launched into a syncopated commentary on more subtle techniques for disrobing a compliant lover. Somehow I managed to finish this business anyway, throw our lines onto dock and pilings, and push us off from the rest of the world.

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Regardless of her earlier remarks, only when I’d raised the sails and taken her helm did I notice any pleasure in her that might authentically be called physical. After gently pushing the tiller over for our last tack to the harbor entrance, her bow came round—and her sails filled. My free hand hauled them in till the wrinkles disappeared and she began to heel a little onto her side. With the next wave we sliced into, a shudder ran right through her. I felt it vibrating the tiller in my hand and, out of the near silence of rushing water, heard a small contralto catch come and go in her voice. Then she sighed . . .

We made for open ocean where we could be alone and there’d be less need to carefully consider each of our actions, where we could talk together without interruption and share the same sensations washing over us again. Or almost . . .

Occasionally I’d hear her utter another sexual moan, but now they seemed in context and real; and once, when I’d let the helm fall off a bit, she actually whispered, “Harder,” to me with only a thin varnish of humor on her insistence. Toward morning, when the wind had slackened to under ten knots and we were settled onto a broad reach, I playfully asked if

I'd induced her to climax, or should I search out a squall. "Close enough," she replied, and obviously the lady meant it.

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It wasn't until we were headed back that she asked . . . and there was a coy purr in her voice when she did. "You haven't been sleeping at home much lately, old dear. I'm sure I'd have noticed you drunkenly tripping over the dock lines and sprawling into the cockpit if you had."

"I'm not so frequently mired in drink or dock lines as you claim, woman."

"Not till the past few years," she said—I noted the concern in her tone—"and then, granted, not as often as you might be." Her humor returned. "But you're begging the question like an extinct politician. Is she attractive, darling? *Besides* being intelligent, that is (I presume as much). Both libidinous *and* available? Willing, in other words . . . Enthusiastic with your every imaginative—"

"Yes, Carina," I interrupted, "most of those things."

"Good," she said. "Then, for the *most* part, I approve. Why haven't you brought her home? You know I've seldom had objections before." She paused for emphasis. We hadn't had this particular discussion in a long time. "I mean even *before*." Her voice took on a quality that reminded me of how she'd sounded as a child. "I'm aware that I don't . . . interact as I used to, but a good relationship isn't shattered by shifting circumstances. I love you . . . therefore, your pleasure pleases me. Unless, of course"—her tone matured again, became distinctly . . . well, *wifely's* the only

word for it—“she doesn’t deserve you. Or is there another reason I wouldn’t like her? What . . . ? Is she afraid of water or something? If the tart’s given to seasickness, or similar perversions, just entertain her in the forward berth and keep her out of my running rigging.”

I recall gazing out at the phosphorous shine in the trailing edge of our bow wave and saying, “Most call her Naomi, but her name is Neona. And, in response to your last barrage, Carinita, I’m not really sure. She’s from Colorado, so—except for a glance at the sea, somewhere around what used to be Kansas—she’s never been near this much water in her life.

“Apart from that,” I ventured, “you two might find some common ground . . . maybe get on well enough together,” then swatted the cockpit seat next to me, waited for her obligatory “Ouch” prior to adding, “and I’ve never let *anyone* meddle with your running rigging . . . unless the idea appealed to you—even *before*.”

She could hear the quiet that followed and, into it, said softly, “I know, *mi vida*. You’ve always tried to look after me.”

I nearly dredged up a chuckle, but gagged on it and had to heave air all the way from my diaphragm to clear the damned thing. “You were usually pretty determined to look after yourself.” Since there was no reply, I went on. “I haven’t reckoned how well she’d get along on a sailboat, Carina. I’ll bring her round and you can take stock of her.”

“What aren’t you telling me?” she asked. “No little secrets between our sheets, remember.” I smiled at our old pun. “What is it you can’t fathom?”

“Don’t laugh, Carina? *¿Querida?*” She responded with more silence: in essence, *Take your chances*. “What if I were to tell you she can raise the wind?”

Away in the distance, I’d spotted the bonfire our people fueled on fair nights to mark our breakwater, rather than squander electricity on meager traffic. “And how very intoxicated were you?” Carina laughed. Closing my eyes for a moment, I enjoyed the sound anyhow, but this time it seemed like my turn to try my hand at some mute eloquence; and, as I began to head us toward that tiny flicker of light, “All right,” she informed me, “I’m listening.”

## Chapter 3

We'd been becalmed for days . . . and I'd become so frustrated after hours of hand-correcting chart annotations that Carina had finally thrown me out. She ordered me to go enjoy myself, have a few drinks but avoid doing myself any irreparable damage, and not come home till either the wind or my mood lifted. She expected to be taken literally, so I checked her lines and went.

The Half-a-Chance wasn't much of a bar, but then, Nada Más wasn't much of a town. Both of which suited us well enough and served our purposes. We'd no grand ambitions concerning urban development, few pretensions not already dilapidated. I made for that particular collection of gray boards with a once-lurid, far-faded, come-hither mermaid sign hanging skewed, odd chairs and crates strewn in front.

Flopping down on a seat in the still air, I shouted into the dim entrance for the usual (nothing fancy, just domestic and red—not that there was enormous choice in the matter). What emerged was out of the ordinary. When she set the mason jar filled with wine onto the makeshift table, “Shall I call you Ishmael?” she asked.

“Call me what you like,” I replied, looking up. “My father had an antique sense of humor.”

I saw ash-blond hair falling over irises so blue they might have been augered through her into vacant sky behind, over pale breasts with demarcation lines from being previously covered in something a lot more opaque. My thoughts must not have caught up with me yet, for they snagged on a contrast I wouldn’t consciously have made: not only had Carina’s hair and eyes been practically a spectrum darker, her breasts, too, had always tanned exponentially brown. So I moved those stray thoughts along to the towel my new acquaintance wore as a sarong tied at her waist, then on to her calves and bare feet.

As if to prove dry wit was genetic, and could be propagated, like grape vines, I offered a rather tactless assessment. “There’s a modest blush . . . or impending sunburn—but you’re certainly not domestic.”

“You dress more . . . casually here than where I come from,” she said. I heard the awkwardness in the explanation and ignored it, looked back up and past her to the grizzled old man who generally dispensed the drinks and bait and gossip.

“She came in with the trade goods,” he told me. “They dropped her off and picked up cured fish.” He stood there for most of a minute, suffering from an abnormal loss of words. “That’s not to say I swapped somethin’ for her or anything,” he stipulated all of a sudden. “Paid her own freight. May be workin’ here.” It didn’t sound as if he’d made up his mind. “For a room an’ all.”

“Is she working here now?” I asked.

He had to ponder it another few seconds, ultimately said, “Not so’s you’d notice.”

There was some invitation implicit in her smile, which I accepted by pointing to a chair. “In that case . . . bring us another,” I told him. To her, I said, “Since they’re both produced locally, the wine’s better than the beer.” I wasn’t sure which remark he was scowling at, but he did as I asked. “Plenty of body, perhaps a trifle sweet . . . but the vineyards are only beginning to truly revive.” She wasn’t sure if the conversation was a game. Then, I wasn’t sure myself.

“It has a hopeful taste to it, though.” I tilted the jar and poured the first few drops into the coarse sand at my feet before raising it to my mouth. She appraised me, curious. “Custom,” I told her, recited, “*Salud*,” and drank.

She shook her head—no more than a compass point (not quite a dozen degrees)—puzzled eyes amid loose hair, shoulders rising expressively up through it, nipples proffering glimpses from beneath. “I was simply wishing you well-being,” I said, but was so taken with her gesture I had the slightly wicked desire to see her repeat it. “*No importa*,” I tossed in, instinctively trolling.

She did just that. I followed it with pleasure, grinned too broadly, and shook my own (four points or more). There was reciprocal amusement in those eyes, but a small corresponding frown around her mouth. “I don’t understand the dialect.”

“*Lo siento*,” I apologized—“I’m sorry”—and meant it. She shrugged but didn’t smile. “I was being self-indulgent.”

“I see nothing intrinsically wrong with self-indulgence,” she said. *Then* she smiled.

“I could teach you if you’d like.”

She kept smiling, but her lips parted. “Dialect?” she asked . . . observed me without bothering to blink, but lowered her eyelids and did so through her lashes. “Customs?” This time when she shook her head and said, “Not at the moment,” it was more of a swaying movement, involving her whole upper torso, that ended with a deliberately lewd little shimmy. Dispersed in a nimbus of flailing hair, immaculate laughter erupting from a calculated pout . . . she transubstantiated to quivering flesh—conscious of the effect. So she quelled it. Her face, with a genuine bloom of embarrassment, turned downward to her glass and she peeked up shyly past that camouflage of lashes once more. Meanwhile, she’d betrayed the entire demure pose with a still-lascivious grin. “Or was self-indulgence what you had in mind?”

I considered that question for a long time.

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At first, we merely sipped the drinks, her watching the water, me watching her. “It’s vast.”

“Always was a few thousand miles across,” I mentioned, “and a bit wider than that recently.”

“I don’t like to lose control,” she said softly and dropped her focus to her wine. “You know how to control it though, don’t you?”

Hoisting my brows a fraction, “Yeah,” I answered, “ordinarily I do. On occasion, I’ll have about three too many, but even then—”

“No,” she interrupted, whipping blonde hair back and forth again, “I meant the sea.”

I swirled the wine, regarding wavelets splashing against the inside of the jar, and very carefully, very clearly said, “Never. Which is not to say I don’t know my craft. I do my damndest to cooperate with it . . . roll with it . . . keep in harmony with it”—glancing at the ocean, I murmured, “and thanks for the dance, Lady,” under my breath—“but never do I for a moment entertain the notion of *controlling* it.” When I’d returned my full attention to my current companion, who’d gone out of her way to incarnate specifically as the provocative female placed at my table, I discovered I already had hers. She’d embarked on a personal reconnaissance foray, studying me . . . and *I* sighed this time.

“You don’t get it, do you? At his very best, a sailor becomes attuned to the elements around him the way standing rigging is tuned to keep a mast in balance under varying loads from various angles. If you can put yourself *there*—and sometimes you can—you’re no longer responding; your responses seem spliced to the stimuli . . . and the question of what’s controlling whom becomes irrelevant, because it’s not one you could put to the splice in a line when the length of it’s taut. The process can’t be dismantled into cause and effect . . . unless you commence second-guessing.” She drained her glass without taking her gaze off me. “It’s the same with everything,” I added.

“Is it really?” she asked, staring back out to sea. Lost in some reverie of her own, she sat gliding her fingertips over the perspiration on her skin. I motioned the old man for two more.

She stroked condensation off the cracked tumbler onto her forehead, since the wine it held was still cool from being caved, though—gods know—not cold, while I pushed the sweat out of my eyebrows with my thumb. “Humidity won’t lift in dead air,” I muttered. “Makes the heat oppressive.”

Her nostrils distended to draw the dormant atmosphere in, and a tiny hum of agreement seeped back through them. The rest of it had to wait and escape more quietly past her teeth when she inevitably opened her mouth. Next, she shut her eyes by half and stretched out both arms with hands twisted at an oblique angle, as if she were about to fly away . . . but delaying it. The proprietor stood there for another stunned moment, watching minuscule streams of sweat slide down her body, grunted to himself and walked off. So he wasn’t there when the moisture on her skin began to dry and the first breath of wind we’d had in days fluttered in her hair. She stirred after that, located her glass and drained it again . . . then picked up mine.

“What were you about just now?” I asked her.

“Cooperating?” she answered. “Splicing together some cause and effect? Thought a little ventilation might be nice.” She laughed, and I joined her.

It was a slight breeze—ambivalent as the woman who’d inferred it . . . yet almost that refreshing—and though it appeared mere coincidence, I felt obliged to her for any respite, confessed as much. Plus something else: “No mariner set adrift could fail to appreciate a creature with such . . . practical charms. You’d make quite an accomplice to a helmsman in the doldrums. But if creatures that exotic were to consort

with common sailors, there's no telling where it would lead."

She ran her fingertips up *my* forearm this time. "I'll bear that in mind," she told me, "though I suppose the results might tend to be somewhat mood dependent."

"What brought you here, anyway?"

"See the world," she replied. "Or what's left of it. To find the edge and look over." She raised her head and scanned the village, the mountains that rose behind it, then the horizon where the sun was slipping into the Pacific like so much unstable real estate. "And this is the edge."

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Eventually—after emptying another bottle of the local pride and sharing a few bowls of even better homegrown ganja, then teaching her to play backgammon and losing the last six straight games ("Once you stop second-guessing, it *does* seem to work with everything," she commented. "Well, I've worshipped at that shrine all my life," I told her, "without half so much obvious success"), after showing her how to peel shrimp in exchange for her subsequent demonstration of how to peel a sarong . . . then making an urgent and omnivorous kind of love very slowly, as if both of us had been famished—we lay tangled and resting on the bed in her sparse room above the tavern. The breeze kept rising all evening, to a steady fifteen knots with gusts of twenty-five or more. "If this wind gets much stronger," I noted idly, "I ought to go check Carina's lines."

Neona snuggled in closer and nibbled at random. "Can't she take care of herself tonight?" she asked.

"No, she *can't*," I snapped—the reaction was so abrupt it unsettled her—and listened to the rhythmic creaking of the old sign out front . . . until it gradually diminished. "But she'll be all right for the time being."

Neona propped herself up on one elbow, searching my face in the shadows. "You talk about her as if she were your wife."

"By our customs, she is."

"Maybe I should tone it down?" she asked. Instead of answering, I just pulled her back to me. The weather—never what I'd have called inclement that night, yet prone to turbulence throughout—suffused her attitude . . . or took cues from it, and settled quietly before morning. So did we.

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A few days later, lying in the same place and position, "Tell me about Carina," she suggested. I knew Neona was waiting there in the darkness while I absently stroked her hair. Her nails prodded at my matted chest, and somehow it felt like a genuine need to understand. I suppose the silence was threatening to grow too large to be filled, because she went on tentatively, "The *Lady Carina* seems to be some sort of legend around here."

"She is," I told her, "though that wasn't always the name of the boat."

**That's all for the moment, I'm afraid.**

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