

Leviathan

by
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Leviathan is a work of fiction and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Chapter 1

At last, the anchor was up, the sails were set,
and off we glided.

Herman Melville, Moby-Dick

Tommy Chiaravallo groaned, punched the pillow into a more supportive shape and rolled onto his side. It didn't work; the cat followed the shift of position and continued rhythmically to knead Tommy's abdomen with outstretched paws.

Tommy opened his right eye and sighted on the bedside clock. Four A.M.

"Yo, Ralphie, knock it off, buddy," he whispered.

Ralph paused only for an instant, then began kneading again.

"Fucking cat," Tommy said in a quiet tone he hoped wouldn't wake the woman sleeping beside him. "Jesus, Ralphie, leave me alone."

The cat paused and stared at Tommy for a long moment with infinitely mysterious green eyes, in which Tommy caught a glint of moonlight.

Tommy sighed and closed his eyes, then turned onto his other side. Ralph immediately followed the movement of Tommy's body.

"Fuck!" Tommy said. The cat's paws kept pushing against his bladder. He groaned again. The sensation of fullness could no longer be ignored; he definitely needed to get up to pee.

Celeste moaned and shifted beneath the covers.

"Tommy?" she murmured.

"Go back to sleep, honeybuns," he whispered. "It's just Ralph. Something's bugging him, now I gotta pee."

Tommy got out of bed as quietly as he could, hoping Celeste would drift off again. Ralph excitedly hopped off the bed and circled him, purring loudly, rubbing against his bare ankles.

"Too fucking early for this," Tommy said between yawns. "Bad habit to start, Ralphie boy." He padded, barefoot, into the bathroom, opened the fly of his pants and took aim with a sigh of vast relief.

It was the middle of May, still chilly in Bucks County, Pennsylvania; the tile floor was cold beneath his feet. The nearly full moon had not yet set and when Tommy finished and glanced out the window to the side of the toilet he saw four dark shapes slowly approaching his house on the street below, moving as stealthily as sharks.

None of the cars had its headlights on. They pulled up at the curb, two of them placed carefully, bumpers touching, across the end of his driveway, blocking it. The moonlight was bright enough for Tommy to see that the cars were distinctively white over black.

"Shit," he said. "Ralphie, I fucking love you, buddy."

Celeste moaned and tossed in her sleep. Tommy didn't bother to shake off the last drops; he shoved his penis into his fly while he ran through the bedroom.

He galloped down the stairs two at a time. Doors led from the kitchen through a laundry room, then to the garage; he bolted through them. Tommy ran out the door in the side of the garage that opened to the deck and then kept right on running: across the deck, straight across the backyard, past the pool, through the gate in the split rail fence at the rear of the property.

He scrambled down the steep, muddy embankment that ran alongside a gurgling trickle of a stream in the woods behind the house and—his bare feet cold and torn by brambles—trotted north. He was in better shape than he'd been since high school and he jogged along at as steady a pace as he could manage, ignoring the cuts on his feet, the poison ivy, sloshing through the ankle high water. Where there were deeper pools he was forced out of the streambed, maneuvering instead through the thick tangle of brush, glad he'd worn a tee-shirt to bed because—in spite of the exercise—his pants were soaked to well above his knees and the air was cold against his skin.

He fell several times and slid on the mud more times than could be counted, but he maintained as brisk a pace as he could and kept moving.

He knew exactly where he was going; he had a car hidden behind locked doors less than two miles away. It had Maryland plates and was registered to Thomas Chambers, a resident of the city of Annapolis in that state, a fake identity Tommy had paid a great deal to create. There were packed suitcases in the trunk: enough fresh clothes for a week, granola bars, bottles of water, a sleek handgun tucked into an ankle holster, and a duffle bag full of cash.

By the time the police began relentlessly ringing the bell and pounding on his front door, Tommy was too far away to hear them, or to hear Celeste's loud complaints. She was a smart girl; waking up to cops demanding entrance, yelling that they had a warrant, with no boyfriend beside her in bed—but with an agitated, circling cat—she stalled as long as she could before opening the door, hoping to buy Tommy more time.

There were four uniformed officers, three plainclothes detectives, two warrants and one drug-sniffing dog. The first document gave the cops the right to search the house for illegal drugs and weapons, the second the right to arrest one Thomas Chiaravallo. None of that surprised Celeste. In the interest of full disclosure, of beginning a new relationship with honesty, Tommy had been very blunt with her about how he had made his money. What did surprise her, however—and “surprise” is way too mild a word for her reaction—was the *why* of the warrant for Tommy's arrest.

He'd sold drugs; she understood that. He said that part of his life was over and she aspired to believe him. There were other things, regular monthly payments that were obviously bribes, some murkiness surrounding the hedge fund he managed, some oddities involving his income tax. Yet the warrant noted none of that. Instead, Tommy was wanted for murder, and the name of the victim shocked Celeste so much that she plopped right down on a leather loveseat, mouth open, wide-eyed.

“You've got to be shitting me!” Celeste said, breaking the only rule in life that she felt really mattered, the one about not talking to cops without a lawyer within eighteen inches of your elbow.