

Contraband (A Stone Barrington Novel)

To Download this book in many format Visit :

<https://wocoentala.org/source1/9398133460f8e2d56f45f2e759b9c4c4>

Stone Barrington is caught in the web of a national smuggling operation in the latest action-packed thriller from the #1 New York Times bestselling author.

Stone Barrington is getting some much-needed rest and relaxation in the Florida sun when trouble falls from the sky--literally. Intrigued by the suspicious circumstances surrounding this event, Stone joins forces with a sharp-witted and alluring local detective to investigate. But they run into a problem: the evidence keeps disappearing.

From the laid-back Key West shores to the bustling Manhattan streets, Stone sets out to connect the dots between the crimes that seem to follow him wherever he travels. His investigations only lead to more questions, and shocking connections between old and new acquaintances. But as Stone must quickly learn, answers--and enemies--are often hiding in plain sight . . .

Stuart Woods is the author of more than seventy-five novels, including the # 1 New York Times-bestselling Stone Barrington series. He is a native of Georgia and began his writing career in the advertising industry. *Chiefs*, his debut in 1981, won the Edgar Award. An avid sailor and pilot, Woods lives in Florida, Maine, and New Mexico.

Stone Barrington lay, naked and dozing, on the upper deck of *Breeze*, the large motor yacht he co-owned with his business partners, Mike Freeman and Charley Fox. His friends Dino and Vivian Bacchetti drowsed on nearby deck chairs. They were anchored, late in the day, in the harbor of Fort Jefferson, the pre-Civil War installation that had been a prison for Confederate soldiers during what Southerners still liked to call the War Between the States. Seventy miles east of Key West, the anchorage was gin-clear and usually occupied by a few yachts, but now all was quiet: the last boat and seaplane of the day having departed, and the lagoon was theirs.

A distant buzzing noise penetrated Stone's semiconsciousness, then it stopped and started again. Stone opened an eye--which was pointed to the east, away from the low sun--and found a black, insect-like spot in the air, getting larger. As it approached, it grew in size until it was clearly a small, high-winged aircraft--probably a Cessna--equipped with floats. Except something was wrong.

Stone sat up on his flat deck chair and looked at the plane with both eyes. One of the floats, the one affixed under the left wing, was no longer affixed, it was dangling. And one other thing: the buzzing had stopped completely, and so had the propeller, as the pilot wisely feathered it to give himself less drag and more glide distance.

Dino sat up and looked around. "What was that noise?" he asked.

Stone pointed. "It isn't noisy anymore."

The airplane grew closer and lower. "What's that thing hanging off the left wing?"

"It used to be a float," Stone said, "like the one under the other wing, but now it's just a hazard."

"How can he land it like that?" Dino asked. Viv was now awake and also looking at the airplane, perhaps a quarter mile out.

"With difficulty," Stone said. "Dino, please ask Captain Todd to launch the rubber dinghy right now." Dino ran down the stairs to the main deck, while Stone stood up and followed the flight path, forgetting that he had been naked under his small towel.

Luckily, Viv's gaze was on the airplane's equipment, not his. "That looks awful," she said.

Stone watched the airplane—probably a Cessna 206, a kind of flying station wagon—turn left, then right, and finally straight in for an apparent attempt at landing in the harbor.

Captain Todd ran up to the top deck, followed by two of his girl crew members, and began clearing away the RIB, a rubber dinghy with a fiberglass hull and two outboards.

Stone's gaze was still fixed on the airplane: a pilot, no visible passengers. He could see that there was no belt across his chest, as there should have been, just a yellow shirt. The airplane touched down lightly on its good, right float about a hundred yards ahead of the yacht. The pilot was cheating right with the rudder and ailerons, in an effort to keep the bad float out of the water for as long as possible, which wasn't long. The left wing came down and its tip slammed into the water, spinning the airplane around 180 degrees while separating the wing from the fuselage, and coming to a halt amidships of the yacht, about

thirty yards out. It immediately began to sink.

Stone, without really thinking, backed up to the rail behind him and began running across the deck. He got a foot on the opposite rail and propelled himself over it, missing the main-deck railing by a few feet. He finished in a not-too-bad dive and grabbed the biggest breath he could before his hands struck the sea. He leveled off a few feet below the surface and began swimming toward where he remembered the airplane to be, while blinking rapidly to get his eyes accustomed to the salt water. He didn't have far to go. He reached the aircraft as it struck bottom with the right wing, and he got hold of the handle on the pilot-side door before the fuselage could settle on the bottom. He worked the handle and tried to yank the door open. It came slowly, helped by the fact that the pilot's window was open, allowing water to rush into the fuselage and taking some of the pressure off the door. The pilot's chin rested on his chest, and blood was flowing from a cut high on his forehead.

Stone braced a knee on the fuselage and slowly forced the door wide open. The pilot was fastened to his seat by a lap belt, and his yellow shirt turned out to be a life jacket. Stone got the seat belt unfastened, grabbed the man by his longish hair, pulled him free of his seat, and yanked the CO2 cord on the life jacket. As the vest filled and the pilot began rising, Stone looked into the rear of the airplane for other passengers, but saw only several pieces of black aluminum luggage under a cargo net. He pushed off the bottom as hard as he could and stayed with the pilot.

He was in no more than twelve or fourteen feet of water, but the surface seemed very far away. He held his breath as long as he could, then began to let it out slowly, then he was up and gasping for fresh air. The pilot floated on his back next to him.

Dino jumped into the water beside Stone and helped him hold on to the pilot. The RIB was started and drew up beside them. Hands came to the rescue, and Stone was relieved of the load. He grabbed a rope handhold on the RIB's float and hugged the rubber, sucking in as much air as he could. Finally, they dragged him aboard, limp and puffing.

"Is he alive?" Stone asked nobody in particular.

"Alive and coughing up seawater." Todd said.

They pulled the RIB alongside the yacht, hooked up the cables from the double winch, and soon, with six people aboard, were hoisted slowly to the top deck and set gently down into the boat's cradle.

"Jenny!" Todd yelled at another hand on the stairs. "Call the Coast Guard on channel sixteen and tell them we have a light aircraft down at Fort Jefferson, one survivor with a head wound, and we need a chopper here pronto!"

Jenny turned and ran down the stairs.

The two girls in the RIB, both trained EMTs, started to work on the pilot while Todd brought them a large medical kit.

"He's going to need half a dozen stitches," one of them said. "And he's got a couple of broken ribs. But he's breathing normally, no sign that the ribs have penetrated anything."

After what seemed an eternity to Stone, a helicopter appeared, low over the water. It spun around and hovered over the top deck of the yacht and a rescue diver, who had been sitting in the open doorway, his legs dangling, was lowered a dozen feet onto the deck, in a rescue basket.

Dino, Todd, and the two crew lifted the pilot gently into the basket, and it was raised and brought into the copter. As it settled onto the cabin floor there was a puff of smoke from inside the helicopter, accompanied by a screeching noise. The chopper rose and hovered beside the yacht for a moment.

There was the squawk of a voice on the rescue diver's helmet radio, then the chopper rose and turned east, toward Key West. It made a low pass over the yacht, and a yellow nylon duffel was tossed out and landed on the yacht's deck. Then the copter turned for Key West, climbing quickly and disappearing. The sun was now half a red ball behind them as it eased its way below the horizon.

The rescue diver unsnapped his chin strap and pulled off his helmet, releasing a cascade of shoulder-length blond hair.

For the first time, Stone realized there were breasts under the jumpsuit.

"Hi," the diver said. "I'm Max. The chopper has had a winch malfunction and couldn't get me back aboard. They're low on fuel, so they beat it back to Key West without me. Can I hitch a ride to wherever you're going?"

Stone grinned at the sunburned face. "I think we can find room for you," he said.

"I like your outfit," she said.

Stone, realizing he was still naked, grabbed a towel and secured it around his waist. "Let me get you a robe," he said, grabbing a terry robe and helping her into it.

She glanced at her divers wristwatch. "I'm now off duty," she said. "Any hope of a drink?"

"Right this way," Stone said, grabbing her duffel and escorting her to the stairs.

She shucked off the jumpsuit, revealing a tanned, curvy body clad only in a yellow bikini.

Dino turned to Viv. "Look at that," he said, shaking his head in wonder. "Stone gets dumped a week ago in New York, then he comes down here and another woman falls from the sky."

2

They descended to the main deck and walked into the saloon, as the British and Stone liked to call it. Dino and Viv were nowhere to be seen.

"I guess Dino and Viv are freshening up," he said.

"I could use some freshening, too," Max replied. "May I borrow a shower?"

"Let's find you a cabin," Stone said. "Four to choose from." He led her down the companionway and opened the door to a cabin.

"Wow," Max said, "this is bigger than my bedroom at home."

Stone showed her where the towels were. "Come on upstairs when you're ready."

"Where is your cabin?" she asked.

"Right next door." He closed the door behind him, went into the owner's cabin, shaved, showered, and put on some white trousers, a white T-shirt and a blue blazer, then went up to the saloon. Dino and Viv were tucking into vodka gimlets.

"So, where's the angel?" Dino asked.

"Showering, etcetera, etcetera."

Before he could pour himself a drink, Max came up into the saloon, wearing tight white jeans, a red shirt tied above her navel, and sandals. There was a gold badge affixed to her white belt. "Yes, thank you," she said. "I'll have whatever you're having."

Stone went to the bar, took a frosty bottle from the freezer, and poured them each a drink.

"Mmmm," she said, "breathtaking! What is it?"

"A vodka gimlet," Stone replied. "Have a seat and tell us about being in the Coast Guard."

"I'm not in the Coast Guard," she replied. "I'm a Key West police detective. We've been doing chopper training with the Coast Guard. I'm Max Crowley."

"Well, you're among friends, Max," Stone said. "I'm a retired cop, and so is Viv. Dino, I should warn you, suffers from the delusion that he is the police commissioner of New York City, so humor him."

"Bacchetti? Is that your last name?" Max asked.

"It is," Dino said.

"Mine, too," Viv said.

"I've read a couple of law enforcement magazine pieces you've written, Commissioner. They were very good."

"Thank you, ma'am," Dino replied.

"What happened with the airplane?" Max asked Stone.

"Two things, apparently," Stone replied. "He had a damaged portside float, and he was out of fuel. The airplane is on the bottom about thirty yards that way." He pointed.

"No other passengers?"

"None. Just some luggage secured with a cargo net in the rear compartment."

"In Key West we call that salvage," she said. "Can we have a look at it tomorrow?"

"Sure, we've got SCUBA equipment."

A crew came in and served a tray of canapŽs, and Stone got up to refresh their drinks.

"I warn you," Viv said to Max, "the first gimlet is delicious. The second is dangerous."

"Don't worry, I've got a hollow leg," Max replied.

"Is 'Max' short for something?"

"Maxine, a name I despise. I was named after a rich aunt, in the hope that she'd leave me some money."

"Did she?"

"Not yet. We're still waiting for her to fall off the twig."

"How old is she?" Dino asked.

"Ninety-something, I think. She won't tell us."

"How long have you been on the Key West force?" Dino asked.

"Nearly ten years. I was a Monroe County deputy sheriff for two years before that."

"What's your current assignment?"

"Whatever I catch," Max replied. "Burglary, homicide, sex crimes, domestic abuse. We're a small force."

They sat down to a dinner of Caesar salad, porterhouse steak, baked potatoes, and green peas. Stone poured from a bottle of cabernet. Between courses, Max got a phone call and excused herself from the table to answer it. She spoke for a moment, then came back to her seat. "That was my boss," she said. "Captain Taylor. He wants to know how long I'll be, ah, at sea."

"We'll be here two nights," Stone said. "Is that long enough?"

"I told him that was my best guess. Oh, and he said the pilot made it to Key West Hospital okay, and after emergency room treatment, he's resting comfortably."

"Is he talking?" Stone asked. "I'd like to know what he was doing when everything went to hell, especially how he managed to run out of fuel."

"When I said he is resting comfortably," Max said, "I should have said sedated, to keep him from moving around too much with three broken ribs."

"Three?" Stone asked. "Our crew said two."

"The X-rays say three. Turns out I know the guy from around town: I didn't recognize him when we loaded him into the basket. His name is Al Dix, aka Dixie. He hangs out at the Lame Duck, a music bar in town, and he gives flying lessons and does ferry flights for a living. He's thought to be a good pilot, with several type ratings."

"He did as good a job on the landing as anyone could have, under the circumstances," Stone said.

"When can he talk?" Dino asked.

"Tomorrow or the next day," she said.

After dinner they took their cognacs out to the fantail and enjoyed the night. There was no moon, and the incredibly bright Milky Way splashed across the sky.

"You forget what it's like out here, with no town lights to ruin things," Stone said.

"It's just spectacular," Max said.

Stone pointed at the other end of the lagoon. "We've got company."

"I didn't hear anybody come in," Dino said.

"I guess we were at dinner."

"It looks to be fifty or sixty feet," Max said, "with a dark hull and no cabin lights burning. Hard to make out in this light."

"I guess they turned in early," Stone said. "We'll get a better look at them in the morning."

Viv stood up and yawned. "I don't know about you all," she said, "but I'm bushed. This kind of yachting is hard work." She kicked Dino's foot.

Other Books

The Complete Index to British Sound Film Since 1928, From the editor of the Complete Index to World Film comes an equally comprehensive, if specialized, sourcebook on the output of the British film industry in the sound era. A vast range of theatrical styles and talents are covered in 11 fast-access indexes, including: -- 12,900 film entries with information on title, year, director(s), actor(s), type of film, length, alternative title, production/releasing company, and coproducing countries -- 3,900 directors -- 24,600 actors -- 1,100 cinematographers -- 1,200 composers -- 2,400 authors whose literary works were adapted to the screen

???. .