

P U R S U I T

A TALE OF BISHOP'S ISLAND

written and illustrated by

JASON GARRETT

visit the author site at

www.authorjasongarrett.com

ONE

The view of the Pacific Ocean from the southern crests of Chapel Port always made Aryn Rayburn's heart beat a little faster. Regardless of how many places she had traveled to around the world, this view was the one that made her feel most connected with life. A few miles east, the contour sloped downward to meet the sea at such a steep angle that the coastal road became unusable during the winter months. In just a few weeks, travelers would begin finding alternate routes, leaving the road abandoned until the spring thaw.

During those months Aryn, a former Olympian, would trade in her running shoes for skis so she could use the road as her own private slalom course. In years gone by, she had traveled cross-country on skis from neighboring Jacoby Fields some thirty kilometers along the city limits towards her parent's home in Wicker Bay. Of course, that was before the tragic accident that changed her life, when she was still the beloved daughter of Bishop's Island. Like the island of her birth and its

citizens, Aryn had endured great tragedies and though her heart had been broken, her spirit remained strong.

Situated only fourteen kilometers off the shores of the Pacific Northwest, Bishop's Island took its name from the Civil War merchant, Nathaniel Bishop. Settled as a place untouched by the blood of war, Bishop invited likeminded families to start new lives there. Years passed and the settlers had become established before they learned of Bishop's true tyranny. Rather than live in fear and oppression, some islanders fought back and forever established the independence and determination of Bishop's Island.

For six generations, the citizens of Bishop's Island remained stalwart in the midst of tragedy. Five epic events shook the island to its very foundation, yet every time the people dusted themselves off and kept rebuilding. A shrine remembering one such event lay in the approaching horizon as Aryn continued her sprint. Since her family helped overthrow Nathaniel Bishop, it was no surprise that Aryn's own morality and vigorous determination defined her.

By the time she reached the McMannis Memorial Prayer Garden, Aryn had already run two kilometers further than her physical therapist had recommended. What they did not know, and what she would not tell them, was that the garden was only the halfway mark on her daily run. With everything that had been going on in her life in recent weeks, Aryn had awoken that same morning with an urgent need to visit this place in search of a connection that seemed to be lacking.

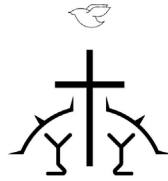
Never one to admit her struggles, at least not to those around her, she was pleased that she had ignored their advice and pushed herself. It was the pain, burning in the muscles and bones, which reminded her that she truly was alive. As she drank chilled water and breathed damp December air, she could feel her heart pumping with such ferocity that she swore it might burst from her chest. Through it all, she smiled to herself and looked around the terrace view.

The garden, named for the family of Robert McMannis, was a memorial to the former Mayor of Chapel Port and the forty-one lives lost on Bishop's Island in the collapse of Hollis Bridge twenty-six years earlier. A two-acre flower garden that overlooked the Pacific, it had become a place of serenity and understanding for the citizens of the Island. For Aryn, the garden held a special significance in much the same way as the collapse of Hollis Bridge. The area of the garden where she found herself was the same place where her husband, Ryan, had proposed marriage.

Hollis Bridge had taken the life of her beloved grandfather and, in some ways, had given her a husband. It was the garden where they met and where she knew she would love him forever. Thinking back on those days, Aryn wished now more than ever that she had done so many things differently. A single tear ran down her face and mixed with the sweat on her skin as she massaged her right thigh.

Shutting her eyes tightly, as though to strangle the thoughts she was having, she forced herself to hold on to the pain. Kneeling and pivoting, she reversed her body and leaned her forearms onto the stone surface of

a bench she personally commissioned for dedication in the prayer garden. On its face was a simple message, hidden in an artistically created glyph she designed and had etched on the marble.



“Seated with God”

She needed to feel His peace today and prayed it would flow over all the hearts on the island. Staring at the trees lining the road, Aryn closed her eyes and bowed her head in tranquil prayer. Unbeknownst to her, however, she had not chosen as secluded a position as she believed. As the zoom lens of a camera focused on her, a handful of high-resolution digital photos captured her act of belief.

From the cab of a pickup truck, two men watched Aryn; one snapping photographs and the other recording her prayer through a parabolic microphone aimed in her direction. The photographer continued to snap pictures of the athletic blonde, while the driver listened to the heartfelt prayer. Though Aryn wept, the man remained steely-eyed and unmoved even when she looked to the sky and opened her eyes. As though she saw them, a look of surprise lit her face, and she rose to run in the same direction from which she had come.

“Tight shape for an historian,” the man with the camera remarked and added, “She has to have some kinda spirit to be out runnin’ in this weather. That’ll make her extra fun to break. Shoo, we ain’t had one this hot in a while now.”

Glowing through squinted eyes at his passenger, the driver replied, “Call Connor and tell him she’s headed back.”

As the driver, a man named Sutter, started up the truck, he watched Aryn taking long, strong strides across the pathless hillside. Whereas his colleague, Yost, saw a spirit worth breaking, Sutter saw a potential adversary who would make this job a bitter test. Aryn’s photographs preoccupied Yost, but Sutter had read every page of the dossier on their latest prey. He knew this woman would never submit herself willingly.

Since childhood, Aryn Renee Greger had been athletically inclined in every sport she tried her hand at and a few she had never seen played before. Soccer gave way to long distance running, softball gave way to jai alai, bicycling gave way to motocross, and swimming gave way to kayaking. She was an avid archer, water skier, equestrienne and a certified wreck diver. More than once, she had gone on cave diving expeditions and even did some cliff diving just for fun.

In middle school, she was approached to train as an Olympiad and by the age of fifteen she had become a media darling. A silver medal and fresh-scrubbed appeal complemented her success. By nineteen, she had retired from serious competition and graduated high school with honors. At twenty, she decided to travel the globe to learn from some of the cultures against whom she had competed.

She returned to Bishop's Island at the age of twenty-one and started a non-profit camp for children to hone their skills at the same sports she loved. In the spring before her twenty-second birthday, she met Ryan Rayburn and before she turned twenty-three, she took his name. The three years since had been years of great upheaval and change, none of which she volunteered to endure.

Though athletically gifted, Aryn's parents had insisted that their youngest daughter focus on her studies as something to fall back on. She had landed on history and had learned nearly everything there was to know about Bishop's Island. Most of her knowledge came from stories told to her in the journals of her late maternal grandfather, Arthur Rocard. Something of a legend on Bishop's Island, Rocard was the first journalist of the six-generation settlement.

In the history of the island, Aryn was a member of the fifth generation of settlers and a resident of Chapel Port. She had no memory of her grandfather, no special moment that only they shared. She was born the seventh day of May and her grandfather lost his life in the collapse of Hollis Bridge the following day. But as she had been told on numerous occasions throughout her life, her grandfather had held her a single time with wondrous pride.

As she thought back on that solitary fact, she punished herself by running directly up the southern face of one of the steepest hills between her and her house. She needed to feel the muscles of her body burning beneath her skin as her lungs fought the thinning air. Setting her jaw as tears burned her eyes; she took that hill and demanded nothing less than

perfection from her form. Her body, though unreliable in recent months, struggled to trust her stubborn will, but still she reached the top.

Like an arrowhead, she sliced the wind and as her feet hit the pavement of the road, she dashed in a northwesterly direction. Ninety meters ahead, she would intersect Stillwell Crossing, a gravel road that led to a four-lane expressway on the island known as 'The Divide. Once she felt the gravel beneath her shoes, she broke into a furious sprint. With every ounce of her being, she loathed this road and all it represented in her life. Were she to stop and focus, she would see the scarring on trees and rocks from metal and fire.

Today, however, she was not going to allow herself to wallow in those memories. She instead turned it into fuel and propelled her body faster and harder. Headlong, she raced for home with all the determination that had become a defining trait of her character both as an athlete and as a woman. Struggling to read the time on the face of her watch, she spotted the fenced perimeter of Pete Swasey's place and crossed the road without checking traffic.

As her feet hit grass on the other side, a horn from a logging truck wailed through the air. She never looked back; she just kept running the maze of Buckthorn trees as the roofline of her house teased her view. With a loud gasp, she fell face first and skidded roughly four feet across the ground. Looking down, she saw the broken laces on her left shoe and hurried to remove both shoes and socks.

On bare feet, she recovered and ran the remaining twenty meters towards the entrance of the three-car garage. Barreling through the side

door, she kicked it shut and lunged across the hood of her car. Her running pants slid across the metallic surface like an airplane taking flight and flung Aryn towards the door to the house. With her shoulder, she sprung the wooden door ajar and heard it rattle as it struck the kitchen countertop.

The door recoiled, struck her cold, wet toes, and caused her to wince in pain as she hobbled around the counter. Down the halls she rushed, from the eastern end of the house to the western. At the end of the corridor, she entered her studio and plucked an unfinished oil painting. Again, she darted towards the opposite end of the house at breakneck speed.

Her side screamed in agony as she reached the living room and stared at a duo of framed wedding portraits. Quickly, she hung the frame of the painting over the highest picture frame and straightened it to hide any appearance of not belonging. From the picture window, she eyed the driveway but saw no commotion. Grimacing as the pain in her side and bloodied foot worsened, she ran back down the hall and towards the bathroom.

Pulling off her powder blue jacket, she revealed a gold-hued, sweat-soaked tee that she stripped off to reveal an equally soaked sports bra. Entering the bathroom, she twisted the sink faucets open wide and began slathering water over her face and neck. As beads of sweat and water dripped from her hair and body, she reached for a tube of lipstick and began scrawling an illegible series of glyphs against the vanity mirror.

Even as the lipstick became misshapen, Aryn pressed harder and wrote faster.

Finishing the message, she dropped the tube into the sink and reached for yesterday's pair of dirty jeans. Removing her running pants, she slid sweaty, sculpted legs into the denim leggings and pulled up the zipper across her scarred waistline. Staring at her bloody foot, she noticed the trail of footprints and squatted. Hastily, she plucked the peeled-back toenail from her small toe and stayed silent through the pain.

As she reached for the doorknob, a sound in the house caught her attention and froze her seemingly perpetual motion. Her alert blue eyes reflected the lighting of the vanity and she cautiously reached to shut off the bathroom lights. In the dark, she felt around for her tee or running jacket but found nothing. Lunging backwards, she searched for her nightshirt, one of her favorite button-down shirts belonging to Ryan, only to remember that she had thrown it in the wash before going for her run.

Through heaving breaths, she listened for another sound outside the bathroom. She recalled that, because of cloud coverage, she had left her useless cell phone on the nightstand in the bedroom. If she could get there, she would be able to get the phone, a shirt of muted color and shoes, maybe even keys to the car. She only had to open the bathroom door without its squeaky hinge tattling her location.

The sound of her heart pounding in her ears made it hard to tell if the squeaky hinge had betrayed her. Before she knew it, she was down the hall and in the bedroom. From the nightstand, she had her cell phone

and a spare motorcycle key. Under the bed, she found two left shoes and one right, none matching the other.

Forgoing footwear, Aryn raced for the closet and eased open the mirror-faced doors. From its hanger, she pulled a dark blue aviator jacket and zipped it snugly over her torso. A creaking in the floorboards caught her ear and she perked up keenly. The thumping of her heart grew louder as it became more difficult to swallow.

Tiptoeing towards the door, she built herself up in preparation to make a run for it. The instant she reached the doorway, however, an intruder plucked her from the bedroom and flung her into her studio. Canvases crumpled beneath the weight of her body as easels toppled and sent a canister of brushes rolling across the hardwood floor. Before she could focus on the intruder, she saw him kick one of the easels and heard glass crash behind her.

As shards of glass continued to fall from the eastern wall, Aryn dizzily attempted to shake off the blow. Trying to reclaim her footing beneath the loose brushes and slick canvases made the situation more frantic. Above the pounding in her head, she could hear the intruder kicking around tubes of paint and canvases. She attempted to pull herself up by taking hold of a wooden canvas rack, but the staples pulled apart and she fell to the ground once more.

Yost used Aryn's arm against her and flung her to the ground, smashing the phone and pinning her facedown. Standing over her and using a belt to choke her, he laughed and pulled Aryn's head back until her upper body came up off the floor. A soprano wheeze escaped

through her flared nostrils as the pain of bending in such a direction made her dizzy. She could feel the intruder's hands upon her, and then a cold tingling throughout her body before she began to pass out.

Lowering her to the ground, Yost released the stranglehold and knelt down over his prey. Unsuspectingly, Aryn's eyes flashed open and she thrust her head backwards. The hit was solid and rang in her ears but left her unsatisfied. Twice more she used her head like a battering ram to crush Yost's nose.

Turning, she lunged and kicked him away before clumsily leaping to her feet. Towards the broken windows of her studio, she scurried and continued to watch Yost. Climbing out, she crept along the shrubbery that lined the back of the house until she reached the garage once more. She only could hope that no one would be inside to stop her.

Entering the garage, she took the handlebars of her sport bike and dug the keys from the pocket of her jeans. It had been several months since she had ridden a bike, in fact, her license to do so had expired and she did not attempt to seek renewal. Taking the helmet from its shelf and securing it on her head, she eased the bike out the side door of the garage and began wheeling it downhill away from the house. She only looked back once to see if anyone spotted her and then allowed momentum to propel the bike for her.

Climbing on, she thrust downward with her bare foot and started the bike, alerting the intruders in the house to her location. Not looking back, she was pleased when the bike started and she squeezed the gas and steered onto the driveway. In an instant, she was off the property and

hurling down the street. As she raced towards the city, she thought of the safest destination.

From the house, Yost exited behind Sutter, who watched Aryn speed away on the performance bike. Opening the door to his pickup, he phoned a number and waited for the caller to answer. Across the cab, Yost spit blood and eyed his broken nose in the mirror. Before Sutter could offer a smart remark, a woman's voice responded to him across the phone line.

“You missed her, didn't you?”

“She's headed towards you,” Sutter replied, “just like we planned. We'll drive her to you, just be sure to stay on her.”

“I'll pick up the slack,” said the woman, “again.”

Ending the call, Sutter got into the truck and fired up the engine before peeling out of the driveway.

“When we find her, I'ma gonna kill that—ow!”

As the passenger's side tire struck a pothole, Yost struck his broken nose with the palm of his hand and screamed. Stepping on the gas, Sutter throttled the pickup in the same direction as Aryn. Though he had no chance of catching her, he could remain in her sight long enough to direct her. There would be penalties for all of this, but finally they had met a quarry worth chasing.

The wind and road sediment were abrasive against her bare feet, but Aryn refused to slow down. Reliving a night she had worked so hard to forget, she raced the wet and winding roads towards downtown Chapel

Port, avoiding Stillwell Crossing and The Divide. She would not make the same mistakes as before and, more importantly, this time she was running towards the person she had run away from the night of her accident.

Given her knowledge of the area, she was certain it would be easier to stick to the side roads and disappear. In her mind, she retraced her steps in the five days since she first spotted the pickup truck that had been following her. In the side mirrors of the bike, she thought she saw the truck again and pressed the throttle. There was no way they were going to catch her this time.

Aryn was less than a mile from a more populated area and considered the various gas stations, diners and small businesses she could stop at to call for help. Of all the places, the one that made the most sense was Dilhane's Pharmacy. She could get some shoes to put on her feet there and, with an open account, would not need to come up with money or identification that she did not have. Conveniently, they also had rear parking which would allow her a chance to park the bike out of view from the street.

As she blew past the diner on the edge of town, she slowed her bike and stuck to the plan. In the mirror, she lost sight of the pickup as a rent-to-move truck pulled out behind her, but she was sure the intruders were still on her tail. She kept the bike centered with the grill of the rent-to-move truck, hoping to create a blind spot and confuse the pursuers. Gripping the handlebars with cold and sweaty hands, she saw the

pharmacy a block away and put on the left blinker before turning into the parking lot.

A gentle rain fell as she pulled off the street, and drove around to the northern side of the building, away from visible traffic. In less than a minute, she would be safely inside the pharmacy. From there, she could make a collect call to Ryan's office and wait until he got there to help. Then, she would call the constable's office and report what was happening.

Propping the kickstand of the bike, Aryn removed her helmet and turned to see the rent-to-move truck with a ten-foot bed and a connected auto trailer pull in behind her. The lot was small on the northern side of the building and the truck had nearly blocked in her bike. In case she could not get a hold of Ryan, she needed to be able to getaway in a hurry. With that in mind, she approached the driver of the rent-to-move truck.

The woman behind the wheel smiled and rolled down the window as Aryn approached. Before she could speak, Aryn froze in fear as the woman raised a gun and fired. A flexible baton round, much like a beanbag round, left the barrel and struck Aryn just below the collarbone. Rendered unconscious, she fell to the ground and gave her pursuers a window of opportunity.

The female shooter exited the cab, opened the back of the truck and took Aryn's motorcycle, wheeling it toward the vehicle trailer as Sutter parked his pickup behind them. Angrily, Yost exited the truck, bloody tissues crammed into his nostrils and his beady eyes fixed on Aryn. With

a chain in hand, he secured her wrists and feet before dragging her towards the truck.

His accomplice, a Greek woman named Helle Bouras, secured the sport bike to the trailer as Sutter kept watch. With ease, Bouras secured the bike and leapt from the trailer to the parking lot. Sutter nodded and moved back to the cab of his pickup, checking his watch. Kneeling, Bouras collected the flexible baton round and returned to the cab of the rent-to-move truck. In under four minutes, both vehicles exited the parking lot unseen and with their prey in tow.

Inside the rear compartment, Yost secured Aryn's chains to a hook on a welded-in iron frame, fitted for the truck. Feeling the truck begin to pull away, he lowered the door and secured the latch. Though Aryn was still unconscious, Yost spouted off idle threats and angry cursing. His ranting and raving echoed off the fiberglass walls as a radio squawked loudly and Bouras' voice purred over the speaker.

"Don't rough her up, Yost. She has to be presentable."

"Aw no, I'ma gonna have my fun with this'un," he swore as though Bouras could hear him and clutched Aryn's jaw. "I'ma gonna be the one that hunts you down and ends you, darlin', just mark my words. If you weren't worth twice as much untouched, I'd have my fun with you now."

Releasing Aryn's face, he pulled out his knife and pressed the tip of the blade between his crooked front teeth. He traced the tip of the knife along Aryn's mouth and down the curve of her neck. Taking a handful of hair in his hand, he sliced away a few inches and sniffed it before throwing it to the ground. Moving in, he smelled Aryn's skin and laughed

as he caught the pull slide of the zipper on her aviator jacket with the tip of his knife.

As her eyes fluttered open, Aryn stared into an overhead light bulb that sizzled every time a bead of water struck its face through the leaking roof. Beneath the light, with the chains pinching the skin on her wrists, Aryn swayed limply by her bound hands and feet. Groaning, she felt a chill on her skin and raised her head to stare back at Yost. Looking up from Aryn's torso, the broken-nosed man smiled crookedly and threatened her.

“Before this is all over, I'ma gonna show ya what happens to girls that mess with me. Course, you not gonna be so pretty then.”

Feeling the blade of Yost's knife tracing over her skin and applying pressure, she hoped the swaying motion of the restraints would not lend to further injury. When she had a chance, she had to be ready to act and move. Afraid to shut her eyes, she stared back at him, and as she recalled what had happened in the parking lot, she prayed to God for mercy and opportunity. Proving she was not wholly forgiving, she prayed that these people would too suffer for what they had done and had yet to do.

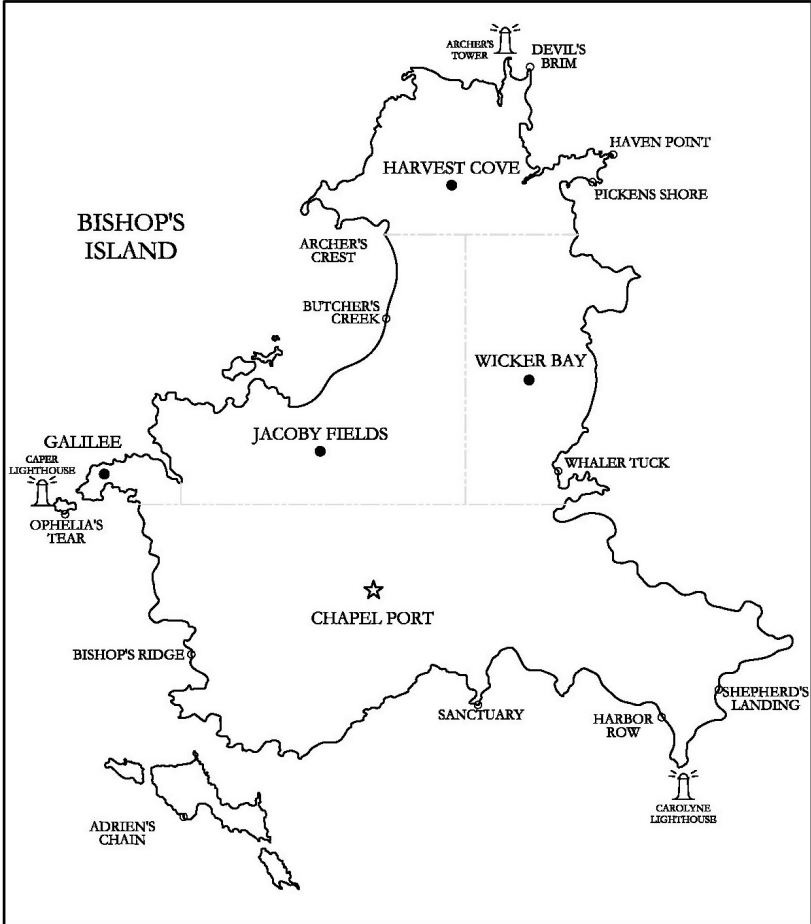
Groaning as the rough roads jolted her suspended body, she refused to cry out as the chains tightened around her wrists and ankles. Before she could relax her mind, she felt a hand at her neck as Yost pulled her head upright. Opening her eyes, she stared back at him without fear. Even as the chains pinched so tightly as to form blood blisters on her wrists, Aryn glowered with tears swelling in her eyes. She could barely see his face, but she could smell his putrid breath as he spoke to her.

“I’m gonna warn you only once,” he claimed. “You better do what I say, savvy? All I hafta do is open the door and toss ya out if I want to. You get me, sister? So you be a good girl.”

Remaining unresponsive, Aryn felt her entire body shake as the truck hit uneven road. Chuckling at the sight, Yost scratched his ear with the knife and traced the blade along Aryn’s chin for effect.

“So save your prayers, sister,” he warned. “Ain’t nobody savin’ ya from what’s gonna happen now.”

Jabbing a syringe into her neck, Yost injected a sedative into Aryn’s bloodstream and watched as her eyelids became as heavy as lead plates.



Map of Bishop's Island, circa 2010

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the creator's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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Pursuit

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