

CAITLIN'S ANIMAL FARM by Sara Duvall

I wonder now if perhaps I could have prevented the entire thing, or at least part of it. I look back and I can see the warning signs hidden in the whole ordeal. I can still remember every last detail due to the fact it didn't happen a very long time ago. I can't say that anyone was entirely to blame because, of course, my opinion is slightly biased. I don't know if I am at all at fault but I am truly sorry if I am. I know it is too late for apologies and the like. But to retell a story such as this one is a great accomplishment as you may see. As I said, the event didn't happen so long ago that I cannot recall everything in all elements but some things are entirely based upon point of view. More specifically, my point of view. You will have to be the judge.

It probably began with my Biology teacher, Mrs. Sandy Becker. She proposed a trip to a small island inhabited by a minute amount of people in the Bahamas to study in detail marine and plant life. It was approved by the school board and the principal. The first twenty-eight kids to sign up with a down payment of fifty dollars got to go. Most of my fourth period Biology class signed up right away.

We left our home in Queensport, North Carolina on April thirteenth and were due back on the twenty-seventh. Transportation was provided courtesy of Sebastian Kingsley's millionaire father. Two small private jets capable of holding eighteen passengers were flown to the Queensport Memorial Airport. Each jet contained fourteen students, two teachers, a pilot, and a co-pilot. I knew most everyone on my flight including Milla Johanssen, my best friend.

Also on board was Suzanne Beckwith and her best friend, Stephanie Scott. Both girls were seniors who had failed sophomore biology. They needed the science credit to graduate so they waited until their last year in school. Stephanie was very materialistic. Her father

was another hard-core business man with plenty of green to toss around. Stephanie couldn't have cared less about school, her grades, or anyone else for that matter. And Suzanne Beckwith wasn't much of an improvement. Suzanne wasn't a very good student but she was very cunning and deceitful. Suzanne was also very good at getting whatever her heart desired which meant whatever she couldn't have. Both girls were very pretty, Stephanie more of the ditzy blonde beauty and Suzanne more of the artful dodger with a hint of femininity woven in.

Three guys from my class, Ben Van Deest, Wesley Perkins, and Jed Pike, were on my flight as well. Ben and Wesley were sophomores and I didn't know them that well. We hadn't been in any of the same classes in our freshman year. Jed I didn't know well either but from my observations, he was a clutz of all clutzes.

One pair of twins were also aboard with me. Leah and Laura Foster were freshmen. They looked almost identical but it was easy to tell them apart. Never seen without the other, Leah and Laura were really very quiet.

The rest of the plane was occupied by five guys that weren't in my class. Allen Kilbourne and Elliot Patman were football players, both nearly two hundred and forty pounds of muscle and nothing else. Sebastian Kingsley was the model child when his rich father's back was turned. He got excellent grades, he was captain of the tennis team, and he was every girl's dream despite his arrogant ways. Kevin Rodgers was one of those guys you never hear about after you graduate. He was very shy and rarely if ever spoke out of turn. And lastly, there was Danny Byrd. Danny was going to be a physicist. He was one of the smartest people in school if not the smartest. I think Danny was able to understand Einstein's theory of relativity when the rest of us

were building with blocks. But anyway, Danny was a tall lanky fellow with wire-rimmed glasses and a goofy smile.

The flight started out wonderfully. We all got to know each other a little better and it was all together a pleasant experience. We stopped over in Miami for a re-fueling and lunch then it was on to San Pedro. The island was about three hundred miles east of Cuba and we would have to land in Cuba and take a boat out to the island. I happened to glance out the window of the jet and an alarming sight greeted my eyes. Ebony-black, voluminous storm clouds filled my line of sight. Mist swirled about. I gasped slightly and that brought it to everyone's attention. We all crowded to windows to see. Mrs. Becker went up to talk to the pilot. He replied that we were going to land soon on a sandy little island until the storm passed. We never made it quite that far because as soon as Mrs. Becker sat down, the little craft took a sharp veer left and straight down. Several screamed and cried out. The pilot's shaky voice blared over the roar of wind against the plummeting jet. "Please stay calm. We will need to evacuate the craft as soon as possible. Follow my directions," he said. I went through the motions of pulling on a life preserver and getting ready to jump. And then, as if in slow motion, I peered out the tiny window. Out of the whirling grey-black mist, land sprang up at the jet like a hungry lion. I don't remember what happened after that because we hit the beach like a steam engine and everyone blanked out.

I awoke to find myself buried almost totally in sand and lying about one hundred feet away from the massive wreckage of the plane. I lifted my head and pain coursed through my entire body. Slowly and

painfully I rolled over on my side and brushed the sand off myself and stood up. Groaning, I limped over to Milla's body lying not ten feet from where I had been. Bending slightly, I saw that she was alive and awake. "Milla," I called softly. "You O.K.?" Milla's green eyes stared up at me in disbelief. She took a deep breath.

"Am I dead yet, Caitlin?" I nearly bust out laughing but it would have hurt too much.

"No, but can you get up?" I asked. I watched as my friend went through the same steps as I had to stand up. Together we walked around to assess the damage. I was able to walk and move about better the longer I stayed up. We went around to see who was still alive and who was not. Not everyone had been thrown out of the plane as some of us were. I climbed in the plane wreckage to see who was there. Mrs. Becker and the pilot were long gone. Stephanie lifted her head up and looked at me. She smiled faintly. I went over to her. "Are you O.K. Stephanie?" She nodded.

"I think Suzanne is over there and so is Allen. Can you help me up?" I gave Stephanie my hand and carefully helped her up. She winced and eased her weight off of her right foot. I limped over to the far corner where Suzanne and Allen and Wesley were lying in a tangled heap. Gingerly, I kneeled beside them and rolled each over. Wesley moaned and Suzanne's grey eyes flew open. She sat straight up and promptly ~~through~~ threw her arms around my neck. Allen tried to sit up but failed.

"Oh my god, am I alive? Please say it was all a nightmare and everything is going to be O.K.," Suzanne sobbed into my shoulder. I patted her quivering back.

"It will be O.K. but its all real I'm afraid." Suzanne began to wail. "Can all of you get up and out of this plane?" I asked. Wesley flinched as he got into an upright postion. Once the three of them

had gone outside, I proceeded to discover that Ben Van Deest, Leah and Laura Foster, Danny Byrd, and Jed Pike were all in the plane and were all relatively unharmed except for a severe case of shock with the twins and a possible broken arm with Danny. We climbed out into the failing sunshine and limped over to the group huddled on the beach a little ways away. I sat down and surveyed the scene.

"Is everyone basically O.K.?" I asked. Most everyone made some form of reply. "Is everyone here?" Milla answered that she had found everyone else. "Mrs. Becker and the pilot are dead," I said. "Does anyone know where we are?" Everyone said no. "Is it possible that maybe we are on San Pedro already?"

"I doubt that, Caitlin. Mrs. Becker said that there was a radio sation on the island as well as a dock. I don't see either of these," Danny replied. "Looks like we are stuck."

"Great," I muttered under my breath.

"So what do we do now?" Elliot wanted to know. No one answered him so I decided that I was going to have to take some form of authority on the issue.

"It looks pretty late now so I suggest we find some shelter preferably near the wreck. If we can use the blankets we brought maybe we can make sort of a tent against the plane itself." Everyone seemed to agree and some of the boys went inside the jet and fished out a couple of big beach blankets which we hung over the wing of the craft. Everyone was exhausted so we fell asleep quickly.

The next morning dawned cool and clear. I was not the first one awake. Ben was sitting on a rock staring out into space. I approached carefully. "Ben?" I said softly. He turned to me.

"Morning, Caitlin. Sleep well?" he asked.

"Yeah, O.K. I guess. You?" Ben was acting sort of strange. As if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. "Ben are you O.K.?"

Ben turned to look at me again, this time his eyes were full of tears. "I might die here, Caitlin. I might never have a family or go to another movie or play Nintendo with my brother. I want to see the world, Caitlin, I want to travel and have grandkids and eat ice cream. Being stuck on this damn island just shoots my life up into flames. And knowing I might never see my house or my family or my dog again scares the hell out of me," Ben said, his voice cracking. Huge tears fell from his eyes. He seemed so helpless. I touched his hand. He suddenly burst into tears and broke down right in front of me. I put an arm around his violently shaking shoulders and let him sob his heart out. After maybe ten minutes he stopped and looked up at me. "I bet you think I'm a big wimp now don't you?"

"No, I do not. Not many guys have the class to let their emotions show in front of someone of the opposite sex. I think you're just scared like the rest of us. It's not anything to be ashamed about. Now, do you want to help me collect fire wood and search for breakfast or do you want to stay here?" Ben sniffed and got up.

"I'll go with you," he said. We ~~went~~ went back to the place where everyone else was sleeping. Milla was just waking up. I told her to stay there because Ben and I were going to look for wood and food. She nodded sleepily.

We went down the beach and around the side of the island. It was bigger than I had thought at first. But it was really quite small. We found a large pile of driftwood and some wild oranges that we carried back with us. By that time everyone was up and about. We passed out the oranges and layed the wood down for further use. While everyone slurped hungrily on their oranges, I took the opportunity to talk. "Um, you guys, I think it would be a good idea to get organized because we don't know how long we are going to be here. Does anyone has ~~any~~

have any suggestions?" I asked timidly. It was against my nature to be in charge.

"I say we elect a leader," Suzanne said. "Someone who can take control, like....me," that received a bunch of groans. Suzanne sniffed indignantly.

"I agree with Suzanne about having a leader. Not like a president or a monarch but just someone to say what goes and keep general order." Leah spoke up from the edge of the group. Suzanne smiled dotingly at her.

"See? I say I be the one to, um, keep order. After all, I am captain of the cheerleaders so you know I have good leadership skills," Suzanne flipped her blonde hair over her shoulder and flashed a megawatt smile at the guys.

"Well, we should have nominations for the position," Ben chimed in. "Its the only fair way." Suzanne shot him a look of disdain.

"I nominate Suzanne," Stephanie chirped.

"I second the nomination," Leah said softly. Suzanne smiled triumphantly.

"I nominate Catilin," Milla glared at Suzanne.

"I second the nominaiton," Ben, Danny, and Laura chorused. I blushed.

"Looks like we will do this the democratic way. Let's have a vote. Secret ballot of course," Sebastian said. "Everybody put your heads down and when I say the name of the candidate of your choice, raise your hand."

"Hold it there, Kingsley, How do we know that you won't accidentally miscount the votes in favor of one of them?" Danny piped up.

Sebastian feigned surprise. "Me, sway the votes? Preposterous! O.K., O.K. To be totally fair, I will swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me Suzanne.

Just joking. I mean God. Let's get on with it." The votes were counted and Sebastian prepared to announce the winner.

"Congratulations, Miss.....Beckwith!" Suzanne screamed and jumped up to throw her arms around a very pleased Sebastian's neck. He grinned proudly.

Suzanne stepped back and cleared her throat. "My first action as leader of you will be to assign jobs. Let's see," the queen bee paused to examine her audience carefully.

I sighed. This was sure to be a real trial with her. "May I offer a suggestion, Suzanne?"

"But of course. This is a democracy is it not? Go on, Caitlin. Speak your mind," Suzanne replied.

"It might work better if you wrote down all the jobs that need to be done and then give them to whoever is best qualified for it. It might be a little more organized that way," I said.

Suzanne pondered this in her mind for a moment. "I guess so. OK. Somebody go get me some paper and a pen. And a glass of water. I am absolutely famished," Suzanne finished her speech with a brush of her hand across her brow. Several people asked for a drink from the cooler we'd brought from home as well. Suzanne shooed them aside with the phrase, "I was here first."

When everyone had settled down a bit, Suzanne clapped her hands and asked if anyone had any suggestions for work degrees. Gathering wood, food and water were not the first mentioned. Suzanne called on her friends (she had us raise our hands) and skipped over the rest of us. Stephanie said we should have a spot reserved only for sunbathing. Suzanne O.K.'ed that as well as Allen's suggestion of having all the food available to everyone at all times. Finally, Danny stood up. "Listen Suzanne. These are stupid ideas. Do we really need a place to sunbathe? I mean, we need to survive. Why don't you let Someone

else do this? Caitlin did a really good job of it yesterday."

Suzanne shot me a look.

"All right then. I hereby appoint Caitlin Delaney task force head. But you have to tell me every thing you do because I'm leader. And you can't give me anything too hard to do because I'm leader." With that, Suzanne marched off into the shade of the airplane wreck. I stood up and went to the front.

"Um, O.K. First, we need people to gather fire wood, food, and water. No wait, before that we need volunteers to scout the island and see if there is a fresh water spring anyplace. Do we have any volunteers? I'll go myself but I want at least two other people with me." Danny and Milla raised their hands. "Good. We'll do that later. Someone should also get the bodies out of the wreckage. We can have a little burial ceremony or something." Allen reluctantly volunteered for that. "Thanks, Allen. O.K. Next we will have to build shelter. Before I get someone for that, I think we should wait until the scouting party gets back so we can see what we have to build with. For now, if everyone could help get all of the usable stuff out of the plane while we are gone, that would be great." Everyone nodded. "Does any ~~one~~ one have anything else to say right now? Suggestions or comments or something? No one said a word so I wondered if I was doing something wrong." A few people snickered. "Well, let's get on with it." As we started to leave, Suzanne ran up to me.

"~~Exc~~ "Caitlin, I know you're really good at this leading thing but don't let it go to your head. I'm still in control here and the only ~~reas~~ reason you get to do this is because I'm still in shock from yesterday. As long as you remember who is boss we'll get along fine, O.K.?" she grinned her Cheshire cat grin at me. I just nodded.

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We left the rest of the group busy clearing out the wreckage.
Milla spotted a small lagoon on the other ~~ix~~ side of the island.



The search group left around two in the afternoon. We skirted the island and found a small lagoon on the other side. Upon further inspection, we found that it was fresh water. Trekking further toward the center of the island, we found several orange trees as well as some nut trees. The interior of the island was pretty flat and sandy. There was a small cavern hidden partly by overhung vines. Danny crawled inside a little ways and reported that it was only about eight feet deep and five feet high. We walked on through the middle of the tiny island laden with tall tropical trees and thick vines. Milla suggested we play Tarzan for a while. Then Danny looked up. "Hey," he said. "Wouldn't it be awesome if we built a bunch of treehouses up in those trees?"

Milla laughed. "Yeah, like the Swiss Family Robinson."

"No, I'm serious. If we had a saw or something, we could make a really great place. Besides, we don't know if there are any wild animals on the premises. God forbid anything harm our precious Suzzan