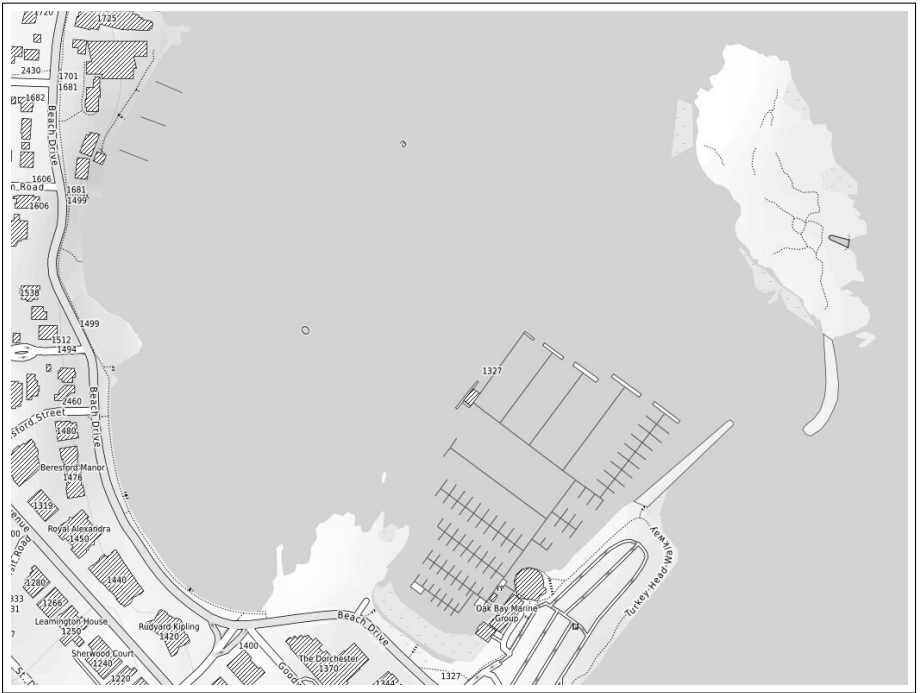


# Oak Bay



Oak Bay

“Are you Gregory Peckingham?” the tall, well-dressed man asked.

“Yes. Who wants to know?” said Greg.

Greg was an average-height man wearing a soiled pair of dark blue coveralls. An old, cream-coloured cloth cap covered his head to prevent dust from infiltrating his hair. Greg was hand-sanding the hull of a large motor cruiser sitting among a half-dozen boats at the rear of the dusty parking lot behind the marina.

“My name is Marcus Goldwyn. I was wondering if you could do something for me.”

Greg looked over his shoulder to see Marcus standing with his legs

slightly apart. He wore a black dress shirt, open at the neck, with light grey trousers and a jacket. A wide, black belt with an embossed pattern of large, vertical lozenges enclosed his waist. Marcus was a neat, trim man with a fitness that came not from hard work but from regular gym sessions. He was close to six feet in height. Clean-shaven and in his early forties, he was good-looking with a strong jawline, clear eyes, and an unblemished face. He looked like a model used to sell expensive yachts, the kind with the rugged sea-faring look ... and hands of a bank clerk.

"Oh? What's that?" Greg asked.

"I understand you're a sailor?"

"That's right,"

"And you've been offshore?" Marcus said.

"Yes. What's this all about?"

"I don't quite know how to say it ... I have a sailboat," Marcus explained.

"You need a skipper?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Well ... it depends," Greg said.

"What do you mean by that?"

Greg looked around and noticed a man casually approaching the nearby sailboat, chocked and standing on its keel.

"Would you like to have this conversation in a more private setting?"

"Yes, that would be wise," Marcus said.

"I thought so."

"You know what I want?"

"We'll talk later. Help me carry this rubbish over to that container," Greg said.

He indicated the pile of old broken pallets scattered around the hull. Together, they lifted what they could carry. Greg led Marcus over to a large steel container used to discard the rags, old sandpaper, and rotted wood accumulated from boat work. After they dropped the wood beside the steel container, Greg sauntered back with Marcus.

"You know it's illegal ... what you want me to do." Greg said.

"Yes, but—"

"I'm guessing you want out. Am I right?"

"Am I that transparent?" Marcus asked.

"I wouldn't play poker if I were you."

"I guess ... but will you do it?"

"I said, it depends. First, let's get some things straight. I'm not your buddy. I want you to spend the least amount of time with me as is necessary. You got that?" Greg said.

"Yes, but why are you—"

"Never mind. Let's grab another pile, and I'll tell you more."

They picked up another load of pallets and walked with them toward the trash container. As they carried the wood, Greg continued his conversation.

"Now don't interrupt me," he said in a low, growling voice. "Here's what you'll do. You'll engage me to move your boat from wherever it is to Canoe Cove. You're moving it there to anchor it out to save money. I assume you're paying for moorage?"

"Yes, but—"

"I said, don't interrupt. We have only a little time before this will look suspicious, got it?"

"Yes."

"Wait a week and then ask my boss to contact me. Tell them someone told you I was available for small jobs. Show some concern that you want to ensure I'm trustworthy but reluctantly give in. Let my boss tell me all the details about the boat. Make sure you give him your phone number so I can contact you when I get to Canoe Cove. You got that?"

"Yes, but how can I—"

"Jesus, you don't learn very fast, do you? Now piss off. I don't want to see you again until I get your boat to Canoe Cove. I'll contact you."

Marcus stopped walking and stood there at a loss. Greg continued to walk back to the boat on which he had been working. He picked up the sanding block in his broad hands and began to rub the hull methodically. A few seconds later, Marcus turned and left the marina yard.

Greg had been working for about five minutes when he saw the shadow of a human figure fall across the part of the hull on which he was working. He ignored the presence of this unknown person and continued to sand the hull.

"Nice boat," the stranger commented.

Greg grunted.

"Yours?"

"I wish," Greg replied, continuing his work.

"You been working here long?" the stranger asked Greg.

Greg stopped sanding and turned around to face a tall and slightly obese middle-aged man dressed in well-used casual clothes of a nautical style that would easily place him as a successful boat-owning businessman. The problem was that he had a formidable appearance at odds with his clothes. His broad, rough face, broken nose, and stance gave him the look of someone not shy of using his fists to make a point. Greg put his free hand on his hip and gestured angrily with the sanding block in his other hand.

"You wanna talk? Then you work and talk. I don't have time for idle chit-chat. I've got to get this hull finished today. You want to help me carry this shit-wood over to the trash container like that other idiot time-waster? After a couple of loads, you'll get the message, too. He didn't last too long!" Greg said, turning back to his work.

"Who was he?" the stranger asked in a stern voice.

Greg stiffened a little but continued sanding.

"How the hell should I know?"

"Seen him before?" the stranger asked.

"Nope."

"Well, if you see him again, let me know, okay?"

Greg stopped sanding and turned around to face the stranger again.

"Who the hell are you?"

"You don't need to know. You'll see me around."

The stranger turned and sauntered away. After a few moments, Greg gave a noticeable shrug. He resumed his sanding, feeling the tension in his body slowly subside as the effort burned the adrenaline out of his veins.



A week later, Greg finished his work for the day and walked towards the old concrete shower block attached to the main marina office. Along the way, he paused to remove the dust-ingrained overalls protecting his regular clothes from the infusion of old anti-fouling and grease. He pulled off the heavy, navy cloth, gave them a gentle shake, then carefully turned them inside out and rolled them into a ball with the clean side outermost. Mike, his boss, emerged from the office just as Greg reached the door to the shower block.

"Hey, Greg! Wait up a bit, will ya!"

"Sure."

Greg leaned against the frame of the door until his boss reached him. He had a roly-poly body from too much eating and sitting. Mike wore an extra-large pair of blue jeans with yellow suspenders printed with black imperial increments that looked like two wide tape measures. The joke around the marina was that he would measure up boats for their berth with his suspenders; if he liked the guy, he would stretch the suspenders so the boat would measure smaller, and the owner pay less for his moorage.

Mike was an agreeable sort of person. Greg got on well with him as he didn't push people around.

"How was your day, Mike?" Greg asked.

"So-so. You know how it is these days."