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Adventure begins *here...*

The Lost Chapter of **TORPEDO**

by Jeff Edwards

At several places in the story, *Torpedo* makes reference to a nineteen-year-old U.S. Navy Seaman Apprentice named Jerome (Jay) Gilbert. Missing since the night of the deadly attack on the British Embassy in Washington DC, Jay Gilbert has become something of a mystery man. Who is he? What part — if any — did he play in the murder of the staff of the British Embassy? Could an American Sailor really be involved in an act of international terrorism? And, of course, where is he now? How did he vanish so quickly and so thoroughly?

The answers to some of those questions are hinted at in the story, but they're never stated plainly or convincingly. In part, this was due to literary decisions on my part. I don't like to answer every question, or tie up every loose end. Unlike those neat formula-driven detective shows where everything wraps itself into a neat bundle in time for the closing credits, real life is complex and messy. Some issues are never resolved. Some mysteries are never unraveled. I try to cover all the big pieces, and still leave a few loose threads for the reader to pick at.

But in the case of Seaman Apprentice Jerome Gilbert, another force was at work as well: the infamous Editor's Axe. *** Insert ominous music here... *** An uncaring and power-hungry editor viciously ripped this chapter from the manuscript, with no thought at all of the damage being done to the arc of the story.

Okay, it wasn't like that. Actually, my editor and I discussed the matter at great length, and decided together to pull this chapter out of the story. Our decision was driven by several factors. The Jay Gilbert story was originally intended to be the first chapter in the book. It has a strong flavor of espionage, and we were worried that it might set the up the wrong sorts of expectations in the mind of the reader. Although politics, military intelligence, and spy craft do have



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their parts in it, *Torpedo* is foremost a military story. We thought it would be better to set a military tone from the very first pages. We also wanted to get to the *USS Towers* story line a little more quickly. In the end, we decided that the best way to satisfy those concerns was to delete this chapter and jump directly into the action aboard the Towers. So the Jay Gilbert version of Chapter 1 ended up on the cutting room floor.

As I write this, we're working feverishly to get *Torpedo* ready for the release of the Second Edition. In the process of digging through my file archives, I came across the original version of Chapter 1. Until now, no one outside of my family and my editor have seen it. Please note that the chapter was cut from the novel before we did the line-editing, so you're seeing it as originally written – complete with typographical errors.

I still believe we made the right decision in pulling this chapter, but I also think that this is a pretty decent piece of work. It most definitely answers some of those nagging questions about a certain Sailor named Jerome Gilbert.

And now, without further ado, I present the mysterious *Lost Chapter of Torpedo...*

CHAPTER 1

WASHINGTON, DC
SATURDAY; 19 MAY
8:17 p.m. EDT

The alarm in the back of Jay Gilbert's brain went off the instant he saw the other two men assigned to his team. *Shit. Not good. Not good at all.* Jay trusted the alarm. It had managed to steer him clear of serious trouble for most of his nineteen years. And the few times that he *had* really screwed up had all come as a result of ignoring that little warning signal in his head. Not that Jay was psychic, like that bullshit on the TV hotlines. The alarm was more like a built-in bad news detector, and right now it was pitching a bitch.

The sun had been down for nearly an hour, but the parking lot behind the WizardClean building was well lit. Jay tried to get a better look at the two guys as he walked across the lot toward them. They were standing under a floodlight next to a green van with the WizardClean company logo on the side: a cutesy cartoon of an industrial carpet shampooing machine wearing a pointed wizard's hat with stars and moons, surrounded by a cloud of little sparkly bits of fairy dust.

The men were dressed in green WizardClean coveralls, just like Jay was; the WizardClean logo embroidered small above the left breast pocket and large across the back. Both men were about Jay's height, a little under six feet, and both were about ten years older than him — say late twenties or so. Any resemblance to Jay ended there. Where Jay was wiry and blonde, the men were dark haired and solid looking. Their skin

was darker than his. Not African, but dark. Greek maybe. Or Italian.

Jay stopped a few feet away from the friendlier looking of the two and stuck out his hand. They looked okay, as far as he could tell. So why were they making the hair on his neck stand up?

The man took Jay's extended hand and shook it. "Mike Umar," he said. He smiled, showing lots of white teeth. The smile didn't seem to make it to his eyes. "You must be Jerome."

Jay forced himself to return the smile. "I prefer to be called Jay."

Mike released his hand and tapped the second man on the shoulder. "Jay, this is my friend Rafii. He likes to be called Ralph."

Mike's voice had just a touch of an accent, but Jay couldn't place it.

Jay extended his hand to the second man. "Good to meet you, Ralph. I'm looking forward to working with you."

Ralph ignored his outstretched hand. "We do not need a replacement. We have done this job a hundred times. We can do it with two men."

Jay dropped his hand. "I'm sorry to hear about your friend. The Dispatcher said it was his appendix? Is that right?"

"Yes," the man called Mike said. "He fell ill only a few hours ago."

"You do not know how we work," Ralph said in a quiet voice.

Jay felt the heat go to his cheeks. Hopefully they weren't glowing in the fucking dark where this rude little bastard could see. Jay took a slow breath and said, "I'll try to stay out of your way. I've got quite a bit of experience with carpet cleaners." He grinned and made an effort not to grind his teeth. "I'm a Seaman Apprentice over at the Naval Yard. I scrub a lot of toilets, polish a lot of brass, and shampoo a shitload of carpets. In the big scheme of things, a Seaman Deuce is just above whale shit, and that lies on the bottom of the ocean." He tossed off the last part like a punch line and threw in a little laugh. Neither of the men joined him.

"Let's go," Mike said flatly. He walked around toward the driver's side of the van. Ralph opened the front passenger door, climbed in, and slammed it behind himself.

Jay pulled at the handle of the side door and the door slid open with a squeaky grind. He stared into the darkened interior of the van. He could make out the shapes of the cleaning machines, but not much else. His alarm was still going off like a madman.

Shit

What if he just walked away? It wasn't like he really needed this job. He could leave these two assholes to whatever whack shit they were up to.

But what about the ring? Amy's ring. An eighth carat diamond wasn't big by anybody's standards, but even that was more than he could afford on what the Navy paid E-2's.

And he did want to give Amy the ring. Not that she would insist on it. She would

marry him without any ring, he was sure of that. But he wanted to do it right. He had played it out fifty times in his head... He would be decked out in his dress blues, and crackerjacks were easily the sharpest uniform in the world. Dark blue tailored wool with crisp white piping and a tightly rolled neckerchief. Even a lowly Seaman Deuce with no ribbons or medals looked great in his jacks. He would go down on one knee, just like the romantic guys in the old movies. And then, the ring. Amy's sea green eyes would go wide with surprise and then they would go bright with happy tears...

The engine of the van rumbled to life, jarring him back to reality.

Mike's voice came floating out of the darkened van. "Are you coming?"

Jay climbed into the rear of the van and pulled the door shut. *Shit. Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit.*

He settled into the single seat rear seat and groped around in the darkness for his seat belt. The van smelled of strong soap and oiled metal. Maybe his alarm was wrong this time. He looked out the window as the van bounced over a pair of closely spaced speed bumps and rolled out of the parking lot into the night.

No one spoke. The minutes dragged on, the silence broken only by the rumble of the engine, the whine of the tires on the asphalt, and the occasional squeak of the suspension when the van ran over a bump or pothole.

They were giving him the silent treatment. But why? What had he done to piss them off? He hadn't caused their buddy's appendicitis attack. He hadn't even asked to be assigned to their crew. Hell, he hadn't done anything but offer honest work in exchange for honest pay. So, why were these guys pissed at him? Or were they pissed at him? Maybe they were just freaked out about their friend in the hospital. Maybe that was what his alarm was pinging on; they were stressed out about their buddy and it was fucking up their attitudes.

Jay leaned forward. "The Dispatcher says we're doing the British Embassy tonight, is that right?"

Mike glanced over his shoulder for a half a second. "Yes."

"What's it like?" Jay asked. "I've never been in an embassy before. Is it all rich and fancy like the White House or something?"

"It is a building," Mike said. "It has dirty carpets."

"Yeah," Jay said. "But I'll bet it's like a museum, huh? All kinds of famous paintings and statues... Ever see any famous people there? Like princes or movie stars?"

No one answered him.

They stopped at a red light, and a street lamp poured enough light in through the windows to reveal the back of the van. The three carpet shampooing machines he recognized, along with a dozen or so green plastic five gallon canisters: the famous



WizardClean carpet cleaning formula.

The light changed and they accelerated through the intersection, leaving the street lamp behind and plunging the rear of the van into darkness again.

Jay sighed. "Alright," he said. "I know you guys don't want me here, but you've got to know I didn't dream this shit up."

Neither of the men replied, and neither of them even glanced back at Jay.

"The Dispatcher laid it out for me," Jay said. "The company bills for three men. So they have to *send* three men, otherwise the customers complain. You guys were short a man. They were gonna send somebody, and I don't have a regular crew yet. Luck of the draw."

The men continued to ignore him.

Shit. These guys were whack jobs. Jay's hand found its way to the cell phone in his right hip pocket. Maybe he should he call 911. But what would be report? He tried to imagined how the phone call would play out.

"9-1-1. Is this an emergency?"

"Yes. I'm stuck in a van with two rude assholes who give me the willies."

"Sir, did you say 'the willies?'"

"That's right, the willies. The creeps. The fucking heebie-jeebies."

"I see. Sir, other than the willies, are you injured or in immediate danger?"

"No, I'm not injured. I don't know if I'm in danger. These guys are armed with deep-cleaning carpet shampoos and they're not afraid to use them..."

Yeah. *That* would bring the cops running. Or the van from the cracker factory. It sounded crazy, even to him. Hell, it *was* crazy. But that didn't stop his alarm from pinging like a pinball machine.

What in the name of god was it? What was his brain picking up on that he was missing? Some kind of funny vibe, he knew that much. But what? Were these guys stealing something? He looked around the darkened van and wondered what could be worth stealing. They couldn't be smuggling, because they weren't even leaving town.

Could it be something to do with the embassy? Were they planning to rip off the Brits? A famous painting or something? A statue? That didn't sound right either. They'd never get out the door with anything bigger than a paperweight, the guards would make sure of that.

Jay shrugged, the gesture lost in the darkness. He had no idea what the Asshole Brothers were up to. He half-smiled the second the name appeared in his brain. *Yeah. That was them. The Asshole Brothers.*

He sighed. Relax... Forget about the Asshole Brothers. Think about something



else...

Think about... Amy. Jay smiled in the darkness. Amy, of the sea green eyes and the quick laugh. Amy of the ticklish feet and the cute little heart-shaped butt. Amy, who shared his dreams and believed him when he said that he wouldn't always be a poor broke Seaman Apprentice.

Amy was pregnant. He knew that. She hadn't told him yet, and she wasn't showing at all, but he knew. He could see it in her eyes. She wanted to be happy about the baby, but she wasn't sure how Jay was going to take the news.

That was why the ring was so important. He needed to propose *before* Amy told him about the baby. That way, she would understand that he wanted to marry her because he was in love with her. Not because she was pregnant with his baby. He wanted her to know that it was a bond of love, not of obligation.

His smile grew wider in the darkness. What would the baby look like? Would she — Jay just knew it was a daughter — would she have Amy's eyes? He hoped so.

The van swung suddenly off the road and up a short driveway to a tall chain link gate. Mike leaned out the window to punch buttons on a key pad. The gate clanged loudly and began to roll to one side.

Jay stared through the windshield over the shoulders of the Asshole Brothers. What the hell? This wasn't the British Embassy. This was one of those mini-storage places. He caught sight of a faded orange sign on the side of one of the storage buildings:

LOCK-AND-LEAVE

You keep the key. We'll keep it safe.

24 HOUR ACCESS

The van rolled through the gate as soon as the gap was wide enough.

Jay leaned forward. "What are we doing?"

The Asshole Brothers ignored him. The one who called himself Mike steered the van between two long storage buildings, identical rows of gray steel garage-style roll-up doors sliding past on both sides. The stretch of pavement between the buildings was a corridor of shadows, lit only dimly by a series of half-assed floodlights strung way too far apart to make any real dent in the darkness.

Jay raised his voice. "I said, what the fuck are we doing?"

Ralph said something softly in a language that Jay didn't understand. Mike replied in the same language.

Mike looked over his shoulder and treated Jay to another of his bogus smiles, his teeth nearly glowing in the dimly lighted van. "It is a little detour. Nothing more."

Jay felt his fists begin to clench. His alarm. He should have listened to his fucking alarm. "What kind of detour?"

No answer.

Jay snatched at the buckle release on his seatbelt, and got to his feet, hunching over under the ceiling of the van. "WHAT KIND OF FUCKING DETOUR?"

The van braked to a stop in front of one of the steel garage doors. Jay grabbed for his seat back and managed to keep himself from falling over.

The man called Mike shut off the engine and both of the Asshole Brothers were out of the van before Jay had recovered his footing. The nearest garage door began rolling upward immediately. The Asshole Brothers stood in front of the opening door, apparently paying no attention to Jay at all.

Whatever the hell this was, it had to be bad. He had to get out of there. He had to get out of there *now*. Something really fucked up was going down, and he was not going to stick around to be a part of it.

Jay pulled the door handle as gently as he could. Quiet! Quiet! If he could get the door open without their hearing him, he might be able to get a decent head start. Just let the bastards try to catch him once he got going. The lock clicked softly. He pulled a little harder and the door began to slide open. *Just a little more... Just a little...*

The door squealed, a slow-motion version of the same squeaky metallic grind it had made the first time he'd opened it. Shit! Oh shit! They'd heard it!

The one called Ralph trotted over, covering the few steps to the van before Jay was all the way out of the door. By the time Jay was on his feet, Ralph was close enough to touch him.

Ralph's face was nearly invisible in the shadows. "I am sorry," he said. "This is why we did not want you along."

Jay took a half-step to the side, trying to give himself room to run if Ralph tried anything squirrely. "What the hell is this?"

Ralph pointed into the van. "The soap."

"What about the fucking soap?"

"The WizardClean soap. It is very expensive." Ralph's voice was much friendlier than it had been before.

"So?"

"We substitute cheaper soap when we clean the carpets. The customers do not know the difference."

The door of the storage unit was fully open now. A man emerged, pushing a

dolly loaded with green plastic WizardClean canisters.

Mike walked over and grinned in Jay's direction. "You see? We sell the expensive soap and make extra money."

Ralph nodded. "We did not want to share our profit, so we did not want you along."

The third man rolled past Jay with his dolly-load of soap canisters. Then he was out of Jay's line of sight. That sucked, but he couldn't watch all three of the bastards at once.

"Now we will have to share with you," Mike said. "You know our little secret, so you will get one third. Do we have an agreement?"

Jay nodded. "Okay." He glanced sideways, trying to catch a glimpse of the third man. No such luck. "Sounds good to me," he said. "I can use a little extra money."

Yeah, right. Soap. Let these assholes think he was buying into their bullshit. Whatever this weirdo crap was all about, it sure as hell wasn't soap.

Jay tensed his muscles, getting ready to make his break the instant they took their eyes off him. His right hand stole toward the pocket where his cell phone was hidden. He'd be screaming for the cops as soon as he had a decent head start.

An arm seized him around the throat, squeezing his windpipe in the crook of a muscular elbow, cutting off his air supply. *The third man...*

Jay tried to reach behind himself, to gouge an eye, grab a handful of hair, anything.

Something slammed into his back, just above his right kidney, and the pain shot through him like a nauseating wave of fire. Again the fist jack hammered into his kidney, and again. His stomach heaved and his vision narrowed crazily, strange blobs of light and color floating behind his eyes as he fought for breath.

He felt himself being dragged. Then, someone grabbed his feet and hoisted him off the ground. He tried to lash out with his feet, kick the second attacker, but the pain and lack of oxygen were robbing him of strength.

"In here!" a voice snapped. And then the speaker switched to another language.

A few seconds later, someone barked another command in the strange foreign language and Jay's feet dropped to the concrete floor of the mini-storage unit without warning. His left ankle twisted on impact, and another explosion of pain ripped through him as something in his foot broke with an audible crunch.

The man behind him was not letting up on his throat. He half stood, half dangled from the pressure of that merciless arm. His throat flooded with vomit, but the crushing arm allowed it no escape.

"Look at me!"

Jay jerked wildly, trying to shake loose of the arm. Just a sip of air. Just a sip... Someone grabbed his hair and yanked his head back. "Look at me!"



His eyes focused for a second and he saw the man who called himself Mike. There was something in his hand. Something long and shiny.

“Consider yourself privileged,” Mike’s voice said. It came from a million miles away, and the sounds didn’t seem to match up to the movements of his lips.

“You are the first,” Mike said in his impossibly distant voice. “But you are not — the last.”

Mike’s arm shot forward, and an altogether new sort of pain erupted in Jay’s groin. A white hot laser of agony. Mike’s hand jerked roughly upward, and the pain flared in its wake, tearing through Jay’s stomach and up into his chest.

He began to fall toward the floor in a crazy slow-motion glide that seemed to have no respect for time or gravity. His hands rose to cover the unexplainable/impossible rip that had appeared in his body. He felt his intestines and organs slither between his groping fingers in a hot rush of coppery wetness.

His head hit the cement, nearly driving the last light from his brain.

The ring... Can't forget Amy's... ring...

And the alarm in his head was silent.