

Chapter 4

The next morning began with Sam's cell phone ringing like there was no tomorrow. It sat on the table in the main cabin and blared away. The vibrate button was activated so the phone did kind of a dance on the table. The powerful ring easily awoke Lonnie and me. I went into that partial sleep, partial dream, and partial awake sequence as I stumbled out of my bunk. I reached over to the table in the main cabin and picked up the phone.

By the time I got to the phone, it had stopped ringing but the letters *TGH* were flashing on the screen. "What the hell was that?" said Lonnie.

"I don't know, but somebody named TGH wants to find Sam pretty bad."

"TGH is *Tampa General Hospital*, Genius. Go and roust Sam out of his quarters. There could be an emergency at the hospital."

As it turned out, this was the second time in two days that I found DeeDee naked in my arms. I had awoken her, and she sat straight up and looked at me for a few seconds. She had nothing on at all. Her skin looked pink in the moonlight as it danced through the portal and landed on that beautiful face. I looked at her as she pulled me to her chest and gave me a hug. It was the kind of hug that had the trappings of a casual middle of the night visit.

I smiled at her. "DeeDee, wake Sam up, we think there's an emergency of some sort." She was now perched on her knees leaning forward so her head did not hit the bulkhead ... tits pointing right at me. "Huh?", she said.

"Wake up Sam. His phone is ringing." I said. I glanced at the little clock on the shelf in the master's quarters. It was 4:27 AM. DeeDee managed to wake Sam up and he came out of his quarters – naked – groggy – and a little bit hung over.

He returned the call to TGH and listened with great disappointment to the voice on the other end of the line. I sensed with my uncanny intuition that this was the last of my DeeDee showings.

There was a fire in Tampa that affected about twelve people - most with serious burn damage. Some victims required surgery. Sam got dressed in a hurry and unfortunately so did DeeDee. Sam called for a taxi as they packed up and prepared for a rapid departure to Tampa. The sailing trip of Sam's life had just taken a very wrong turn.

Lonnie and I stood in the cabin as if we were both hit by stun guns. It was just past 5 AM. The birds were not yet up. The dock lights were lit up like a runway. A ten-knot breeze kept the flag busy as some early morning fishermen made their way out into the Gulf of Mexico.

I put up some coffee. Lonnie used a semi-sarcastic and aggravated tone. "Okay, so what now, Genius?"

"Well, we were on our way to Key West, right? Carla has a slip reserved for us, right? So let's head to Key West."

Lonnie grunted. I continued, “It’s not like Sam is going to use his boat or anything of that sort. If he wants to tell stories, and he will, he can tell them on our boat back in Bradenton.”

I sat back and thought about things, not necessarily related to our current situation. For an adult male, I don’t have many strings tying me down. I am single and live aboard my boat in Bradenton. Home is a thirty-four foot Mainship trawler named *LifeLine*. By now, I’ve been here in Florida for six or seven years. Back then, I needed a change in lifestyle so I settled into beautiful *Dolphin Cove* – a full service marina on the Manatee River on Florida’s west coast.

It was a big change from my life in New York City and it turned out to be a positive one. I think. I run a small software company that caters to marinas. This I do with my partner, Ed Dowd. I run my company at the navigation station in the main cabin of the *LifeLine*. I have a laptop, a cell phone, wireless internet access and a twenty-three inch flat screen TV mounted into the bulkhead.

For reasons I cannot fully understand, Lonnie Turner became my best friend. Lonnie is retired from the military as well as the Washington DC Police Department. Basically, most of my life entails working, sailing and getting involved in adventures at the marina. There are, of course, other aspects of my existence, including being a die-hard New York Yankees fan trying in vain to root for the Tampa Bay Rays. It’s not easy being me.

As far as getting involved with dockside adventures, it’s a mystery to me. My goal in coming to Florida was to lead a nice quiet life taking care of my customers and helping out my friends. For reasons that escape me entirely, things just seem to happen around me. These things grab a hold of me and all of a sudden I’m up to my waist in some sordid affair that leads me into places I really shouldn’t be.

Hey, it’s a lot better than going to sales status meetings at some large technology company. Given all of that, my life is pretty good. My love life is not necessarily a stable one. I had managed to drive off two good women due, in part, from my reluctance to truly settle down. I just seem to get caught up in things that are not conducive to a healthy relationship. My current effort at achieving boyfriend status involves Carla, the dock master at Key West Marina. We met awhile back when I took an extended trip through the Florida Keys and the Bahamas.

Carla was in her early forties and had been dock master for enough years to give me advice on how to back into a slip in a heavy wind. She had jet black hair that framed a cupie doll face and complemented her curvy shape. She always seemed to wear khaki shorts and a halter top except in the winter when she wore khaki shorts and a halter top with a jacket.

I snapped back from self analysis and poured two mugs of coffee. Basically, we were ready to sail. We really didn’t need Sam and DeeDee for crew. We were well provisioned and the boat was in perfect shape. So, I said to Lonnie, “How about it? Should we just stay with our plan and head for Key West?” I heard a grunt with a positive tone to it so I took that for a yes.

By 10 AM we were ‘lines away’ leaving *Venice Yacht Club* for Key West.

