

Chapter 1

Patricia sat with her feet propped up on the coffee table sipping iced coffee. Damn, it was lonely here in her Florida timeshare without Melissa and Ashley. She probably ought to just give the place up. There was no point in it any more with Melissa and Ashley married. It was a God-send when their girls-only timeshare vacation began as an effort to cheer up sweet Ashley after her father died. She met new friends and swam every day. Patricia sighed, thankful that Ashley had a good husband to make her happy. Too bad Mark had to work long medical residency hours, but Ashley had her social work job to keep her busy.

Patricia jumped when she heard a knock at the door. Who could it be? She wasn't expecting anyone. Her usual timeshare neighbors were not here this year. The only people she knew were at the salon.

She got up from the couch and walked to the door, wishing she had a peephole like the one at home.

At least, she had the protection of a hooked screen door. She opened the door slowly.

"Good morning, Patricia."

"What in the world are you doing here, John?"

"May I come in?"

Patricia hesitated for a couple of seconds and unhooked the screen door and pushed it open for him. She stepped back to let her ex-husband come in. She closed the door behind him.

They stood there looking at each other.

"At Ashley's wedding reception I mentioned that I would be close by during your usual timeshare vacation and I could come by. You didn't exactly say I couldn't, so here I am."

"Well, yes, I remember that conversation," Patricia said.

"I'm here on my boat. I dropped by to invite you to dinner on the boat tonight."

"I don't know," John.

"Just dinner, that's all. Just say yes to dinner. We can catch up on the family. What everybody has been doing since Ashley's wedding in New York. I'm sure you know a lot more about that than I do."

"Well, I guess I could," she said.

"Good, how about if I pick you up at 6:30?"

"If you're in that marina a few blocks from here, I could just walk. It's not necessary to pick me up."

"I want to pick you up, Patricia."

"OK, John. I'll be ready at 6:30."

"All right then," John said.

Patricia followed him to the door and locked it behind him.

She walked back to the couch and flopped down on it. She said aloud, "What was I thinking? Agreeing to have dinner with him on his damn boat. Dinner alone with him." She shook her head in disbelief of her own stupidity. She must have lost her mind. Just plain lost it. Seeing each other at Melissa's wedding and then Ashley's wedding, well that was one thing, but having dinner alone was quite another thing.

She checked her watch. She barely had time to get to the salon for her mani pedi and facial. All part of the ritual during the timeshare vacations. It had always been a highlight of the stay when Melissa and Ashley were with her. Now it seemed kind of silly.

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Patricia stood in front of her small closet wondering what in the world she should wear to this dinner on John's yacht that shouldn't be happening in the first place.

Of course, she had brought plenty of red, her favorite color. She also had some favorite purple pieces. But this dinner. It was so strange she didn't know what she should wear. She finally decided on an above-knee purple strappy sundress and high-heeled platform tan snakeskin sandals. The high-heeled sandals might be a bad choice for the boat, but she felt practically naked without heels on. She didn't understand why so many of her friends had given up heels. They looked frumpy in their little-old-lady shoes. Not her.

Before she got in the shower she did several sets of her boob exercises. No flip flops and no floppy boobs for her.

When she got out of the shower, Patricia put on her bra and panties and blow dried her hair. Thanks to her hair dresser of more than 20 years, her honey-blonde hair had the same beautiful color year after year. She was glad she had transitioned her bob into a longer bob style that gave her new options. She'd put some waves in for tonight.

She opened a drawer and started applying face creams. She smiled, remembering the time her online cosmetics order was so pricey it triggered an early-fraud -warning call from her credit card company. Clearly it was a guy who didn't know his ass from a hole in the ground. She had verified the purchase, trying hard to be polite.

Patricia leaned toward the mirror and fussed with her eye shadow, wiped it off, and reapplied it. She finished her makeup with mascara applied with an expert touch. She stood back a little to check her hair. She reshaped the loose waves on the right side, pulling the hair forward a little more.

Fully dressed and made-up, she checked her image in the full-length closet mirror. Not half bad for a 64-year-old woman. Not bad at all. She grabbed a purple clutch and put her lipstick into it.

Patricia went into the living area and sat down on the couch to wait for John.

He knocked on her door at 6:30 sharp. The bastard always had been punctual even in college.

She purposefully let him knock a couple more time before she unlocked the wooden door and unhooked the screen door. He opened the screen door and stepped in.

"You are absolutely gorgeous this evening, Patricia. Unbelievably gorgeous."

"You mean unbelievably gorgeous for a woman of my age."

"I mean unbelievably gorgeous for a woman of any age."

She laughed. "You always were a silver-tongued devil, even in college."

He smiled. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes, I'm ready to go."

She left on the floor lamp at the end of the couch and locked the wooden door.

John took her arm as they walked down the front steps.

He escorted her to the passenger side of the black BMW and opened the door for her.

"Thank you," she said. As he closed the door, she was thinking it had been a long time since anyone had opened a car door for her.

As they pulled away from the curb, he said, "I hope you still like Greek food."

She looked over at him and said, "I do. I'm surprised you remembered that."

He smiled. "I remember a lot of things about you."

Patricia squirmed. She hoped he was not going to be a running dumb ass and make a pass at her. He had said just dinner and she was going to hold him to it.

He wheeled into his reserved parking space in front of the yacht.

"Do you sail this yacht by yourself, John?"

"For the long trip from Houston to this part of Florida, I usually have one extra man. The two of us manage pretty well. It takes us several days. The best part about this particular sailor is he has Greek heritage and he knows his way around any size galley. In my book he's a chef, but he refers to himself as a cook and entrepreneur, so I don't call him a chef. In fact, he is co-owner of a small Greek restaurant and sails with me because sailing is in his blood. We are friends, and we sail as often as two people in our situations can manage."

"Is he on the boat now? Will I meet him?"

"No, when we are here, Stephanos stays with his brother. He came in this afternoon to cook our Greek meal as a special favor to me. He grumbled a little about having such short notice. He said he could have done a better dinner with at least 24 hours' notice."

"He sounds like a serious chef."

"That he is, but if you meet him someday, don't call him a chef."

John got out of the car and helped Patricia out and took her arm as they walked along the dock to his yacht.

"Why do you call it a boat? It looks like a yacht to me."

"Calling it a yacht would be ostentatious. It's just a boat, compared to the real yachts."

Patricia was grateful for John's strong arm as she boarded the yacht.

She looked around the beautiful deck, clean and shining.

John motioned to the stairway. He said, "Let's go below, and I'll show you around before I warm up and serve Stephanos' Greek meal."

Patricia carefully navigated the fairly narrow stairway and stepped into a living area with a small couch, coffee table, and two easy chairs.

John said, "On big yachts there is a salon for entertaining people. I just have this small living room."

"It's beautiful," Patricia said.

John led the way down a narrow hall and opened a door. "This is the master bedroom. This is where I sleep. It has a double bed and little bathroom over there, complete with shower. It's small, but this bedroom could sleep two." He stepped back and watched Patricia poke her head into the room.

"That's beautiful interior design. Was it this way when you bought it or did you have someone to redecorate?"

John laughed. "It was this way when I bought it. I'd rather spend whatever spare time I have sailing this boat instead of decorating it."

He walked ahead and opened another door. "And down here is the guest bedroom. It's smaller, but could also sleep two. It has its own little bathroom, small but a lot better than an airplane lavatory. Stephanos sleeps here when we make long trips." Patricia stepped inside and looked around.

"Beautiful," she said.

"Let's go back down the hallway to the living room where we'll access the galley and small dining booth."

He followed Patricia back down the hall toward the living room.

"Very impressive," Patricia said.

"My favorite place is the galley and dining area. If you're claustrophobic, I guess you wouldn't like it, but I like to drink coffee and read in there."

He opened a door on the other side of the living room and beckoned her to go in. Patricia stepped in and looked around. "Oh, I like this, too. It's small, but efficient and cozy."

"All right then," John said, "you've had the interior grand tour. It's time to eat. You just sit down in the booth while I warm up Stephanos' feast."

Patricia sat down at the booth. The table was set with red and white paisley placemats, solid red napkins, and attractive stainless steel flatware.

John said, "I hope you still like Merlot. That's what I have for this evening."

Patricia nodded her head yes, as John set a bottle of Merlot and two wine glasses on the table.

"May I pour you a glass before dinner?" he asked.

"No, thanks. I'll wait."

John said, "This won't take long. It's a very simple meal. As Stephanos said, he could have made a much more complicated meal if I had given him more notice. Would you like to have the salad while the entree is heating?"

"That would be good."

Patricia watched him go back to the fridge and pull out individual bowls of Greek Salad. He smiled at her as he placed them on the table.

He went back to the fridge for a big bowl of stew and placed it in the microwave to heat for 10 minutes.

A plate of Baklava sat on the counter ready to be served for dessert.

John put a trivet in the middle of the table and placed a big serving spoon by it.

He sat down across from Patricia. "If you're like me, you may be surprised that there's no lettuce in the salad. I was surprised the first time I had it at Stephanos' restaurant. It was just cucumbers, tomatoes, and onions. He says you can use other vegetables too, but no lettuce."

"You're right. I haven't had Greek Salad like this." She took a bite and chewed it. Looking up at John, she said, "But I like it."

"Good." He dug into his own salad.

The microwave dinged. "We don't have to hurry. It will stay hot while we finish."

"Where did you meet this Greek sailor friend?"

"At his restaurant. I was eating alone there one day when he was making his rounds of the tables, greeting people and asking if their food was good. Somehow we got to talking about sailing. I invited him to go out with me the next weekend, and we've been friends ever since."

"That's remarkable," Patricia said. "You sound like Ashley. I used to say Ashley has friends like a dog has fleas."

John threw back his head and laughed. "That granddaughter of ours is remarkable. And, you were remarkable in planning and executing a beautiful wedding for Melissa and for Ashley."

Patricia smiled at him. She said, "It was great fun. I had your money to play with, John."

"And, you used it well." He held her eyes for a moment.

"Are you done with your salad?" he asked.

"I am."

He cleared their salad plates and returned to the table with the big bowl of stew. Setting it down on the trivet, he said, "This is eggplant and beef stew. Would you like to have some pita to go with it?"

"No, thanks. I saw the Baklava on the counter. I'm saving room for that."

John remained standing, dipping soup into her serving bowl.

"Thank you. It looks and smells fabulous."

“Enjoy,” John said. “Stephanos offered to teach me how to say ‘have a nice meal in Greek,’ but I declined. I was afraid it would be as disastrous as my attempts at French.”

Patricia joined in his laughter.

They ate in silence for a few minutes, savoring the hot stew.

“Isn’t Melissa’s baby due soon?” John asked. “I haven’t kept up.”

“The baby boy is due in a few weeks.”

John said, “I need to call her right away. I shouldn’t have waited this long.”

Patricia took note of the frown on his face. “She’s an older mother. Do you think she and the baby are going to be OK?”

“They will be fine, John. She has an excellent OB.”

“Here we are closer to 65 than 64, and we have a granddaughter just married and a grandson almost here.” He chuckled. “All part of the amazing advances in medicine, I guess. I know Ashley’s husband Mark is going to knock the ball out of the park with his residency. He is gifted and very determined.”

“I think you’re right about Mark. I just hope he has time enough for Ashley.”

“May I dip some more stew for you, Patricia?”

“It was wonderful, but I’m saving room for the Baklava,” she said.

“Well then, let’s have it.”

John cleared the table and set the plate of Baklava on the table. “It’s really good with Turkish coffee, but I’m too old to drink that stuff in the evening. Would you like any kind of coffee? Maybe decaf?”

“No thanks, I’ll stay with the wine.”

He poured her another glass. “I won’t have any since I’ll be driving you home.”

“You could walk me home instead of driving. That way you could have another glass of wine.” Patricia couldn’t believe those words had come out of her mouth. It had to be the wine talking.

John’s face lighted up. “That’s a great idea. By the time we’re ready to go, it will be cooled off a lot.” He poured himself another glass of wine.

When they finished their wine and the Baklava, Patricia said, “What a great meal. Please give my compliments to Stephanos. Now, let me help you with the dishes.”

“No dishes tonight. You are my guest. I’ll walk you home when you are ready.”

“Now is a good time,” she said.

They got up from the table and headed back to the living area and up the stairs. When she stepped onto the deck, Patricia said, “Look, John, there’s the big dipper. Can you see it?”

John stepped onto the deck and looked up. He said, “There’s usually so much light pollution here that you can’t see much. There it is for sure.” He gave Patricia a peck on the cheek and said, “It’s a good omen.”

“Maybe so, John. Maybe so.”