

Chapter Sixty

As I walked aboard the ferry, *Adventure*, I saw him. He noticed me as well, but I knew who he was and he, of course, had not a clue as to my identity. He took a place near the stern and leaned on the rail. I pushed my way through the crowd of early riders and stood next to him. I struck up a friendly conversation. He told me he was going to go fishing. So was I, though I didn't tell him that. He needed a shave, and I noticed some flecks of reddish brown on the sleeve of his khaki jacket. I assumed they were blood spatters from the soldier who had been closest to him when we mowed them down.

During our brief dialogue he mentioned that he was going to his boat, which he kept in the Bald Head Island Marina. That closed another loop for me.

At that point I estimated my chances of killing him were about sixty-forty. Even though I still had the element of surprise on my side, he was a smart, devious, vicious son of a bitch. When I made my move, the slightest glitch could reverse those odds in an instant and Bitsy would be a widow for the second time.

As the ferry boat entered the marina basin I looked over the yachts docked there. There were a half dozen that looked as though they would be in the correct price range to qualify as the boat Karim had purchased. I decided to casually stroll in the same direction he would take when we debarked. From here on in I would be winging it, a course of action I hated. One thing for sure, I couldn't pop him out in the open. That would leave me no exit, unless I wanted to swim back to the mainland, dodging police boats.

The marina was completely full, every slip taken. This came as no surprise as I guessed that most were there for the festival. Boaters are usually early risers. When a

sailor moves his boat from one port to another, he almost always opts for daytime. This is especially true of coastal sailors who like to spend the night in a marina or safe anchorage. Cruising after dark on a river or in the Intracoastal Waterway is fraught with peril for any but the most experienced mariners, so getting up at first light becomes a habit. As I walked along, I saw several boaters enjoying their morning cup of java on board. One trawler captain was regaling visitors with sea stories, and getting plenty of laughs. As I passed his vessel, I noticed he had a large seashell hanging from a leather thong around his neck. He waved in my direction and then put the shell to his ear and began carrying on a conversation. After a moment he said, "Hello. Hello. You're breaking up." He let the shell fall to his chest and said, "These damn shell phones. You can never depend on them." Laughing uproariously at his own joke he sat down. I grinned and went on by, thinking how bizarre my life had become that I was laughing at jokes on my way to killing someone.

Karim turned from the land onto dock 'C', where the boats were tied up alongside in a row and not in slips. Where I stood, there was a low concrete wall, painted with alternating blue and white stripes. I took a seat on top of it and watched my quarry make his way to the last craft on the floating dock. It looked like a Carver, somewhere between forty and fifty feet in length. He swung himself aboard and went into the pilot house. I heard the diesels rumble to life. It seemed al-Hadji wasn't going to waste any time in clearing out. I began to work my way slowly toward his boat. A morning breeze began to ripple the surface of the basin, and causing the red, white and blue flag on the stern of Karim's boat to move in gentle waves. He exited the cabin and stepped over the side to the dock, where he unplugged the shore power cable and began to coil it over his arm. I

took advantage of his preoccupation with preparations for getting underway by moving swiftly to where he was working. I slipped the Glock out of my waistband and held it down at my side where he couldn't see it.

I said to him, "Need any help getting off?"

He glanced up at me with a perturbed look. "No thanks, I can handle it by myself."

I smiled my most friendly grin, and then pointed the pistol at him. "Actually, I believe you're going to need a lot of help, Karim."

He stood immobile, thinking desperately, I'm sure, about how this could be happening. Finally, he said, "You're the man from the warehouse."

"Yes, it would seem that I am. And you're the son of a bitch that murdered dozens of my friends in Houston. You should have quit while you were ahead, you Islamic piece of shit."

His voice was quavering. "What are you... what do you want?"

"Lay the cable down and move to the stern."

We both moved to the end of the Carver where the open deck offered easy access. I ordered, "Get aboard."

I followed him as he hopped from the dock to the boat. "Go into the cabin."

Inside, I said, "Lie on the deck, al-Hadji."

As he began to crouch, he clutched the small of his back. "My muscles are sprained. It is very painful to lie down."

My mouth was forming a strong, "Tough shit," when he brought a pistol from behind him. In one fluid move he pointed it directly at me and pulled the trigger. I have

heard that when your number is up, everything slows down and your sensory perceptions, hearing and sight, are magnified tremendously. I saw his finger squeezing and it was obvious he would complete the action before I could raise my Glock and shoot him. A smarmy grin spread across his face. He had the drop on me and was reveling in it. Doc Holliday probably had that same look when he shot the hell out of the Clanton gang at the O.K. Corral. My jaw clenched and my ass puckered as I waited for the round to hit me. Some people find it hard to believe that it is possible to actually see a bullet flying through the air. I'm not talking about tracers, but regular, ordinary rounds. I saw them more than once flying out of the elephant grass in 'Nam. It might have been because of the way the sun glinted on the copper jacket. I don't know. I couldn't dodge them, but I saw them. I expected to see a slug fly out of the barrel of Karim's weapon, on its way to my chest. But I didn't. Surreally, there wasn't a bang from Karim's weapon. Instead, it gave a loud click. And then another click and another.

He looked at the pistol and shook his head. The dumb son of a bitch had forgotten to reload after the shootout at All-Sports Distribution.

I said, "Allah is fucking you over, Karim. Now, drop the weapon and lie down."

He obeyed and the gun clattered to the teak deck. When he was flat on his stomach, I moved around him, feeling for a second weapon. He was clean. I said, "Get up and sit in that chair at the nav station."

He did as I directed. "Where do you keep the duct tape?" Every boater in the known universe has duct tape. He pointed to a large drawer under the couch. I opened it up and found a roll.

“Put your hands behind your head and swing the chair around so that you are facing the station.” When he was in position, I got behind him and instructed him to put his hands in his pockets. I looped a long piece of tape around his torso and then began taping him securely to the chair.

I know what you must be thinking. I would be nothing without duct tape. Well, you’re right.

When he was secured to my satisfaction, but certainly not his, I finished with a strip across his mouth, moustache and all.

I went back on the dock and picked up the shore power cord and threw it on the aft deck. Next, I slipped the dock lines around the stanchions on the dock and tied them off on the boat, fore and aft. Back on board, I put the shift lever in reverse and let it idle, causing the craft to tug gently on the lines. I untied the stern line and pulled it aboard and walked forward to release the bow line. As it came free, I brought it in and ran the few steps to the wheel house as the Carver began to move backwards into the exit channel in the marina basin. I ran up the RPM’s on the starboard screw which turned the boat toward the channel that led to the Cape Fear River.

I said over my shoulder to my passenger, “We’re outa here. Ah, a life on the bounding main. There’s nothing like it.”

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