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MIAMI MASTERS  
COLLECTION

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BJ WANE



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Miami Masters Collection

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Bound and Saved  
MIAMI MASTERS BOOK ONE

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*To Sandie, for her insight, critique, support and valued friendship.*

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## Prologue

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**T**he amber/gold luminescence of the setting sun snagged Cassandra Bowlin's gaze as she turned into the long drive leading up to her stepfather's stately, southern mansion. But a beautiful, scenic sunset did nothing to detract from how much she hated that house. The two-story, pillared, pre-civil war structure would've been a picturesque welcome if not for the man who owned the property. Parking in front of the wide steps leading up to the front veranda, she cursed the reason that brought her out here tonight. Only for her mother's sake would she step foot in the place or even think about talking to the man who had kept Victoria Bowlin-Deveau under his strict thumb for the last ten years.

Rubbing the brewing headache forming between her eyes, Cassandra bemoaned her mother's weak, needy personality that had enabled the mayor of her hometown, Choctaw, Alabama, to take advantage of Victoria's vulnerable state after Cassandra's father died from a sudden heart attack at the young age of forty. Grief-stricken, unable to cope with her loss, her mother had been easy pickings for the ruthless man who never took no for an answer when he wanted something, or someone. And he'd

desired Victoria for as long as Cassandra had been aware of what lust was. That Victoria was easily manipulated was just too much of a lure for Jacques Deveau to resist.

Regardless of her mother's wishes for peace between her and Jacques, Cassandra couldn't let his latest dictate go unchallenged. As always, if Victoria wouldn't, or couldn't stand up for herself, Cassandra would do it for her. Stepping out of her car, she strode up to the front door before she could change her mind and chicken out. There had always been something shady about the mayor she didn't trust. To say the man gave her the creeps would be putting it mildly, but she'd never let his callous disregard for those around him keep her from at least trying to make things right for her mother.

Waiting to take advantage of Victoria's once-a-week night out with her card group to coincide with a day all the servants had off had been difficult, but necessary, she reflected as she rapped on the front door. She wondered if it would be too much to hope he would be in one of his rare, good moods. It had been devastating to then eighteen-year-old Cassandra when her mother announced she was pregnant less than a year following her father's death and Victoria's marriage to Jacques six months later. The announcement dashed her hopes the marriage wouldn't last and added to her worry about the stranglehold Jacques seemed to have over Victoria. Then little Billy had been born with Down Syndrome and she had fallen in love with the precocious boy. When she called the other day to talk to him, she'd been stunned to learn Jacques had made good on his long-time threat and sent Billy to a special home for mentally challenged kids, far away from everything and everyone he knew and loved. Even worse, Jacques refused to let her mother visit him until, according to Victoria, she cut the apron strings. Since Billy had just celebrated his ninth birthday, his cruel, unrealistic stipulation propelled Cassandra to do what she'd sworn she wouldn't do again, step foot inside the bastard's house.

Five minutes passed without a sound from inside. Trying the knob, she found it unlocked and let herself in. The eerie silence accompanying the semi-darkness of the house set her nerves to jumping, but all she had to do was picture Billy's scared, confused face to keep from turning tail and running. She called out, but only received the echo of her voice in reply. Making her way to the back, she stepped out the den sliders onto the rear veranda and scanned the well-manicured yard and shimmering pool.

"I know you're here," she muttered in frustration, wanting this confrontation over with. The faint sound of voices caught her attention, and after pausing a moment to detect where they were coming from, she skipped across the lawn toward the line of trees hiding the Choctaw creek. Darkness enshrouded the woods with only the faint peeks of the grey early evening light coming through sparse areas of foliage. The voices grew louder the deeper into the woods she went, one high-pitched, agitated and scared tone pressing her to slow down with precaution.

The gurgle flow of the creek rushing downstream toward Pea River reached her ears, along with Jacques' cold voice. A chill swept up her spine from the ice dripping from her stepfather's voice. Pausing to separate a few branches, she sucked in a deep, shocked breath at the sight before her. A jolt of nauseous fear rose to clog her throat when she spotted the four men, one on his knees with a gun pointed to his head while Jacques stood by, arms folded, gazing upon the frightened man's quivering form with a dispassionate look.

"You've been warned before. You know how I deal with traitors."

*Oh, God.* She struggled to remain quiet, and for one brief second contemplated rushing out there to try to stop what she knew they were going to do. Fortunately, pure terror kept her rooted in place, unfortunately, it also prevented her from running. It took hearing Jacques' next words to galvanize her into action.

"Take care of him."



As he turned from the now sobbing man pleading for his life, Cassandra spun and ran, the rapt of a gunshot reverberating through the air, spurring her to go faster.

“What was that?”

*Had someone heard her?* Fear-induced adrenaline surged through her as she crashed through the woods.

“Check it out.”

Jacques’ voice came too close behind her, propelling her across the yard as soon as she broke from the trees, her legs pumping as fast as her blood. By the time she reached her car, Cassandra’s labored breathing and sweaty palms made grasping the door handle difficult. *Come on, come on*, she prayed until she finally flung open the door and dove behind the wheel. She’d left the keys in the ignition, and within seconds was peeling out of the drive and back onto the main road, her clammy hands gripping the wheel in a desperate attempt to get herself, and her speeding car under control.

Cassandra had no idea if anyone saw her, but couldn’t take the chance. A connoisseur of cop shows, she tried to remember every episode where someone had to flee for their lives, and what they did to keep from being found. If one of those men spotted her, she didn’t have much time. If not, her sudden disappearance would send up red flags. Until she knew for sure, she couldn’t take any chances. Zipping through an ATM, she cleared out both her checking and savings accounts then hastened to her apartment.

She didn’t even have to pull into the parking lot to get an answer to her question about whether she’d been seen. The two other men with Jacques were getting out of a windowless van and striding up to her door, purpose etched on their cold faces. Driving on by, tears blurred her vision as she realized how radically her life had just changed in the space of a few split seconds.

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## Chapter 1

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**T**he largest boat Sandie had yet seen filled the slot right in front of the Gold Star Marina office. Surrounded by windows on three sides, the compact office space offered her a view of the entire semi-circle of moored, luxury boats the exclusive Miami marina leased slots to. She'd only been working the part-time job for two weeks and counted herself lucky to have landed the job at all. After fleeing from Alabama a month ago, she'd been desperate to start earning at least enough money for food and necessities so she could hang onto as much of her cash as possible. Bunking at homeless shelters saved some expense, but public transportation added up each day.

Releasing a despondent sigh, she shifted her gaze from the three-tiered boat to the endless expanse of the vivid blue Atlantic Ocean beyond. What she would give to just sail off into that azure space, leaving behind the fear and worry she'd lived with for the past thirty days. Sandie couldn't remember when she'd last enjoyed a peaceful night's sleep or relaxed long enough to get through a meal. By now, school would've started, and she missed the kids and her job as an elementary art teacher as much as she did her mother and brother.

Leaning her arms on the counter, she took note of the early morning activity along the pier and envied those people their normal, happy lives. Fearful of calling home those first few days, she had sent her mother a simple text telling her she would be out of town visiting a sick friend for a while, then called her school and asked for a sabbatical because of a family emergency. After that, she'd ditched her phone and sold her car once she cleared the state, temporarily severing all connections to her life in Choctaw, which included coming up with the abbreviation of her name.

By the time Sandie reached Jacksonville, her nerves from constantly looking over her shoulder were shot. Loneliness and fear, two new emotions for her, made her desperate to hear a familiar voice from home, something to remind her of why she'd fled everything she knew and loved. The disposable phone she'd picked up proved to be too much of a temptation and she'd put in a quick call to her mother. Sandie had wept silent tears upon hearing Victoria's voice, and knew she would do whatever she had to to keep her mother safe from her husband's secrets, regardless of Victoria's needy nature that had led her to fall for Jacques' manipulative wiles in the first place. For the time being, keeping her mother in the dark about the truth was the only thing she could think of to give her time to come up with a solution to her problem. The one thing she knew about her stepfather for certain was, in his own warped way, he really did love her mother, and she was banking on that to keep Victoria safe.

The worst thing about her current plight was not knowing what Jacques knew or was doing back home, or who she could turn to for help. One of the most frequent guests Victoria bragged about hosting was the chief of police and his wife, which was why Sandie hadn't rushed to the police after fleeing Jacques' estate. She had no idea who she could trust. Her stepfather was rumored to also have the ear of the lieutenant governor,

and after having been in a position of power in their small town for the past two decades, she didn't doubt his connections went that high.

Her mood had picked up when she'd reached Miami and the bus depot happened to be within walking distance of the wharfs and restaurants where she'd hoped to pick up work. Mickey, the older man who ran the marina, had been happy to pay her cash for the few hours a week she helped in the office, relieving him of the tedious paperwork involved in filing employee taxes and giving him some time to himself. Sandie had worked her way through college in a small boat rental and bait shop down by the river, and the paperwork and phone calls in the marina office were similar enough to make this job easy for her to pick up.

The phone rang, diverting her attention from things she couldn't control right now. Over the next two hours, in between taking calls, waiting on slot leasers and filing, Sandie's eyes kept wandering back to the mega boat replacing the smaller cruiser that had occupied the same slot last week. She wondered who owned the new one and why the tall, sandy-haired, blue-eyed previous owner left. Zachary Allen-Vancuren, according to his rental agreement, had only been in the office once since she started, and like the rest of the rich patrons of the marina, had treated her with polite indifference.

Not that his, or anyone else's, social disregard bothered her. Coming from the 'other side of the tracks' in a small, prejudiced town in the deep South, she'd grown up developing a thick skin against taking snobby airs personally, even from men who set her heart to tripping in a way she'd never experienced before when meeting any other man for the first time. Of course, one of the things Jacques liked to harp the most about to Victoria was Sandie's lack of gratitude for his 'rescue' of her mother from 'that' life. Though Victoria never agreed with him, she also refused to disabuse him of that bloated, misplaced self-praise.

Her stepfather wasn't alone in his attitude toward those of lower social status, and that was just one of the reasons Sandie normally didn't find herself attracted to men such as the wealthy yacht owner.

With a dreamy sigh, she recalled the appealing contrast of his sun-bronzed, rough-hewn face with his dark blond, wavy hair and vivid, light blue eyes. Towering over her diminutive, five foot, three-inch height, his cool, detached gaze as he'd looked down at her hadn't seemed to matter to her deprived body. Sandie blamed her long celibacy for her uncharacteristic response to the corded muscles in his arms, thick thighs and searing look in those cobalt eyes that had left her with damp panties after he strolled out without a backward glance or even a thank you when she'd handed him his receipt for last month's rental payment. She could recall numerous times in the past ten years she'd felt an instant draw toward a man and several times when that attraction had been mutual and explored in a pleasurable way, but never one that struck her with a quick, lightning bolt of pure, hot lust.

Stress, she figured, pulling her mind out of the gutter and back on work. She could blame her current circumstances and the hand fate dealt her on just about anything. An hour later, the rumble in Sandie's stomach told her Mickey would be returning any time, leaving her with another long afternoon to kill before she could return to the shelter for the night. Mentally going over the food options along the docks in her price range, she looked down the wharf for a sign of her boss and instead caught sight of two men who turned her blood to ice in her veins.

*Oh, God. How had they found her?* Sandie would recognize the two men who had been with Jacques that fateful evening anywhere. Her heart thumped in hard, painful rhythms, nausea churning in her stomach as she reached with a shaky hand under the counter for her backpack. Panic welled as she cast a frantic

search up and down the boardwalk for a way to hide. When the men turned around and strode toward one of the dockworkers who just arrived, she made a snap decision.

Racing out the door, she dashed across the pier and leapt aboard the closest boat. Stumbling to her hands and knees, she scrambled to right herself then sped around the side of the wide teak deck and slipped inside the first door she came to. Breathing a sigh of relief at finding it unlocked, she clicked it shut behind her, taking a moment to draw a much-needed breath as she looked around the cavernous, plush room for a place to hide. Sandie only had time to realize she'd chosen the new, luxury yacht to seek asylum on and note the plush sofa curving around the far end of the room before she heard the thud of feet landing on the deck.

With fear-induced bile clogging her throat and threatening to come up, she crept along the wall toward a small, slatted door. Turning the latch, she crawled inside the compact, dark space, crouched down and started to pray. The narrow spaces between the slats didn't let in enough light to see anything inside the closet, but she could get small glimpses of the room. At least ten minutes of silence passed, enough to allow her trembling to slow down a notch.

Clutching her backpack to her chest, she leaned her head against the wall and closed her eyes, so tired she could no longer think straight. A deep, irritated male voice jarred her upright and set her body to trembling again.

“What the fuck are you doing here, Maggie?”

“Come on, Zach, show me around.”

The whiny, needling voice followed the outside door opening and resonated in the large room as the sound of footsteps on the polished wood floors signaled she was no longer alone. Peeking through a slat, Sandie's relief at seeing neither person was one of Jacques' men came second to the shock jerking her upright when

she put a name to that growly voice. Seeing Zachary Allen-Vancuren again packed just as strong a punch to her libido now as it had the first and only time she'd seen him. A pair of white shorts and deck shoes sans socks revealed his long, leanly muscled legs as he stood just a few feet from her hiding spot with his feet braced apart and a frown on his dark face. The tight pinch to his mouth should've warned the woman of his displeasure at seeing her, but she either didn't heed his look or didn't care.

Running her hand up Zachary's arm until she reached the edge of his short-sleeved polo shirt, she leaned against his rigid frame and cooed, "Don't be that way. I just want a sneak peek at what you've done here, and maybe a quick sample of the accoutrements. I've missed you lately."

Sandie rolled her eyes at the other woman's feigned pout then almost giggled aloud when he did the same. Two points for him for seeing through her obvious ploy.

"You know the game, Mags, as well as you know I don't commit, and that's what this is about, isn't it?"

Zachary took, slow, measured steps toward her, backing her up against the curved sofa, and Sandie wondered at the excited gleam entering Maggie's eyes at his stern expression.

"No, I promise," she said, and even Sandie could detect the insincerity in her tone. "Everyone's curious about this baby, and dying to be the first to be invited on an excursion. Are you taking her out today?"

Zachary didn't seem inclined to answer her, instead a small smile that was anything but amused curled the corners of his mouth. *Uh, oh.* She didn't know the man from Adam, but as he gripped Maggie's shoulders and spun her around, Sandie doubted it was to appease her curiosity about his boat. She wondered what the other woman meant by accoutrements, then found out, at least part of it, with his next, coldly delivered statement.

“Pull down your pants and bend over, and I’ll let you sample one of my new toys.”

Neither the dictate nor his icy tone appeared to alarm Maggie like they did Sandie. What was even more shocking though, was the flush of excitement spreading over ‘Mag’s’ face and the quick way she complied with his order. Getting an eyeful of another woman’s upraised butt didn’t exactly thrill Sandie, but watching Zachary stroll over to a built-in cabinet and fling open the door to reveal an array of wicked, painful looking implements, sent a frisson of heated unease throughout her tense body. *Oh, my*, was all she could think when he plucked a short, wide leather strap off a hook and gripped the handle as if at ease with the feel of it in his hand. The round, fleshy backside of his uninvited guest quivered as he approached, but the moist sheen coating her labia belied her nervous tremor.

Okay, she wasn’t a prude, and had her share of lovers, after all, nowadays, a girl didn’t reach her late twenties without having at least one or two affairs. Like all of her friends, she’d also read a fair number of smutty romance novels, and knew about kinky sexual practices. But as Zachary drew back his arm and snapped the eight-inch strap on one plump buttock, the flesh smacking sound and Maggie’s low moan resonating around the room, she realized reading and knowing about such things was far different than getting a close-up view of one of the deeds.

Sandie winced with the next strike but couldn’t look away from the blossoming red slashes appearing on Maggie’s lily-white skin. She didn’t understand how the other woman could lift for each stroke, a silent plea and embracement of what had to be fiery pain spreading across her buttocks. That the spanking turned her on couldn’t be denied, not if her swollen, damp folds were any indication. Maggie’s long blonde hair covered her face, but didn’t disguise her low moans and soft gasps as he set up a steady barrage of well-aimed smacks covering both cheeks before moving down to her thighs.



“This is really what you came for, isn’t it, Mags?” Zachary’s harsh breath seemed at odds with the arousal stamped on his bronzed face and the flare of excitement reflected in his eyes. “More of what I can give you when you’re so needy none of your vanilla lovers will do.” When Maggie stiffened, he jeered with what looked like a much harder swat across both buttocks. “Yeah, for all your claims of wanting only me, I know about your other lovers. Hell, everyone knows you fill in with vanilla when we don’t get together often enough to please you.”

“I... can I help it if I can’t go as long as you between sex?” she snapped back in the first show of pique since she’d followed him into the room. Sandie almost failed in stifling her gasp when Maggie flipped her head up and around, revealing an irritated flush staining her face and brown eyes drenched in lustful need. Wiggling her butt, she wheedled, “But you’re the best, Zach. It’s you I really want.”

Dropping the strap, he palmed her bright red cheeks and Sandie shuddered when he squeezed the abused flesh. She could only imagine how painful his tight grip must be on top of the soreness from his spanking.

“Sure it is, baby. And my money wouldn’t have anything to do with me being the best, now would it?”

That derisive tone held a note of something else she couldn’t identify, but her concentration and gaze shifted focus as he removed his right hand from Maggie’s buttock and made fast work of releasing a mouth-watering, impressive hard-on. Sandie admired his skill in sheathing himself with a condom one-handed as much as she salivated over the impactful size of his cock.

“No, I swear, it’s *you* I want... *please*, Zach.”

She couldn’t tell if Maggie’s plea was for him to believe her or for sex, but it didn’t matter because, from the deep plunge of his cock into her sheath, he went for sex. It baffled Sandie how a painful spanking could arouse a woman. Neither of her parents had ever lifted a hand to her, although she’d spent a good portion

of her teen years grounded, like most teens. Both her buttocks and vagina spasmed as she watched the couple with unabashed voyeurism. *What the hell*, she mused as she fought back a hysterical giggle, *may as well get my kicks when and where I can*. With a scary, bleak future looming ahead of her, Sandie had no problem taking these few moments of reprieve for herself.

Heavy grunts and low mewling cries permeated the room along with the rhythmic slapping of his hips against her vivid red butt. Zachary's tight grip on Maggie's hips held her immobile for his thrusts and made it appear as if he was using her as a conduit for his own pleasure. She not only must not mind, but got off on his control as much as she did his discipline because it took just a few strokes of his cock to set her off. Her sharp cry of release rent the air, followed by his low grunts and, if she heard correctly, a few swear words.

Zachary jerked up his shorts, his face expressing impatience instead of satisfaction. He didn't help her stand or with righting her own clothes, but Maggie didn't seem to take that slight in a negative way either. Her eyes shone with sated triumph; that was, until he clasped her elbow and led her toward the door.

"You've had your fun, now off you go. I have things to do."

"Damn it, Zach!" Yanking her arm from his grip, she glared daggers up at him, frustration having replaced her previous, 'pleased with herself' look. "You can't just use me and discard me like trash."

"I didn't use you, we used each other. Don't come around here uninvited again."

His cold, controlled voice echoed in the empty room after he slammed the door behind them. Sandie had to agree the couple used each other, although, from the little she'd heard, for different reasons. She released her pent-up breath on a loud exhale, her shoulders relaxing as silence reigned on the boat after she heard them leave. Now that the fun interlude was over, she needed to assess her situation, and fast. Praying for a longer

reprieve, she inched out of the closet, slung her backpack containing all the possessions she had with her over her shoulder, and tiptoed to the door. Peeking out, she scanned the deck first, spotted stairs leading to the lower level, then glanced back at the dock, ensuring no one stood close enough to spot her before darting out.

Tripping down the short flight of steps, she turned right and found herself in a narrow aisle lined with three doors on each side. At the end of the hall, she faced a single door and moved toward that one just because it was furthest away. If she's caught, that wouldn't matter, but she could only cope with one problem at a time, and right now, she needed a place to hole up just a little longer. The two goons would give up eventually. Every time she thought about what would happen after that, where she could go where she'd be safe, her throat closed up with fear, threatening her breath and sanity.

Another unlocked door, thank God. Sandie breathed in relief as she stepped inside an opulent bedroom she guessed belonged to the owner of this floating extravagance. The king size bed set up on a dais suited him, she thought as the inviting comfort of multiple pillows and a soft, downy, black and gold cover drew her forward. Exhaustion, mental and physical, pulled at her, tore at her resistance and brought rare tears to her eyes. She was so tired of being alone, scared and running, constantly running. Sliding stomach down onto the bed, she vowed she'd just rest for a few minutes, give her mind and body a necessary, quick, rejuvenating nap, which was all she'd been able to manage for the past month.

A small swath of light splashed across the bed from a port-hole window above the headboard, and the warmth soaked through her jeans. Enjoying the pleasant sensation, her last thought before drifting off to sleep was wondering if that tingle of heat mirrored what a man's slap on her bare butt would generate. If so, it wasn't at all unpleasant.

*NOW, that's a beautiful sight.* Zachary Allen-Vancuren gazed upon his newest acquisition with egotistical pride. The luxury yacht could only be described as an overindulgent extravaganza for a spoiled rich person. He loved it. Having sent Maggie on her way, eagerness to take his new lady out propelled him forward, looking forward to trading the hustle and bustle of big city life for a short, solo trip on the one-hundred-fifty-foot, custom designed mega yacht he'd just shelled out eight million plus for. Leaping aboard, he hoped he didn't have any more untimely, pesky interruptions. His ex-lover wasn't the only woman in his past who'd tried to wheedle her way back into his good graces after delivering the same old, tiresome ultimatum—a ring or she'd be walking. He'd been delighted to show each of them the door. If that labeled him an ass, then he'd wear the slur with pride. They knew the score when they took him on—both his penchant for dominant kink and his 'happy as can be' single status. Why they always thought they could change him, he didn't know, but it never failed to piss him off.

Maybe he shouldn't have given in and fucked Mags again, but he'd been so annoyed with her obvious persistence, he couldn't resist demonstrating one more time how easily he could walk away from her without a backward glance or an ounce of regret. Not only did her forward tenacity turn him off, she was the type of woman who feigned her responses to what she thought he liked dishing out. It would've done no good explaining to her that half the enjoyment for a dominant man was delivering on what the *woman* wanted and needed. Not that she didn't get off, he wasn't a stingy partner, but he also had never found a woman who compelled him to go those extra lengths to feel her out and award her with everything she'd been craving and missing out on.

Inhaling a deep, appreciative breath of the salty air helped

ease his stiff shoulders as he strode across the wide bow deck then slipped inside the 'cockpit' of his new home away from home. The yacht he'd traded in for this sleek, mega beauty had given him and his friends many hours of pleasure, but hadn't been comfortable for spending several days at a time on the open water or decked out with some of the equipment they'd all come to enjoy in the clubs. Now, the seven of them would have their own private space to play, something he knew they'd all been wanting for a while.

Settling behind the controls in the soft leather captain's chair, Zach leaned forward, twisted the key and relished the low hum of the massive engine purring to life. Like stroking a woman to orgasm, he slowly maneuvered the craft out of the slot with intent concentration, thrilling to his success as he cleared the marina and nothing but a sea of blue beckoned him onward. Four days, that's how long he planned to take to get to know his new mistress before sharing her with the guys.

They'd understand his need for a little alone time first, that assurance a side benefit from being such close friends for over twenty years. They'd met at a boy's camp for juvenile delinquents in their teens, bonded over fistfights and the problems of their youth that had driven each of them to the extremes that had forced their families to take drastic action. Those three months had saved their asses in more ways than one, set each of them on the path to straightening themselves out before they landed in prison or the cemetery before they turned eighteen. Zach believed the close-knit gang the seven of them formed had a lot to do with the success of their adult lives. They'd each come from different parts of the state and diverse backgrounds and circumstances, but none of that had mattered during or after those sweat-baked, grueling summer months of eye-opening counseling in the form of a strict, military-style regime.

*Good times*, he mused, a rueful smile curling his mouth. Of all of them, he'd had the easiest path to a better life when his

unknown, long absent father had confessed his existence to his father on his deathbed. Wealthy tycoon, Floyd Vancuren, had wasted no time or expense looking for the grandson and heir he'd never known about. At nineteen, Zach had been only too happy to toe the line, get a business degree and step into his shoes and inherit the family wealth when the old man died ten years later. Another ten years have passed and now, at the age of thirty-eight, he lived a life of leisure, spent as little time as possible in the office and basked in the all the pleasures good health and a lot of money offered him.

If that labeled him an ass, so be it. After a childhood of watching his mother work herself to the bone to support the two of them only for her to suffer now with a rare case of early onset Alzheimer's, he felt he deserved the lifestyle he now indulged in. And Carol Allen deserved every comfort he could now afford to gift her with.

By mid-afternoon, the heat of the August sun pushed him to slow down and float for a while, after all, he had no place to be and was in no hurry to go anywhere. A lot of people would find being the lone vessel surrounded by endless, blue water disconcerting, but he liked the quiet solitude. Moods of melancholy always came upon him after a visit to the home where his mother rarely knew him anymore. His need for space, to just get away always took him out of town, and right now, he was about as far out of town as he'd been in a long time.

Shutting down, he opted to go below decks where it'd be cooler, grab a soft drink and sprawl out on his bed with a book. Unlike most yachts, the space below was as spacious as above deck, room for seven staterooms, each with double berths and private baths, and a wide, galley kitchen. A circular booth big enough to seat ten in a semi-circle around the table sat on a raised dais opposite the long length of counter and appliances.

Popping the bottle cap, he swigged a long draw as he strolled toward the master stateroom at the opposite end. Flinging open

the door, Zach stopped dead in his tracks as his startled gaze landed on a small huddled form curled on his bed.

Outraged at this unexpected, unwanted surprise, he didn't consider waking the intruder gently. "Who the fuck are you and what're you doing here?"