

**Chapter Four, in which we find our compromised hero, having taken the hook and the line, but maybe not the sinker, safely back in bed.**

Later that evening Dan clambered gratefully onboard the sailboat he had lived on for the past five years, anchored currently in Key Largo, one of the more northern of the Florida Keys. He felt safer on water, always had. He scratched Moron's head, having left him aboard to guard what few possessions he had. Moron was a large, miscellaneous, dog that Dan had rescued as a puppy, found in a box beside the highway.

The drive back from Miami hadn't taken much more than two hours, what with traffic backed up on the Causeway, and at least one car fire that he had seen, which always caused his claustrophobia to well up. The hurricane evacuation route signs didn't help. Dan shook his head, and helped Moron into the little dingy he used as a tender, and took him ashore to do his evening business.

He often wondered what the Keys had been like before that idiot Flagler built his railway. He had only recently learned that Flagler was a founder of Standard Oil. Undoubtedly a causeway would have been built in this day of the automobile, by someone if not Flagler, and he himself obviously chose to drive. Bribed by convenience he thought.

Approaching the Keys from the water was so different than from the road. A beautiful tangle of mangroves and manatees on one side and dusty porn shops and tourist traps on the other. What havoc those early industrialists, whose hagiographies he had learned in school, had wrought on the landscape. Flagler wasn't the first to see money in the Keys, but he had had a disproportionate environmental impact that even the ravages of nature had been unable to eradicate, as the highway now ran where the defunct railway had, sold in bankruptcy to the Florida government.

Dan squirmed as he fought off the thought that he was no better, just a modern Flagler looking at the Exumas to make him rich. But surely this was different, he tried again to persuade himself. It seemed such a win-win, and he would not be exploiting the environment, surely, if his goal was to run a "green" resort and raise reef, and REEF, awareness. He really

would be different he vowed, and he could do so much with fifteen million dollars. Yes, they had really said fifteen.

The resort was valued at forty million, according to the First Bank of Exumas, which did seem rather high, given the state of unfinished construction, but they were willing to lend him sixty-five. That left him with ten million to help pay the interest on the loan over the first few years, and fifteen to use at his own discretion to finish the build. The previous owners would get their money, and **everyone stood to profit**. It was almost too good to be true, but the proof was in the pudding, and they had already deposited a signing bonus in his admittedly drained bank account.

They had done a really good job, explaining to him how it could all work, and the champagne and Hennessy hadn't hurt. He had managed to turn down what was clearly a very open invitation from Val to go for celebratory drinks after the deal had been struck. Not so much his morals as the rental car and long drive home, and Moron, waiting to pee back on his boat. Val had suggested he stay the night, and at that point what was left of his resolve had luckily strengthened, Dan thought with relief as he cast his eye around the familiar cluttered interior of his boat, dried Moron off with a towel as he had chosen to swim back, and rolled a skinny reefer before turning out the light.

Dan lay in the darkness, his mind happily turning to the trip to the Exumas, already spending his new found loan in his head as he thought of how he could outfit his old boat for the trip. He drifted off with his head full of visions of **blue tangs** and beautiful beaches, and balconies covered in **oleanders**.



