

## Braving the Tide

I held Sal's hand tightly as I stepped onto the yacht, focusing on the touch of her soft hands and the sweet melody of her voice to distract me from the moving floor beneath my feet.

"You doing okay, hon?" She asked me once both my feet had made it in.

"Yeah. Just a bit nervous." I told her, forcing a smile so she wouldn't keep worrying. But it was an understatement. Today I was being introduced to her father for the first time, a "half-retired" millionaire in the real estate business with a love of sailing. I was nervous as it was about making a good impression, but even more than that I was worried about my chronic seasickness. From canoes to cruise ships, there wasn't a boat ride I could remember in my entire life that did not induce some kind of nausea, dizziness, or on bad days, puking, or even fainting. But Sal's father didn't know this. I had insisted that she not tell him after finding out that he too, had a chronic condition: being notoriously hard to impress.

"Sal, honey!" exclaimed a tall man coming down the narrow stairs on the back of the Yacht. He was tan, like most Miami residents, and wore a clean white suit, with a tee shirt nearly the same shade of aqua as Sal's sundress.

"Dad! So good to see you!" she said, giving him a warm hug. I could see the same high cheekbones in both their smiles, and recognized that same kind of melody in his voice, albeit a few octaves lower. His hair was silvery grey now, but I could definitely picture him as blonde as Sal in his younger days.

"And this must be Mike!" he exclaimed, a pair of thick silver eyebrows popping up momentarily over his giant pilot shades.

“Mark, actually. It’s great to finally meet you, Sir.” I said, feeling the deck move under my feet as I extended my hand to him.

He gave out a hearty laugh as he shook my hand “Mark! I am so sorry, sometimes I am just *the worst* with names. And Sir? So formal! Call me Ron, please!”

“Not a problem, Ron.” I reassured him with a wide smile.

“Great!” He said, and pulled out a cell phone from his pocket. “Hey Frank! We’re all ready to go!” he said into the phone. “*The Pilot*” he mouthed at us as the pilot babbled at him on the other side. “Great! Thank you. Alright! Follow me, kids. Let me show you around the *Cynthia Marie!*”

“So Dad, when did you get the new boat? I’m shocked you finally gave up your old Benetti.” Sal asked as she followed him up the stairs. I trailed behind her, fighting back waves of dizziness with each step as the ship’s motor rumbled to life beneath us.

“Just two weeks ago, wouldn’t you believe it?” he told us, holding open a brushed aluminum door to the central cabin. “I know, the Benetti had *much* more space, but come on in! Check out the new Lounge!”

Inside was very nice, to say the least. Spotless white carpets. Booth-style seats that could fit at least a dozen people lined the left wall, upholstered in a white and aqua floral pattern. On the right, a full bar with aqua-colored underlighting on the counter, was there and waiting for us, complete with actual bartender. On the far wall was another brushed aluminum door like the one we came in.

“Man, I could stop the tour right here and still be floored.” I said, finding the idea of a hard drink and a cozy chair more appealing by the minute.

Ron turned into the room and spread his arms wide. “I know, isn’t it grand? Perfect for cozy cocktail parties, casual business meetings, or spending a lazy Sunday with current and potential family!”

I shot a nervous glance at Sal. Mouthing the word “*Potential?*” at her. She patted me on the shoulder reassuringly. I felt the ship begin to accelerate.

“Sal, what do you think of the colors? I find all this aqua to be just *so* refreshing, but something tells me the decor needs some other color in the mix before it really starts to sing.”

“Hmm...I think you’re right.” she said, bringing a hand up to her chin thoughtfully. I could see the wheels in her head turning as she surveyed the room. Sal worked in the interior decoration business, and loved it, so this kind of thing sent her brain into high gear. “You know, I might actually go with a nice yellow on this one. Yellow and aqua tend to be very complimentary for each other.” She looked over at me and smiled, tugging playfully at the yellow polo shirt I was wearing. “Happens to be Mark’s favorite color, too.”

“Yellow, huh?” Ron said musingly, adjusting his pilot shades and nodding slowly.

“Yeah. I know it’s not everyone’s favorite to wear, necessarily.” I chimed in, feeling my nausea alleviate slightly. “But I like it because it’s cheerful, the color of sunshine...”

“-And *fear!*” Ron broke in, “Perfect! Nothing like a little fear to get the blood pumping, convince the investors to buy now, am I right?” The ship began to rock, and my nausea was back in full force.

“Everything alright, Mark?” Ron asked me. I realized I had been grimacing.

“Yeah, I-I’m fine!” I said, exhaling quickly. “I just haven’t been on a boat in a while, and I guess my legs just aren’t used to being at sea.”

“Uh oh. That’s a shame. Well, not to worry, we can put the tour on pause and take a load off while you get adjusted. You don’t mind, do you Sal?”

“Not at all.” She said, taking my arm and helping me over to the seats.

Sal set down next to me on the bench, still holding on to my right arm, while Ron found himself a section of seat to lounge on off to my left.

“You know, in the meantime, why don’t you tell me a bit about yourself, Mark? Sal tells me you work in real estate as well. Not for a competitor of mine, I hope!” he said with a slight chuckle.

“I said he was *almost* in Real Estate, Dad.”

“Well... not even that, really. I’m a Case Manager in the social services department of *Habitat for Humanity*. We’re a non-profit organization that builds affordable housing for homeless and at-risk families. So it’s not *exactly* real-estate, but-”

“At risk? What does that mean?” Ron asked quizzically.

“Oh, just at risk for being homeless. Actually, I really shouldn’t say ‘just,’ because that kind of underplays it. Usually the situations of the families we help out are pretty bad. One or both of the parents have lost their job, or their salaries aren’t enough to afford the houses around here because local real estate agencies have jacked up the---” The boat hit a huge bump. My stomach lurched with it.

“Uh-huh.” Ron uttered quietly, lounging back in his seat with one leg over his knee. “Tell me, how much does that *pay*, exactly?” My stomach lurched again, this time without the boat’s help.

“Oh come on, Dad. Cut him some slack! It’s not like he doesn’t get paid for what he does.”

“No, I know. I don’t mean to pry, necessarily, I’m mostly asking for the sake of my own *curiosity*. Maybe I could get some *ballpark* numbers, if you don’t feel comfortable with exacts? My only concern you see is if you two are gonna make enough to live on, start a family-”

The boat hit another bump, and all of a sudden I began to feel that all-too-familiar sensation of my gag reflex getting ready for trouble. Before Ron could finish his thought I quickly got up and ran for the door, not wanting to be responsible for redecorating the Lounge carpet. I made it to the side of the *Cynthia Marie* just in the nick of time, sputtering over the back of my hand in the process. I let it all go, all fall away into the sparkling blue water, and ended up banging my head on the metal railing as my knees gave way beneath me. My lunch, and my dignity, all washed away into the Biscayne, while my head felt like I had dived in after it and split my skull on a rock.

“Mark! Mark honey, are you alright?” I heard Sal exclaim as a pair of strong hands hoisted me up off the side of the boat. My knees buckled as I tried to stand, but the hands compensated for it and held me up.

“Stay with me, sport.” I heard Ron say as he helped me over to the outdoor seating area at the bow. “We’re gonna get you something to help you feel better. I’m gonna set you down right... here. You gotta sit up now, okay? It’s gonna suck at first but you’ll feel better, I *promise*.”

“Where did Sal go?” I asked wearily.

“She’ll be back in just a moment. She just went to get you some water and some antiseptic for the welt on your head.” I was startled back into my senses when Ron suddenly leaned over me and tilted my head sideways. Before I could react, he pressed something against the side of my head, just behind my left ear, and then propped my head back up again. “There we go.”

I looked up at him, eyes wide, not even trying to hide my alarm. Ron chuckled at me. “It’s just a Scopolamine patch, son.” He sat down next to me and took off his glasses.

“Scopa-what?”

“For seasickness. Just stick one behind your ear, wait for a few hours, and you’re golden. Works like a charm. Even I’m using one today, see?” He turned his head to the side to show me.

“Wait, you get seasick too?”

“Oh yeah! It happens all the time. I must ask though, is it always this bad for you? With the way you looked when you first came aboard, I’m just glad you made it to the railing!” He chuckled lightly.

My stomach felt strange, but I had a feeling it wasn’t from seasickness. “Oh boy... you could tell that easily? So much for subtlety.” I said flatly. This provoked another chuckle from Ron, followed by a few nods. “And to answer your question, yeah – it usually does get this bad, but I wanted to meet you, so I took a gamble and hoped I could hold on.”

“I figured it was something like that.”

“I’m sorry for not saying anything though. Given what Sal’s told me about how you love sailing, I was worried you’d find me... you know, weak or something.”

“Weak? No! But it definitely had me skeptical. Lying to your bride’s father isn’t the brightest idea, as you can imagine. It got me thinking that you were some kind of scumbag who changes his stripes to please everybody. Not the kind of person I want marrying my daughter.”

I felt another wave of nervousness hit me. “Oh. I... I didn’t mean to seem that way. I mean, I try to be accommodating sometimes, but not like that.”

Ron laughed and gave me a strong, reassuring pat on the back. “There’s no need to worry, Mark. I’m able to see you’re not like that. You might have withheld the fact that you get seasick, but you were really honest with me otherwise.” He paused and chuckled. “Even when you were talking about guys like me jacking up rent prices!”

For some reason, that got me chuckling too. “Yeah, that probably wasn’t the smartest thing to bring up while trying to bond with my fiancé’s dad...”

“No, *definitely* not...”

I heard the door to the lounge swing open, and Sal came out carrying a box of bandages in one hand, and a glass of water in the other.

“Oh thank god! Mark, you’re awake! I was scared half to death that you might have a concussion or something.” Sal exclaimed, handing me the glass of water and taking a seat beside me. “How are you, honey? You feeling any better?” she asked as she opened an antiseptic wipe and began daubing the welt on my forehead.

“Yeah, a bit. Your dad gave me one of his Scopolamine patches, and I think it’s helping.”

“Scopa-what? Mark, you sure you’re okay? You’re saying funny things. He hasn’t been like this the whole time I’ve been gone, has he Dad?”

Ron raised his eyebrows and looked over towards both of us. “No, he’s been just fine.”  
He patted me on the shoulder again softly. “The two of you are gonna do just fine.”