

# *Perfect Bait*



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*To courageous women, loyal dogs  
and boats of all shapes and sizes.*



## Acknowledgments

*Running out to the grounds during the night in a storm is never fun. But when a passenger breaks into the wheelhouse screaming someone has fallen overboard, the sheer terror that shoots through you is mind numbing. I could hardly breathe as I raced from stateroom to stateroom searching for the missing passenger. The moment I knew he was no longer on board, a part of me shriveled up and died.*

This all-too-real life experience, how it happened, and what happened next was the inspirational seed from which this novel was created. From there, each of you must decide for yourself what is real and what is fiction.

To the individuals who recognize themselves within these pages, I've done my best to represent you with the highest respect and to the depth you've each influenced my life. Throughout our lives, it's the people we love, those who love us, and those who don't, who make us who we are. This book is dedicated to each and every one of you.

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*Go placidly amid the noise and haste,  
and remember what peace there may be in silence.*

## Chapter 1

### Seattle, Washington

The storm slammed into the coast just before dawn, exactly as the late night news predicted. It whipped down the inside passages east of Vancouver Island, providing a taste of what life was going to be like for the next six months – cold, wet and miserable.

Every year around the autumnal equinox, the weather in the Northwest turns. It's a part of life. Locals know it's coming, and there's no reason to complain about it, but they always do, as they have since the beginning of time.

Preparing for another Seattle winter, Karyn and I were winterizing the boat when old man Wilson shuffled by, the splintering wooden docks creaking under his weight. He stopped and eyeballed what we were doing. Being neighborly, Karyn asked if he needed any help with his boat.

"Don't need no help. Can take care of her myself," he snapped back defiantly, nodding toward his floating pile of crap a couple of slips down from ours. "Been taking care of her my whole life. Certainly don't need no help from the likes of you."

"Just offering was all," Karyn answered softly.

He grunted in return. I'd ducked behind the opposite side of the wheelhouse as I saw him approaching, and was watching them through the salon windows. There was a glimmer of a smile in Karyn's eyes as she assured him she didn't mean any offense. How she had the patience to deal with him the way she did was beyond me. I couldn't stand the crotchety old prick.

"Yeah, well, you'd better be sure and do that right," Wilson said, looking at the braided mooring line Karyn was holding. "It's going to be a bitch of a winter, and I don't want to deal with your boat breaking loose, banging up against my lady there," he added, jerking his stiff neck and cap-covered head toward his boat. "A real bitch of a winter," he mumbled to himself, turning and continuing down the dock. "I can feel it in my bones."

*No doubt he could*, I thought to myself as Karyn turned, flashing that incredible smile of hers. She knew full well how the old man would respond before she even asked if he needed help. He was as cantankerous as they come. Older than dirt and mean as hell. Couldn't blame him for being so pissed off, though. He'd been living on the water since the day he was born, one of a dying breed being forced out by the nouveau riche who had recently discovered houseboat living along Seattle's ancient waterfront. Didn't matter to Wilson that I'd been born right here, on board this very boat. As far as he was concerned, anyone under one hundred was scum.

What used to be a shantytown of makeshift craft, most of which, like Wilson's, were seemingly kept afloat by only their dock lines, were being run off by multilevel, built-to-the-hilt, wall-to-wall floating condos. They were nothing more than tasteless pieces of architecture that wouldn't last an hour outside the protected waters of the harbor. With deck-to-ceiling glass, tile roofs, recessed lighting and spiral staircases, master suites and fake fireplaces, the condos boasted heads with built-in Jacuzzis, heated floors and tanning beds. Seattle's new houseboats were anything but boats; the new generations of occupants were anything but boat people. But together they were the new floating armada of Seattle's waterfront. Karyn and I resented them as much as the old man did.

Like old man Wilson, my dad was born and raised on the waterfront. Married to the eldest daughter of one of the most successful seafood processors on the coast, he'd spent his life fishing a deep-water trawler, working the Bering Sea until an Arctic storm took his life.

After he died, Mom and I moved off the boat and went to live with Grandpa and Grandma in the big house up on the hill overlooking the harbor. Mom never set foot on the boat again. The following day, Grandpa picked me up after school in the old truck and drove me down to the plant. He put me to work cleaning up the guts behind the cutters at the cannery.

"You earn your keep, boy," Grandpa said. "There ain't no free lunches in this world. The sooner you learn that, the better off you'll be. Understand?"

"Yes, sir." *I didn't have a clue what he was talking about.*

The cutters went through the fish like butter, knives flying faster than the eye could keep up. But after a few days, I began to hate the smell of

dead fish and dreaded when school let out. All the other kids took off to play, while I had to go slop fish guts into the barf barge. "I'm only thirteen," I'd mumble to myself, shoveling another pile of guts onto the barge. "This sucks. It isn't fair."

But every day after school and all day Saturday, I'd slop wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow full of fish guts and carcasses from under the cutters' tables to the barge.

The only good part about the whole ordeal was riding out with Augie Santos to dump the barf barge when it got full. Augie had been driving the barge for my grandpa since the beginning of time. An ancient Portuguese fisherman, Augie been working fishing boats his whole life. He knew more about fish than any man I ever met and taught me just about everything I know about fishing. Every day when the barge got loaded up and we'd head off, he'd drop back a hand line. At first, I thought he was nuts.

"You aren't going to catch anything in here," I pronounced, nodding towards the busy harbor.

He glanced up at me, but didn't say a word.

No sooner than that he got bit. I couldn't believe it. "What d'ya got?" I yelled excitedly.

Holding firmly onto the line with one hand, he reached down and pulled the old Union diesel out of gear. Looking back up at me, his words were soft. "Why don't you come on back here," he said, offering me the line. "Pull him in and see for yourself."

I about tripped over myself, scrambling along the edge of the barge. "Really? Can I?"

"If you can keep from falling overboard or into the guts," he said, a gentle laugh accompanying his words. "Here you go," he said, handing me the line as I reached the stern. "Hold tight, or it'll rip you up."

The fish almost pulled the line out of my hand, burning my palms as the line seared over my skin. His hands were like leather. Mine turned white where the line burned through before starting to bleed, but I didn't let go.

"Jesus!" I screamed.

He nodded, knowing how much it hurt, but liking the fact I didn't drop the line. "If he runs again, let him go. Don't try and stop him. Keep just enough tension on the line so you have some control, but there's no way to stop him when he's this hot."

It was the biggest fish I'd ever caught, or at least fought. My dad had taken me fishing a few times off the docks, but the only things we'd ever caught were some scrawny bottom grabbers. But this fish was something else. "What do you think it is?" I asked Augie.

"Not sure. What do you think?"

Visions of giant halibut raced through my brain. Or maybe even a King. "I don't know, maybe a Chinook."

"Maybe," he said, "but who knows?"

It felt like the fish was beginning to tire. But then he made another long run after I'd gotten most of the line back, again burning my hands.

"Even pressure this time," Augie coached me. "Steady even pressure. You got him coming your way. No need to piss him off any more than he already is."

The fish circled under the boat a few times. Each time he came out from under the boat, I was able to gain a full arm's length of line.

"That's it," Augie said as I gained on the fish. "Slow and easy. Keep his head up, and just guide him toward the surface."

"Holy shit!" I screamed as the big flattie broke the surface, shaking his head violently and rocking me to my bones. Holding on with both hands as tightly as I could, he wasn't able to pull out any line, but he about jerked my arms out of their sockets.

"He's a beauty," Augie said, reaching over the rail, grabbing the line.

Immediately my body quit shaking. My arms were numb and my hands were on fire, but none of that mattered. This was the biggest fish I'd ever caught.

Augie started talking out loud, not taking his eyes off the fish. "Now take it easy, big guy, everything's going to be all right."

He was talking to the fish as if it were a person, and the weirdest thing was, I swear to God that damn fish was listening. It immediately quit thrashing around and let Augie pull him right up next to the boat.

"That a boy," he said softly, reaching down and pulling the barbless hook out of his mouth in one easy motion. The fish hesitated for a split second before diving for the bottom, leaving a huge boil in his wake.

I was speechless.

"Nice job," Augie said, leaning back up and extending his hand.

Taking it, I shook my head in shock, "Why did you let him go?"

Augie pushed the shift level forward, putting the barge back in gear, before asking, "How are your hands?"

"Fine!" I snapped back, slowly turning my palms up and looking down at them. I was pissed. My hands were bleeding and starting to really hurt. "That was my fish. Why did you let him go?"

"Look around you," Augie instructed calmly.

"At what?" *You crazy old coot.*

"What do you see?"

"Nothing. We're in the middle of the bay surrounded by water."

"Not exactly. Look closer."

I had no idea what he was talking about. He waited, watching me. When he saw me look down at the load of fish carcasses and guts we were hulling, his eyes flashed.

"What are you talking about? You want me look at the guts?"

He nodded.

"I don't get it."

Then he asked me, "Are you hungry?"

"What?"

"Hungry? Are you hungry?"

"No. I'm pissed off you let my fish go."

"Your fish?" he asked.

"Yeah. I caught him."

"You certainly did. And you did a damn fine job," he added. "I thought he was about going tear your hands off on that first run."

Looking down at my throbbing hands again, I nodded, shrugging my shoulders. "He just about did."

"I know." Augie said. "You showed a lot of heart hanging on the way you did."

I lowered my head, my anger draining with the fading adrenalin rush. "Thanks." He didn't say anything else for a while until I asked, "Why'd you want to know if I was hungry?"

"Because that's the only reason to ever kill anything. If you're going to eat it, take it. If not, let it go."

His eyes bore into my young soul, holding me there until he saw that I understood what he was saying. I nodded. The corners of his eyes creased into the beginnings of a smile as he slowly nodded back. We understood each other. "Chances are," he added, "we might even fool him into doing battle with us again one of these fine days."

And that was it. That was all he said. But from that moment on, I was hooked. After that, I couldn't wait to fill the barge so we could ride out together. Augie continued teaching me everything he knew about fishing. I soaked it up like a dry sponge.

Born in San Diego, Augie had fished tuna and albacore his entire life—at first from a small converted WWII jig boat, where he spent hours standing in a little area of the stern, hand lining fish, tossing them in over his shoulder before grabbing another line off the spreaders. Jig boat fishing was one tough way to make a living. But he loved it. From there he'd moved on to working the clippers, running as far south as the Galapagos, being away for months at a time making bait, and having to get fresh water from waterfalls cascading over lush islands and into the sea. He

explained to me how they'd row the bait skiff in under the waterfall, fill it with fresh water, then row it back to the clipper "full to the gunnels," he'd say, before transferring the fresh water back on board the clipper with wooden buckets. I was mesmerized. The places they fished sounded more like Fantasy Island than real life. He'd bring out some old frayed black and white photos of tuna as big as a man, and I knew he was telling the truth.

The stories he'd tell of being in the rack, four Calcutta poles tied to one hook, lifting two hundred and fifty pound yellowfin as they streaked towards the surface, inhaling the squid, filled my nights with dreams of fish so big they could swallow a man whole.

"If you didn't time it just right, and they got their heads pointed away, man oh man, were you in for a world of hurt. Nothin' like liftin' fish," he'd say, the memories dancing behind his eyes.

He taught me how to wrap white chicken feathers and cow hide into perfect squid baits. He taught me how to tie the right kind of knots for whatever we were doing. He taught me how to read the water. How to look for signs. What initially had been nothing but liquid surrounding us on our daily runs, slowly turned into a virtual landscape—overflowing with information. Rich in texture. Teaming with life. Radiating like neon street signs pointing which direction to go. He showed me how to recognize temperature breaks, currents back eddies and wind rips. He even taught me how to smell the oil that herring leave on the surface after having been balled up and worked over by a school of salmon. He taught me to watch the birds. "What's going on above the water is a mirror image, reflecting what's going on below it."

And sure enough, we'd pull up on a big bird school, diving and working a bait ball, and you could see the fish flashing under the bait, scales rippling down. "Just like an hourglass," he'd say.

He taught me to respect the sea—to listen to her rhythms—and most importantly, to heed her warnings. "For when she unbridles her fury, no man, beast or ship is safe." He taught me an appreciation for the cycles of life, showing me how everything is connected. "We're all just guests here on this big blue beautiful orb," he said, holding his arms out, eyes smiling, his face pointing to the sky, "... bobbin' around in our own little lifeboats. Treat her well, and she'll do you the same."



Three years later, Mom died. The morning we scattered her ashes from the boat, there wasn't a wisp of wind.

The only sound was the low, steady hum of the diesel. Hanging like a

shroud around us, the fog was so thick you could hardly see the bow, but Grandpa navigated through the harbor like it was the back of his hand. Few words were spoken. Grandma held me tight by her side the whole way out. I was doing all right until I felt her shiver. I looked up and watched a tear drop down her cheek. Seeing her crying made me start balling like a little girl. Men didn't cry in Grandpa's world. I knew it, but couldn't stop. He glanced over at us without saying anything.

After awhile, he pulled the boat out of gear and shut off the main. The instant silence was overwhelming after the comforting, steady drone of big iron. It took a hundred yards for us to stop gliding across the sheet glass water. When we did, the priest, a long time family friend, spoke in quiet tones about what a wonderful woman my mom had been. We joined him in The Lord's Prayer. Then, without any fanfare, Grandpa scattered Mom's ashes overboard. They ever so slowly filtered down towards the water spreading out like a giant cumulus cloud. *A cloud with wings*, I thought to myself, tossing a bundle of hand-picked flowers onto the disappearing ashes. Grandpa gave Grandma a squeeze, thanked the priest, fired the main back up, put the boat in gear and spun us around for home.

When we got back to the dock and got the boat secured, Grandpa looked me in the eye. "You still hankering to move back onto this ol' boat?" he asked.

I was shocked. "Yes, sir," I managed to say. "You know I am."

"Then go ahead," he said. "You've been doing a good job tending to her all these years. She's old, but she's solid. You two take care of each other."

I didn't know what to say. I threw my arms around him and squeezed for all I was worth. No one ever hugged Grandpa. I felt his spine stiffen, but he let me hold on for a couple of heartbeats. Then he patted me on the back like a dog and took hold of my shoulders. His stare could have bored holes through granite. He was one of the most respected and powerful men on the waterfront — a big, tough Swede who had fish in his blood. The few who challenged him did so only once. He ran his domain with an iron fist and, in my case, a well-cured leather strap that made its acquaintance with my young ass on more than one occasion. In his world, there were no excuses, no second chances. His motto was: Do it right or pay the price. Just like the sea.

He nodded slowly before continuing. "Go ahead. Get your things and move back here. But if I hear so much as a rumor about you missing a day of school or causing any problems, it'll be your ass. You understand?"

"Yes, sir." There I was, sixteen and being told I could move back on board. I loved my grandparents, but living on the boat alone ...



"Thank you," I said, offering my hand. His grip was uncompromising. "I won't let you down."

Grandpa nodded and reached into his pocket, pulling out the keys to the old '51 Ford pickup I'd been driving around the cannery for the past three years. "You earned this," he said with a satisfied nod, handing me the keys. "You worked hard. Never asked for anything and never complained. I'm proud of you, son."

I didn't know what to say. Tears started to well up, and my chin started quivering. I had to bite my lip to keep from crying again.

"Work hard. Be true to yourself," he told me. "Everything else'll take care of itself." He paused, looking out across the harbor into the fog. "Moving back onto the boat, you'll be on your own. You got work at the cannery if you want it, but I'm not going make you come in. If you find something better after school, or you want to play ball—fine. If not, you've been working deck and cutting fish now long enough. You know good grade the instant you see it. If you want, you can start running one of the boats. Up to you."

"No shit, Grandpa?" I blurted out, without thinking.

He frowned at my language, but a smile managed to crease his lips. "Like I said, son, you've earned it."



*Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection.  
Neither be cynical about love, for in the face of all aridity  
and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass.*

## Chapter 2

The three of us had grown up together—a couple of dock rats and the homecoming queen—an unlikely threesome if there ever was one. Karyn was from an esteemed, respected family who lived high up on the hill, way past my grandparents' house. Shane and I were born and raised on boats, sons of the sons of fishermen. When we were only kids, no one seemed to pay us any attention, nor did we seem to care if they did. But as we grew into adolescence and were seen doing everything together, people started talking. "That sweet young thing, always surrounded by those boys. She's developing into such a beautiful young lady. She shouldn't be spending all her time with those boys from the docks. It's not right."

We were certainly not the type of young men an outstanding family like Karyn's wanted to have courting their only daughter. But all the fuss was in a world we could care less about—an adult world miles from our own.

Weekends were heaven. Exploring the sights and sounds of Seattle, we roamed the open-air markets of the waterfront. For as long as each of us could remember, we had been inseparable. In our youthful innocence, we thought nothing would ever change that—until gangs of raging hormones made their way into our young bodies. Before we knew it, they started dominating our world. It was only a matter of time before either Shane or I would get the girl—one of us tasting the sweet nectars of love; the other left alone to discover just how important a young man's right hand really is.

We'd all been clamming in the flats during one of the lowest tides of the summer. The late summer afternoon was hot. By the time we'd filled our buckets, we were a mess. The ensuing mud fight was inevitable. By the time it was over, we were covered in sticky black goo from head to toe.

Laughing hysterically, we trudged back towards the shoreline through the ankle-deep muck. Shane's mom drove by just as we reached the road. She shook her head at the three of us, but smiled. She needed Shane's help with something, so he climbed into the back of their pickup, leaving Karyn and me alone.

"My house is closer than your boat," Karyn said. "This mud is starting to dry, so let's go there and clean up."

"Your parents will kill us if they see us like this," I said, holding out my arms for emphasis.

"We can sneak in the back gate and use the pool house."

When we got to her house, we crossed the densely landscaped backyard to the far side of the pool. We rinsed off with the garden hose so we wouldn't track mud all over the place, but our clothes were still a dripping mess.

"Here!" Karyn said, tossing me one of the two big beach towels she'd snagged from just inside the pool house door. "Wrap up in this, and leave your clothes out here."

"I'm good," I said, as I finished rinsing off.

"I want to shampoo this stuff out of my hair, and you should, too," she insisted, turning her back and pulling off her top. She wrapped a towel around her waist before maneuvering her pants and panties down to her ankles. Her little wiggling motion froze me in my tracks. Turning around, she gave me a mischievous smile that set my loins on fire—an uncontrollable erection instantly on its way. When you're my age, if the wind blows hard enough, you get a hard-on. Seeing her undress right there in front of me was way too much.

"Are you coming?" she whispered softly, stepping out of her panties and sliding past me.

Embarrassed, I didn't know what to do. So I just stood there, frozen in place like an idiot, trying to hide a full hard-on. Glancing over her shoulder—seeing the bulge under my towel—she smiled again before disappearing into the pool house. A few seconds later, I heard the shower running. I could see her silhouette through the bathroom window as it started to steam up. The images of Karyn naked in the shower just a few feet away drove me crazy. I couldn't help it. I reached down and came within seconds after touching myself.

I was sitting on the padded wicker couch, still in my wet trunks with

the beach towel securely draped over my lap, when Karyn came out of the shower, her skin glowing. A towel was wrapped around her, tucked in just under her arms to cover her breasts but barely covering her thighs. Her head was tilted to one side, and she was wringing her hair. She was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. The sun had dropped down, just tipping the top of the trees surrounding the pool. Light reflecting off the water shone through the windows, bathing the room with soft, golden light ... the beginning of an incredible summer sunset.

She sat down next to me. I couldn't look her in the eye. I was completely overwhelmed by her presence. We sat there, neither of us saying a word. Finally, as she finished towel drying her hair, she leaned over and gently brushed the corner of my mouth with her lips. I couldn't move. She lingered there, her face just inches from mine. Reaching over, she touched my cheek and tilted my head up so our eyes met. I saw the smile inside her eyes radiating life. Barely letting her lips touch mine, she kissed me again.

This was the first time I'd been kissed by a girl. And this wasn't just any girl—it was Karyn. I could feel her sweet warm breath on my face. The world began to melt away, leaving only the universe within our souls. Our bodies quivered as our lips met again, but this time she pressed down hard enough to force my lips apart. Her tongue slipped inside my mouth, sending a new wave of chills down my spine. Closing my eyes, I surrendered to exquisite sensations—her soft lips, her warm mouth and gentle touch, her fingers around the back of my neck.

As our kisses grew more passionate, our bodies hungered for more. She pulled me closer, pressing our mouths together even harder. Arching her head back, she gasped for breath. My lips slid down her neck, soaking up her skin in a never-ending series of kisses. Her towel had loosened. Holding my head with both hands, she gently guided my lips toward her young breasts. I could feel her heart pounding under her soft velvet skin. Her palms covered my ears, muffling all sound; her fingers clutched my hair, controlling my every move. Slowly guiding me across her chest, she kept my lips just inches above her breasts. With every breath, her chest swelled and her nipples rose, barely grazing my tongue. Finally, she lowered my head allowing my aching lips to make contact with her nipples. She moaned and then pulled my head away, holding me there, just inches from her heart. Then slowly, she lowered my head again. I ran my tongue along the underside of her pure white breasts. Her heart was pounding. She guided my mouth back to her perfect nipples that hardened as my kisses turned into suckling.

"Oh, God," she whispered, "that feels so good." Suddenly she pulled my head up. Biting my ear, she moaned, "Make love to me, please. I

want you inside me so much it hurts." We both were breathing in short gasps, our hearts pounding. "Please," she pleaded. "Please." Her towel fell completely open, revealing the soft tuft of her light-blonde pubic hair. Spreading her legs, she took my hand and guided it toward her young vagina. It was warm and moist. My fingers slid inside her effortlessly.

"Oh, God," she whispered breathlessly. "Kiss me there," she pleaded between moans, pushing my head down. Arching her back and bending her knees slightly, she opened her legs a little wider, completely exposing herself. My lips touched her there. Delicate juices filled my mouth. I'd never tasted anything so intoxicating, so sweet. It was incredible.

She tried holding her body perfectly still, but couldn't restrain herself any longer. Her legs began quivering as her hips slipped into a rhythm of their own. My tongue was barely caressing her when she arched her back, pushing herself harder against my mouth. My tongue slipped inside her. She moaned. I let myself go, becoming one with her pulsating rhythm as she became one with my mouth. My tongue was everywhere. Caressing, sucking, probing.

Suddenly she grabbed my head and cried out, scaring the crap out of me. I froze, thinking I had done something wrong. Her hands became a vice around my head, holding me perfectly still while my mouth covered her womanhood. "Oh, my God! My God! Don't move!" she commanded.

I couldn't move if I tried. I was petrified. My mind was searching for answers it couldn't possibly know. Questions swirled around inside my brain. *What happened? What did I do wrong? I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I love you.*

"Oh, God. Oh, God," she kept repeating over and over again,

Slowly, her hands relaxed around my head. She leaned forward, her lips resting delicately on the top of my head, barely touching my hair. The warmth of her breath sent a new wave of chills down my spine. I didn't have a clue what had just happened, but was still too afraid to move. She held me perfectly still, trying to catch her breath. I'd been kneeling on the floor between her legs. Slowly, she slid down off the couch and slid underneath me. I was still rock hard, but moments after her mouth found my penis, it exploded. She continued sucking while I came. The next thing I knew she was on her knees, straddling me. I was still hard. Effortlessly, she guided me inside her, lowering herself down until she completely engulfed me. We both stopped breathing. When our eyes met, I saw a tear running down her cheek.

"I love you," she whispered. "I love you so much. I've dreamed about this moment for so long." She leaned over, and we kissed—a deep, slow kiss, growing in intensity. I could feel her pulse beating along the full length

of my penis. Her quick, intense squeezes started our bodies moving again. She pushed herself up off my chest, her beautiful breasts pure white against her golden tan, her nipples firm and tight. I arched up to kiss them.

She moaned again. Her hips started undulating, faster and faster. "Oh, God, I'm going to come again!" she screamed. Her head flew back, and she closed her eyes, breathing hard. I could feel every one of her contractions. Her orgasm mushroomed around my penis. Her legs quivered. Her entire body pulsed with passion. Beads of perspiration glistened off her body. Eventually, she eased off me, rolling over and sliding onto her stomach. Then she whispered, "I want to feel you come again." Spreading her legs and arching her smooth white body off the carpet, she presented herself to me. I slid effortlessly back inside her from behind. "Oh, my God. That feels so good," she moaned.

Her beautiful body was the most erotic thing I'd ever seen; her rich golden tan highlighted the places where the sun couldn't reach – the secret, sacred places she'd kept hidden from the world – until now. Her beautiful flaxen hair, still wet from her shower, lay tangled across her back. Her soft moans, the heat radiating off her body, her taste, and the delicious sweetness of her completely overwhelmed me as we moved in perfect harmony. The feeling of being inside her from behind was so different from having her on top of me. For the first time since she'd kissed me, I started to feel a sense of control over what was happening. Having already come twice, I wanted this moment to last forever. Whenever I'd feel myself starting to come, I'd slowly pull myself almost all the way out, leaving just the tip of my penis touching the inside of her lips. She hesitated for a moment and then pushed backwards, forcing herself against me, surrounding me with pulsating warmth, passion and pressure.

"Don't tease me," she pleaded, shaking her hair. "Don't tease me like that. I've wanted you inside me for so long. Please don't stop. Don't ever stop loving me."

I surrendered, pushing into her as deeply as I could. Looking down, I could see her vaginal lips, swollen and crimson. My penis glistened from her moisture as it slid in and out of heaven. The feelings were unbelievable. After awhile, I could feel my entire body getting ready to explode again. "I'm going to come!" I screamed.

Her body responded instantly, tightening around me, demanding. We came together in perfect unison. I collapsed next to her and rolled onto my side, still inside her. My arms were around her chest, as if holding onto life itself. Our bodies, a perfect fit, were locked together in total bliss. She held me inside her, her heartbeat surrounding my every nerve.

We lay together, slipping into eternity—breathless, exhausted, bathing in the afterglow that only love can give. The sun had dipped below the horizon. The room was all dark, yet a light still shone in her eyes.

“I love you,” she whispered.

“I love you, too, Karyn. More than anything in the world.”

“I know,” she said, nestling her head into my chest. “I know you do.”

I could have died right there, and my life would have been perfect. I didn’t know that such feelings of absolute peace and contentment existed. Lying together, holding each other, the world could have come to an end, and we wouldn’t have cared. Neither of us uttered another sound for the longest time. Nothing needed to be said. Our young bodies, our brave hearts, our innocent souls, said it all, celebrating in the pure essence of love. We’d been best friends since we could remember, and now we’d crossed a threshold into a new world.

Lying there, I knew that for as long as I lived, I’d never forget a single moment of what we’d just shared ... the way she looked coming out of the shower ... her radiant skin, glowing, wet from the hot water ... her beautiful hair rolled up in a loose bun. And that look in her eyes—a look I’d never seen until that night. The look of love ... the look of a woman in love. Gone was the girl I’d known all my life. Gone was the boy I’d been until that moment.

The soft light of the moon poured into the room and covered us with a blanket of warmth, protecting us from the world outside. I chuckled, thinking how perfect it was, when only hours before we’d been in an all out mud ball war in the tidal flats. I had no idea anyone could feel like this, that two people could make each other feel this way. I lay there wondering, thinking, *Why me? Why am I the luckiest person in the world?* I don’t know if she sensed it or if the thoughts actually escaped my lips, but she knew what I was thinking. She lifted her head to look at me. She smiled, and the room lit up around her.

“What?” I asked.

“Didn’t see this coming, did you?” she asked, smiling at our entwined bodies. Her voice had a new tone to it—something strong and permanent, a knowledge and depth I’d never heard before.

“No, I didn’t,” I answered honestly. “I’m still half afraid I’m just dreaming.”

“Oh, trust me,” she said, her smile broadening, “you’re not dreaming.” Her kiss sent chills down my spine again.

“Why me?” This time I heard the words come out.

She waited a long time before answering. I didn’t care. I could have lain there with her forever. “I’ve seen you checkin’ me out. Looking when you



thought I couldn't see you. Glancing at my breasts or looking at my butt when I bend over."

I wouldn't have dreamed it possible to feel embarrassed after what we'd just shared, but I did. "It's okay," she said reassuringly, gently brushing my hair back. "I like it when you look at me like that."

"You're so beautiful. I can't help it." I was still embarrassed and couldn't look her in the eye.

"But you never tried anything," she said. "You never once even tried to kiss me. Not once."

I didn't say anything, but God knows I'd dreamed about kissing her. A thousand nights I'd lay awake thinking about her, unable to sleep. I loved her gentle way with people and her quick wit. I thought about her golden hair, her incredible eyes—oh, God, I loved her eyes—her radiant smile, and her perfect body—those incredible breasts that had blossomed right before my eyes. Catching a glimpse of white under her blouse or seeing the outline of her panties through her shorts made me crazy. She was all I thought about whenever I played with myself before going to sleep. But she was right—I'd never uttered a word to her about the way I felt. Even if I had the balls to tell her, I wouldn't have known what to say. So I'd just kept my mouth shut.

"I knew you wanted me," she continued with intuition beyond her years and way beyond mine. "I could see it in your eyes." I turned away. "Don't be embarrassed," she said, gently pulling me towards her and kissing my forehead. "It's one of the reasons I love you so much." She paused, the smile never leaving her eyes. "But you never tried anything. At first I thought maybe it was because you didn't like me."

I started to interrupt, but she touched my lips with her finger. I kissed her finger, and for a moment all thought processes came to a halt. She continued, "But then I'd see the way you looked at me, and I knew you felt the same about me as I did about you. After awhile, I realized you were just shy. I thought it was cute. I wanted my first time to be perfect. With you, I knew it would be."

"This was your first time?" I blurted out without even thinking. She'd been so in control. She'd known exactly what to do. I was shocked. It felt like she'd made love a thousand times. A shadow crossed her face. I felt like an idiot. "I didn't mean it like that," I said, trying to apologize. "It's just that ... it's just that you were so good. I mean you made everything so perfect. I thought, because you seemed to know exactly what to do, that you must have done it before." My words trailed off limply. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that the way it sounded."

The smile returned to her eyes “What? You think guys are the only ones who play with themselves?”

“I had no idea ... never dreamed that girls jerked off.”

“Trust me,” she added with a coy smile, “maybe not exactly the way you’re thinking, but we do.”

“Unbelievable.”

Laughing out loud, she continued, “If we waited around for you guys to figure out what to do, mankind wouldn’t even be here today. Trust me, we want it as much as you guys do, if not more.” Her hand was inching its way over my stomach. “Here, let me show you.”

Lowering her head, she took me in her mouth again. Time ceased to exist as we made love again. We’d created a universe of our own, wrapping ourselves in a cocoon of love. Our souls were entwined for life. By the time we were beyond exhaustion, it was well after midnight. We kissed each other goodnight for the umpteenth time before she left the pool house and slipped through the back door of her parents’ house. For a few moments, I waited outside the gate to make sure she made it up to her bedroom without waking her parents.

Walking home along the quiet, deserted streets felt more like floating. I don’t think my feet touched the ground once. I was head-over-heels in love. The world around me was in perfect harmony – until I got home and climbed on board. Shane had come over after finishing the chores his mom had for him. He’d fallen asleep on the back deck and awoke a little startled as I sat down across from him.

“Where have you been?” he barked. Looking me over, he immediately knew something was different. “What the hell?” he said gesturing with his chin. I hesitated, not answering him. “You’ve been with Karyn, haven’t you?” he said, an accusing tone in his voice. When I didn’t answer, he snapped, “That little bitch!”

Springing up, I was in his face before he even knew it. “Take that back, you asshole.”

“Easy, Rider!” he said, holding up his hands. “I didn’t mean anything by it.”

“Take it back!” I demanded. “Okay, okay,” he said laughing. “She’s not a bitch.”

I relaxed as I backed away from my friend, but I was still pissed. *How could he say that about her?*

“You fucked her tonight, didn’t you?” He had no idea what love was. “I knew it!” he said, getting all excited. “I knew it. I could see it the minute you woke me up. You devil,” he continued, “I’ve been trying to get in her pants all summer.”



"You what?" I snapped back at him.

"Relax, cowboy," he said, holding up his arms innocently. "She wouldn't have anything to do with me. Managed to kiss her a couple of times, but she wouldn't even let me get to first base."

"You kissed her?"

"Don't look so shocked, amigo," he said smiling. "She's hot. Why wouldn't I give it a shot?"

"You never told me," I said lamely.

"Why would I?" he said. "Nothing happened. I kissed her a couple of times. No big deal. Tried to get into her panties, but she wouldn't give it up. Said she was saving herself for the 'right guy.'" He laughed. "Looks like you're the lucky one."

After having just had the most incredible experience of my life, I hated listening to him talk like that. "It wasn't like that," I said.

"Then tell me. Was she hot or what?"

"Fuck off!" Now I was pissed. "It wasn't anything like that."

"Sex is sex," he announced. "They're all tramps."

"You're fucked up," I said. Shane and I had been best friends since we were kids, but this was breaking new ground. A part of him I'd never seen before was coming to the surface, like a really bad zit. "Where do you come up with this crap? I'm tired. I'm going to bed."

"It's true. Women are all the same."

*As if you know anything about women.* We'd been spending the night on each other's boats since forever, so having him sleep over was no big deal. But that night, something changed. I felt different about his being there. I wanted to be alone. Actually, I really wanted to be lying next to Karyn. But as I lay there, listening to him doze off and start snoring on the bunk next to mine, I realized our worlds had shifted and would never be the same again.



After our night in the pool house, Karyn and I were inseparable. We did everything we could to keep her parents from finding out about our having sex, but we didn't fool them for long. Mr. Lake threatened to kill me if I touched his daughter again. It was a scene right out of Hollywood. I ran for my life out of their house with Karyn screaming she loved me, pulling on her father's shirt and her mom crying hysterically. It would have been comical, except for the fact that Mr. Lake would have killed me had he caught me.

Following that little incident, the Lakes did everything in their power to keep Karyn and me apart. In her sophomore year, they sent her to an all-girls boarding school outside Shaker Heights, Ohio. The day after they dropped her off at the headmaster's office, she booked a first-class, one-way ticket home using the American Express card they'd given her for emergencies only. They finally gave in, and Mrs. Lake began devoting much of her time to socialite spin control. Perception was everything in her world. They hadn't wanted us to get married, but were making sure the world they lived in saw our union in the right light.

*As far as possible, without surrender,  
be on good terms with all persons.*

## Chapter 3

The clear, balmy June afternoon couldn't have been prettier. It was the weekend following our high school graduation ceremonies. Our fairytale wedding made news in the local papers. "The Perfect Wedding" read the front-page headline in the social section of the *Seattle Post*, a newspaper Mr. Lake supported annually with major advertising dollars.

*"... Corey Phillips marries into the Lake family, taking the hand of the charming and talented Ms. Karyn Lake, only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Charles Lake ... Corey Phillips is the eldest and only grandson of Seattle's own R. J. Walters, President and CEO of Walters Processing and Shipping, the largest purveyors of seafood on the west coast ... Sweethearts since childhood, Karyn and Corey looked ready to take on the world today. The wedding took place under clear blue skies on the terrace of the exclusive West Bay Yacht Club. Among the notable in attendance were ... and all of us here at the Post wish them the very best. Good luck, newlyweds."*

All the while, Mrs. Lake silently thanked God that Karyn wasn't pregnant under her wedding dress for the extensive photo spreads.

Despite my new in-laws' offer to help us with the down payment on a house for our wedding gift, Karyn and I decided we wanted to live together on the houseboat. We loved it down there. She transformed the boat into a delightful floating home. In spite of themselves, by summer's end Karyn's

parents enjoyed spending Sunday afternoons with us. At first, they'd refused to set foot on board the boat, but after awhile, seeing how happy their daughter was, they couldn't resist. Sundays became a tradition—barbecuing fresh salmon on the back deck, a big pot of crab legs steaming on the old oil stove, and the mouth-watering smell of Karyn's home-made sourdough bread filling the air. We were becoming a family. With her mom's homegrown garden salads and a couple of bottles of White Zin from their private reserve, life was good. After dinner we'd sit on the back deck, enjoying the quiet beauty of a summer's day drawing to a close.

"You still like working at the cannery?" Mr. Lake would inevitably get around to asking.

"Daddy, you know he does. Why do you ask us that every time we see you?"

"I just want Corey to know there's a spot for him if he ever wants it, that's all."

"Appreciate the offer, Mr. Lake, I really do, but I like what I do." I'd had offers to crew as well, but didn't want to be away from Karyn for weeks at a time. So even though the money wasn't great, I kept my job as a buyer. Being home every night was worth it. We couldn't have been happier.

With Karyn and my being married, Shane was now the odd man out in our little threesome. Shane and I made it through a rocky spell after Karyn and I first hooked up. But being as athletic and good looking as he was, it didn't take long for him to feel he was the lucky one—with all the trim he was getting. When we were alone, he couldn't stop spewing the intimate details of his endless nights of romance.

"How can you just hang with one chick?" he wanted to know. "Karyn's cool and all, but dude, there's nothing like fresh pussy."

"Maybe," I'd say humoring him. "But what else can I tell you? I'm in love."

"Love, you say." He jumped down my throat. "Why are you always talking about love? I ain't talkin' love, man. I'm talking sex. Pure sex. About getting into as many pairs of sweet young panties as I can. Every chick has her secret, my friend. Every one of them. And trust me, it's there, right there, between their legs. Everything else is an afterthought."

"You're sick. You know that?"

"Heaven on earth, baby. Heaven on earth," he'd say, laughing and punching me in the arm. "I'm telling you, you're blowing it, only fucking one chick."

"I feel sorry for you."

"You only live once."

"You're a bad cliché," I said, shaking my head. "No wonder women grow to hate men."

"You're just jealous you're not getting any of the fresh stuff."

Never for a split second did I feel as if I was missing out on anything by being with Karyn. I was the luckiest man in the world. As much as Shane tried to convince me otherwise, Karyn and I were as one wrapped in each other's arms.



But then the war came home. I don't know if it was because of Vietnam or the fact the world just started spinning a little off its axis, but for three kids growing up listening to the boys from England, believing peace did stand a chance, we were about to be thrown into a world of napalm and bombs that didn't give a rat's ass who you were, or what you believed in. Nixon was elected President in 1968, and the first draft lottery since World War II was held December 1, 1969; it determined the order for conscription into the Army for men born between January 1, 1944 and December 31, 1950. In the fall of 1971, having your number picked didn't mean winning the lottery – it meant a one-way ticket into hell. If you were an able-bodied, all-American male, eighteen to thirty-eight, and your number was called, you were basically fucked.

Being single and not in college, Shane was USDA prime beef, 1-A draft status. Of the three hundred sixty-five birth dates selected for the draft that year, Shane's came up forty-third. A few weeks later he was standing in line in his underwear, along with a thousand other inductees, turning his head sideways and coughing while some medic held his nuts, told to urinate in a cup, was stamped 1-A, and shipped off to Fort Ord for basic training.

The night we found out Shane was headed to basic training, I announced during dinner, "If you're going, then so am I." Karyn and Shane both looked at me, but neither one said anything.

Finally Shane reached over, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "Listen up, amigo, I know what you're saying, and I appreciate it."

"Bullshit," I said, sensing where he was headed. "I'm going."

Shaking his head, he squeezed my shoulder hard. His vice-like grip actually hurt. "I love you like a brother," he told me. "You know that." I nodded as he continued. "But you're married. You have Karyn to think about, to take care of."

"But ..."

Karyn was hanging on his every word, but remained silent.

"No buts about it. You're staying here. You've got responsibilities. I promise you. I'll be all right." I looked away. He squeezed harder, forcing me to meet his eyes. "I promise," he repeated, staring into my eyes, until he saw my look of surrender. "Not all of us are destined to be warriors," he said softly. "Not this time around, anyway."

Karyn reached over and put her hand on my knee.

Shane gave me a little squeeze before letting go of my shoulder. "Besides, I'm not going to have time to look after your sorry ass over there. You'd probably end up getting us both killed."

Springing out of my chair, I flew at him with an open arm tackle, tipping his chair over. We both went tumbling to the floor. "I'll show you whose sorry ass needs looking after." But pinning me in seconds, Shane soon had me begging for mercy.

Karyn's laughter rang in our ears as she started clearing the table. "You guys will never grow up."



After three months in basic training, Shane's platoon was given a four-day pass, and he flew home for the long weekend before being shipped off to defend our nation against the all-powerful North Vietnamese. Those were the last days of life-long friendships.



For the first time in history, the mayhem of war was played out in living color every night on the six o'clock news. The effects on the country were mind numbing. By the time Shane finally came home, he and America were changed forever. Other than a few bumps and bruises, he'd escaped physically unscathed. Decorated with honors for bravery and heroism, he stood erect and proud, but his eyes were deep orbs of darkness and depression. The horrors he'd seen had manifested into a vicious cancer that was eating him alive from within. He was a hollow shell of the proud, young man he once was.

Without a second thought, he moved in with Karyn and me, taking over the same stateroom we'd shared as kids. The three of us were reunited. The post-war Shane didn't talk much, and when he did, it was never about the war. As far as I could tell, he didn't sleep much either.

One afternoon while Karyn was at the market, I asked him if he wanted to talk about what had happened over there. He paused, staring at me

with unblinking eyes. Shaking his head slowly, he said, "You don't want to know."

I held his gaze. Searching his eyes but finding only darkness in the blank emptiness of his stare sent a cold chill up my spine. "Don't ask me again, okay?" he said. That's the last time we ever talked about the war.

From day one, he cautioned Karyn and me never to come into his cabin at night. "Can't sleep much," he told us after being back a few days. "What rest I am getting is only skin deep. So, please, for your own safety, don't ever come into my cabin without knocking."

Karyn and I nodded, thinking we understood. We didn't.

"And most importantly, wait 'til I say it's okay before you open the door."

Karyn and I nodded again and exchanged glances.

Seeing our confusion, he added, "I might react without thinking." He paused before drifting away again. We waited. We were growing accustomed to his disjointed conversations. He was never fully present. "Especially at night, when I'm in the dark, when I'm sleeping. Don't come in on me, okay?" It wasn't really a question.

The weeks passed. I went off to work every morning, leaving the two of them to take care of things around the boat and handle the chores. They'd shop for fresh vegetables, home-made breads and pastas on Market Street or pick up lunch and bring it down to me at the docks. The time they were spending together, walking our old stomping grounds, seemed to be slowly helping Shane ease back to normalcy.

One afternoon I came home early, needing a file that I had stored in his cabin. Before he moved in, I'd been using Shane's cabin as a home office. He and Karyn were out when I got to the boat, so I just went in to get the file. What I found instead scared the crap out of me.

When they came home, I was sitting on the back deck, holding his loaded 9mm in my lap. They both saw the gun as they stepped on board. Before Karyn or I could say anything, Shane stated flatly, "I sleep with it, locked and loaded, on my chest. Can't close my eyes without it." Karyn and I looked at him as he continued. "I've been trying to wean myself off it. Like today," he said, looking at Karyn, "forcing myself to leave it here when we go out."

"Do you mean you've been carrying that thing around town with us?" Karyn asked.

"Afraid so."

Karyn was stunned. "I've got to put these groceries away," she said heading inside.

Shane's eyes never left the gun. I handed it back to him. "Thanks," was all he said, taking it and following Karyn into the salon. For the first time since he came back, I realized I didn't want to know what happened over there. Ignorance was my bliss; Vietnam was his hell.

That night as Karyn and I climbed into bed, I asked her if she'd been able to talk to him at all about what had happened over there.

"Not really," she said. "Sometimes in the mornings after you go to work, we'll sit together, sipping our coffee. We mostly just sit, listening to the stereo. But sometimes he'll open up a little."

"And say what?"

"Nothing really. He loves the music. Wants to know all about the artists – Joni Mitchell, Crosby, Stills and Nash, Richie Havens, Country Joe, Janis, Credence, the Who, and especially Dylan. Says if it weren't for the music, he doesn't know what he would have done over there. Says it was the one thing that kept him from going insane."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Says if he had it to do over, he'd go to prison before letting them use him like they did."

"Does he ever talk specifics?"

"No," she said, snuggling her head under my arm and onto my chest. "Sometimes I get the feeling he wants to, but then he gets this glazed look and shuts up." She paused. "I don't push it. He'll be all right. It's just going to take time. He certainly doesn't need you or anybody else pressuring him."

"That's the last thing I'm doing," I said defensively. "I'm just trying to help."

"He'll ask for your help if he needs it. Until then, just let him be," she said curtly, rolling over, away from me. "Go to sleep. You've got another early day tomorrow."



Five A.M. came as it did every day. The faint buzzing from the alarm somehow found its way into my gray matter, activating a series of involuntary electrodes to start the transition from dreamland to reality. By the time I hit the snooze control, my brain was kicking in. It was time to get up. I left Karyn alone in bed, like I had to do every day since our honeymoon. The fish market never closed, so neither did our cannery. The mornings of Karyn rolling over, barely conscious, reaching out with her eyes still closed, begging me to stay and make love, were long gone. She no longer even groaned at the sound of the alarm.



Once the steaming hot shower started to work its wonders, I was able to shake the cobwebs out. The morning would then start to grow on me, especially summer mornings. I loved the tranquility of a new dawn, the quiet stillness on the water and the peace of mind that settles in while going through familiar routines: the mirror steaming up from the hot water; the fresh aromas that fill the room after stepping out of the shower; the clean scent of shampoo lingering in the heavy air. I liked the comforting feeling knowing that things are as they should be: knowing my love was just past the door, tucked securely under the thick warm down comforter, sleeping like a baby. But not today.

Leaving Karyn was never easy, but when it was raining it was twice as hard. We'd had such a wonderful summer, especially now that Shane was home. During the past few days, while we'd been prepping the boat for winter, we'd started to dread winter's arrival. The only interesting part was watching old man Wilson salute Shane whenever he saw him. Shane would stop whatever he was working on, stand up straight and salute back. The night before, we'd watched the storm track on radar together during the late news. Even though I knew it was coming, I just wasn't ready for the start of another winter. Especially not this morning.

The whole time I was getting ready for work—listening to the wind and rain pounding against the windows, knowing how damn cold it was going to be once I stepped outside—all I wanted to do was climb back into bed and wrap my arms around my wife. But I had to settle for giving her a soft kiss on the cheek. She barely moved as I whispered, "I love you" before I headed out. That first storm of the season sent a cold chill down my back as I lowered my head to make my way up the dock to work.



Karyn thought there was nothing wrong with the fact that her talks with Shane now included some holding and comforting. Shane was a friend, and nurturing him was a normal response for her, giving to a friend what he so desperately needed. In her heart, she felt Shane not only needed her love, but also deserved it. She couldn't deny him what he needed to become whole again, knowing none of his old high school flames he'd been seeing could give him what he really needed. And even though she was infuriated when he'd come home some nights reeking of their perfume, she held her tongue. How could anyone blame her for giving him the one thing she knew would make him whole again?

But as tears continued to pour from his scarred soul, simply holding him was no longer enough. Karyn became possessed by a primal instinct

she had no control over – an instinct so powerful, so strong, it was driving her beyond reason, beyond rational thought. Men go to war; women pick up the pieces. Men kill; women nurture. The tattered anti-war poster hanging next to the back door had taken on a whole new meaning since Shane’s return. *Make love, not war.*

So, without thinking of the repercussions, Karyn allowed her body to give in a way only a woman’s can. The boundaries of right and wrong blurred and melted away. What began as a selfless act of giving, driven only by compassion and friendship, became a fire burning with such strength that denial was no longer an option. She gave herself completely, over and over again. She withheld nothing. Their needs engulfed them in a fire so powerful nothing in the world could have kept them apart. Moments of tenderness would be swept away, leaving them gasping for breath. With their lovemaking lasting all day, everything in her life – except Shane – became meaningless. One veteran’s healing had begun.

As their days of making love turned into weeks, then months, somewhere within the deepest reaches of their collective consciousness, they had to know their actions would have far-reaching consequences. A price would eventually have to be paid, because within the balance of nature, for every action, there’s an equal and opposite reaction. Karyn knew she was saving the life of a man she had known all her life. Little did she realize that in saving one man’s life, she was destroying another’s.

She knew what had started out as controlled compassion was now an obsession raging out of control. She couldn’t help herself. She wanted Shane’s touch more than she’d ever wanted anything in her life. Her body ached for him. She’d lie awake in those pre-dawn mornings, pretending to be asleep, waiting for me to leave for work, knowing Shane would be inside her the instant I left. Her body longed for his touch, almost hurting with anticipation. With each passing day, their love erupted with more passion. As they clung to each other, covered with sweat, the steamy scent of their love hanging over the bed, they knew it was only a matter of time. They were beyond caring if they got caught; they threw pretense to the wind. Getting busted would be a relief.

Even when the signs are all there, the one whose heart is about to get ripped apart always seems to be the last to know. When I first began sensing something was going on between them, I remember resisting those subtle alarms firing off primal warnings deep within my soul. *There’s no way. The two of them together?* Those thoughts went against every fiber of my being. It felt so surreal, as to not even seem possible. *They’re my best friends, for Christ’s sake,* I muttered to myself, driving to work. I kept visualizing Karyn lying in bed, curled up in her favorite fetal position, all warm and toasty

under our thick comforter, her golden hair tousled with a few stray strands gently lying across her forehead, her slow, deep breathing as she slept, her soft skin, her slender long legs and beautiful breasts, so inviting, so alone.

A horn blasted behind me, jarring me back into reality. Dazed, I eased away from the traffic signal. I hated myself for even imagining them together, for even thinking something might be going on. *You're an idiot. If you don't start paying attention here and concentrate on driving, they're going to be scraping you off the pavement.*

I was about half way to work when I realized I'd forgotten the sales summary I'd been working on the night before. Hanging a U-turn at the intersection, I headed back to the boat to pick it up. *If you'd pulled your head out of your ass, you wouldn't be getting soaked for the second time this morning,* I scolded myself, as I ran back down the dock in the rain. I leaped on board, threw open the door to the salon and ran right in on Karyn and Shane making love.

I stood frozen, unable to move. They didn't even hear me come in. I couldn't breathe as I watched my wife, straddled on top of my best friend, their orgasmic screams of ecstasy ringing in my ears.

