

Lust, adultery and back-stabbing in scenic Hobe Sound Florida set in the 1950's.

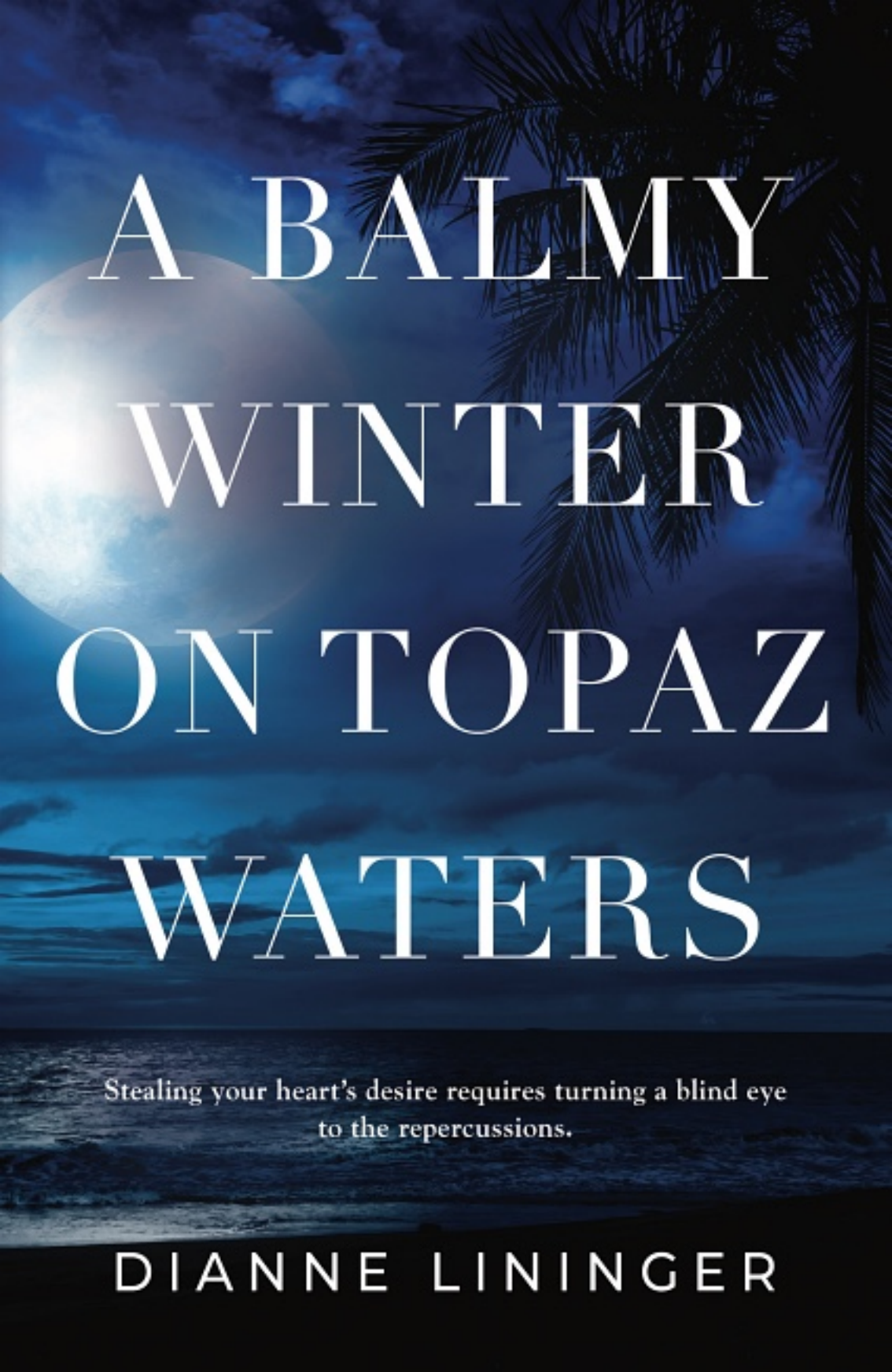
A Balmy Winter On Topaz Waters

By Dianne Lininger

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The background of the cover is a dark, moody photograph of a tropical beach at night. A large, bright full moon is positioned on the left side, partially obscured by the dark silhouette of a palm tree frond that extends from the top right corner. The sky is a deep, dark blue with some wispy clouds. The bottom of the image shows the dark, calm water of the ocean meeting a dark sandy beach.

A BALMY
WINTER
ON TOPAZ
WATERS

Stealing your heart's desire requires turning a blind eye
to the repercussions.

DIANNE LININGER

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CHAPTER V

DECEMBER

"Yes, that fine lady is right here," Dave told the caller. He handed the phone to Ellen. "It's your daughter Kimberly!"

Nervously Ellen grabbed the receiver from Dave. "What's up, Kim?"

"Ooooh just as I thought. Mommy has a boyfriend! Whatz z his name?"

"Kimberly you're drunk! You haven't called me Mommy since you were nine years old! What's going on?"

Loud giggles burst forth into Ellen's ear.

Ellen grit her teeth and shot Dave a scowl as Kim's giggling continued.

"Answer me, Kim? Better yet, call me back when you sober up!"

'Yeah, I had a few! Butz zo what! I'm all lone on Thankzgiving and I need to celebrate. Whoz your guy?"

"A married neighbor! His wife is on the porch outside!" Ellen lied. "Speaking of guys couldn't you find one to invite you out for Thanksgiving dinner?"

"Yeah, I've got boyfriendz but no one seriouz enough fur that!"

"What about that Randall you were seeing? He seemed serious enough!"

"Phffft! Randall is hiztory!"

"And so is this conversation! Call me when you're sober. And stay out of your car! You're liable to kill someone!"

"Yez, Mommy." Kimberly giggled again.

Ellen slammed the receiver down and shook her head, turning to confront Dave. "Why did you answer MY phone? You had no right! This is MY house!"

"Hey, relax."

"I just hope Kimberly doesn't remember anything when she sobers up!"

"What's the big deal if she does?"

"I'm not ready for my daughters to know about us yet!"

"I don't get it, you threw a fit when I didn't introduce you as my lover at The Breakers, but now you're all in a dither because your family might find out!"

"It's different, Dave! I'm their mother and you're a married man! When the hell do you plan to file for divorce?"

"I'd rather Sandee did that."

"In other words, you're still in denial!"

"No, I'd just feel better if Sandee's the one who takes that step."

"Because you're deluding yourself that she's coming back! Well grow up! That's never going to happen, face it!"

"It's not for you to decide, Ellen! And I'll waste no further time arguing about it."

"You know what? You can enjoy your banana cream pie on the porch by yourself. I've got a headache! I'm going upstairs to my bedroom to be alone!" With that Ellen stormed off.

The following morning when Ellen came downstairs, she noticed the sofa bed folded up. Dave was nowhere in sight. Obviously, he had moved back into his own house across the lane. Ellen worried she had driven him away for good.

Dave failed to return that night. Ellen was now deeply concerned; however, she wasn't about to beg him to come back. Ellen reached into the back of her kitchen cupboard and retrieved a bottle of vodka.

Suddenly she remembered her father who died an alcoholic. Whenever a problem occurred, he would reach for a drink to solve it. Whenever things didn't go his way, or he was depressed, a drink always lifted his spirits.

Naturally his problems compounded, and more and more drinks were required to make him feel better. Ellen always thought of him as weak. She was determined not to follow that path. So she put the bottle back and decided to spend the day at the beach.

The holiday weekend passed slowly without Dave. She wished she could take back her words.

The following Monday the bistro was closed. Ellen planned to spend it at her sanctuary, the beach. She pulled out her magazines and selected two. Someone was knocking on the door. She opened it to find Dave standing there.

"Oh, so you're bothering to knock!"

"I didn't know if I'd be welcome. "Are you still angry?"

"That depends," Ellen told him.

Look at the end of your dock." He pointed. "I bought us a canoe. Let's go christen it!"

Ellen clapped her hands in delight before hugging him. Together they almost skipped toward the dock in joy! The canoe was a forest green with two long oars.

"I'll do the rowing," Dave volunteered.

"You'd better!" Ellen told him.

As gentle breezes swept across her face the scent of tropical waters filled her nostrils. Ellen felt an ecstasy almost as sublime as the first time they made love. The waves almost felt as if floating upon clouds.

Fisherman waved to them from docks. Ellen waved back and Dave nodded.

With his powerful arms Dave rowed past acres of gorgeous wild foliage and thick mangrove. Soon small scenic cottages popped up here and there along with ostentatious multi-million-dollar homes. Behind one a huge white horse roamed amidst an exotically manicured landscape; another mansion displayed a lavish garden with peacocks strutting about.

Ellen wondered if she was in the midst of a wondrous dream. If so, she hoped never to awaken.

"Oh, that was heavenly!" she enthused upon returning to dock. "I want to do that again and soon!"

"A full moon will be on display tonight, let's take advantage then. A cold spell's on the way and it might be too chilly later." Dave said.

"A cold spell in Florida, seriously?"

"Yes, we have them but nothing like up north! Florida winters are strange; one day you'll need to bundle up and the next is perfect beach weather."

Later, under an enormous full moon, their evening canoe ride proved no less impressive. Even the stars seemed to shine brighter while glistening upon the water along with the moon and its wide glade. Ellen marveled upon it.

"Dave, let's make love here?" she urged.

"What, in the canoe?"

"Yes exactly!"

"Okay but be prepared to swim to shore when it turns over!" He chuckled.

"We'll just need to be careful."

"Where's the fun in that!?" he exclaimed

"I'm willing to risk a midnight swim if you are."

"We probably won't be comfortable, but okay why not." Dave pulled the oars in and placed them aside.

As the half-naked couple fervidly engaged in flagrante delicto another boat pulled up and shone a light directly upon them. "Damn teenagers!" a policeman shouted. "You kids should be ashamed! I'm contacting your parents!"

"Take a closer look!" Ellen shouted back. "You're going to need a Ouija board! Mine died in the 1930's!"

"And mine are dead, too!" hollered Dave.

"Sorry folks," the officer replied in a tone of embarrassment. The police boat quickly took off.

Uproariously Ellen and Dave began laughing.

The following evening the temperature dropped down to 40 degrees. Dave covered many of his plants, bushes, and fruit trees with old sheets he'd purchased from a thrift store to protect them from the cold.

"I'm ashamed to say I've been neglecting my garden these days. Sandee used to help, but she's gone now. According to forecasters the cold front will be brief, but it can still do damage."

"Where I'm from this is considered warm for winter, yet I'm freezing!" Ellen replied.

"I hear that from northerners all the time!" Dave told her. "It's amazing how fast you become acclimated to the Florida weather. Now's the perfect occasion to put that fireplace to use! There's plenty of wood on the ground outside. I'll start collecting."

"And I'll gather up some pillows and quilts so we can really enjoy it," Ellen said with a saucy smile.

"You're still shivering, how about some hot cocoa to add to the atmosphere?" he asked.

"I was counting on you to heat me up. But if you want cocoa, I'll get right to it."

"Let me prepare it," Dave volunteered. "I make cocoa with coffee and cinnamon. Afterward I promise to give you some real heat beneath the sheets, I mean quilts!"

"I can't wait." Ellen grinned.

"But first the wood!" he said. "Let's get that fire going."

"Don't be too long, lover!"

Between sips of cocoa Dave began singing the song, *Dream A Little Dream of Me*. He sang it badly and off key. Ellen held her sides laughing. However, when he came to lyrics "Stars fading but lingering on dear, longing to linger to dawn," she joined in singing beautifully.

"I'm impressed!" he exclaimed afterward. "You've a lovely singing voice!"

"I was the lead singer in our church choir back home," she told him proudly.

"That's not surprising! I'll bet you could land a professional gig in a musical show."

"Oh, go on, flatter me more! That song is an oldie I'm surprised you even know it."

"It was my mother's favorite! She used to sing it all the time around our house -- and much better than me."

"Well now it's my new favorite replacing Doris Day's Que Sera Sera. What other songs can we sing?"

"Speaking of oldies here's a truly great one!" With off key flair Dave began singing a rousing rendition of the old Irish tune Garryowen.

Ellen quickly joined in! Together they ended by bellowing out "Garryowen in glory!"

"Is there any song we both don't know!?" Dave exclaimed.

"I'm familiar with Garryowen because it was the official song of my brother's battalion during World War II. I never told him so, but I thought it unlucky and a bad choice." Ellen began to tear up.

"You mean because it was the song of Custer's 7th Calvary, and we all know how that ended."

"Every time I heard him singing it, I always got the sick feeling he wouldn't be returning from the war, and I was right."

"Oh, I am so sorry, Ellen. I didn't mean to dredge up that memory."

"I vowed after conquering cancer I wouldn't let the past define me," she said wiping away tears. "From that point on I was determined to face life head on and deal with whatever came my way!"

"Ellen, you are the most courageous person I've ever known."

"So, let's talk about Garryowen. How do you happen to know all the words to that song?"

"Blame a fifth-grade skit. My friends and I reenacted the Battle of Little Big Horn. Because I'm half Italian, half Cuban and dark, of course I played an Indian. In fact, the one who scalped Custer! The kid playing him was wearing his sister's blonde wig. I gave out a wild war whoop as I waved it high in the air in triumph!"

"Wish I could have been a fly on the wall and witnessed that!"

"Sandee said the exact same thing when I first told her."

Oh no, Ellen thought! Why did he have to bring HER up? Change the subject fast! She told herself. "Do you have any siblings?" Ellen asked.

"Do I ever! I'm the youngest of six children; four boys and two girls in my family."

"And where are they now?"

"Scattered to the winds, I'm the only one remaining in Florida."

"I deduced you were of Italian stock due to your last name, but I had no idea you were half Cuban. It's an interesting and enticing combo."

"My mother was born in Cuba. She and her family ran a cafe there. My father was a cruise ship captain. They first met when she was only fourteen years old, already a head-turning beauty. He promised her that he'd marry her someday."

"Obviously he did!" Ellen leaned in closer.

"Yes, he married her right after she turned seventeen and brought her back to Miami with him. Despite or because of their significant age difference, the marriage worked out well, although she missed her family in Cuba. My grandparents remain there."

"I'm surprised they haven't immigrated to this country."

"I wish they would especially with this Castro situation! My grandfather who is no fan of Batista feels Castro will be good for the country. I feel the exact opposite!"

"So do I," Ellen agreed.

"Sande and I tried to persuade them during our honeymoon there. But they insisted they're happy where they are; hopefully they'll change their minds soon."

"I want to meet them some day."

"Perhaps." He shrugged. "Who knows what the future will bring."

"Que sera sera!" Ellen declared, throwing her arms tightly around him. She pressed her lips against his, their tongues embracing

Quickly they began stripping the garments from each other's bodies until both were naked. Sinking beneath the quilts they began fondling one another. Ellen hoped daylight would never arrive.

The following morning Ellen woke up alone. Entering the kitchen, she discovered French toast brioche with raisins along with a note. Dave had left to tend his garden.

As Ellen poured herself a cup of coffee the phone rang. Marie Soltyiak was on the line.

"We're in Paris now," she said. "And our kids and grandkids have joined us. Ed and I have come to a decision. We're putting the Hobe Sound cottage up for sale after your return."

"But it's so lovely here!" Ellen reminded her.

"We're planning on buying a condo in Mexico for our retirement; one right on the beach!"

"How marvelous!"

"We worried the rest of the family wouldn't be onboard with the idea, but it turns out they're just as excited about it as we are! In fact, our grandkids can't wait! Say, you wouldn't be interested in buying the cottage, would you?"

"Well, I just might be!" Ellen smiled to herself.

"After the attack I'm frankly surprised to hear that."

"My stay here has been wonderful. I mustn't allow one terrible experience to ruin it. We'll discuss everything at length later."

"Fantastic!" Marie exclaimed.

After the conversation ended, Ellen danced about singing Que Sera Sera while envisioning a future with Dave. Surely, he will come to face reality! Sandee will be divorced and gone, and they would be free to marry!

"Ellen Mancinio," she loved the sound and kept repeating it to herself. She visualized their future together.

Dave would move in openly and permanently. They'd persuade his elderly grandparents to move up from Cuba and occupy the little house across the lane. There they'd work in the garden supplying fruit and vegetables to the bistro.

Ellen foresaw a beautiful life ahead for all of them.

Between lovemaking sessions Dave mentioned he was planning a special surprise for her on Christmas day. Perhaps he was going to propose? Yes, that must be it!

Ellen wondered how her daughters would react upon learning of her marriage to a much younger man. But no matter, they would be living far away in a distant state.

Dave informed Ellen he would be going to the bistro the following Monday, his usual day off, to decorate for Christmas. Only he and Bebo this year, Empiria would be spending the day with her new boyfriend arriving from Ocala.

"Years past Sandee would help too if available," he lamented.

"Well I'm available!" Ellen declared. "I'd be happy to assist you and Bebo!"

"And you're welcome to do so," Dave replied.

The following day Ellen read the rapist and thief was on the prowl again. She mentioned this to Dave, showing him the newspaper article.

"At least his target in the first case was lucky," Dave pointed out. "Two guys in a neighboring bungalow heard the girl screaming and kicked the door down."

"The poor young woman's a seasonal tourist probably looking for a pleasant getaway in Florida," Ellen added.

"Several homes on the beach were robbed I see; one while the owners were sitting right in their living room watching TV."

"He's a brazen son of a bitch! I sure wish the police would hurry up and catch the guy!"

"I'd like to have five minutes alone with him first," Dave said with a snarl.

"Yes sweetheart, I know you would."

When Monday arrived, Ellen was eager for the job ahead. She loved decorating for the holidays but was a bit surprised to find Bebo still behaving coldly towards her. The man seemed to avoid acknowledging her altogether.

Ellen already surmised that Empiria didn't like her. But she was determined to try at least to win Bebo over. Sporting a beaming smile, she approached him. "That's an interesting nickname," she said. "And I'll bet you have an interesting history as well."

Bebo continued to look straight ahead while hanging decorations. For a while Ellen didn't think he was going to answer.

After a long pause he finally spoke, "I've been called Bebo since I was a tiny child. My complete name is Bertrand Bonbeau. As to my history, it is varied." He didn't appear to want to elaborate.

Ellen decided to back off.

After the Christmas decorating was finished, Bebo quickly left with a nod to Dave along with a swift wave of his hand. Again, Ellen wasn't acknowledged.

On the ride home she mentioned this to Dave adding she felt a strong antipathy from both of his employees.

"Empiria adored Sandee and vice versa," she was told. "As for Bebo, there was an unfortunate incident with a white woman that was misconstrued and left him leery. Plus, he's a private person and we respect that. It's nothing personal against you."

"Gosh, what sort of incident?"

"After becoming full owner, I hired Bebo along with a nineteen-year-old cracker girl named Durley Ann. She and her hubby had just moved here from the panhandle near the Alabama border. It was off season, and I planned to train her. I doubt she hadn't anything beyond a second-grade education if that. The girl had trouble with reading and writing. And customer comments upset her."

"Why did you hire someone like that?"

"In spite of these shortcomings she had talent and potential as a chef. Bebo kindly took her under his wing and did everything possible to help her."

"Ah, I see where this is going."

"One day her husband came in as Bebo was instructing her. His hand was on her back. When her cracker husband saw this, his temper exploded! He cursed at Bebo with the vilest white trash language imaginable."

"How awful!"

"It escalated into a fist fight! The cracker swung first, bloodying and breaking Bebo's nose. Bebo swung back and the cracker landed on the floor with even fewer teeth than he came in with. He threatened Bebo with arrest!"

"Oh no!"

"I stepped in and told the guy go ahead and call the sheriff. Since he started it, he would be the one arrested. I'd make sure of it!"

"Good for you!"

"I also fired Durley Ann on the spot and forbade both from coming into the bistro ever again. And I'd have them arrested for trespassing if ever they did. Shortly after, I hired Empiria. She is a godsend."

"I realize both are an integral part of your life. I do so want them to accept me, or to at least give me a chance."

"They will. But remember Empiria has a guy now. He's her main focus."

"Well that's wonderful!"

"The man's name is Charles Hawkman and he's one quarter Cherokee. He just sold a lucrative construction business. Charlie's moved to Hobe Sound to be closer to his grandkids."

"Wow he's a great match for her!"

"I told Empiria if she marries him, she can retire and be set for life. She laughed and said she wasn't ready to join the living dead."

"Hey, that's insulting! I'm retired! Do you consider me one of those?"

"Definitely not!" He reached over pulling her close against him.

Ellen hugged him and kissed his cheek.

"We can do better than that." He grinned.

"Oh yes," Ellen agreed. "We're almost home!"

Christmas Eve seemed to arrive fast. Dave busied himself planning a festive dinner for them both. As Ellen was setting the table the phone rang. She raced to get it before Dave.

And thank goodness she did, Kimberly was on the other end!

"I'm here with Grace," Kim said. "She just put a goose in the fridge to defrost. We're planning a feast for Christmas dinner tomorrow. "

Grace grabbed the receiver away from her sister. "And Kim is making Grandma Thackeray's extra boozy fruitcake."

"And I'm serving it with rum raisin ice cream!" Kimberly hollered into the receiver.

"We invited Miss Darla to join us," Grace continued, "but she's celebrating Christmas with her niece Meagan."

"So, what are YOU doing for Christmas?" Kim asked, grabbing the phone back from her sister.

"Friends have invited me to dinner; a family here in the neighborhood," Ellen lied.

"And what about tonight, Christmas Eve, what are your plans?" Kimberly insisted upon knowing.

"Enjoying a delightfully quiet dinner here alone at the cottage," Ellen lied again.

"Oh, I feel so sorry for you. If I was there, you'd be out having fun instead!"

"Let me talk to Grace again," Ellen said with a tone of impatience.

"Fine, here!"

"We miss you Mom," Grace lamented. "Since you left for Florida, it hasn't been the same."

"I'm surprised your father didn't invite you both over to celebrate Christmas with his new family."

"Actually, he did, but we declined. Still, he sent us both holiday cards with a hundred dollars each inside."

"Well, that was generous of him!"

"Kim is spending winter break here with me in my apartment. She refuses to go back home."

"Kim would have more space in the guest house than in your apartment."

"But I'd have to interact with Amy and her brats," Kimberly shouted into the phone, "plus Dad would be constantly telling me what to do!"

"Not if you kept to yourself in the guest house!" Ellen shouted back. "Buy some books; brush up on your studies. You'll be returning to class before long."

"But our guest house doesn't have a kitchen, remember? I'd still be forced to interact with them! "

"Okay, you win, stay with Grace!" With that Ellen wished them a Merry Christmas and ended the conversation.

Dave glanced askance at her. "From what I heard I'm still a secret."

"Because you're a married man! When you're free I'll get a megaphone and shout it from a water tower! I can't understand why you insist upon clinging to a dead marriage."

Dave groaned. "Let's not get into that again, not tonight. I've worked too hard on this dinner; I want nothing to spoil it."

"Again, why are we having our festive dinner tonight instead of on Christmas?"

"I told you I've a special surprise planned for tomorrow. The forecast is sunny and warm. Our day should be perfect!"

"Sounds interesting."

"It's something I believe you'll enjoy. Now be seated, dinner is about to be served, but first the appetizer, Oysters Rockefeller with caviar."

"Ah, you remembered I loved that at The Breakers!"

"I've also prepared the Belle salad topped with avocado and Brie."

As Ellen sat relishing every bite Dave brought out roast squab with seasoned red potatoes followed by hot rolls served with honey butter.

"And for dessert I've made my special Florida fruitcake with pineapple, cashews, coconut, and just enough rum for flavor."

"Delightful!" she exclaimed.

Dave served the fruitcake along with espresso. Ellen was more than pleased with the entire meal.

"I believe this is my favorite Christmas Eve ever!" She cooed while sipping the espresso.

"Hey, it's not over yet," he said with a seductive wink and a smile.

Ellen quickly set her cup aside. "Before we make love, I want to give you my gift!"

"Shouldn't our gift exchange be on Christmas morning?"

"In my home we did it on Christmas Eve. Our girls couldn't wait and now I'm too excited!"

"I must go across the lane to fetch yours then."

"Okay but hurry back!" Ellen raced up the stairs.

He returned with a beautifully wrapped package under his arm. "The gift counter wrapped it," he confessed. "They do a much better job."

"I wrapped yours myself!" she said. Ellen extended a small box covered completely by a large, glittery bow. She eagerly watched him open it before unwrapping hers."

"A Swiss watch. Wow! Give mine back; I need to get you something way better!"

"No darling, any gift of yours I will forever treasure." Ellen's jaw dropped after opening her package.

Dave's gift was a pair of gaudy leather sandals decorated with tiny semi-precious stones. Ellen thought them garish as well as tacky. But thanked him with a big, forced smile; she wondered if it looked as fake as it felt.

"They're to show off those long, tanned, shapely legs," he said with a grin.

Ellen realized she must force herself to wear them no matter how embarrassed they made her feel. "Now a special treat for you," she told him. Ellen set them aside and led Dave by the hand up the stairs.

The remainder of Christmas Eve was spent making love by candlelight up in her bedroom.

Christmas morning, they both slept late; and then made love again. Afterward they enjoyed a leisurely bubble bath together, one scented with orange blossoms. Both took turns washing the other, this led to fondling. Giggling and splashing followed.

Dave rose and dried himself first. "Take your time," he said putting on a robe. "I've planned a gourmet Christmas brunch."

"Why Mr. Marciano you are going to spoil me rotten with all this special treatment."

"That's the plan Milady."

Ellen sprayed herself with L'Air du Temps body mist in eager anticipation of the Christmas surprise ahead before grabbing a robe and heading downstairs.

"Ah, something smells delicious!" She beamed from ear to ear as she entered the kitchen.

"I'm preparing a French omelet with Portobello mushrooms along with diced herbed potatoes, and I'm baking those parmesan cheese croissants you love. Be sure to save room for the miniature Kahlua pancakes with pecans and bananas."

"Gosh, that's a meal for the entire day!" Ellen declared.

"We probably won't be eating again until much later," he told her.

"I'm getting really excited about your plans for today!" she exclaimed.

Brunch over, he instructed Ellen to go relax while he washed dishes and cleaned up the kitchen. "It's the least I can do after that expensive gift you've bestowed upon me."

"No, we're a team!" she insisted. Ellen proceeded to clear the table. "Besides, I can't wait to hear your plans for today."

After all was clean and in place, Dave threw down his washrag and took both of Ellen's hands in his. "Put your bathing suit on." He smiled. "We'll be spending all day at the beach. We'll picnic by a bonfire on the shore later. I'm betting it's the first time you've ever spent a Christmas day on a beach!"

Actually, Ellen had; she and Brad enjoyed Christmas in Aruba before the girls were born. But this was to remain her secret. "Dave, what did I ever do to deserve someone as wonderful as you in my life?" She cooed smiling into his face while gazing deep into those beautiful bedroom eyes.

"Well for one, you survived cancer! So, the rest of your life deserves to be beautiful." With that he pulled her closer. They kissed while clinging tightly to each other.

Ellen sighed with contentment as they slowly separated. She felt as giddy as a teenager.

"Fetch some towels and blankets, bring your robe. After dark it might get cold by the ocean. I'll take care of everything else," he told her, nodding.

Ellen made sure to wear those gaudy, tacky looking sandals Dave thought were so pretty.

While driving Ellen was surprised when Dave made a sharp turn beforehand. "The beach is up ahead! Where are you going?"

"That's the public beach," he stated. "This road leads to a private one."

Soon Dave pulled up to a secluded spot and parked behind a cluster of tropical foliage. Beyond was a scenic stretch of isolated paradise. Palm trees swayed over miles of glistening sand as gentle waves sensuously reached out to embrace the shore, receding before another lingering touch.

The sheer beauty of it all took Ellen's breath away.

"For as far as you can see this beach belongs to real estate magnate T. Wayne Burlingham, Brielle's former lover," Dave informed Ellen.

"The one who flew her down to Rio for the Carnival, I remember you telling me."

"We've always referred to this as Brielle's beach."

"Are you sure we're welcome here, considering what happened between the two?"

"I think so."

"But you're not absolutely certain; I detect hesitation in your voice."

"Sandee and I ran across him a few times afterward. He was polite although distant. Had he shown any hostility I would never have brought you here."

"This beach is far too beautiful not to be enjoyed." Ellen sighed.

"The four of us swam here together a few times. Brielle always insisted on coming around sundown despite being warned that's when the shark's feed."

"Yikes!"

"She hated blazing sunshine. Brielle was fair complexioned. Her face and arms were covered with freckles. This made her self-conscious, however it only enhanced her beauty."

"Apparently the lady was a burner not a tanner. My oldest girl Grace is that way too."

"Brielle would wear a broad-brimmed hat along with a long-sleeved kimono until the sun began setting. And then she'd uncover to reveal the tiniest bikini ever created!"

"Those seem to be gaining in popularity. Still, my ex-husband declares them indecent! He absolutely refuses to sell any in our stores."

"Sounds like a real prude to put it politely."

"I recall one vendor, a lady who'd hand sewn a stack came in with her sixteen-year-old daughter as a model. Brad threw them both out!"

"That guy is a disgrace to men everywhere!" Dave chuckled.

"Brad swore that if ever he discovered one in the possession of either daughter, he'd disown her!"

"Brad sounds like a real asshole!"

Ellen snorted with laughter.

"Upon our last visit here, Brielle went too far and shocked Sandee. At dusk while splashing in the surf she removed her bikini top and tossed it onto shore."

"Oh my!" Ellen clasped her hands with amusement.

"Offended, Sandee demanded to be taken home immediately. Naturally, Brielle couldn't understand. She and her sister had gone topless many times on beaches in France."

"And I'll venture a guess that Brielle was a bit drunk, too."

"Yeah, she kicked back with a few, another thing that displeased Sandee."

"Sounds like quite a bit of friction between those two."

"Sandee never cared much for Brielle or her lifestyle. Plus, the mademoiselle was a notorious physical flirt and Sandee always found this threatening."

"To be honest I don't blame her!"

"I pointed out to Sandee that her figure is the better one. Sandee's curvy with a more generous décolletage, whereas Brielle was lithe and similar to a ballerina in structure. Sandee could have easily outshone her in a bikini if she ever dared to wear one."

Ellen turned and clenched her teeth. Damn, forget about HER, she thought. She struggled to hide her annoyance and forced a smile.

Ellen snuggled closer to Dave. "That's all in the past, let's concentrate on the now," she said. "Let's you and I take a stroll together down this wondrous stretch of beach."

"I was about to suggest just that." He beamed. "By the way those sandals look really sexy on you."

"I'm happy you think so." Ellen told him with a forced smile.

"But leave them here. We don't want to get them wet and ruined," he advised.

This gave Ellen an idea for later.

The two walked arm-in-arm together upon the warm sand while occasionally venturing into the surf skirting the tide and dodging waves.

"Burlingham said that in ten years or less he intends to cover this beach with high-end condos," Dave stated with a note of sadness in his voice.

"Oh no, that will spoil it!"

"I feel likewise." Dave sighed deeply. "People are relocating to Florida in such great numbers that I fear our state will one day sink into the sea from all the concrete. Not to mention it's going to change the entire character of Florida."

"What if I'm one of those people?" She inquired, snuggling up against him resting her head on his shoulder.

"Oh well that's different then!"

"You'd better say that!" Ellen gave him a playful punch in the arm. "How about stretching out on the beach for a while and just basking in the day," she suggested.

"I'll go get the blankets and everything else from the car," he replied.

"Only one blanket!" She winked.

"After dark when the temp drops, you'll be glad I brought more."

A Balmy Winter On Topaz Waters

Relaxing on the beach under the warm sun in her dark sunglasses, Ellen soon fell asleep. When she awoke, she spied Dave moving through the waves like a dolphin. Ellen sat up.

"Are you ready for a swim, yet?" he hollered.

Quickly she raced to join him. "There's privacy here, but no lifeguard," she pointed out.

"What do you mean? There's one right here!"

"You're kidding!"

"Nope, I worked as a lifeguard back in Fort Lauderdale. That was my weekend job when I was a senior in high school.

"Is there no end to your perfection, Dave!" She gave him a mighty splash!

He laughed. The two frolicked merrily as they swam among the waves.

Ellen waded toward the shallow waters closer to shore. "I'm going to do Brielle one better," she announced, "and I'm sober, too!" With that she removed her one-piece bathing suit and tossed it onto the beach."

Dave applauded before throwing a celebratory fist in the air. "Hey, let's make this a nude beach!" With that he removed his swim trunks and flung them onto land.

Now Ellen was the one applauding. "Come here sailor boy," she beckoned.

With a beaming smile he came bounding through the waves.

"Have you seen that film FROM HERE TO ETERNITY?"

"Of course! Sandee and I saw it together."

Ellen grimaced. She placed her hand over Dave's lips. "I don't want to hear THAT name again. This is OUR day. Yours and mine!"

"Duly noted, Milady!"

"Remember that steamy love scene in the surf between Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr?"

"You bet I do!"

"Well, you and I are about to do it one better."

"Oh, we can do it way better than that, baby!"

Amidst the splashing surf the two made love in different positions often getting a mouthful of salt water in the process; but that only added to their fun.

Out of breath and returning to dry land both plopped down on the blanket to rest. But soon Dave was ready for another round of lovemaking. Although exhausted, Ellen was eager.

Afterward Dave reached into a canvas bag and retrieved thermoses. "These two contain water, but I also have lemonade flavored with mixed berries if you'd prefer."

"Right now, I'll take the water. What else is in that bag?"

"I brought cinnamon hazelnut coffee for later when the temp cools down."

Ellen laughed. "We've got each other for warmth. And neither of us is going to cool down anytime soon."

"Hey, I need to rest after that!"

Now physically spent and hydrated, he threw himself back on the towel to nap. Ellen did likewise.

Later she was the first to awaken. Ellen rose and began collecting shells along the beach. She glanced back at Dave sleeping, she smiled with contentment. This truly was a day she would always remember and treasure -- And it was not yet over!

As Dave awoke, he spotted her pretty shells displayed in the sand.

"I'm going to create a collage to commemorate this Christmas day," she told him with pride.

"Everything about you brings me joy and warms my heart, Ellen." He smiled. "I will treasure the memory of this day as well."

"Let this day be the first of many!" she declared. "Let's have that lemonade now and we'll make a toast!"

"How about a long, deep kiss instead?"

"Oh yes!" She lunged, almost flinging herself atop him.

Dave almost had to push her off. "I'd better start gathering wood for our bonfire. The sun sets fast this time of year."

"We'd better put our suits back on. Someone's liable to see us!"

"Don't worry! No one will! This is a private beach, remember?"

"I'll help with the wood!" she volunteered.

After creating a blazing fire on the beach Dave went to his car and returned with a cooler. He was wearing a robe and threw Ellen hers. "Hungry yet?"

"I take it you mean for food?" She smiled impishly.

"We have the rest of this night for the other," he stated.

"Yeah, I could eat." She shrugged.

"We'll start with the shish kabob."

"Goody! And what else?"

"There's roast beef sandwiches on Cuban bread with imported Irish cheddar. And my Florida fruitcake as well, plus marshmallows for roasting."

Darkness fell as they sat upon the sand feasting. The sound of crashing waves just beyond seemed louder now. Even with the blazing fire, her warm robe and hot coffee Ellen felt a chill in the dark. She was grateful for those extra blankets Dave was thoughtful enough to bring.

The two cuddled together beside the bonfire. Lovemaking followed, but it was slower and gentler this time but equally satisfying and longer lasting.

As the sun rose both awakened to discover the bonfire had burned out leaving only embers.

Ellen let out a contented sigh. "Our Christmas Day is now but a wonderful memory. Let's go home. This time let me be the one fixing breakfast."

"No, Dolly Dee's Donuts is not far. You must try at least one! They're the best in Hobe Sound. Since we drank all the coffee I'll buy some more and we'll bring everything back and breakfast here, then we'll go home."

"But Dave, look at the way we're dressed! We're in robes!"

He laughed dismissively. "I know Dolly, she wouldn't care if we're nude! Besides we're not dining in. But you'll need to come inside to select your flavor of donut."

"You can choose for me."

"I want to introduce you to Dolly! She's quite a character."

"Is that really a good idea under the circumstances?"

"Hey, you threw a fit when I failed to introduce you to my friends! All I need to say is that my neighbor and I went for an early morning swim!"

"Okay, okay, enough said. What time is it anyway?"

"Judging by the position of the sun I'd say it's around 8:00 AM."

"Where's the watch I just gave you? Why aren't you wearing it?"

Dave appeared uncomfortable. "It's not for here."

"Why not?"

"Unless you're Howard Hughes or a Rockefeller that's not the kind of thing you'd wear to the beach. I'd hate to misplace and lose it here," he replied with irritation.

"If you did, I would replace it, I promise!"

"NO! I'd never be okay with that."

"But you're okay with me, right? So, what's the problem?"

Dave looked away. A few minutes of silence ensued. "Come, let's go get breakfast," he said at last changing the subject.

"Are you sure that donut shop will be open this early?"

"This time of year, yes! Remember it's tourist and snowbird season."

Dolly Dee's Donuts turned out to be just a hole-in-the-wall place inside a small shopping plaza.

"The rent is cheap here and that's why Dolly doesn't want to relocate," Dave told Ellen. "She'd rather spend money on quality ingredients for her donuts. If we arrived an hour later there would be a long line ahead of us."

As they stepped inside a familiar scent struck Ellen's nostrils, she began to tense up. A heavy-set woman stood behind a counter above a display case.

"Hey there, Dolly! How yah doing?" Dave shouted out. "This is Ellen, my neighbor across the lane; I'm showing off Hobe Sound trying to convince her to move here permanently. I thought an early morning swim might do the trick!"

"Welcome sweetie, if Hobe Sound ain't paradise it's the nearest thing to it."

"Ellen, this is Dolly Dee Ferrante. Her donuts are heavenly!"

The big woman turned her attention toward Dave. "Where's that gorgeous wife of yours?"

"Busy at work," he replied.

"The two of you need to get your schedules in sync and start a family. I know you'll both be great parents."

"Whatever will be, will be," Dave told her. He forced a weak smile.

Ellen turned away. She began to wander, looking around. Clearly the donut shop lady didn't suspect they were lovers; obviously due to the big age difference, she thought.

"That fragrance in here is more alluring than the most exotic perfume!" Dave exclaimed.

"Everything's freshly made!" Dolly declared. "Gio and I have been busy since 4:00 AM."

Dave pointed to the display case. "Those strawberry creme ones look mighty delicious, but so do the coconut. What do say, Ellen?"

"Good choices, one of each for me and a large coffee," she replied without a glance at the case. Instead, she gazed into the workroom at the back.

A man stood working there. Ellen studied his profile. And noticed something familiar about his build and the way he carried himself. Suddenly her memory was jogged! She gasped. The man turned; she saw him full face now. They made eye contact. Immediately she recognized those cold piercing icy blue eyes.

He recognized her as well and froze.

Ellen rushed to Dave's side. "Call the police," she whispered.

Dave appeared surprised and was confused. He asked her to repeat.

"Call the police," she stated again in a louder tone.

"Why Ellen, what's wrong?"

"Call the police now!" she ordered, almost screaming the words.

A thunderous crash was heard from the back!

"That's the man who attacked me! He's back there!" Ellen hollered pointing toward the room.

Dave raced there! But the man had escaped out a back exit. A large vat of boiling grease had been dumped on the floor to block his pursuit. Dave hurried out to the front.

Quickly Dolly was on the phone to the police. She instructed Ellen to put the closed sign up and pull the front shade down.

A few minutes later Dave returned panting and out of breath. "He disappeared into the woods. The guy was probably hiding somewhere in the undergrowth. I was unable to see him," he said shaking his head.

Soon the police arrived and began taking everyone's statements. The two officers were different from the ones to whom Ellen had previously spoken. These were both large older men.

"This is my fault!" sobbed Dolly, clearly distraught. "I felt sorry for him. I placed an ad in the newspaper for help. I discovered him sleeping by my front door early the next day as I came to unlock. He claimed he needed the job desperately to pay for a motel room. The poor man was homeless."

"What else did he tell you?" an officer asked.

"He said that he hailed from Michigan's Upper Peninsula near the Canadian border. He migrated here with the snowbirds after his wife took everything in a divorce. And I must say Gio was a hard worker and one of the most reliable too. This is a major shock!"

The other officer asked Ellen to step outside where he began to question her. Customers started arriving. All were politely informed the shop was closed until further notice. Curious, they began inquiring as to why. The officer replied that he was not at liberty to comment at that time.

He directed Ellen to the side of the building for more privacy.

She stuck to the story they gave Dolly. She and Dave were just out for an early morning swim. The officer raised an eyebrow. His mouth twitched. He seemed suspicious.

"At the public beach I assume?"

"No," she replied with a gulp. "A private one, my neighbor knows the owner."

"And where is that?"

Nervously Ellen gave him directions. She glanced through a side window and noticed Dave being questioned by the first officer. She wondered if he was holding to the same story.

A second police car drove up. Inside was an officer along with a plain clothes detective. This man Ellen recognized. She had spoken with him before shortly after her assault. His name was John Morefield. She still had his card by her nightstand.

"I just ran a background check on him," he announced. "The man's full name is George Isaac O'Malley, but goes by his initials GIO. He's actually from Chicago and has quite a history there."

"Don't worry," assured the accompanying officer, "we've got men out tracking him now with dogs, they'll catch him."

Time seemed to pass slowly; Ellen's stress increased with no ensuing capture.

Now it was the day before New Year's Eve and still the criminal remained on the loose. Ellen was frantic he'd return.

"Relax," Dave reminded her. "Remember I'm here with you now."

"But you're at the bistro during the day and I'm here all alone!"

"Just stay inside and make certain everything is locked."

"In other words, I'm a prisoner while the bad guy runs free!"

"It's only temporary until he's caught."

"I'm going crazy stuck inside! If only I could spend a day at the beach!"

"Oh, by the way," Dave remembered. "I drove by Brielle's beach yesterday. No trespassing signs were plastered all over the place as well as cameras mounted on trees which weren't there before."

"Thank God for that!" Ellen sighed with relief.

Obviously, the police have informed Burlingham we were there."

"So, we're unwelcome, now!" Ellen sniffed in a huff.

"Looks as if we'll have to settle for the public one and behave ourselves," Dave said with regret. "But we have other places," he added with a naughty wink.

Ellen bid him goodbye as he left for the bistro. Instantly she bolted the door behind him.

To distract herself and lift her spirits she went upstairs to her closet. Ellen pulled out a sapphire gown she'd purchased the previous month for their New Year's Eve celebration. Dave planned a return to The Breakers in Palm Beach. Ellen was filled with excitement and looking forward.

The expensive satin gown was certainly Breaker's worthy. Now she had to decide on accessories. Would she wear her sling back silver pumps or the navy ones with flowers on the toe? And which evening bag would go best; the white with sequins or the shiny metallic one?

The only way to know for certain would be to try everything on while gazing into a full-length mirror.

Ellen relished the feel of the fabric against her flesh. But something was wrong. No matter how hard she tried the dress refused to zip! Just the month before it fit perfectly at the shop! Now she couldn't get it past her ribs. Frustrated she let it drop to her hips.

As it hung there, she reached for her large hand mirror to view the back. Horrified, she spied a roll of fat invisible from the front. This was not there before!

Her swimsuit did feel tight on Christmas; however, she didn't spend much time inside it that day. Had Dave noticed, she wondered? Probably he did due to their intimacy. Suddenly Ellen felt old, ugly, and out of shape. Secretly Dave must be repulsed by her; how could he not!

Ellen jerked the gown off and kicked it across the floor. Gritting her teeth she growled before flinging the hand mirror across the room smashing it, almost knocking over a lamp!

She turned to stare at her body in the full-length mirror. From the front she looked fine, maybe a tad heavier. She turned sideways. Her stomach was starting to protrude again just as in her pre-cancer days. Ellen fought the urge to smash this mirror as well! Why had she not noticed these things before?

Ellen felt disgusted with herself. Suddenly she heard the doorbell. Several loud knocks followed. She hurried to the window. A police car was parked outside.

"I'll be right down!" she hollered out. Ellen rushed to slip on a robe before racing downstairs.

Detective Morefield was at the door in plain clothes with a uniformed officer. Ellen invited them in. The officer waited outdoors. Morefield came inside and seated himself.

"Any news?" Ellen inquired.

"Yes, in fact that's the reason I'm here."

"Did you catch him, I hope."

The detective nodded. "He was hiding out at an estate over by the beach. The owners, snowbirds had flown home early due to a death in the family. He'd been living in their tool shed while they were away."

"Oh my!"

"The place is isolated and landscaped for privacy. It was the perfect spot for him. However, a member of the lawn crew spotted him and notified us."

"So he's in custody now?"

"No, he lunged at officers with an axe when they attempted to arrest him. He's dead now."

Ellen clutched her chest. "The officers are okay, I hope?"

"Yes, they are fine. But George Isaac O'Malley, Gio will never be a danger to anyone ever again."

Ellen sighed deeply. "I suppose I shouldn't be pleased to hear of anyone's death, but I am."

"That is perfectly understandable, considering," the detective told her.

After he left Ellen went to the kitchen. Opening a cupboard she pushed aside the wine bottles. Ellen needed something stronger. She poured herself a tall drink of vodka. Afterward she stared at the empty glass and grimaced, this should be champagne, she thought. This news was long awaited and welcome, not to mention a tremendous relief!

Ellen thought of her girls. She needed to call and put their minds at ease. Grace would be at work, but Kimberly would still be on winter break and might be there to answer. Yet she wasn't. The phone just rang and rang. Why was she surprised? Kimberly was young and out having fun.

Suddenly Ellen remembered what she was doing right before the detective arrived. Her heart sank. She should go upstairs and clean the bedroom mess she left behind.

As Ellen headed toward the stairs the phone started ringing. She was expecting one of her girls instead it was Marie Soltyiak.

"We're still in Paris," she said. "Our kids and grandkids have gone home, but Ed and I decided to stay awhile longer. I just called to check in on you."

"Oh Marie I have such good news!" Ellen exclaimed. In detail she revealed the event without ever mentioning Dave. Although she nearly made a few slips in her excitement.

"Are you still considering buying the cottage and living there year-round?" Marie inquired.

"I might, but it's still up in the air," Ellen replied. She longed to confide details of her romance with her close friend. But Ellen knew she dared not. Marie would never understand."

"Actually, I'm surprised it happened in the first place. Hobe Sound has a far lower crime rate than our hometown," Marie told her. "But think it over, Ed and I won't be back for a while so you've plenty of time to decide."

After Marie's call a disturbing thought crossed Ellen's mind. Now that the attacker was out of the picture would Dave continue to stay with her? No longer was his protection needed. That excuse was gone!

Plus, Dave was young and extremely attractive. She was old and lumpy; how could he possibly envision a future with someone like her? Ellen returned to the kitchen to pour herself another drink and soon lost track of time.

Dave came back an hour early with a small white paper box in tow. "We closed the bistro until January 2nd since everyone has plans over the

holiday," he announced. "And here's some coconut fudge! It's the latest item on our dessert menu."

Ellen noticed a strange expression coming over his face. Suddenly she caught sight of herself in a mirror and was shocked! Her hair was disheveled, and her lipstick had bled into the lines of her face.

"Is everything okay?" he asked with concern.

"Detective Morefield was here earlier. That criminal guy Gio's dead!" she exclaimed with an exaggerated wave of her arm. She stepped forward nearly stumbling onto an end table."

"Careful!" Dave shouted. "Yes, I know. He came to the bistro with the news. Ellen, are you drunk? No need to answer it's obvious!"

Tears fell from her face. Her soft sobs then exploded into loud ones. "I'm so ashamed!" she cried out.

Dave rushed to comfort her. "You have no reason to be. After what that creep put you through, I understand, believe me."

"You are a perfect beautiful man in every way!" Ellen cried out. "I don't deserve you! I probably disgust you!"

"No, oh no sweetheart, how could you ever think such a thing?" He hugged her tightly while kissing her forehead."

She collapsed in his arms.

When she awoke, she found herself alone in her bed upstairs wearing only her underwear. She attempted to rise but fell back into bed. Her head throbbed in agony, and she was nauseous. "Dave! Dave!" she called out. "Where are you?"

Minutes later he entered the room. "Don't try to stand with those bare feet. I think I swept up all the glass but there might be a few shards I missed. What happened in here yesterday?"

Ellen stumbled for an answer but then fell silent.

"That's okay," he said fluffing her pillow. "Scoot back I'm going to bring you a tray."

"I don't want food! Bring it and you'll be mopping vomit off the floor as well as glass shards!"

"I'm bringing you exactly what you need. Trust me! Don't try to get up."

He left and returned with a tray containing a bottle of vodka and a shot glass along with rye toast and whole grain crackers.

"Ah, the old hair of the dog!" Ellen said. "I put nearly the exact combo together for Kimberly after her prom night. What a laugh she'd have if she could see her mom now!"

"And friends did likewise for me as I did for them," Dave confessed. "Remember I wasn't always a non-drinker."

"I should be more careful. My father died an alcoholic. "Ellen's hand shook as she held the shot glass. He grabbed her wrist to steady her. "I've often warned Kim about that. Of course, she never listens! Guess she takes after me."

Later while she was recovering Dave brought her Bouillon broth, a tomato omelet, and hot tea with lemon and honey.

"It's New Year's Eve, isn't it?" she said finishing up her tea. "Do you mind if we don't go out tonight to celebrate. I'd rather stay home."

"I figured as much. I've already cancelled our reservation at The Breakers. It was in the Florentine Room too. And I was looking forward to seeing you in the new gown. But you can still model it for me. I picked it off the floor and hung it back in the closet for you."

Ellen gave out a deep fatigued sigh. "Tonight was to have been so very special for us. I'm sorry to have disappointed you."

"Tomorrow is New Year's Day. We'll celebrate here. For tonight we'll take folding chairs out to the dock and watch the fireworks. Those rich people living on the beach shoot them off twice a year; also on the Fourth of July. We can enjoy them from there."

"That sounds delightful." She forced a smile.

"It's not The Breaker's, but it will be special. I'll see to it," he assured.

Dave was not exaggerating. From the dock the view of fireworks was nothing short of glorious. Scintillating colors burst forth lighting the night sky with majesty high above as both watched in wonder and delight.

Afterward upon going to bed Dave didn't try to make love to her. Ellen was relieved.

The following morning, she was able to reach her girls on the phone by calling early.

"Your daughters must have found the news comforting," Dave remarked.

"They were not exactly happy about being awakened early on New Year's Day! And still, they remain nervous about me being here alone."

"But you're not alone!"

"Oh, and how can I explain that to them, exactly?"

"Let's not get into that again! What do you want for breakfast?"

"Starting today no more fattening meals, I'm gaining my pre-cancer weight back. I just want toast and coffee."

"But that's unhealthy. I'm going to fix you a vegetable frittata with a side of fresh fruit."

"No Dave, this morning I just want toast and coffee!"

"Okay." He shrugged.

Later Dave brought his grill over and set it up in the back. Ellen put up a card table on the dock along with folding chairs.

From there she watched him grill shish kabob with jumbo shrimp and vegetables followed by burgers topped with gorgonzola.

"Wait'll you taste my homemade pineapple ice cream," he told Ellen. "And it goes especially well with that coconut cake I brought over."

Ellen rolled her eyes. "Dave, what did I tell you this morning? I'm on a diet now."

"But today's a holiday! Food is part of the celebration. Besides I thought you'd be famished after that skimpy breakfast." He placed a dish filled with food before her.

"Where is that watch I gave you? I never see you wear it."

"It's too fancy and expensive for everyday wear. It's a special occasion piece."

"Well today is a holiday, New Year's Day! Go and fetch it. I want to see it on you!"

He turned noticeably tense. "It's hidden in a safe place and will take me too long. So just forget it, Okay?"

"No! Go get that watch and put it on for me. Please!"

He looked away sheepishly avoiding eye contact.

"Dave, what did you do with that watch?"

"I sold it, all right! With Sandee gone I'm struggling to get by on one income."

"Wow that was fast! I only gave it to you a week ago! Why didn't you tell me this instead of lying to me?"

"I knew it would hurt your feelings. You looked so proud when you presented it to me."

"So instead, you chose to deceive me! Is that better? How do you think that makes me feel, huh?"

"You've placed me in an awkward situation, Ellen."

"What?" She threw her hands in the air. "Everything about our situation is awkward! I've lost my appetite, I'm going inside."

"No, Ellen wait!" He raced to catch up. "We have something special together. You can't deny that. Come back and sit down."

Reluctantly, she did. But the meal overflowed with tension. During the evening Dave attempted foreplay with Ellen, but she pulled away.

He stood and stripped down. Standing naked before her, Ellen studied him and remembered why she was so strongly attracted.

"Please don't be angry with me I'm already beating myself up," he pleaded.

"Well, you've got a lot of making up to do, mister!" She cracked a smile. There was no further need for the fold-out sofa bed now.

"Turn out the light!" she ordered.

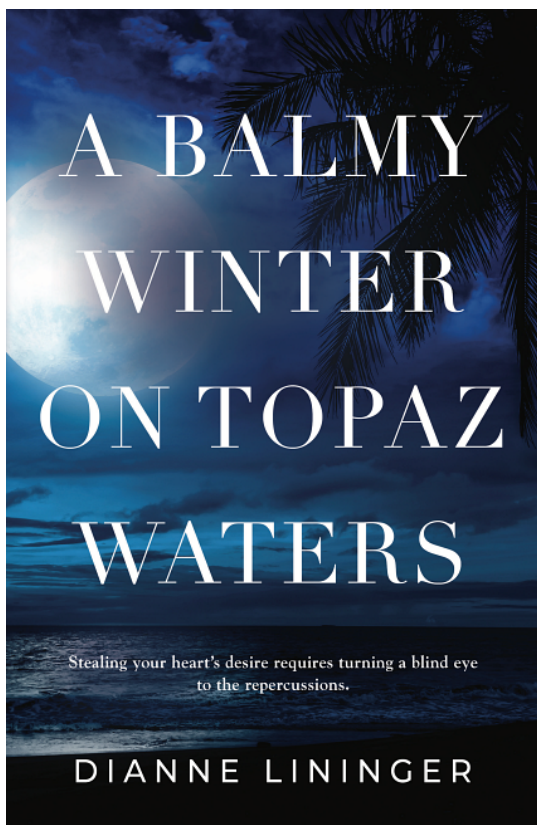
Soon after they made love; with gentleness at first, then hot and filled with passion.

The next morning after Dave left for the bistro and post-holiday business; Ellen decided to surprise him with a generous check upon return. Immediately she sat down to write one.

Afterward she closed her eyes to dream. Ellen looked forward to reaping his gratitude.

Suddenly her train of thought was disrupted by a knocking at the door. Annoyed Ellen rose and flung it open. To her shock and surprise Sandee was standing there. The young Mrs. Mancinio appeared more beautiful than Ellen remembered. Her hair was styled in a chic updo highlighting her facial bones. Sandee looked even slimmer or was that her imagination.

Ellen stood speechless.



Lust, adultery and back-stabbing in scenic Hobe Sound Florida set in the 1950's.

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