

Sex on the Beach

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Also by Raud Kennedy

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Stick Out Your Tongue
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Sean

The old wood cabin cruiser rocked softly in the wake from the boats motoring past the Marina. Their red and green running lights shimmied on the night's black water. Across the harbor, the city lights of Boston lit the clouds with a milky fluorescence. The warm summer air filled with the rumble of another jet at Logan Airport as it stretched its wings and reached toward the heavens. There were four of us sitting around the card table on the deck of my creaking Chris Craft, myself, my girlfriend, Lisa, a pal of mine, Evan, and his wife, Samantha, but she went by Sam like on that old television show, Bewitched. Actually, when I think about it, Evan kind of looked like the Darren character on that show. He had a businessman's haircut and always wore a blazer on his days away from the trading office. We were oil and vinegar, but we'd become friends back when I used to have to wear a suit to work every morning. But not anymore. I dressed like a bum and my hair hung to my shoulders.

We had a Ouija board on the card table, and so far it had spelled out, “sex.” I didn’t know if ghosts or spirits or whatever thought about sex, but with the rocking of the boat, I wasn’t going to put a lot of faith in it. Not that I normally would, but sometimes it would spell out some pretty spooky things, like misspelled names of dead friends and things like that, but now it just said sex, and that was cool with me.

Lisa nudged me. “Sean, you did that on purpose.”

I held my hands up in surrender. “I swear, I didn’t. I can’t help it if the spirits are horny. It must be these hot august nights and the sight of you two babes in clingy tank tops.”

Evan looked down at his lap and shook his head. “No, I confess, it was me.” He was kidding. He never messed with the game. He was very superstitious, especially when it came to reading the stock market. He’d buy or sell depending on what his morning horoscope in the Globe said, and the funny thing was that he actually made money for his clients. Who says the president shouldn’t have an in house astrologer? He was all for it.

Sam gave Evan a good shove. She knew him too well. “Don’t even say it. No more strip poker. You and Sean cheated last time.”

“Yeah, and you wore three bras,” I said, laughing as I got up. “Who wants another beer?”

“I do,” Evan and Sam said. Lisa shook her head. She was always shaking her head. She had trouble letting her hair down. In the year we’d been dating, I’d only seen her more than tipsy three or four times. Which was good. I’d dated girls who matched me drink for drink, and they weren’t a pretty sight heaving over a curb between two parked cars at the end of the night. No, Lisa was above that. She was what my little stepsister would call model pretty, tall, skinny, with long blonde hair, and blue eyes that could give you the warm fuzzies, or be so cold your

nuts wished they'd never dropped. She did some modeling on the side for a few Newbury Street boutiques as favors to the friends of hers who owned them. That is when she wasn't busy managing Diva's, a lucrative hangout in Back Bay that served the smallest portions for the highest prices. Eating there was like being on a fat farm. Managing that place wasn't a bad job for a twenty-four year old, but she was ambitious. She wanted to own her own restaurant by the time she was twenty-seven, and she might just do it.

I didn't know what she saw in me. I owned a burger hut next to the sailing club on pier four in Charlestown. I'd named it Munchies, and the slogan went, "Burgers so tasty, you'll be stoned after the first bite." Lisa had always had a boyfriend. It was like she thought she needed one to be socially acceptable, and sometimes I felt like I was simply there to fill the role, like a round block fitting in the square hole. I brought out the fresh beers and passed them around. "Okay, back to the spirits," I said. We all rested our fingertips on the indicator and waited for the horny ghost to speak up. The next few letters were "on the." Now I knew someone was rigging the board. "Okay, which one of you is messing with it?"

Everyone shook their head. I raised my eyebrows at Lisa. This was her kind of humor. She liked to make us think the ghosts were spelling out the names of various drinks. Once she even conned us all the way through spelling out Tanqueray Martini. "Not this time," she said. "I don't even like Sex on the Beach drinks."

"Yeah, but you do like sex on the beach?" Sam asked with a giggle. She was always good for a few laughs once the motion of the boat and the beer had loosened up her wifey composure. Lisa gave her a blank look and didn't answer, which was answer enough. Lisa and Sam weren't what you'd call girlfriends. They didn't go to the

bathroom together, if that says anything.

Evan cracked his knuckles, sending shivers up Lisa's spine. She hated that and he knew it. "Come on, let's finish it," he said.

We put our fingertips back on the indicator, and when the next letter was B, I pushed my chair away from the table and leaned back. "Enough, either one of you is messing with the board, or the ghost is a lush and a horndawg."

Lisa stood to go use the head. "I've had enough anyway. It's getting late," she said as the ship's clock in the galley started to chime eight bells, the change of the midnight watch.

Evan drained the rest of his beer and set the can down on the card table. It landed with an empty tinny sound. "Yeah, we should get going. I don't want to be on the road when the bars empty out. That's asking to get pulled over."

"I'll drive," Sam said with another giggle. Evan ignored her. He never let her drive if he was in the car. He lived in a world where the woman belonged in the kitchen, and the man in the living room behind his evening paper. When they had left, I stuffed the empties into a cardboard shortpack container and put the Ouija board away. I wasn't a neat freak like Felix Unger, but empty beer cans strewn around a boat made me feel like inbred white trash from Maine. I guess you could call it a pet peeve of mine. Lisa handed me the last of the cans, and I folded up the card table. "Do you want to stay over?" I asked.

"Do you want me to?"

I put my arm around her waist and pulled her to me. She smelled like perfume and cigarettes, one of my favorite combinations going back to my days of bar hopping in the grunge clubs when I lived out in Seattle. "Always," I said and moved to kiss her, which was a

gamble. She had a way of hiding her feelings that made it difficult to know if she'd kiss me back, or turn her head and give me her cheek. I know, she sounds high maintenance, but we had our good times. Her sense of humor was as dry as the Sahara, and she could say the funniest things with the straightest of faces. And she was damned hard to win against in strip poker, which was probably the reason she liked to play it. But I didn't mind losing, if you could call it that. I'd grown up on the Columbia River Gorge in a small town called Hood River, and had spent my share of summers on the nude beach at Rooster Rock, so nudity was no big deal.

It looked like the captain was going to get some. Undressing Lisa was like eating the leaves off an artichoke. It took time to get to her heart, but once you had, it was there. Sex with Lisa, when it happened, was like a heavy meal. She'd grind away on top of me with her eyes shut, and her evil twin would whisper sweaty words in my ear. I just wished her evil twin would come around a little more often. Afterward, she'd collapse on me, and I'd ease out of her, and then we were back to playing roles again. Having sex with her was the only time I didn't feel like a round block being forced into a square hole. Sure, we talked, and she made me laugh, but she always kept me at a distance with that shaking of her head. I'd given up trying to act cool around her. Shit, I'd given up trying to pretend I was something other than who I was a long time ago. At thirty-one, I'd had my fill of that crap. I wasn't going to play her Romeo when I knew in my heart I was Lothario.

Later, while she was still laying half on me, I said, "You know Lisa, have you ever wanted to go down to the Florida Keys?" It was something I'd wanted to do ever since I'd bought the boat a couple years ago.

"And be a parrothead in Margaritaville?" she said sleepily as she moved off me.

“Something like that. Once I get new engines for the boat, we could motor down the Atlantic Coastal Waterway all the way to Key West, the only place on the east coast where you can see the sun set over the ocean.”

She was dozing and had fallen asleep, which was probably for the better. I wasn't up to having my dreams shot down. Her parrothead comment had said as much. She'd need some convincing to get her interested in the idea. Lisa wasn't the adventurous type. Adventure to her was spending a weekend out on the Cape in Provincetown with her gay restaurant friends. That was all right by me. I wasn't exactly in a hurry to drop the small fortune it would cost to replace the boat's old engines. They were okay for motoring up the Charles River and around the harbor, but I wouldn't trust them to make it to Nantucket Island or Martha's Vinyard. I could pay for them with the money I had in my saving account, but I was planning on using that to open another burger hut over on Revere Beach.

I woke in the morning around ten. Lisa was already up and gone. While I'd been sleeping off last night's beers, she'd made coffee and had headed home to shower and change for work. At least that's what I figured. One of the benefits of not being a drinker was six hours of sleep and she was up and running. Not me. I'm no morning person. I needed my coffee and breakfast before my grumpy edge softened. By the time I had walked from the marina to the pier for another day behind the counter at Munchies, I was my usual happy self. The sun was up, the sky was blue, and the tourists would be hungry after their tour of the USS Constitution. It was going to be a good day, at least that's how it looked when I arrived.

Buzz was already there setting out the tables and white plastic chairs. He was one of two Boston University students I'd hired to help me out, and if need

be, to run the joint when I wasn't around. Buzz was a typical kid from the suburbs, baseball cap, khaki shorts, and polo shirt, but he had a sharp eye. He played a game where he'd try to guess what the customer was going to order based on what they looked like. He was right more often than not, but it wasn't like there was a lot to choose from, Munchie Burgers, Mad Dogs, Tijuana Tacos, barbecued ribs and chicken on the weekends, and assorted sides to go with everything. We did a brisk take out business and we delivered to the various marinas in Charlestown, which was a lifesaver in the winter when the tourist trade slowed.

"Hey, Capt'n," Buzz said as I walked up. "Did you make contact with any long lost ancestors last night?"

I'd told him of our Ouija board plans. "Nah, it was a flop, unless you think sex on the beach has a different meaning in the spirit world than it does over at the Warren Tavern."

"You got me. I wouldn't know. They don't teach us about that stuff at BU."

"Really? I wonder why," I joked, and went inside to prep things for the noontime crowd. But first, I shuffled through the CDs and called out to Buzz, "What are you in the mood for?"

"No Beach Boys. I've had that fucking Barbara Anne song stuck in my head since yesterday."

"Then it's time for the king of the surf guitar." I put a couple of Dick Dale CDs in the carousel, hit play and turned it up. Miserlou ripped through the air nice and loud, making me feel like I was back home in the Columbia Gorge, windsurfing the waves.

In the afternoon when things were in full swing and Buzz was flipping burgers on the grill and I was behind the cash register, two townies I recognized as regulars showed up and ordered a couple Tijuana Tacos and "Special Pepsis." I couldn't get a liquor license being on

the pier and not being an enclosed space, so I sold beer in Pepsi cups to the people I was certain weren't from the Liquor Board. It was no different than going to Chinatown after serving hours and ordering cold tea in any one of a dozen restaurants. Boston was so full of rules and regulations, excise taxes and permit fees, it was like living with Orwell's Big Brother riding around on your shoulders. You could barely take a piss without them trying to hold your dick for you. That was what all the Taxachusetts money went to, so if there was a way around it, I'd definitely try it.

And speaking of the devil, that afternoon one of the city's health inspectors came around and sprung a surprise sanitation check, but he was there for more than that. He was the same guy I'd had to bribe with fifty bucks last summer to overlook the Special Pepsis. That wasn't his department anyway. I figured he was here for another payoff, so before he'd opened his mouth, I took fifty bucks from the register, folded the bills and palmed them.

"How's it going there?" he said as he stepped up to the window and looked around. He had a greasy smile and his dentures weren't seated right. "Looks like business is good." When we shook hands, he took the money without anyone seeing a thing. I felt like I was paying off a Newbury Street drug dealer, but I sure as hell wasn't getting any candy. My money quickly disappeared into his pants' pocket. "It's going to cost you a little more this year," he said. "Inflation."

What a prick. He was getting greedy on me. There was so much graft in Boston, I'm surprised it hadn't crumbled to the ground long ago like ancient Rome. You could pave the streets with the bribes people were paying just to run their businesses. "It's nice to see you too," I said coldly. "How much more?"

He was a short guy with a gut that hung out over his

belt. Too much macaroni and cheese. He wore a gray striped polyester tie with a nylon Boston Bruins windbreaker. He was just another cog on the wheel, whose only contribution to the world would be as worm food when he was six feet under. He glanced at Buzz, scratched his eyebrow, then looked back at me. “About 500 bucks more.”

“You got to be shitting me.”

“Don’t worry, you don’t have to pay me all at once. How about weekly installments of a hundred bucks,” he said with a smug smile. I wanted to jump across the counter and toss the guy off the pier. “Hey, if not, I can have you shut down within the hour.”

Well, that was that. He held all the high cards. I opened the cash register, took out another fifty and didn’t bother being discreet when I handed it to him. “Thanks a lot, pal,” he said and pocketed the money. “What’s good today?” he asked, looking up at the menu.

Buzz made the sound of hocking up a loogie while flipping the burgers on the grill. “Which one is going to be his, Capt’n?” I laughed. The inspection prick chuckled and walked away. “I hate those fuckers,” Buzz said. “It’s McDonalds poisoning people, not us.”

A hundred dollars poorer, I poured a beer and sat on the back steps to see if I couldn’t figure out a way to get some leverage on the inspection dude. I could threaten him with kicking his ass, but that would be a joke. If I tossed his ass off the pier, he’d shut me down. My best bet was to videotape him taking the payoff, then use that against him. Shit, I was brooding over what was simply the cost of doing business in Charlestown and Boston. I was telling myself this when I overheard heated voices around the corner. My curiosity got the better of me and I moved a little closer to hear better.

“We gotta hit Murphy.”

“Nah, Sal will do what I say.”

“No way, it’s getting too close to risk it. We need to do it and do it now. I’m not going down because Murphy’s getting cold feet.”

I recognized the voices. It was the two townies who’d ordered Special Pepsis. I would rather have not heard what they said, but now that I could hear them, I wasn’t going to walk away.

“All right, we’ll do it your way, tonight before anyone gets suspicious.”

“Now you’re thinking,” the other chimed in. They were talking about killing someone, and I could hear the smiles on their faces. They sounded relieved, like a decision that had been hanging over them had finally been made.

I knew this shit went down in Charlestown, I’d read about the shootings in the newspaper, but they were always anonymous faces and places in the projects. If I hung out at the Ninety-Nine next to Johnny’s Foodmaster, I might’ve known more about it. The Ninety-Nine was a restaurant and bar chain that wasn’t much different than a Denny’s, except there was a heavier emphasis on the bar and it had at least ten televisions on at once. No matter where you looked, you could see a Bruins game, or a Pats game, or like now in the summer, a Red Sox game. It was where the townies from the Mishiwam Housing Project went. It had a paranoid atmosphere. I used to pop in there once in a blue moon, but one time the cops showed up en masse, cordoned off the parking lot and sealed up the place.

I was lucky I hadn’t been there. It turned out that a drug meeting inside between five guys had gone bad. In the middle of lunch, one of the guys stood up, pulled a gun and started shooting at the three guys across the table. They didn’t have a chance, he hit them all. Nobody expected a move like that in the middle of a crowded restaurant. The shooter and his partner ran out of the