

SINCERE ENTHUSIASM

by
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“Do you want a job or are you looking for a free ride?” His leather-skinned hands ceased their sanding as he gazed intently at Tanya.

“Well, we wouldn’t ask to work passage on a wooden boat if we didn’t want to work, now would we? Plenty of plastic around,” she waved her hand dismissively toward the full marina.

He nodded. “Experience?”

Tanya liked him. No games. Hadn’t even glanced down at her body. “My dad had a mahogany sailing dinghy. I had to keep her varnished and in prime form if I wanted to use her.” She hesitated. “But, I’ve never been offshore.” She hated admitting that.

Miranda gave a mock salute, “And I, Sir, own to never having set foot on a sailboat, only stinkpots, but I’m a hell of a worker.”

The full ginger beard couldn’t hide his dry lips’ twitch of humour. “Come aboard. We’ll talk. I’m DJ, she’s ‘Decision’. The Trade Winds are setting in nice and early so I’ll set sail within the week, before the first of the year. Don’t want to arrive in the Caribbean with all these fools.”

“I knew lots of boats gathered here every year to make the crossing, but I never dreamed there would be so many. Not many wooden boats though,” Tanya observed.

Leaving their shoes on the quay, they stepped up the short plank onto the natural

teak deck. Tanya wanted to throw herself at his feet, beg him to let her cross the Atlantic with him. Her dream. That was why she was in the Canaries. It had to work. What a boat!

“Forty two feet, six foot draught...” he ran on with statistics and facts. Though Miranda was politely attentive, Tanya absorbed every detail.

Below decks was in serious disarray and stank. Far from the meticulous ‘everything in its place’ she had thought was the make of all sailors. She noticed the look of distaste on Miranda’s full square face. A hefty woman, at thirty five she had a settled confidence, her sarcasm always apparent. They had met just a couple of days before in one of the bars where yachties hung out. Each had made her way to the islands in search of a crewing position. Tanya was pleased they had joined forces.

“How long have you owned her?” Miranda asked as they stepped back up on deck.

“Oh, about ten years. Yeah, the Trades have set in real nice. If I take you girls on you’ll have to hustle. I’m willing to buy the food, but I want her ready to go within two days. You saw the mess below. And we need one more coat of varnish on these rails.” He stood with hands on hips, his well-developed, weathered arms a few shades darker than the torso. Tanya kept trying to discreetly read the words across the wounded heart tattooed on his left arm.

“Be here by 0700 in the morning if you’re willing to work.” He retrieved his sandpaper and went back to sanding the rail.

Tanya looked at Miranda, shrugged. They were obviously dismissed. She looked around at the beautiful ketch. “See you in the morning,” she called as they started down the quay. He grunted but didn’t look up.

“Canadian or Yank?” Tanya asked after they had ordered beers at a street cafe in town.

“Definitely Yank.” Miranda mimicked his flat mid-western dialect, “You saw the mess below’.”

They laughed, Tanya choked on her beer. Miranda ordered them two more.

“Did you see that heart with the knife in it?”

Miranda nodded, “Too much hair to read it. God, but he’s hairy.”

“Wonder if his bum’s as furry as the rest of him,” Tanya wrinkled her nose, imagining.

“Well, I feel sure you’d know after a short time at sea. He’s not one to stand on ceremony or social niceties.”

Tanya went serious. “I must go on that boat, she’s exquisite. DJ’s okay. Rough, but he loves her. He may be a real Bligh, but it’ll be a fast crossing on ‘Decision’, I’ll bet less than two weeks with these winds.”

“You look positively smitten. Have you ever fallen for a man the way you have for that boat?”

Tanya blushed. “Not as quickly, but it’s one of the reasons I’m here. He was very successful and very married. I was a fool.”

Laughing, Miranda shook her head, “Somehow I knew it was something like that. Me, I’ve always been too much of a realist to fall for anyone or anything.” They sat in silence for a while, each perusing self, reflecting.

Miranda stood, “I’ve got to make a call. The post office is just around the corner. Right back.”

“I’ll get the next round.” Tanya was cool to the flirting waiter but smiled at the attractive fellow who took the corner table. He looked Latin but fashionable in his tight jeans and loafers. She’d seen him at the marina.

She’d finished her beer by the time Miranda returned. “The regular queue?”

“Could have been worse,” she shrugged. “Must work on my Spanish. I know the words but the blank looks make me want to pull out the book and point.”

“More fun to learn from a lover,” Tanya smiled, nodding to the right.

Miranda checked him out. “Not bad,” she laughed. “But, we’ve work ahead and imminent departure.”

“You’ll do it then?! Brilliant. We’ll be excellent crew.”

Tanya had real difficulty scrubbing the head the following morning. “I’d be okay if we hadn’t had wine with dinner,” she moaned.

“You sure the Port had nothing to do with it?” Miranda lifted her head from the mould-encrusted top-loading refrigerator.

“That’s the first thing you’ve said without swearing all morning.”

There was noise on deck. “How about a hand up here?”

They looked at each other. Miranda shook her head. “After five hours of cleaning up that pig’s mess, I don’t trust my mouth. You should go help him bring the supplies on board.”

Tanya sighed. She couldn’t believe anyone could live in such filth. But, her exterior was well-kept, the engine looked good. Maintaining her would be no problem once they got her squared away below decks.

“How’s it going?” DJ asked as he handed her a case of Spam.

“Okay.” She had mentioned she didn’t eat meat. The case of corned beef came next.

“Got to be well-stocked,” he smiled, proudly presenting a case of tinned beans, a case of crisps, a bag of potatoes, ten loaves of sliced white and a six-pack of toilet tissue.

It’ll only be a couple of weeks, she told herself as she watched him walk away with the deck cart.

It was sunset when Tanya collapsed on deck. “Now she’s beautiful inside as well.”

DJ nodded, “Everything’s come together faster than I expected. I reckon we can leave in the morning.”

Miranda was in the companionway, disappeared into the saloon.

“I had changed the oil, prepped most things before you two showed up.” He sat thinking for a bit. “Yeah, be here same time tomorrow. I’ll walk you through the basic procedures and we’ll be out of here before 10:00.”

Tanya was so tired she was numb, the hangover still with her. She tried to smile, “You must not like it here.”

“You got a problem with tomorrow?” his voice was cold.

“No, I...”

“She’s just tired,” Miranda stepped out into the cockpit. “We both are. Not to worry, we’ll be here early and ready to go. Come on, Tanya, you need a hot meal.”

“Thanks,” she mumbled as she followed Miranda into the cafe.

Miranda’s green eyes flashed, “It’s more important than you realise.” She order a couple of beers and the catch of the day for them both without consulting Tanya.

“I’ve got to make a call, be right back.”

She had begun to eat by the time Miranda returned. They talked little and she began wondering if she was doing the right thing.

Tanya was nervous as she stepped on board the next morning. “DJ, you up? Miranda’s gone to the open market for fruits and vegetables, she’ll be here shortly.”

“Did you spill anything in here?”

She stepped below. The place was a shambles, floorboards up, cupboards open and contents strewn about. DJ looked wild, his red hair sticking in all directions, smears of dirt and grease on his face and body.

“No, we were really careful. What’s wrong?”

“Did you fool with the seacocks?”

“Of course not. We didn’t even lift the floorboards, there was too much else to do. What’s going on?”

After swearing and mumbling he started slamming down the mahogany sections. “I was doing a final check on everything before I went to bed and found water in the bilge. She’s dry for a wooden boat so I haven’t checked it in weeks. Can’t find where it came from. Can’t leave ‘til I find it.”

“I’ll make coffee.” She climbed around the settee and into the galley, thankful for a way to keep busy. She felt totally useless and could tell he was on the verge of exploding.

She jumped when Miranda called, “DJ, could you come up here please?”

Cursing, he stepped out the companionway. Tanya heard several people moving around on deck. Voices. Curious, she quickly finished the coffee prep and went to see who was there.

She stepped into the companionway just as they were clipping the handcuffs on DJ.

He glared at her. "Bitch," he spat and they marched him off the boat.

She watched, dumbfounded, as the police walked him down the quay, put him in a car and drove away.

Miranda hugged her, "You okay?" Standing beside her was the man from the corner table.

"What happened?"

"This is Carlo. He owns the boat. DJ stole it from the Plymouth yard that was refurbishing it for him. He flew down as soon as I faxed."

"I'm indebted to you both," he beamed. "Now I must remove every trace of him. Especially the name. She is my beloved 'Desir'."

Tanya watched him moving nimbly about the deck. They belonged together, complemented each other. How could she have ever believed this work of art was DJ's?

"I'm sorry I had to use you, but I knew your looks and sincere enthusiasm would get us on board."

"Are you a cop?" she asked incredulously.

Miranda laughed, "Detective, please. DJ's been stealing yachts in Europe for years, only quality mind you, and selling them in South America and the Caribbean. He's been spotted several times in the three months he's had 'Desir', but I kept missing him. That's why I opened the seacock yesterday when he talked of early departure. The local police have watched but couldn't touch him 'til the paperwork came through this morning."

Carlo joined them, hugged Miranda, then Tanya. "I am so happy. He was a slob, but he doesn't seem to have damaged her."

Tanya smiled, "It's good you have her back, but I'll admit I was really wanting to cross the Atlantic. You see, I fell in love with her."

His black eyes danced. "My home is Martinique, I've made the crossing many

times in her. Perhaps you would consider crewing for me. Both of you.”

Miranda scoffed, “Detectives don’t go yachting, but thank you. Duty waits.”

Try though she did, Tanya couldn’t hold back her loud, “Yes!”, and the little jig she danced on the natural teak deck.

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