

MYSTERY OF THE TEMPEST

A Fisher Key Adventure

by
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CHAPTER ONE

Trapped thirty feet below the surface of the shimmering Atlantic, his right foot caught in the wreck of a sunken ship, Denny Anderson thought: *I'm going to die.*

I'm going to die a virgin, he amended.

An eighteen-year-old virgin.

An eighteen-year-old virgin who was supposed to graduate high school in—he checked his black dive watch—two hours.

Denny could see the headline in the *Fisher Key Gazette: Local Teen Perishes in Underwater Tragedy.* The newspaper would run a photo of him, or Steven, or both of them together. It didn't matter, since most people couldn't tell them apart. The article would highlight his academic and sports achievements at Fisher Key High—more academic than sports, since he usually left the jock stuff to Steven—and talk about his acceptance to the Coast Guard Academy. Maybe there'd even be a paragraph or two about how he and Steven had often helped their father, Captain Greg Anderson of the sheriff's office, solve local crimes and save the occasional life or two.

Would be nice if he could save his own, though.

Denny yanked again on his trapped foot. The *Manitowoc* was an old cutter that had been sunk to create an artificial reef just a few miles off Fisher Key. The Florida Keys already had the third biggest reef system in the world, but the boat was a special treat—already blooming with plants and sea life, swarmed by yellow and

blue tangs. Before sinking it, the Coast Guard had stripped off any cables, lines, or other diving hazards to make the wreck.

But underwater relics tended to shift and change in the strong currents, and storms could upset them as well. A railing near the stern had collapsed onto Denny's foot as he was swimming past an open hatch.

He checked his tank. Twenty minutes of air left.

Hello, Steven, he thought. *Where are you?*

No sign of his twin. Probably at the bow, snapping photos with the new camera their grandparents had sent as a graduation gift.

Maybe Steven would use it to take pictures at Denny's funeral.

Stop with the drama, he told himself. He twisted around and tugged again on the collapsed railing. He didn't have enough leverage to get himself free. Too bad he didn't have any convenient crowbars.

But he could *make* one.

He stretched out to the end of the collapsed rail, braced his free foot at an old weld, and started pulling. The metal had weakened, but it didn't snap free. He tugged some more, thinking hard about all he still needed to accomplish in his life: get laid, fall in love, share a passionate kiss.

Not necessarily in that order.

Steven had nailed all three of those, spectacularly, by the time he was sixteen. Not that Denny was keeping score. Okay, of course he was keeping score. But it was easier for Steven. He had the confidence and ambition to do anything he wanted. Like the whole SEAL thing. Since age twelve, Steven had set his dreams on being a Navy SEAL. On the day that Denny got his acceptance letter from the Coast Guard, Steven had driven up to Miami and enlisted. No problem. He liked to brag that by the time Denny graduated, Steven would already have saved people on top secret missions around the world.

Denny considered himself to be confident and ambitious as well, but the key difference between their love lives was biological and irreversible.

Steven liked girls.

Denny liked boys.

Huge difference.

Not that Denny couldn't have kissed a guy if he'd wanted to. He didn't want to.

Couldn't want to.

Not until he graduated from the Coast Guard Academy. Don't ask, don't tell, and don't get discharged.

A shadow passed over him. Denny looked up and saw exactly what he didn't want to see: the sleek outline of a nurse shark, looking for lunch.

Eaten by a shark. So not his idea of a good time—or a good death.

He stopped trying to free himself and waited for the beast to pass. It meandered over him for a moment, as if toying with him, and swam north. Once it was gone, Denny checked his air again. Fourteen minutes left.

Thirteen.

Twelve.

Finally, a piece of railing snapped free. He wedged it beside his trapped foot and applied some careful pressure. He freed himself just as Steven swam into view, blissfully ignorant of how close he'd come to being an only child.

Steven jerked his thumb toward the surface. *Time to go.*

Denny kicked upward with his flippers and rose through the shimmering blue water.

When they surfaced, the sky was a flat, cloudless blue. Gorgeous. Everything about the Florida Keys was beautiful to Denny. If there was anything he wasn't looking forward to about the Academy, it was New London's dreary winters and the cold waters of Long Island Sound.

Steven spat out his mouthpiece and reached for the side of their dinghy. "We've got an audience."

Denny twisted in the water. Bobbing on the waves nearby was a crappy old fishing boat in desperate need of a paint job. She seemed barely seaworthy. Standing on her deck, however, was a Greek god of a man. Tall, chiseled, golden-haired. Impossibly handsome. Late twenties? Early thirties at the most. Muscled arms with a broad

chest and narrow waist, barely clothed in a pair of white shorts. He was better looking than any man Denny had ever ogled online or in real life.

Denny wanted to leap out of the water and tackle him with a big kiss.

The whole virginity problem could be solved by this man, on the deck of that old boat, in just a few minutes.

“How’s the diving, boys?” the Greek god asked.

Steven looked unimpressed by the stranger’s good looks. He hauled himself into the dinghy and said, “It’s okay.”

“This is where they sank that cutter, right?” the man asked.

Denny wanted to contribute something to the conversation—anything at all. Preferably, something to prove how suave and intelligent he was. He just knew he’d do the exact opposite if he opened his mouth.

Steven squinted at the man. “You shouldn’t dive alone. It’s dangerous.”

The man laughed. “I think I can handle it.”

Denny was sure he could.

The man’s gaze lifted up to something in the water behind Denny. “There’s a beauty.”

Still treading water, Denny twisted around. A seventy-foot wooden sailing yacht sailed majestically past them on a course for Fisher Key. All five of her sails were hoisted to catch the steady wind. Denny had been around sailboats, yachts, launches, and other boats all his life, and he even owned his own speedboat, but this ship was completely out of his class. Some kind of antique racing boat, he figured.

They couldn’t see her crew, but Steven read the ship’s name from her stern. “*The Tempest*. Shakespeare crap.”

The yacht headed proudly toward shore.

“Come on,” Steven said, ready to start the engine. “Mom’ll kill us if we’re late.”

They wished the man happy diving and steered toward home. As the Greek god grew smaller and disappeared behind them, Denny felt exactly like a lovesick thirteen-year-old.

“Stop drooling,” Steven said, looking stormy. “He wasn’t that handsome.”

“He was drop-dead gorgeous.”

“You’re pathetic. How are you going to fool anyone at the academy if you drool over any guy who wanders by?”

“Who asked you for advice?” Denny demanded.

“I’m just saying.”

“You’ve been pissy all week. For someone who’s going to graduate with honors and then go deflower Kelsey—”

“No one calls it ‘deflowering’ anymore, you idiot. And it’s none of your business.”

“She’s told everyone at school! I think I saw it online, too.”

“Shut up.”

Denny studied Steven’s profile in the glare of sunlight. Twin or not, you couldn’t share your whole life with someone and not know when something was bothering them. Steven’s crankiness made it seem like he was dreading graduation rather than looking forward to it.

Getting Steven to admit anything was always a major chore. He wasn’t just a closed book. He was a closed, locked, shrink-wrapped book buried in a treasure chest at the bottom of the deep blue ocean.

Considering the day he’d had so far, Denny didn’t feel like trying to pry open that treasure chest anytime soon.

“You’re the idiot,” he muttered. He couldn’t see the Greek god anymore, but he was out there somewhere. Waiting on the horizon. For the rest of the trip he fantasized about the Greek god sailing around the world with him on a beautiful yacht.

A boy could dream, couldn’t he?

CHAPTER TWO

Standing in the crowded, sunlit band room of Fisher Key High School, Steven felt sick. Some of that came from the rum and Coke that Eddie Ibarra had been passing around in the parking lot until just a few minutes ago. Eddie was always stealing alcohol from his mother. In the Secret Yearbook in Steven's head, Eddie had already been nominated as both (a) Most Likely to Have a DUI, and (b) Most Likely to End Up in Rehab.

Which sucked, because they'd been friends for twelve years, and Steven didn't know how to save Eddie from the bad road ahead.

Most of the twisty feeling in Steven's gut, however, came from knowing he'd already screwed up his own life and had no right to advise anyone else.

Not even the absolute certainty of sex with Kelsey Carlson tonight could cheer him up.

"You look green," Kelsey said, straightening his tie for him. She was gorgeous in her yellow dress, her blond hair curled in dozens of ringlets. She'd dabbed herself with some exotic Indian perfume, and it was strongest from the vee between her ample breasts. The scent was making him dizzy.

"I'm not green." Steven pulled on the tie. "I hate this thing."

She patted the knot with her long, graceful fingers. "It looks great. Take a deep breath, okay? No passing out during my speech."

Kelsey was valedictorian of their class. Smart on top of gorgeous. She could have had any guy she wanted during high

school, except for that chastity vow she'd made to her father. A vow that would end tonight, in Steven's arms, with champagne.

He told himself he wasn't nervous about Kelsey.

He had bigger things to be nervous about.

Eddie nudged his side and showed him a silver flask. "One for the road?"

"You keep it," Steven said.

He pulled on his tie again. It was dumb that everyone had to dress up under their graduation robes. Why couldn't they wear shorts and flip-flops? The only girl in the room not wearing a dress was Robin McGee, the self-appointed radical feminist lesbian of their class, who'd successfully forced the school board to let her wear slacks. She was standing over by the piano with Denny, both of them laughing about something. They were joined by Sean Garrity, the most openly gay teenager Steven knew.

Steven didn't dislike Robin or Sean. They both worked for his mother at her bookstore, as did Denny. But did Denny really have to hang out with them so often? People suspected him of being gay just by association. And Denny was gay, sure, but that was a secret only Steven knew.

People who suspected Denny also suspected Steven, which was totally unfair. And which was maybe why Steven had spent the last two years chasing girls...

In the Secret Yearbook in his head, Steven noted "Most Likely to Overcompensate" beside his own picture.

"Did you hear me?" Kelsey was still standing right in front of him, her perfect eyebrows quirked over her deep blue eyes.

"Huh?"

"I got the key to my dad's boat. We're all set."

He also knew, from her text messages and weekly updates, that she'd also bought condoms and lube, and had stocked up on a morning-after pill in case anything ripped or ended up where it shouldn't be. She was (a) Most Likely to Write a Book on Good Sexual Health, and (b) Most Likely to Teach Teenage Girls How Not To Get Pregnant.

Kelsey asked, "What's wrong?"

“I ate something bad for lunch,” he lied.

“Do you want to sit down?” she asked.

Eddie burped in Steven’s ear. “Navy SEALs don’t need to sit down. They eat nails for breakfast. They parachute out of planes without parachutes. Steven’s going to be Admiral SEAL before you know it.”

Steven wished Eddie would shut up. He was the only one on Fisher Key who knew the truth. Maybe in some universe, lying to your friends and family and classmates was hilarious. Not in Steven’s, though.

Eddie took a quick hit off his flask. “Hey, look who came. Prince Valiant.”

The graduating class only had fifty-three students in it. Fifty-four if you counted Brian Vandermark. Brian had no entry in Steven’s Secret Yearbook. His family had moved to Fisher Key over Christmas vacation. He’d transferred lots of credit from some rich private school in Boston, and was enrolled in college AP classes online, so hardly ever had to come to school. He had floppy blond hair, wore thick glasses, and had made no friends.

He was standing in the corner now, talking to no one, reading a paperback.

Who brings a book to graduation? What a dork.

Mrs. Harding, their elderly music teacher, clapped her hands together. “All right, now! Line up in alphabetical order. You’ve done it enough that you know where to stand.”

Kelsey kissed Steven on the cheek. “See you soon,” she promised, and glided off.

As usual, Steven ended up third in line, right behind Denny. Denny came first alphabetically, but Steven was older by two minutes, which counted as more important. Aaron Adams, skinny and awkward, would lead the procession into the auditorium.

“What if I trip and fall?” Aaron fretted.

Denny said, “You won’t trip.”

“I fall all the time,” Aaron said.

Steven said, “You fall down and I’ll step on you.”

“He won’t step on you,” Denny promised. “Because you’re not going to trip or fall.”

Pomp and Circumstance started up in the auditorium. Steven looked down the line at his classmates. The soccer team guys—Sammy, Enrique, Logan. The smart girls, like Kelsey and Robin. The dorks and the cheerleaders and everyone in between. Most of them had known each other since the first grade. In a few minutes, they'd be graduates, and in a few months they'd be off to different colleges or jobs, and ten years from now they'd hardly be in touch.

Kelsey caught his gaze and smiled broadly at him.

Prince Valiant, all the way at the end of the line, struggled with the zipper on his gown and dropped his book.

Steven turned to Denny. "I'm going to throw up."

"What?"

"Right here, on both of us."

"No, you won't," Denny said, making that sour face he always did when he wanted his own way. He tugged Steven's tie loose. "You just need air."

Mrs. Harding said, "Okay, Aaron, go!" and Aaron started walking.

Denny put his hands on Steven's shoulders. "Just breathe deep and follow me. You'll be fine."

The music grew louder. The next thing he knew, Steven was marching forward and everyone in the auditorium was clapping. The stage lights dazzled him for a moment until his eyes focused on his parents, sitting in the aisle. Dad looked impossibly big in his official police uniform, and Mom, always short beside him, was wearing the green and red dress that reminded him of a tropical bird.

They both looked proud enough to burst. And that was a huge problem. Dad, especially, was going to be damn disappointed when he found out that Steven had gone to Miami to enlist and been turned down by the Navy.

When he found out that Steven and Eddie had faked the enlistment papers that Steven had brandished at the kitchen table.

When he found out that his son was a liar and a fraud.

Steven was never going to be a Navy SEAL.