

CHAPTER 5

Doubt pinged around like pinballs in Dixie's brain as she drove through sea-hugging mist that enveloped the long bridge connecting Galveston Island with the mainland. Scam artists. Cons. Swindlers. Sharps. Such tricksters wore many faces, each designed to elicit trust, empathy, even sympathy. That was it. That's all she'd seen in Gennae's eyes.

Even the color was a scam—brown contact lenses. Every psychologist knew that brown eyes were the best at eliciting sympathy.

Dixie peered ahead for the Escort. Although it had vanished like a phantom toward the bridge, she wasn't sure Gennae had not taken one of the final freeway exits. Headlights did little more than reflect off the fog, just as her thoughts bounced off each other, reason trying to connect with intuition. She'd studied enough martial arts to understand the power of sensing her way rather than thinking it. Right now her gut hunch told her Gennae Thompson had fled toward Galveston. And Gennae was terrified.

Maybe she'd spied Dixie shadowing her. Intentional or not, the girl had executed a few clever tail-shaking maneuvers on those back roads. But Dixie hadn't sensed at all that she'd been made. The Escort had turned erratically, slowing and speeding up without apparent reason, reminding Dixie of a caged animal frantically seeking a way out.

She peered into the fog. *Where are you, Gennae?*

According to Ryan's e-mail info, the thief was from Georgia, had spent only a brief time in East Texas to pull off a minor scam before moving on to Tulip, Arkansas. Yet Gennae had sped over the coastal roads erratically and brazenly, as if she knew every pothole. Or was she simply wasted and didn't care about damaging her car?

One beer wouldn't be enough to waste her. An iced six-pack in the Escort? No habitual drugs listed on her rap sheet. The false brown eyes had looked haunted, desperate, vulnerable—but not drugged.

Desperation, then? In Dixie's experience, cops didn't strike such intense fear in a seasoned crook. Not decent cops, anyway. Habitual crooks thumbed their noses at law enforcement. Ran from it, true, because running was part of the game, always staying one step ahead. But they didn't fear being caught by a cop as they might fear the blade-fingered hand of Freddy Krueger.

Spotting a white sedan, Dixie accelerated up the arched bridge. The fog was thick enough that she could swim to Galveston. She squinted, practically nudging the sedan's bumper, and saw a Mercury Topaz insignia—*damn!* She eased off the gas.

Whatever Gennae's reason, the Escort had zigzagged inevitably toward the coast. Once you ran out of mainland, the only dry place to go was Galveston, and Dixie was headed there anyway to meet Parker. Was Lady Luck whispering in her ear tonight? She'd found Gennae once on a hunch, and she was already late for dinner. Might as well go double or nothing.

Noticing her heat gauge climbing toward the danger zone, she punched off the air conditioner and lowered the windows. Instantly, highway bedlam assaulted her ears. Muggy August heat invaded the alternate vehicle Dixie'd decided to drive after the Mustang's air went on the fritz. A taxicab. Bad choice, apparently.

As soon as she descended the down side of the Galveston bridge, the fog magically cleared. Along the curb line, wisps of murky haze remained as the freeway turned into Broadway, a main boulevard flanked by modest homes, retail businesses, and historic mansions. Towering palm trees stood like leafy hosts to a tropical paradise. Under the street lamps, flowering oleander shrubs perfumed the night, even as they cast hulking shadows.

Familiar landmarks floated through Dixie's vision as she searched for the Escort, and her inner mind began to funnel those images through younger eyes, the eyes of a young female thief on the run. *Twelve hours on the road since Nacogdoches...scanning for cops... scared...tired. A beer in her belly and a trunk full of stolen merchandise to peddle—*

Unless she'd already fenced it.

What she needed was a safe place to crash for the night. Off the highway, off the expected route. Lots of motels in a tourist area, maybe a few cheap ones. Take the chance, get some sleep before hitting the road again. Maybe find a place to off-load some PC equipment, pick up a few bucks—replace the money she'd lost at the dog track. A thief could turn a better price here than in Mexico... and maybe, on an island, not so many cops would be watching for her.

Running scared.

Recalling the skinhead's jumpiness, Dixie couldn't shake the notion that Gennae perceived a fate more terrifying than felony arrest. What if she needed help and had no one—

The cell phone chirped, startling her. Dixie snatched it off a Velcro tab glued to the taxi's steering column.

"Aunt, Dix! Parker said you found her!"

"I might've spotted her, Ryan. I'm not sure."

"Are you in Galveston? Galveston's a small town."

"Big enough to get lost in." She continued down Broadway toward the Seawall at East Beach, watching for the Ford at every driveway, slowing to a crawl as she glanced down side streets and scrutinized parking lots, generally being a nuisance to drivers honking past.

"You said she might be looking for another job. I could check Jobs-on-Line in that area. Computer stores, electronics, video rentals. Call you back with a list."

Again, not a bad idea. Ryan was a smart kid.

"How about emailing the list?" she said. "I'll pick it up from Parker's computer. I'm meeting him for dinner." Fifty-five minutes ago, according to the dash clock.

"You can't stop to eat! What if she gets away?"

At Seawall Boulevard, Dixie turned west. A breeze off the Gulf of Mexico flushed the stink of road fumes from the cab. Surf sounds swallowed the traffic noise.

"Ryan, I don't even know for certain that Gennae came to Galveston. She might've gone to Kemah or Seabrook or any other coastal town." Time to give up. She turned back toward the restaurant to meet Parker. "Get me that list. I'll start calling it tomorrow—"

Then she spotted it. A white Escort, driving fast three blocks ahead. Too far away to see the license plate. The Escort turned right.

"Aunt Dix?"

“Email that list to me.”

Stepping on the gas, Dixie powered off the phone and tossed it on the passenger seat. She followed the Escort’s right turn just as it turned left a block ahead. Racing forward, Dixie cut in front of a panel truck, drove past modest houses with peeling paint, boats parked at curbs, and caught the white Ford at a stop sign. Her headlights shone on a *Texas* license number. *Double damn!* Not likely Gennae could have switched plates since leaving the race track.

Nevertheless, Dixie eased past the car after the stop and glanced into the driver's seat. A burly, bearded Hispanic shot her an inquisitive leer.

Dixie scanned in all directions for another white Escort, but no dice. Gennae was as gone as dandelion fluff in a Texas wind storm.

Would she really seek out a job here? According to the poster, she’d hired out in small towns at least twice before Tulip, each time taking a new name and apparently conning her way past any background checks. But right now, tonight, she’d be doing what? *Nearly twenty-four hours on the lam, driving hard most of those hours. Check into a cheap motel room....*

Having picked up the felon’s trail once, Dixie itched to keep searching. How long could it take to drive the entire island street by street? Thirty-two miles long but only two miles wide, she could do it in, what? Ten hours?

Her success in rounding up skips came by a combination of hard work and hunches. This northeast section of Galveston offered easy access to anonymous lodging and fast food. The Escort might at that moment be parked at a Motel 6 or Bide-a-Rest. As the neon vacancy lights flashed by, Dixie scanned the parking lots.

But she’d stretched Parker’s patience as far as she dared. Chasing a thief, even one who wore a thirty-thousand-dollar reward that Dixie’s ambitious nephew had hung his heart on, was not worth risking another dent in an already battered relationship. Parker Dann was the only man in Dixie’s thirty-nine years who’d made it past the first major annoyance, past the first break-up. He’d actually won her Mean Ugly Dog’s slurp of approval. Parker was a keeper.

Making a U-turn, she headed toward the east-end historical district—iron filigree, brick curbstones—and drove to Chateau Lafitte. Stepping out of her souped-up taxi, she fluffed her hair, sticky from the sea air, then tugged a blue silk tweed blazer over her jeans and camp shirt. For this special occasion, she’d braved the makeup drawer, swiping her lips and cheeks with color, brushing a coat of mascara over her lashes. Now she hoped the heat hadn’t started the whole mess sliding down her face.

She checked in the taxicab’s side-view mirror and rubbed a smudge off her chin.
As good as it gets, Flannigan.

Conscious that in Parker’s place she’d be as mad as a wet cat, Dixie mounted the inn’s grand staircase to a pair of equally grand leaded-glass doors. She wiped her boots on a mat that read “Welcome to Chateau Lafitte” and walked in.

CHAPTER 6

Galveston Streets had described Chateau Lafitte as a delightful stroll through the decadence of nineteen-twenties Galveston, when the island was a top resort with big name entertainment, big time gambling, and the annual “Pulchritude of Beauty Pageant.” Behind the maitre d’s station, a life-size portrait of Jean Lafitte, the French pirate who’d inspired the restaurant’s title, greeted visitors with a dastardly glint in his eyes. Dixie assumed the painter had taken artistic license.

She gave her name and asked for Parker’s table.

Suave, sixtyish, and energetically hospitable, the host referred to his chart, then beamed at her.

“Right this way, Ms. Flannigan. Mr. Dann is indeed expecting you.”

As he guided her through the dining room, a jazz piano played Irving Berlin. “Tomorrow”? Or “It Had To Be You”? Dixie loved Berlin’s music but rarely could name the songs accurately, which didn’t prevent her from humming along as she walked.

Nearing a bank of red velvet booths, she spied Parker, and the guilt of blatant tardiness settled more solidly on her shoulders. She’d never seen a deeper frown on his roguishly handsome face. Sitting there in his custom tailored suit, dark hair a tad too long, true blue eyes that always held a trace of mockery, Sean Connery mustache, he might’ve been one of the renowned gamblers who frequented Galveston Island in its heyday. Or one of the swashbucklers who banded here with the infamous pirate.

Parker spotted her and rose. Several female heads in the room turned to look, and Dixie’s heart gave a thump of appreciation. He was damned easy to look at. Then his gaze dipped in a brief appraisal, and his frown tilted into a generous smile. He kissed her cheek.

“If my words slur and I fall asleep in my soup,” he murmured, discreetly nuzzling her ear, “it’s all your fault. The Aile d’Argent was intended for sharing.” His breath carried the bouquet of good wine.

Dixie slid onto the lavishly upholstered bench across from him and glanced at the half-empty wine bottle.

“Vintage 1993. You drank a hundred bucks worth of wine while you waited?” And she’d promised to treat.

“As Dorothy Parker once quipped, ‘Take care of the luxuries and the necessities will take care of themselves.’ Also, I was getting even.”

He grinned boyishly, but the barb in his voice said he was only partially joking. Once again Dixie’s work had infringed on their personal life, and he resented that infringement.

He filled Dixie’s glass. “At least I saved the last half for you.”

“Thanks. I intend to enjoy every dollar-sweetened drop.”

Parker raised his own glass in a toast. “To timeless wine and tardy wenches.”

“Isn’t that supposed to be ‘*tarty wenches*’?”

“Whichever bra fits.” He winked.

Remembering the last time they’d drunk themselves tipsy on Aile d’Argent, Dixie decided the night just might be salvageable. In the wee hours of a moonless morning, they’d made love in the surf outside his new home on West Beach. Salty. Sandy. Decadent. And damned good sex.

“I’ll concentrate on catching up,” she promised, mentally vowing to keep Marla Gennae Thompson firmly out of her one-track mind for a few hours.

As she sipped, Dixie’s gaze took in the vintage decor, including a nineteen-forties mannequin in cowboy boots, fringed bikini, and ten-gallon hat. Wearing a pearl-handled revolver holstered at her hip, the mannequin was “playing” an antique slot machine. Crime romanticized.

Gambling was only a crime in certain states, of course, but Dixie often wondered why Americans prosecuted some infractions and shrugged off others. A cat burglar, handsome and charming as Pierce Brosnan, who stole only what others could afford to lose, was tolerated with amusement. Smooth-talking politicians lied, cheated and got reelected. Con men made six-figure incomes by bilking gullible citizens too embarrassed to report their loss.

Gennae Thompson had ripped off two previous employers. Why had the next one hired her?

“Seafood Fettucini,” Parker suggested. “That is, if you were daydreaming about what to order.”

She closed the menu.

“Fettucini sounds perfect.” She resisted asking what *kind* of seafood. Left on her own she’d exist happily on pizza and burgers, but Parker preferred more exotic cuisine. Since meeting him, she tried to be more adventurous—except for frog’s legs.

While he ordered their meal, Dixie examined a miniature craps table built into the side of their booth, where it connected to the wall. Purely for amusement, she supposed. She scooped up the shiny red dice and shook them.

“Wonder if the restaurant’s management passed this novelty by the gaming authorities.” She tossed the dice on the green felt. They landed with a five-deuce showing.

“You must admit, Texas was a lot more fascinating in its wild and lawless past,” Parker said. “And every business needs a gimmick to one-up the competition.”

As if on cue, a lanky young man, sandy-blond and wearing an exquisite nineteen-twenties tuxedo introduced himself as Astin Gray, owner of Chateau Lafitte. As winsome as a Hollywood cat burglar, he resembled an older gentleman featured in a pair of portraits over the restaurant’s unique fireplace. When Dixie accepted his cool handshake, sage green eyes captured her gaze.

“Parker told me he was expecting a very important friend. He didn’t mention that she was also extremely attractive. Are you a *tessarae* fan?”

Dixie blinked at him, thrown by the unfamiliar word.

“Roman craps,” he explained. “Caligula was mad about it. Of course, the emperor was totally mad, in general, but the game is fun. You’ll find the rules and a score sheet beside the table.”

Mad about it? This kid looked no more than thirty, tops, but his speech sounded as antiquated as the furnishings. Dixie scooped up a card she'd thought was a dessert list.

"Astin's considering a thirty-foot catamaran," Parker told her, before the silence became embarrassing. "He called me about handling the brokerage."

That explained Parker's determination to attend Chateau Lafitte's grand-opening weekend. Seemed it was okay for *his* work to infringe.

One side of the *tessarae* card depicted a pair of men in togas balancing a table top while a third man rolled the dice. The typed copy beneath the drawing stated the rules.

"This game sounds pretty much like modern craps," Dixie commented, though she wasn't all that familiar with craps. Yahtzee, now, she could get deadly with Yahtzee.

"Very few differences, or so my uncle tells me," Astin admitted. "If I can be of service tonight, please ask. Meanwhile, enjoy your meal."

He strolled to another table. On his heels, their waiter appeared and placed crisp salads on the table.

"Sixes," Dixie murmured, rolling the dice again. Incredibly, a pair of sixes turned up. "Must be my lucky night." She told Parker about winning with Gin Sip on a long shot—though she'd never actually learned how the photo finish turned out—and spotting Gennae on a hunch.

"Gee gosh darn, partner! Guess it's time to buy your yearly lottery ticket." Parker wickedly wiggled his eyebrows.

"Skeptic! Watch me roll fives." She threw the dice. Five and four. "Okay, short run. Lady Luck's flirting with me."

Still, she couldn't curb the notion that she might be on a minor winning streak. Maybe she could convince Parker to cut out of here early, and together they could work a grid across Galveston, check motels, bars—

Uh-oh, red flag! Her job invariably provoked Parker's male chivalry gene, which infuriated her. But...he *did* know the town better than she did.

"Parker," she ventured impulsively, spearing a chunk of lettuce, "if you needed to hide, here in Galveston, where would you go?"

"This time of year? Stewart Beach. Everybody looks the same there."

True. Tourists flocked to Voodoo Daddy's Swamp Hut for quick food and weak drinks, rode the water coaster, visited the giant human maze. Any summer day the beach was packed with sunbathers anonymously clad in thin slices of colored fabric. Floppy hats. Pink skin. Easy to blend in. Even a bald female could hide under a hat. "What about at night?"

"Put a FOR SALE sign on my house and bum a sleep-over with a friend."

"And if you didn't know anyone?"

"Make a new friend. Follow him home—or in my case, her. Like Bruce Willis in *The Jackal*."

"You mean, pick up someone in a bar? A one-nighter?" Risky. But effective. Especially if the friend had a handy porte cochere to park your vehicle—garages on the island were scarce as fish toes.

Parker divided the remaining wine between their glasses.

"I take it your thirty-thousand-dollar bird flew away in the night," he said.

"Flew like a homing pigeon in this direction." As Dixie related the wacky drive Gennae'd taken, she once again sensed a deeper motive behind the girl's actions. "It was

like...I don't know, like a giant magnet was pulling her in one direction while another jerked her back. If she'd kept driving south she could be halfway to Mexico by now. Even if she stayed on our side of the border, she could melt into the continuously changing population. Galveston is a dead end."

"Unless she plans to take a cruise. Or stowaway on a cargo ship."

A tiny tomato fell off Dixie's fork, splashing dressing on her jacket. She grabbed her napkin and wiped at the spot. "Why didn't I think of that? Ships leave Galveston daily for foreign ports. Gennae could be boarding a cruise ship right now."

"Doubtful. They don't sail on Fridays. Mostly Sundays and Thursdays."

Which gave Dixie about what, forty-eight hours?

"Do they leave at night?"

"Afternoons, usually."

Thirty-six hours. If Gennae had found time during her hasty departure from Tulip to book a cruise. Maybe she'd hired on as kitchen help, or as a waiter or steward. Hell, she was a gambler, maybe she was dealing Black Jack. But wouldn't any job aboard a cruise liner be filled by the main office? Dixie could call them, find out if they'd hired anyone recently who would be shipping out this week. Maybe Gennae had been planning this escape even before her employer in Tulip discovered those empty boxes.

Maybe. But it didn't feel right. All Gennae's previous jobs were of the easy-come, easy-go variety. Surely a large cruise line didn't hire without a thorough background check.

"How easy would it be to steal aboard a cargo ship? Or hire on as a deck hand?"

Parker shrugged, chewing. The Gennae chase had lost his attention.

Dixie toed one boot off under the table and gently ran her stocking foot up the inside of his leg.

"After dinner, handsome, suppose we take a romantic stroll along the dock?"

He captured her foot between his knees.

"Woman, you do take me to the nicest places." His left hand slipped under the table to massage her toes. "Can we get naked and frighten the fish?"

"That's a quote, isn't it? From a woman, only she said 'don't do it in the street and frighten the horses.'"

"Close." He smiled, his fingers working magic on the ball of her foot. "Would this be a bird hunting stroll? Will we be packing heat?"

"The bird I'm after is only five-five, a hundred and ten pounds. No history of carrying a weapon."

"That's the kind of thinking that gets cops—and skip tracers—killed."

Yes, but dammit—!

"Parker, anytime I pull a gun, I expect to use it. Would I *shoot* a twenty-year-old kid rather than let her escape? No fucking way." She retrieved her foot.

"All right, touchy. Sorry to punch your piss-off button."

For a tense moment, they ate in silence. Dixie knew he was remembering the time she'd pulled a gun on him.

"In South Dakota," he said, "would you—?"

"Yes. I would've shot you, but only in self-defense. You're bigger than me, Parker. I didn't know you, and you were a threat."

He grinned. "Glad to see you're still the badass bitch I fell in love with."

She grinned back. “And not totally stupid. We’ll carry a stun gun on our stroll along the dock.”

“Ouch!” Parker winced, as if recalling the jolt of eighty-thousand volts surging through his own body.

“If the two of us and that stunner can’t handle her, maybe I need a new line of work.” Dixie instantly regretted those last words. Parker would love it if she found a new career. Her job gave him sleepless nights, especially when she contracted to catch a particularly nasty bail jumper.

Their meal arrived, steaming, elegantly presented, and smelling good enough to wipe away all thoughts of felon-chasing. When the waiter and his helpers had departed, Dixie tucked enthusiastically into the pasta.

“If you really want to take a waterfront stroll,” Parker said casually, “I know a much more romantic place than the cargo docks.”

“Oh?” Of course he did. He was a yacht broker.

“That fifty-two-foot Nautical Bluewater is almost finished. Thought you might like to see it.”

“The one for your client in the Caribbean?” All boats looked pretty much the same to her: Sleek. White. Confined.

“We’re refitting it with a custom galley.”

“So your client likes to cook, as well as sail.” And so did Parker. “You two must have some riveting conversations.”

“She takes delivery next week. Someone will sail the boat down to St. Thomas.”

Someone? Had Dixie missed a beat in all their conversations about this yacht? Three-hundred grand at five percent commission, it certainly wasn’t the largest Parker had ever brokered, or the fanciest. But he’d yammered about it all summer.

“Eight days sailing down,” Parker said. “Spend a few on St. Thomas, then fly back.”

A vacation made in yacht-broker’s heaven. “You usually hire a professional to make delivery. Bonded. Capable of maneuvering hurricane alley.”

“How is your seafood?”

“Fine. After I picked out all the rubbery bits—”

“*Not* the calamari! I thought you liked it.”

“Parker, stop changing the subject. Are you planning to deliver this boat yourself?”

“Now, that’s a thought.” His gaze stayed glued to his plate.

“Eight days on the open sea?” And he was probably trimming it. “You’re from Montana. Horse country. Big sky, mountains. Landlocked. There’s a lot of water between here and St. Thomas.”

“Mhmm.”

“Hurricane season started when? Last month?”

“How about another bottle of Aile d’Argent?” He looked around for their waiter. “My treat this time.”

“Don’t try to ooch your way around the details by getting me pickled. Doesn’t it take *several* people—deckhands—prisoners—whatever—?”

“Crew.”

“To handle a boat that size?”

“You and I could handle it. You took directions pretty well the last time we were out.”

When she wasn't seasick.

“We could take Ryan,” he added.

“My nephew? He's thirteen. His brain is hard-wired to his computer. He's not a sailor, he's a liability.”

“Not if his parents go. The cabin sleeps six.”

Whoa. Dixie sensed news about as welcome as backed-up plumbing. “Have you already spoken to Amy and Carl about this?”

“I might've tossed it around with Carl last time we visited.”

Carl would love it. He'd graduated from one of those colleges that offer water sports as a major. And Amy would figure Parker entirely capable of walking on shark-infested water—parting the sea if necessary to let Hurricane Hellion blow on through.

Dixie felt her blood boiling up from her toes. “So I'm the last to hear about this jaunt into peril?”

“Perhaps you're just now listening. When we talked about hazarding the treacherous Gulf, you were sitting right there in the room.”

Touché. She did tend to tune out when Parker fantasized about sailing to far-off places.

“Dixie, your work is more dangerous than a well-planned sail through the Caribbean on a seaworthy vessel.”

“Tell that to Leonardo DiCaprio.”

“You hate airplanes, you hate boats. How are we ever going to see the world?”

“When there's so much of the good old U.S.A. we haven't yet explored, why bother? I hear those islanders aren't all that thrilled to see Americans. Why go to a place we're not wanted?”

“Don't believe the friggin bellyaching you hear from disgruntled tourists.”

Oops. Parker only used the modified F word when she came close to pricking his armor of good humor. Wanderlust must be awakening big time. Having the soul of a gypsy, Parker had never stayed longer than three years in one city since he left Montana for college. He'd finished his degree in six different states. By contrast, if skip-chasing didn't occasionally draw Dixie afar, she'd likely have spent her entire life in her own backyard. Did Cupid always pair up opposites?

During coffee and strawberry mousse—which was good enough to make her shamelessly scrape her plate—they nudged the conversation back to neutral territory. Neither of them wanted to spend the weekend arguing.

A recent Galveston resident, Parker had taken the opening of Chateau Lafitte as an opportunity to research the Island's history. With his usual flamboyance he recapped the details. “Occupied since the early 1500's. Once known as the Wall Street of the Southwest, once the richest city in Texas, but also the site of the Great Storm of 1900, the nation's all-time worst natural disaster. Did you know that Jean Lafitte—”

“Are you reading that off the back of your menu?”

“Looked it up in the Rosenberg Library. You ought to see that place, shelves of real books to browse. Real librarians to answer questions. Not once did I have to click a mouse.”

“You didn't get that California tan in a library.”

He shrugged good-naturedly, moustache following the upward curve of his very kissable lips. “Guess I like knowing about the places I live.”

Places. Plural. New home not even completely furnished and he was yearning to travel on. Too bad she couldn’t keep him barefoot, pregnant, and chained to the kitchen stove.

Dixie grinned at the thought.

Parker raised a rakish, curious eyebrow, but she shook her head. Some thoughts were better left unspoken.

“Tell me more about your adopted island home,” she coaxed.

He gave her a full-out smile, his big face lit up like a young boy’s. “Did you know Jean Lafitte was exiled...?”

By the time the waiter presented their bill, Dixie was ready for that moonlight walk to work the trivia-induced lethargy out of her brain and didn’t much care which dock they chose.

Then she thought of the sailors she’d known—not many, true, but every one of them raunchy and rough around the edges. And she pictured Gennae in her skinhead garb. Was she expecting to pass herself off as a boy? A shudder traveled across Dixie’s shoulders as she realized the fate the girl could expect when her charade was discovered.

On the other hand, maybe Gennae had never made it to the island. Maybe she’d taken one of those foggy exits when she realized she was headed for the Gulf.

“Roll you for the dinner tab,” she offered, rattling the over-sized dice.

“No ma’am. You bought the wine. Dinner was my treat.”

“You always treat. Roll you for dinner *and* the wine. High score pays.” She tossed a double five—the fives she’d wished for earlier.

Parker noted her high score. “All right, easy money. If you insist on losing your shirt, I’ll take those odds.”

He threw a four-deuce.

“Show off. Okay, so my winning streak was short-lived.” Dixie tucked a credit card into the waiter’s money holder, then scooped up the dice again. “Let’s test it one more time. Yacht basin or shipping docks.”

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