



Take Me All the Way Preview

selected excerpt

PROLOGUE

Jeremy Sheridan crushed his empty beer can in his fist. Nothing felt right. Staying or going. But he disliked the idea that he might be a burden.

He sat on the deck of the little shop where his brother-in-law, Lucky Romo, painted motorcycles for a living. The same little shop where Jeremy had been living for awhile, next door to his sister, Tessa, and Lucky, thanks to their kindness.

He'd spent a lot of time with Lucky since his return from Afghanistan. He'd never have expected the guy to become his new best friend, but he found Lucky easy to be with. Maybe it helped that Lucky didn't talk a lot. Funny, most people looked at Lucky and saw nothing but a big burly biker with long hair and tattoos. But the guy was an artist, the real thing, a freaking Picasso with a paint gun.

And people who looked at Jeremy saw a war hero. *The* war hero. Destiny's official Boy Wonder.

It was a role he'd thought he wanted. One he'd pretty much played all his life. Star athlete in high school, homecoming king, all around good guy. And he'd thought coming back to his hometown and being that same guy again would be easy, the natural thing to do. But turned out he'd brought some heavy baggage home with him. The kind you couldn't unpack.

He walked into the house, to the fridge. Opening the door, he rummaged around and at the same time heard Lucky come in from working in the garage.

"Any more beer?" Jeremy asked.

"Had the better part of a six pack in there last night," Lucky replied. "You drink it all?"

"Guess that's possible." Jeremy cursed under his breath. "Sorry, man," he murmured.

"Don't need to apologize," Lucky said, "but ... you don't seem like you're doing too good."

"I'm okay," he claimed. But he still stared into the fridge, because it was easier than meeting Lucky's gaze.

"Listen, you sure you don't want me to paint that old truck? I've got some down time right now."

Jeremy glanced up to see Lucky hiking a thumb over his shoulder to the driveway. Lucky had probably offered to paint Jeremy's old Ford pickup half a dozen times since he'd come home. Jeremy knew it looked like crap – a mottled, sun-beaten red. But it had *always* looked that way, from the very day he'd bought it used right after high school with the money he'd saved from working at Edna Farris's apple orchard. It felt like one little piece of his old life he hadn't lost. "Nah, man. But thanks."

Though now it hit him for the first time that maybe it was an eyesore in the driveway of a guy who painted vehicles for a living.

Now he met Lucky's gaze. "If you want me to move on, just say the word."

"No, it's not that. There's plenty of room, and you're family. And hell, you spent most of your adult life in war – that's bound to mess you up. But ..." Lucky stepped closer, spoke lower, even though they were the only two people anywhere nearby. "People are beginning to talk. To worry."

Jeremy finally shut the fridge door, stood up straight. "People?"

"Tessa. Your parents." He stopped, sighed. "Everybody really. Tessa and your folks are pretty sure some stuff happened in Afghanistan they don't know about."

"You say anything?" Jeremy asked. He had confided in Lucky. Lucky had come through some bad shit himself and landed on his feet. *Better* than on his feet – he had a great life. Maybe Jeremy had hoped Lucky's change of fortune would rub off on him somehow.

"No," Lucky assured him. "You asked me to keep it just between us and I have. But ... guess I worry a little, too, dude. Thing is ... I've been wondering if maybe you should think about talking to somebody."

Jeremy's gut tightened. "I talk to you. That's enough."

"I'm not sure it is," Lucky told him.

"I already did that kind of talking," Jeremy pointed out. "Before I was discharged. I passed with flying colors."

"You mean you lied."

He crossed his arms. "I just wanted to come home, man. Put it all behind me."

"A shame that last part didn't work."

Jeremy didn't answer. But he knew it was true. And he knew Lucky was right. Last summer he'd worked some construction in Crestview, the next town over – but it had been a temporary position and when it had ended, he'd let it. He'd let himself go right back into the solitude up here at Whisper Falls.

Over time he'd discovered that he liked just keeping to himself, here at Lucky's. He liked looking off the deck out into the thick woods that surrounded the place. He liked thinking about walking into those woods and just getting lost there. Sometimes he took those walks, into the trees and up to the falls. Sometimes he napped because it turned off his thoughts for a while.

He kind of wanted to walk into the woods and get lost right now. *But war heroes don't spend their days holed up in the woods drinking beer.* He'd hidden from that reality almost as well as he'd hidden from everything else. Until now.

"Maybe I should go somewhere new," he said, voicing the thought he'd been turning over in his head for days now.

"No, man," Lucky told him, shifting his weight from one work boot to the other. "Like I said, this isn't about that. You're always welcome here."

And Jeremy let out a breath. "I know, and I appreciate that. But ... maybe a change of scenery would do me good."

"Where would you go?" Lucky asked.

Jeremy considered options. On one hand, there weren't many – he didn't have a lot of ties outside Destiny. But on the other, there were millions – it was a big world.

"Maybe I'll go to the beach," he offered up. No particular reason, but the beach was a peaceful place. "Maybe I'll head to that little town where your parents live." Lucky's mom and dad had moved to Florida years earlier, and Jeremy had even gone with his own parents on vacation to visit them right after his return from overseas, back when he was wearing the war hero persona better. "It was nice there."

"Yeah, it is," Lucky agreed.

Although Jeremy wasn't really sure what a change of scenery would do for him. Other than stop him from hiding himself away in those woods forever. At the beach there was only the ocean and horizon. A lot harder place to hide.

Maybe a move would help him make a new start.

"What's the town called again?" he asked.

And Lucky replied, "Coral Cove."

CHAPTER 1

"Pack up your stuff, go home, and get dressed – we're going out!"

Sitting behind her sales table at community's nightly Sunset Celebration, Tamra Day looked up to see her neighbor friend, Christy Knight, who'd just barged on to the Coral Cove pier like she owned it.

Well, *this* was sudden. She and Christy didn't usually "go out."

Then she glanced down at the shorts and t-shirt she wore before raising her gaze back to her friend, a little dumbfounded. "I *am* dressed. And out where? This is Coral Cove, remember?" She loved the little beach town where she'd made her home for the last eight years, but there was no place in Coral Cove that required "getting dressed" in anything fancy to "go out." In fact, the Sunset Celebration, where she sold the pottery and stained glass pieces from which she made her living, was about as "out" as it got around here.

Even now, as dusk descended, she was surrounded by other artists and shopping tourists, and music played over loudspeakers to vie with the occasional call of seabirds passing overhead. Being at the Sunset Celebration always made her feel good, talented, valued. It was the most festive place to be in Coral Cove. And she'd been having a perfectly good evening – up to now.

Which was when Christy pursed her lips, looking only slightly as if she'd been caught at something. "Well, I'm not sure where we're going, but we're meeting Cami for a girls' night." Then she raised her eyebrows hopefully. "Fun, right?"

Okay, what was going on here? Something was definitely up.

It wasn't that Tamra didn't enjoy a night out with girlfriends, but she didn't trust this situation. She tilted her head, squinting lightly into the vibrant colors left from the recent setting of the sun. "Did Fletcher put you up to this?"

Her friend, Fletcher McCloud, had long been on a mission to find Tamra a man. And lately, she'd had the feeling everyone else was in on it, too – except for her.

And she wasn't opposed to dating – but she simply hadn't met a lot of eligible, handsome guys in Coral Cove, not in the entire time she'd been here. So she doubted her Prince Charming was suddenly going to show up tonight just because she "got dressed" and "went out."

Christy gave her pretty blond head a light, cheerful shake in reply. "No, Fletcher has nothing to do with it. We just want to have some fun."

She kept using that word – fun. But fun, Tamra thought, were the lives Christy and their friend, Cami, were already living. They were both in relationships with great – not to mention *hot* – guys. They were both blond and svelte and gorgeous and rocked a bikini like nobody's business. And she loved them to death and was grateful for the joy they brought into her life, and she was glad they were happy. But the upshot was, she didn't need anyone feeling sorry for her or trying to make something happen that ... well, frankly, just didn't seem to be in the cards for her.

"Chop chop," Christy said, clapping her hands so suddenly that Tamra flinched in her folding chair, hit her knee against a table leg, and shook her entire collection of pottery and stained glass. "Let's go get you dolled up."

Tamra grabbed onto the table to steady it – then drew back, frowned. "Dolled up? Really?"

Christy sighed, planting her hands on her hips. "Look, I'm not asking for diamonds and an evening gown here – just a skirt or something would do."

And okay, the truth was that Tamra used to wear skirts a lot more than she had lately. And maybe she used to pay more attention to her appearance in general. As a local artist, long, flowy skirts had always been her usual style for the nightly event at the pier. Again, until lately, since she'd become more of a khaki shorts and t-shirt sort of gal.

So yeah, maybe she'd let herself go a little. But she'd been doing so much work helping to beautify the town, it was the only practical way to dress. It so happened that Cami was the head of the new Coral Cove planning commission, and Tamra was taking part in lots of projects that called for dirty hands, not skirts.

Or ... maybe she'd also let herself go since ... well, since Cami had gotten together with Reece Donovan, a long-time friend Tamra had once carried a torch for. She didn't like admitting that to herself, but it had been a blow. Not Cami's fault, and she was truly over it now, but it had stung at the time. And maybe even left Tamra feeling discouraged about something she hadn't quite realized she cared about: romance.

"Okay, fine," she finally told Christy. "I'll put on a skirt. But I'm pretty sure we're just going to end up sitting at the Hungry Fisherman drinking beer."

"No," Christy said adamantly, shaking her head. "We'll find something better, something new and exciting! It'll be fun."

Now it was Tamra who raised her eyebrows, albeit in a manner more doubting than hopeful, as she replied, "I can't wait to see what it is."

Jeremy sat on a picnic table behind the Happy Crab Motel in Coral Cove, Florida. He'd been here a couple of weeks.

He was living at the kitschy little row motel built in the 50s for free, just because the owner, Reece, was a hell of a nice guy. *That's what you get when you show up someplace without a plan*

– *you're suddenly homeless*. He hadn't exactly thought of that when he'd gotten in his pickup and headed south down I75.

Most people would have made a move like this with more of a strategy in mind, he supposed. And maybe a little more money in their pocket, too. But after he'd come home from Afghanistan, he'd given most of the military pay he'd accumulated over the years to the wife of his friend, Chuck, and their four kids, who lived in Texas. Chuck hadn't made it back and Jeremy had – so helping out his buddy's family had seemed like a no-brainer.

A cold, dark fist closed tight around Jeremy's heart, even in the Florida heat, at the very thought of Chuck. The moment he'd seen Chuck fall flashed in his mind.

Push it away. Get back on track.

What track?

You need a plan, man – a fucking plan.

And that's what he told himself every single day as he dragged himself out of his room. That's what he told himself every night, while he sat around watching the palm trees sway. Sometimes he walked the beach, but that took about all the energy he could muster. And so far, no fucking plan.

When he'd first arrived, Reece had asked him if he could swim. "Yeah," he'd said. "Why?"

"Town's looking to hire a new lifeguard," Reece had told him. "You should apply."

And Jeremy had said, "Uh ... maybe, sure. Thanks for the info, man." But inside he'd been thinking: *Hell no*. The beach on a busy day? No way – too many people, too much uncertainty. And being in charge of protecting people was the last thing he wanted. The military had deemed him a hero; so had his hometown. Because he'd once made a move that had kept his whole platoon from being decimated by an ambush. But funny thing about being that kind of savior – sometimes what people saw, knew, was only one side of the coin.

You need to find a job, man. Not as a lifeguard, but some other job.

The sun had just set, but the air remained warm. September in Florida. A long, planked, sun-washed dock stretched along the bay behind the motel, providing more than half a dozen boat slips. Two of the boats tied there – a catamaran and a sleek white sloop – belonged to Reece, but the other spots Reece rented out.

Now Jeremy watched two college-age boys in the distance, clearly rich and entitled as hell, downing shots of something dark on the lower deck of a big, ritzy cabin cruiser. Daddy's boat. Part of him resented them and their youthful good looks, their loud voices that carried too far. And another part of him just wanted to go drink with them and forget things.

Next door to the Happy Crab stood a rundown seafood joint called The Hungry Fisherman. Movement from near the back of the restaurant drew Jeremy's eye to a big but equally rundown-looking gray tomcat sniffing around the trash bin, on the hunt for scraps. The cat appeared about as down on his luck as Jeremy.

Try though he might, he couldn't block out the frat boys' raucous laughter and snide comments – they were talking about sex now, about what one of them wanted to do to a particular girl – but he kept watching the cat, and stroking the beard he'd let grow over the last few months.

He wasn't much of a beard guy usually, and he wasn't much of a cat guy either – more of a dog man – but he found himself vaguely wondering what particular wars this cat had fought. He kept trying not to hear the loudmouth frat boys.

The big cat padded slowly away from the restaurant's back door, apparently striking out. Jeremy suspected the scent of fish from inside was probably torture, that the cat was like a thirsty man staring at an ocean – water, water, everywhere, but not a drop to drink. The lanky cat – too skinny for a tom his size – took long strides across the parking lot and past the motel's pool, approaching Jeremy.

Stopping at Jeremy's tennis shoes, he looked up and let out a plaintive, "Meow." That was when Jeremy realized the cat was missing an eye, one permanently closed.

"Sorry, got nothin' for ya." Truth was, he'd eaten a lot of seafood himself lately, because Reece wasn't the only generous person in Coral Cove – Polly and Abner, owners of the Hungry Fisherman, had been more generous with him than they or anyone else had reason to be. *Gotta get a plan, man.*

An image flashed in his head – him at a younger age, in his parents' yard with his dog, Dakota. He'd gotten the German Shepard as a puppy when he was fifteen. Loved to play fetch, that dog. And acted like a big tough guy to outsiders, but he was more bark than bite – a big lovable hulk of an animal.

Coming home on furlough and between tours of duty, Dakota had been one of those things that stayed the same for Jeremy, just like that old truck. Pulling into his parents' driveway to see Dakota run out and greet him had always taken him back to simpler times.

Dogs can only live so long, though, and Dakota hadn't outlasted Jeremy's dedication to serve his country. He'd gone in to the Marines at twenty-one and come out eleven years later. His dad's email about Dakota's death, only a few months before his discharge, had hit Jeremy harder than it should have. He still missed that dog.

Since Jeremy had nothing to offer, the one-eyed tomcat moved on in more long, lanky steps, heading out onto the dock, still clearly seeking dinner. The cat must have been drawn by the voices, since he padded toward the cabin cruiser, and right up a small plank walkway onto it.

And it was only a short moment later when the more obnoxious of the two boys barked, "What the hell? Get off my goddamn boat, cat!" with far more passion than the situation called for. Then he shot to his feet and kicked the cat, hard, catapulting it off the vessel.

For Jeremy, the cat's airborne body moved in slow motion. His chest tightened as he watched it strike the trunk of a palm tree just off the edge of the dock with a *thud*, then land at its base.

The cat lay there, stunned and unsteady, disoriented.

And Jeremy's gut clenched as the frat boys both laughed, and the other one said, "Shoulda thrown the dumb thing in the water to see if it could swim."

More cruel laughter. "Maybe I will," the first replied.

Jeremy saw from the corner of his eye when the cat got its wits about it and finally darted away into the night. But it was too late. Something inside him broke loose, taking him back, to the darkness that hid inside people, to pointless cruelty, to other falling bodies – soldiers, friends. He never made the conscious decision to act – he only felt the ground beneath his feet and the fury filling his lungs and heart and head as he bolted from the picnic table into a full-on sprint toward that boat.

All thoughts left him – it was only action now.

And he never said a word – simply punched the quieter of the two in the mouth, knocking him from a chair onto the deck, just before he picked up the louder one by the throat, slamming him against the wall of the cabin with the words, "You messed with the wrong cat on the wrong night, pal."

They were drinking at the Hungry Fisherman.

"I know what you're thinking," Christy said to Tamra across the table. "We're drinking at the Hungry Fisherman."

"You're a mind reader," Tamra said. "Thank God I got dressed up for this."

"I need to add 'create nighttime hotspots' to my to-do list," Cami said, holding up one finger as she shifted into town planner mode. She tilted her pretty blonde head, clearly pondering it. "Though it would have to be a place with just the right blend of elements."

"A beach bar," Christy suggested, wide-eyed and happy as always. "A fun, casual, open-air place."

Cami's gaze brightened at the inspiration. "In the empty lot across from the Happy Crab, at the end of the beach," she added with a smile, pointing vaguely in that direction. She'd already talked Christy's handsome fiancé, Jack DuVall, into buying a long-closed used car lot and opening a miniature golf business there, on which construction was just starting. Jack wanted to mostly just be the money behind the project, so he'd hired Cami to organize it all, and she in turn had hired Tamra to design the course and oversee the building of it.

"That would be perfect," Tamra agreed, liking the idea.

But then Cami's smile began to fade. "Now all I need is someone to finance and run it."

Perennially cheerful soul that she was, Christy said, "Well, the more the town gets refurbished, the more new businesses it will draw. And look" – she held out both her hands to motion around them – "outdoor seating at the Hungry Fisherman! If you can make Polly and Abner change, you can do anything."

True enough, only a month ago, the patio they sat on just across from the Coral Cove Beach had been pock-marked asphalt, part of the parking lot. But Cami had succeeded in getting the owners of the seafood restaurant to put in a small patio enclosed with a wooden fence draped with fishing net and a few white, round life preservers, and in also adding a new, festive drink menu, designed with Cami's help. Music, also a new feature, played over newly installed speakers – at the moment Bastille sang about flaws. And since then, business had picked up and they'd even started staying open later.

"And at least we're not drinking beer!" Christy announced triumphantly with a short nod in Tamra's direction. In fact, Tamra was drinking her second Ahoy Mateys, a rather tasty tropical rum concoction, while her friends both sipped on a couple of All Hands on Decks, the Hungry Fisherman's version of a Long Island iced tea.

"You know what else?" Christy said in her merry way. "The more good changes that keep taking place around here, the more new people there will be to meet."

Tamra glanced absently across the table at Christy – just in time to realize the statement had been targeted directly toward her.

So she arched one eyebrow in reply. And decided it was time to address the elephant on the patio. "Christy, I know you mean well – but why do you think I want to meet new people?"

"Well, I just thought –"

"And given the resorts up the road" – which kept Coral Cove's beach and Sunset Celebration thriving, despite the businesses in this older part of town needing a boost – "there are already plenty of new people coming and going all the time. So as much as I'm on board with sprucing up the area, I don't think it's going to have any impact on my social life. Which is fine just the way it is – promise."

The women across the table from her went quiet. And Tamra realized she'd probably sounded annoyed. Crap. "I'm sorry," she said immediately. "Maybe rum makes me defensive or something. And I don't mean to sound unappreciative. It's just that ..." She let out a sigh. And, for lack of any better options, blurted out the ugly truth. "Okay, I know everyone feels sorry for me because I have no love life. And that's nice of you all, but it's really all right."

"It's not that we feel sorry for you," Cami rushed to say.

"It's just that ... well, wouldn't you like to find someone?" Christy asked. "I mean, deep down, isn't that what everyone really wants if they're honest with themselves?"

Whoa. This had suddenly turned into a deep conversation. Or deep by Tamra's standards anyway. Being an artist, she certainly had the capacity to be deep, but ... she didn't always let it show. It was easier that way.

Both Christy and Cami really did have great lives. And she didn't begrudge them that – but she often wondered if they really understood how different their existences were from hers. They were both so outgoing, whereas she tended to be a little more reserved, even guarded. They were pretty and perky and vibrant, while she was just more ... well, average in all those ways.

She'd never been the life of a party, or "the hot girl," or even "the pretty girl." And she was fine with that really, because the one time in her life when she'd truly felt pretty and special had ultimately ended up making her feel ugly inside, and she'd begun to suspect that being pretty

was sometimes actually more of a detriment to a woman than a help. So she was good with who she was.

"The fact is," she began slowly, thoughtfully, "some people just aren't meant to have the whole big dating-and-relationship thing. And I'm not interested in chasing after it. And I really *do* think you guys feel sorry for me, but stop, okay?" She tried to laugh, like it was all fun and games. "It's really fine."

The other two women stayed quiet for a moment, until Cami asked gently, "Then why don't you *look* like it's fine?"

Oh hell. It was the rum. She'd forgotten to *keep* laughing, keep her smile in place. And maybe the rum was bringing out something else, too, something she'd just been trying to ignore. And she'd been doing a pretty good job of it ... until this very moment.

Trying to concoct a reply, she peered out over the beach as a sea breeze lifted her long, wavy, auburn hair, which she'd pulled back in a low ponytail lately to keep it at bay. And she wasn't sure how to account for her expression other than with ... stark honesty. An honesty and awareness suddenly bubbling inside her, almost actually *wanting* to come out. Damn rum.

So she took a fortifying sip of her Ahoy Mateys and said, "You want to know the truth?"

"Of course," Christy said.

And Tamra dropped her gaze to her colorful drink, another wistful sigh escaping her. "I really am okay with the situation, except for ... the sex part." She'd muttered the last few words. More to herself than to her companions. Then realized she'd really, truly said that out loud, and added, "Oh crap. Apparently rum makes me spill my guts, too."

"Wow," Christy said, looking as stunned as Tamra felt.

But ... didn't women talk about sex all the time? Not *her*, *ever*, until now – but wasn't this normal? "Wow?" she asked, a little embarrassed, worried. Had she breached some social protocol she didn't know about.

"It's just that ... you're usually so reserved and – and straitlaced, I guess," Christy mused, flashing a little grin. "I mean, don't take this the wrong way, but you just don't seem like someone who thinks about sex. Or at least you never talk about it."

Tamra sheepishly lifted her glass. "It's the rum talking."

Christy's smile broadened. "Then I think maybe I *like* you drinking rum."

All three of them laughed, but Tamra was quick to move forward with more of an answer. Even if she didn't know exactly what she wanted to say now that she'd opened this personal can of worms. "Well, normally I'm *not* someone who thinks much about sex."

Only then she decided that was enough, right there. Because sure, there was more she could say on the topic – much more – yet why put herself through that? The rum, apparently, had decided to shut up now.

"But ... enough about that. Let's talk about your wedding," she said to Christy with an enthusiastic tone she hoped would catch on. "Are all the plans set? What's left to be done?"

"Wh-h-h-hait a minute," Cami said, sounding a little intoxicated. "Not so fast."

Tamra just blinked.

And Cami went on. "You can't say what you just said and not tell us the rest."

"Well, sure I can," Tamra insisted. "And there *is* no rest. Not really."

"No," Christy argued. "Cami's right. I like this side of you."

Tamra's back went a little more rigid, though she worked to keep sounding casual. "What side of me? I've really said very little if you think about it."

"But just enough," Christy pointed out, "to make me feel like we're ... getting to know you more. I mean, I know we know you, but ... you don't open up a lot. This is probably the most personal conversation we've ever had about you. And I already feel like I know you way better than I did just five minutes ago."

Tamra could have responded to that in many ways. There were plenty of reasons she wasn't as open and trusting as a lot of other people. She almost envied the quick way Christy and Cami bonded with people – whereas Tamra's bonds formed much more slowly.

And she supposed it was that which made her choose the simplest reply, the one she thought she could just spit out and get over with the quickest – which was, yet again, frank honesty. And yeah, it felt *super* personal to tell them this, but maybe the rum's gut-spilling effects were on the upswing again.

"Okay ... here goes." Though she paused, nibbled her lower lip a second, and then made the mental push forward to share the things she was just now admitting to herself. And it all came out in a rush, like a big bucket of words being dumped out of her mouth. "Like I said, usually I don't sit around thinking about sex, but lately I'm just feeling ... those urges. A lot. As in it's driving me crazy. Yesterday I saw a hot construction worker out on Route 19 and practically drooled.

"But I'm not the sort of person who just wants to hook up with someone, and even if I was I have no idea where I'd find a suitable guy, so no matter how you slice it, it's ... frustrating." She stopped, giving her head a nervous little shake, predictably uncomfortable with the topic. Time to shut up again. "And that's really it – all there is to it."

Though she was quick to lift a finger high into the air then, because she needed to make something perfectly clear. "But that doesn't mean I'm desperate to meet men, okay?" After which she lowered her voice, since a woman at another table glanced over. "Which is good, since there are so few around here who aren't taken."

The truth was, even most of the vacationing men were usually married. Coral Cove drew families and couples. Occasional groups of young women or college boys, but mostly it was a crowd of matched pairs.

"Happy now?" she asked.

And she was just gearing up for the next assault, preparing to defend her position – since well-meaning people who were parts of happy couples always seemed committed to convincing everyone else they *also* belonged in a happy couple – when the blare of a siren cut through the Coral Cove night.

A siren in Coral Cove was as rare as ... well, as rare as sex for Tamra – she was pretty sure she hadn't heard one in all the years she'd lived here. So it halted the conversation instantly, and they all looked up to see the glow of bright blue lights atop one of Coral Cove's three police cruisers as it came screeching into the Hungry Fisherman's freshly paved parking lot.

Two of the town's half dozen cops rushed from the car, running into the space that separated the restaurant from the Happy Crab, toward the dock that lined the bay a short distance behind the buildings.

Polly hurried out the front door in the same rust-colored waitress uniform she always wore, the outdated beehive hairdo atop her head slanting this way and that as she struggled to see what was happening. "What in the Sam Hill?" she asked, looking after the cops.

She turned to the girls and other patrons on the patio, as if *they* knew what in the Sam Hill, but of course they didn't. Christy held her hands up in silent reply to Polly, as if to say, *Who knows?*

A few minutes later, both cops reappeared, coming from the direction of the dock, but now they escorted between them a scruffy, bearded guy in handcuffs. Leading him to the cruiser, they pushed him into the backseat as everyone on the patio gaped.

"Lord, who on earth is that?" Tamra asked.

And Cami said, "Uh oh. That's the guy Reece has been letting stay at the motel for free. I'd better call him."

And as the police car's blue lights faded into the night, leaving the Hungry Fisherman quiet and peaceful once again, Tamra said, "Well, there you go – case in point. If that's the best this town has to offer me in the way of new men, I think I'll just stay celibate."

Order Take Me All The Way