

Frog Head Key

2009 ©

By Eric Douglas



Chapter 3

“What’s that boat doing out there?” Snake asked Tommy and Billy. He had climbed up in a tree they watch the island when he heard it pull up. They had never had to do anything to anyone before the previous night, but they were prepared to make sure no one got too close to their operation.

“I don’t know, Snake. You want me to take care of them like that boat last night?” Billy asked. Firing the rocket propelled grenade the night before had been pretty exciting. He was itching to try it again.

“No, those guys last night saw the storage shed on the other side of the island. These guys just look like divers. I’ll go scare them away on my way back in to get supplies. We’ll need a bunch of freshwater and sugar along with the grain to get this thing going. You two get back to work. When I get back, I expect to have this place up and running again,” Snake ordered as he stalked off.



Jackson and Kia felt the sudden rush as the warm waters of the Gulf Stream washed around them. They quickly righted themselves in the water, gave an Ok signal and began their descent to the bottom. They could easily see the coral reef below them and the sloping contour of the island. Jackson knew the direction of the trouble, but ignored it for a moment. He listened to the sound of his own breath as he exhaled slowly from the regulator, the bubbles making a tinkling sound as they rolled up the side of his face.

He felt himself relax, in spite of the purpose of the dive. There was something wrong, and he had a feeling he was about to get thrown into the middle of it, but Jackson let himself fall into the familiar rhythm of the dive. He could feel the wave action as the small waves above pushed back and forth against the island. The visibility was a mess to one side of him, but clear and fine just a few feet away. They were still above whatever it was that was actually causing the mess, so all he could see below him were clouds.

As he equalized his ears, Jackson watched Kia descend. He had been diving with her a few times, although not as often as he would have liked. He had put her to work quickly after she arrived, without getting much chance to check her out. What he had seen before, and all reports as well, said she was a solid, level-headed dive leader. The tourists loved her.

Wearing only a bikini under her dive gear, Jackson was momentarily distracted. He watched her long, smooth and toned legs gently glide through the water and liked what he saw. It wasn't until she turned to get his attention that he caught himself. She seemed to realize where his mind was, because she gave him a funny grin before turning to point at the source of the problem. A plume of nasty water was blowing out of a hose, straight out onto the reef. They both did their best to stay out of the flow, but got as close as they could. The hose ran back up to the surface above them toward the island.

Jackson and Kia swam around the hose, watching it twitch back and forth. Jackson moved forward cautiously. He wanted to bring back a sample of the water. He also knew that if the cloud of water were toxic he would be in trouble. He wasn't wearing any exposure protection other than a t-shirt and shorts. Kia had protested wearing even that much, saying she liked the feeling of the water on her body. Neither one of them was prepared to deal with toxic chemicals.

Gingerly, Jackson moved the open jar into the flow coming out of the hose. He had to get close enough to the opening to make sure it wasn't too diluted, but he couldn't get too close, or the jar would get blown from his hand. Pulling the jar back, he quickly screwed the cap in place to capture the sample.

As they backed away from the hose, Jackson heard the unmistakable sound of a boat approaching *Daydreamer*. He looked up and saw a smaller boat pull close to his. Frog Head Key was pretty remote and he didn't think this was going to be a coincidence. He signaled to Kia and they began their ascent. As soon as his head broke the surface, Jackson knew his guess was spot on.

"I said you people need to get out of here. This area is off-limits to divers. I'm with the Fish and Wildlife Commission. If you don't get out of here right now, you're going to be in big trouble," the stranger in the strange boat said.

"Hold on there mister. We've got two divers in the water. We can't just take off without them. As soon as they get to the surface, we'll pack up and move out. Don't get too excited," Jake said, a little confused at the stance the new arrival was taking.

"I don't really care what you have to do, I told you it's time to leave. I'll just impound that boat and put you all in jail. How about that?" the stranger continued. "I said I want you people out of here."

“But, come on man...,” Jake started to argue.

“It’s all right, Jake,” Jackson interrupted from the water as he swam around to the ladder hanging from the side of *Daydreamer*. “We’re back from the dive. If the man wants us to go away, we’ll go. We don’t want to cause any trouble.”

“But, Jackson, this guy said...,” Jake retorted.

“No, Jake. Really, it’s Ok. Kia and I are back. We can leave now. We didn’t know we weren’t supposed to dive here,” Jackson continued, keeping his voice even and calm as he turned to the new arrival in the boat. “We’re sorry, sir. It was a mistake to dive here and we’ll never do it again.”

“You had best not let it happen again,” the man said. “Now get your things together and get on out of here. I’m going to keep an eye on you until you leave.”

Without another word, the man started the engines on his boat and moved about 100 yards away, but then he turned and shut his engines back down, watching the four divers to make sure they left.

“What the hell was that all about, Jackson? If that guy’s with FWC, I’m Donald Duck,” Bo asked. “Why did you just give in to him and back out of there.”

“Exactly because he isn’t with FWC, but he wanted us out of there. Anyone that willing to threaten four people in a bigger faster boat knows something we don’t. There’s something going on here,” Jackson explained. “Arguing or getting into a fight with him isn’t going to help us find out what.”

With that Jackson and Kia described the underwater hose pumping out the cloud of filthy water that was creating the algae bloom. Jackson showed them the cloudy water sample he had

hidden in his BC pocket. As soon as he was out of his dive gear, he started *Daydreamer's* twin engines and moved out toward Withrow Key, giving the stranger a wide berth.

“If he was armed and we never made it back to the shore to let someone else know what was going on, what would that have served?” Kia said as the four of them talked at the pilot station. “We need to tell someone who really is with fish and wildlife that something is going on out here.”

“That’ll take forever for them to come out and investigate. Let’s come back here tonight and see what’s going on. We can check it out and get some proof,” Jake said.

“No. You will not come back out here,” Jackson said, stretching himself up to his full 5’11”. He was smaller than both the younger men, but he wanted them to have no doubts that he was in charge. “I have some contacts and I’ll let them know about what we’ve seen. I don’t want you two coming anywhere near this place. Got it?”

“Yeah, whatever,” Bo agreed, without looking at Jackson.

“If you’re just going to run away, then fine,” Jake said without conviction.