

# THE OLD SEAMAN

By

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My husband and I are from Charlotte, North Carolina, so we are close enough to the beach to come often. Each October we come for the entire month and spend it in a rented house at North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

My husband, Steve, is a freelance architect, so he can do his work while at the beach; our grown children come for visits during the month, and it is a wonderful annual ritual. Steve also gets to catch up on some fishing while I read and spend time with family and friends. It's a great time, and the weather is perfect at this time of year.

It was our third day there, and we were out on the pier fishing. Or, rather, Steve was fishing, and I was watching; as usual. We have a great marriage, so we just love being together; no matter what we are doing. The sky was clear, the sea breeze was enchanting, and the gentle rustle of the waves was so peaceful.

After Steve's fishing lines were set he stepped over to talk with an old man who was just sitting close to the end of the pier and just looking out to sea. I had noticed him there yesterday as well

as the day before, and each time he was doing the very same thing; just looking out to sea. It seemed strange to me, and I really didn't want Steve to even talk with him, but Steve always likes to talk to older men. So, again, I just watched and listened from a distance.

I really couldn't hear what they were saying because of the wind, so I just watched the fishing poles and waited. They talked for a long time, and I noticed that Steve just stared at him and listened very intently. When he finally did return I said, "What was that all about?"

"I'll tell you later." And he turned his attention to the gear, and just reeled them in. "Let's go."

That was unusual for him to only spend this little time fishing, and I had a sense that he was disturbed or preoccupied with something. I couldn't help thinking that it had to be something the old man had said. We passed by him without a word, and he continued to gaze out to sea. I was definitely going to have to know about that conversation.

Back in the house, which is a beautiful two story with six bedrooms; perfect for family vacations, we didn't talk at first, so I broke the silence. "Now, are you going to tell me what you two guys talked about?"

"It was really strange, and I really don't know what to make of it." He said with a questioning expression as we sat down in the huge family room overlooking the deck, the sea oats, and the beautiful blue Atlantic. I simply sat silently waiting for more. An enduring marriage teaches one how to be patient.

"The old man seemed odd in a way and at the same time he seemed so at peace just sitting there and staring out to sea. It almost seemed like he was waiting for something or someone."

"Like what?" I wondered.

"I don't know, but he gave me a lot of personal information about himself. For instance; I know that he is 91 years old, and..."

"Ninety one? That old man is ninety one?"

“That’s what he said. He said that he had been a sailor for his whole life, and that when his ship went down in a storm, up the coast from here, about 25 years ago he just decided to retire with his treasure.”

“His treasure? What did he mean by that?” I sat up on the edge of my seat because of this new revelation.

“I don’t know; I didn’t ask. I mostly just listened. Once he got to talking he seemed that he had a lot to say. I don’t think that many people listen to him. He seemed lonely.”

“Poor old man.” My attitude toward him then took on a motherly feeling of wanting to care for him. “Did he say if he had any family?”

“Yes; he said he had children and grown grandchildren, but he never hears from any of them. And, you know, if he has been here in this same place for 25 years you would think that some of them would visit.”

I stood up with resolve in my voice, “Well I’m going to take him a sandwich and a thermos of ice tea tomorrow. I hate it when I see a family member ignored especially if they are old.”

My husband, ever the rational one, said “Well what if he did something to run them all off?”

“Steve! They can just get over it. He’s old; I mean really old. He won’t be around long.”

“Susan you really are taking this personally aren’t you?”

“Yes, but I see the world as one big family, and I think we should do what we can for each other whenever possible.”

“I know; I know. You’re the mother hen to the world.”

“And you love me for it don’t you?”

“You know I do.”

I hugged him and marched off. I was on a mission and now was looking forward to tomorrow so I could care for the old seaman. Maybe I would even talk with him some if he felt like it.

Sure enough; there he was just looking out to sea. I had carried a cooler, so I sat it down beside him and said “Good morning.” There was a moment that felt uncomfortable, because he just looked at me; then finally...

“Good morning.” That was all; he didn’t volunteer any more than that.

“I’m Steve’s wife Susan, and I brought us some tea. I hope you like it.” I didn’t wait for his acknowledgement; I just poured us both a cup.

“Thank you.” He said as he reached his old, withered, sun baked hands for the cup. As we both sipped at the tea I just observed his appearance. He had on a very old sailor’s cap and sported a short scraggly beard. His eyes were a dull, light blue that had been weathered by decades of wind and sun. His clothes were old and wrinkled. Then he surprised me with “What else did you bring out here in your cooler?”

“I brought us some sandwiches.” I said to him with a smile.

“Us?”

“Yes. Steve told me that you live here alone, so I know that you must always care for yourself. I thought that it wouldn’t hurt a thing if I showed you a little kindness. Do you mind?”

I saw his eyes water up a little as he looked away; “No I don’t mind.”

We shared our sandwiches and tea in silence, and it was nice to have the time with this gentle old soul. I extended an invitation for dinner before we left. “My cooking is better than my sandwiches. Will you let me treat you to dinner?”

“You don’t have to do that Susan.” I was pleased that he remembered my name.

“It’s my pleasure. Say 7 o’clock? We are staying in that two story house right there.” I pointed to our house.

“Seven it is then. Thanks.”

He was prompt, as I expected, being an old military man. I showed him around the house, but he found particular interest in our photos. “Who is this?” He had picked up a picture of my mother,

and I noticed how he gave every detail careful observation. Then, without a word, he looked at me as if to examine the similarities. As he gazed into my eyes I felt a warmth that I couldn't explain.

Dinner was warm and more cordial than I expected. And Glenn, the old seaman, felt like family as we shared the time together. We said "Good night" at the door, and that was the last time I ever saw him.

Three days went by, and Steve and I began to wonder why Glenn wasn't at the pier. Then there was a special delivery at the door that I had to sign for. Inside the package, from an attorney, was a hand written letter in an envelope. It was from Glenn...

"If you are reading this letter, dearest Susan, then I have gone on to my Heavenly Treasure. But I had an earthly treasure that I had planned to leave to a charity until my evening with you. I didn't know until I saw the picture of your mother that you are my daughter. I did know your mother very well, and I loved her. I can hardly believe that providence brought you to me in the last few days of my life.

I found a sunken treasure many years ago, but I didn't need it. I now leave it to you. You are my greatest treasure."

And it was simply signed, "Dad."