

A MAC TRAVIS  
ADVENTURE THRILLER



# WOOD'S HARBOR



STEVEN BECKER

# **Wood's Harbor**

By  
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# Chapter 1

Mac swatted the no-see-ums swarming around his face and rubbed his salt-crusting eyes. The coating felt like sandpaper. Finally he removed enough of the crystals to squeeze one eye open. The glare of the sun made him close it immediately. He tried to move, but his legs resisted the effort. It took him a long minute to realize they were entwined in mangrove branches and covered with debris. It was a struggle to sit up, so he lifted his knees instead, and in the process gained enough wiggle room to slide out of his cocoon. He forced himself to squint through his one good eye and crawled across the muck to the tide line where he splashed water on his face. It was salt water, but it was wet. He continued until he was able to open both eyes.

His vision was clouded from the salt and sun, but he forced himself to survey his situation. Surrounded by mangrove roots, he saw pieces of the wreckage in the brush and tried to remember what had happened. He gazed up at the sun, high in the sky, and realized it had been close to sunset the day before when time had stopped; he had been out for almost eighteen hours. His memory came back in bits and pieces as he moved above the high tide line and sat amidst the tangle of roots and brush to think about the last few days. It came back slowly. He remembered the sailboat fighting each wave as he tried to steer it into the raging Gulf Stream. Then the rest of the memory flooded back, startling him to alertness.

He gained his feet and looked around for Mel and Armando. They had been with him on the boat, but his last memory was the life raft and the terrified looks on their faces. The mast had snapped, taking his attention away from the drifting lifeboat. That was all he could remember. The trio had escaped the corrupt CIA agent and headed to the Bahamas, a trail of dead bodies and destruction behind them, a 'borrowed' sailboat beneath them. It had been his insistence on running that had left him stranded and his stubbornness that had convinced him he could navigate the huge waves and current of the Gulf Stream. He looked around with remorse. It may have cost Mel and Armando their lives.

Mac pushed the thought from his mind and tried to gain his feet. His arms and legs were covered with open cuts and scrapes, the current target of the invisible bugs, but his wounds showed no sign of infection. He was forced to crawl, the dense vegetation not allowing him to rise. With two choices, the open water or the brush, he chose the water. There was likely a search going on and he would have to be careful to remain out of sight. If he was found on US soil, he would surely be arrested.

First on the list would be the poaching charge. He recalled the image of the heiress, Cayenne Cannady, red hair ablaze, as she burned at the smuggler's haven.

The temptress had suckered his friend and first mate, Trufante, into using his boat to poach lobsters. The black cloud that followed the Cajun mate was above them that day. The pair had been caught, the boat traced to Mac and confiscated along with his house. He shook his head. Focus on the present. It was better to stay invisible until he could figure things out. He worked through the brush to the shore but couldn't get the two faces in the lifeboat out of his mind. The question of whether he was responsible for Mel's death dominated his thoughts.

The winds had calmed, reducing the seas to a light chop. From the debris scattered in the mangroves, he could tell it had been a good blow. Parts of a boat, fishing nets, plastic bottles and trash were scattered in a wavy line along the tide mark or in the branches, some, two feet off the ground, where the surge from the wind-blown waves had deposited them. He looked around for anything useful and found a pair of mismatched flip-flops and a half-full water bottle which he drained. Able to stand now, he set his shoulders and lower back into a stretch. The sun had moved behind him. He knew he was somewhere back in the Keys facing the Atlantic Ocean. There were hundreds of miles of mangrove-covered shores in the island chain running from Homestead through Key Largo, past Key West to the Dry Tortugas, and he had no idea just where he had been marooned.

He turned towards the sun and started half-walking and half-wading west through the mud, the best choice as he figured the six-knot current of the Gulf Stream would have pushed the wreckage north or east. At least he was still in the Keys. The last place he needed to enter civilization was Miami or points north. He had been walking for an hour, by the position of the sun, but doubted he had covered more than a mile. He fought for each inch. Finally he saw a high-rise appear over the brush and sighed in relief as he recognized the lone condo standing guard over the entrance to Key Colony Beach. He studied the shoreline and moved back into the cover of the brush as a boat appeared from the inlet, then looked inland to find a place to rest until sunset. Coco Plumb Beach, the long stretch of sand leading to the channel, was too busy to approach in the daylight. Even if he wasn't identified, he looked like a hobo and would be reported by the residents.

He crawled under the cover of a small tree. His thoughts turned inward as he fought hunger and thirst. The initial shock had worn off. He could feel every scrape on his body, salt stinging open wounds as it dried. Mel was back in his thoughts. Had she survived? Where was she? Armando was a concern, but he would be handled as a political refugee, given the best care American taxpayers could afford. Mel would be treated as a criminal. He waited for the sun to set, knowing there was only one place he could go for help - and that always led to trouble.

**END OF SAMPLE CHAPTER**

**KEEP READING**