

# Emerald Coast

## Synopsis

### ACT I

It is 1925, and Deidre Dunn sits in a chair next to her husband's gravesite at the cemetery with her son, James sitting by her side. He is dressed in a naval aviator's uniform. As the funeral service for her husband comes to an end, he tells his mother that it's time to leave. She wants to stay a little while longer finding it difficult to say goodbye to her husband. She finds herself praising both her recently buried husband as well as James' biological father, Zeke Martin, a man she knew thirty years earlier when she was the madam of an upscale brothel in Pensacola. This is a secret hidden from all, including her dear son, a secret she will take to *her* grave.

The next scene takes us back to 1896, and it's early in the morning on the Pensacola wharf. The fishermen and dock workers are complaining about gnats, rats and sand in their shoes. After the fishermen leave the dock workers notice the large ship sailing into port. A large stack of lumber is ready to be loaded when the ship arrives.

Zeke Martin, a tall handsome former basketball star at Vanderbilt University and a young civil engineer in his late twenties stands in his office in Pensacola with his assistant Adam Davison. Zeke is responsible for surveying coastal land and identifying possible road and bridge sites from Mobile to Panama City. He is singing the praises of the beautiful area he lives and works in, and with all the advances in modern technology, what a wonderful time it is to be alive. Adam, a young man also in his early twenties, related to the noted civil engineer and county surveyor W. H. Davison does not share Zeke's enthusiasm and wonders why with the heat, insects, alligators and storms anyone would actually want to live here. Zeke wants to survey the *point*, a place where solid land is being created by the ballast of ships from all over the world. The ships travel the oceans more safely when they are full and heavy, so they must first unload the ballast of sand and stone before the lumber from northwest Florida is loaded.

In the early evening after the fishermen have returned from the gulf and unloaded their catch, the conversation quickly turns to later that night when the men will go to town and take advantage of the entertainment in the local bars and brothels. Someone brings up the name of Deirdre Dunn, the most beautiful woman in all of northwest Florida. In her early thirties, she is the madam of a high class brothel called the *Rising Sun*.

In the parlor of the *Rising Sun* two of the "ladies" discuss life and their conversation quickly turns to the madam, Deirdre. One of the ladies who has been working there since Deirdre was a child, explains that Deirdre's mother was a Scandinavian beauty and her father was a hard living Irish gambler who died in a barroom gunfight, leaving his young widow with child to find work where she could. She found it in a brothel and Deirdre

grew up there protected by her mother who sends her away to a finishing school in New Orleans for a proper upbringing and education.

Blue eyes and golden blond hair she is a ravishing beauty and the object of every man in town, but she gives her heart to no one. She is as intelligent as she is beautiful and following her mother's death from yellow fever, she returns from New Orleans and takes over the operation of the "family business" which thrives under her direction. The conversation then changes to their favorite subject – *men* and mainly the fact that they don't need them, yet they couldn't live without them. Franklin Kaiser enters and asks for Deirdre. Franklin owns a very large and lucrative lumber business in the region. Handsome and in his early forties, he is a very wealthy and eligible widower with no children. He is a member of society and can have any woman in town, but he is in love with Deirdre. After a conversation with the ladies, Deirdre enters. Franklin has come to ask Deirdre to accompany him to the opera. At first, Deirdre resists, citing the scene it would cause for a person of Franklin's status to be seen with someone of her reputation. But after he challenges her by insinuating that maybe she couldn't handle it, she relents and agrees to go with him. Franklin then implores her to let him take her away from her life of running a brothel. She tells him that she has no intentions of leaving her business or her ladies; the only life she's ever known. Growing up without a father, she is bitter towards men and knows how much pain men can cause. Besides, she doesn't need a man anyway. Deep inside, however, she thinks about the security of having a loving husband and family. Franklin bumps into Zeke as he is leaving and Zeke is entering. They exchange pleasantries, neither one knowing of the other's affection toward Deirdre. Zeke is also in love with Deirdre and she seems equally infatuated with the handsome young man. He tells her that he doesn't care what she does or how she lives her life. He finds her perfect in every way. They leave the parlor together.

## ACT II

The dock workers are complaining about the heat and are looking forward to the end of the day when they can take a swim in the bay to cool off. The fishermen are talking about the day's catch and the conversation turns to the dangers of their occupations, from falling off the ship and being lost at sea to the squalls and storms that rise up without warning. Then they begin to reminisce about the great storms that have hit the shores in the past. It seems that this may just be the calm before the storm. There is talk of a storm brewing out in the gulf.

A group of society ladies and men are in the lobby of the Pensacola Opera House discussing how the town has grown over the last few years into quite a nice little city boasting street lights and a venue where Broadway stars such as Maude Adams can perform when Franklin arrives accompanied by none other than Deirdre Dunn. They are shocked that a man of such stature would consort with this woman of the night, especially in public. They begin to question, who does she think *she* is? Deirdre is aware of the stares and hushed conversation but is secure in knowing that these women are no match for her wit and stunning beauty. The society men are rather amused by the entire scene.

They enter the theatre. Later in the evening, after the show has ended, someone mentions that a storm may be brewing out in the gulf. The group leaves.

The ladies of the *Rising Sun* are talking about the rumors concerning a storm when Franklin and Deirdre arrive. Franklin once again, implores Deirdre to let him take her away and show her the fine life he can provide. While they talk, the ladies observe that he is getting nowhere fast and begin to question, who does he think *he* is? Zeke enters as Franklin is leaving. They exchange pleasantries, still unaware of each other's involvement with Deirdre and discuss briefly the rumors of the storm in the gulf and the need to be prepared. After Franklin leaves, Zeke tells Deirdre about the possible storm approaching and once again reminds her that to him, she is perfect in every way. After telling him that there is a matter she'd like to discuss with him, but it can wait, Deirdre and Zeke leave the parlor together.

The storm has arrived. It is late afternoon and the wind is ferocious. Zeke and Adam are in the office when word arrives of a family stranded on the point. Zeke decides to attempt a rescue and leaves the office with Adam.

It is the day after the storm and the *Rising Sun* is in ruins. The ladies are all accounted for and Deirdre talks about what needs to be done to rebuild their lives and help others in the community. Adam arrives and tells the story of how Zeke was thrust overboard by a huge wave after rescuing the family on the point. He hasn't been found. Deirdre is overwhelmed with grief and wonders what to do. All is lost. Living in this beautiful area has its costs. Franklin arrives to see how Deirdre and her business fared the storm. He offers her anything she needs, including rebuilding her business. She tells him that he doesn't know her and that he should leave and never come back again. She also tells him that she is carrying a child and it's not his. Franklin asks about the father, but Deirdre, offering no details, tells him only that the father is gone and will never come back again. Franklin tells Deirdre that he loves her and he doesn't care about her situation, he wants to take care of her. He has had a change of heart in his feeling towards Deirdre, and now like Zeke, he doesn't care that she is the owner of a brothel and he tells her that she's perfect in every way.

We return to 1925, and Deirdre and James are in the cemetery standing near Franklin's grave. Deirdre is praising the man she has just buried for being such a loving husband to her and a wonderful father to her son. James wants to know more about how his mother and father met because of unpleasant rumors that he's heard, but she tells him that there's really nothing to the rumors and not much else to say about the circumstances of their meeting. They were brought together by the storm of 1896, Franklin offered to marry her and she wanted a change. James insists that it's time to be going. She agrees, but doesn't want to say goodbye.