

## Chapter 1

No good deed goes unpunished, the cliché goes, and I can prove it.

My good deed was taking Tita Toledo's SUV to the car wash Friday afternoon, because I had borrowed it to pick up a sail in Miami for my boat, *Fenian Bastard*. Little did I know when I slid my credit card into the computerized slot and chose the expensive, full-service wash, that I would be the cause of unleashing unimaginable violence on the tranquil island of Key West.

A white Escalade waited ahead of me in the narrow building, getting its pre-wash soaking when I pulled up to the entrance of the car wash. I watched the robotic machinery move over the vehicle, wetting it in preparation for the next pass that would bring foamy soapsuds. The mechanized arms returned to the front of the vehicle and then moved again toward the rear, slowly squirting soap, covering the Escalade with suds.

Out by the gas pumps, at the car wash exit, a black four-door SUV stopped and two men got out. They caught my attention when they walked into the narrow car wash holding Uzi pistols in their hands. You can hide the 9mm pistol under a shirt, but in your hand the long, 32-round magazine is an attention grabber. These men were not hiding their weapons. While the car wash apparatus soaped the back of the Escalade, both men shot into its windshield, splintering the glass with spider-webbed holes. The noise from the automated machinery suppressed the Uzis' retorts.

The windows were tinted dark, so I had no way of knowing how many victims were inside the Escalade. The machinery moved toward the front of the vehicle, still spitting soap, and the sudsy, white foam coated the two shooters. They walked,

unconcerned with the suds, to the sides of the vehicle, changed magazines, and continued shooting.

I couldn't back up, because of the car behind me. And that driver couldn't see into the car wash, so he wasn't panicking and trying to escape. I reached into the glove compartment, grabbed my Glock 26, and racked a bullet into the chamber.

A small wall separated the car wash driveway from a side street. With my Glock in hand, I opened the door and hoped to make it over the wall without being shot at. I stepped out and the shooter on the driver's side of the Escalade looked in my direction and yelled. The machinery's noise made it impossible for me to hear if he was yelling at the second shooter or me.

I didn't really care, I wanted to get over the wall. I waved my hand in the air and hoped the driver behind me would see the gun and realize something was wrong. The first shooter, covered in white suds, almost like the marshmallow man in the original "Ghost Busters" movie, turned toward me and raised his Uzi.

The window on Tita's SUV's door shattered. I pushed against the car wash wall to steady myself and shot back. The shooter fell back against the Escalade, dropped the Uzi, and slid down to the wet floor. The second gunman opened the Escalade's passenger door and grabbed something from the front seat. He backed out of the narrow space, shooting wildly toward me, his shots cracking Tita's windshield, as the machinery began its wash cycle with long strips of absorbent material swaying over the vehicle, spreading the soap.

The second shooter jumped into the back seat of the fleeing SUV. No one bothered to check on the man I had shot.

The rinse cycle washed the first shooter clean. I walked forward cautiously, not knowing his condition. When I approached, I knew that he was a Central American Indian. Years ago, I was an active journalist, covering the wars in Central America, and I had met many of these men. They were the descendants of the Aztec and Mayan people of that region, and they were fierce warriors. Most of the Indians I had met were short, with raven black hair, hawked nose, eyes as black as coal and skin long ago burned a reddish clay color, just like the man I had shot.

I kicked the Uzi away and felt for a pulse on his neck. I knew there wouldn't be one because of the two holes in his chest. The car wash rinse had washed the blood and suds away, so the man looked into oblivion with his hard black eyes, clean as he would ever be. Calloused hands seemed to push on the wet ground, as if he were trying to stand.

I stared into the Escalade's shattered side window and saw a large Latin male lying across the bloody seat. There was no one else.

When I got back outside, the car that had been behind me was gone. I put the Glock on the dash and called my friend Richard Dowley, the chief of police.

"You ain't gonna believe this, Richard," I said and heard him sigh.

I am Liam Murphy and picked up the moniker "Mad Mick Murphy" because of the crazy stunts I pulled at college in Boston and my Irish heritage. Today, I am a semi-retired journalist living and sailing in Key West, Florida and this was the beginning of my nightmare.

