

TWO

Richard stopped at the hotel's opened fire-exit door on Fleming. SWAT team members held assault weapons, as they waited on the stairs in the cramped hallway, and listened to the squawking sounds from a communications radio. Tension, mixed with excitement, filled the stairwell and hall; I could see it on their anxious faces. An operation like this rarely happened in Key West, though the county sheriff and city police departments practiced for such contingencies with other state and federal agencies. Chances were good that many of the cops had never been involved in this type of procedure before. The thought didn't increase my confidence in being caught up in the situation.

We stood without talking on the sidewalk; Richard gave me time to stare into the busy fire exit, before he spoke.

"You have anything to tell me, before we go in?"

"Tita and I were leaving Island Books when this all came down." I turned and looked at him. "Up 'till now I never gave much thought to the things Jay said. He was always hinting about being an undercover cop, and no one believed him, but he did know what was going on, on the docks."

"He was our snitch." Richard stared back at me. "And the sheriff's and he led us into this. Now, how much did he brag to you about it?"

"The thing is, when he was talking to me, I wasn't paying attention." I needed to round out the lie, to make my story believable. "I thought of Jay when I was leaving the bookstore, because of the time. I remembered pieces of what he told me when I saw him die."

"His pretending probably got him killed."

"You think it was murder?"

"A jumper usually screams, maybe it's a prayer at the end, I don't know, but you said you heard nothing and you were close."

“Why would the Colombians kill him?”

“We don’t know yet, Mick. It might have been an accident or he might have been dead before he went off the roof.”

“Which means he was helped over the edge.”

A loud command came from within the fire exit and the men inside began running up the stairway. Richard grabbed my arm and kept me on the outside.

“You wait,” he said.

A man stood alone at the bottom of the stairs, an earpiece allowed him to listen quietly to whatever commands came over his radio.

“The sheriff has an undercover agent inside.” Richard let go of my arm. “Do you know Rebecca?”

“Rebecca Connelly?”

“Yeah, we lost contact with her a few minutes before your buddy came off the roof.” He pushed me forward. “Something went wrong.”

“Who’s in the hotel? This is more than a Key West rock cocaine bust.”

“I guess we’ll find out,” he said, as we entered the hallway.

I recognized Capt. Steve Jones from the police department.

“Second floor is secure, Chief.” He nodded to me. “You can go on up.”

Richard went first and Steve followed me. Two officers stood by the open fire door on the second floor and we walked into a hallway crowded with armed men. All the doors along the corridor were opened inward and anxious officers paced.

A tall African-American man, wearing a stenciled DEA jacket and hat, came up to Richard shaking his head.

“No one in her room, Chief,” he mumbled, not happy with what he had to say. His dark-brown eyes were angry. “The room was neat though, so nothing happened in it.”

“Do we know which room the Colombians were in?”

“Yeah, across the hall and it was clean too.”

“We on the roof?”

The man nodded and Richard walked toward the elevator. I followed.

“Now we need to search the entire hotel,” he said to himself, as we entered the elevator.

He pushed the button for the roof.

The old mirrored elevator was small and jerked along slowly.

“It doesn’t look good.” I knew he was talking about Rebecca. “Maybe we’ll find some answers up here.” The elevator stopped and the doors opened onto the large, airy lobby bar, busy with armed officers and a fantastic view of Key West. “Or maybe not.”