

THREE

The view of Key West from the top of Hotel Key West is breathtaking, even on a rainy afternoon, but it wasn't raining and the men and women running around the roof were not interested in the sights. The private banquet room, across from the rooftop bar, held those unfortunate enough to have been enjoying the view when Jay went off the hotel's pinnacle, with or without help. Teams of uniformed police officers and deputy sheriffs interviewed the potential witnesses; those milling around, waiting for their turn to be questioned, gazed out the large windows, but didn't look like they were enjoying themselves or the panorama.

Behind us, the elevator's door closed and I heard the straining sound its cables made as it moved down.

"You wait here," Richard ordered, and went outside.

All the seats around the bar were empty, so I sat at the corner stool. The bartender was in the banquet room; I'm sure he was counting the money this was costing him, in his head. A person could sit at the bar, get a hundred-and-eighty-degree view of the island and the waterfront, and still drink away the afternoon, in air-conditioning and safe from the circus crowds below. There was no better view of the famous Key West sunset; at Mallory Pier, the popular location to watch the sunset, the celebration was all about being in the middle of the circus.

Everyone ignored me, I felt invisible. A walkway circled the roof for spectators to view all sides of the island, but now cops and deputies searched in both directions, but I didn't see Richard or Chance.

I took the small notebook I always carry, from my cargo shorts' pocket, along with a mechanical pencil, and started making notes of what I had seen earlier and what was happening around me; it's a journalist's trait that's been with me since Wally Walworth and the Gilhooley brothers accepted the challenge to make a newspaperman out of me. It would be years before I became a journalist. That was at the old Hearst paper in Boston; the paper is no longer there, and I think I am the lone survivor of the foursome. But, I did learn how to be a newspaperman from them, beginning while I was the weekend office boy in high school; I learned more from the three of them than I ever did in college classes.

Bored, I stood up and was ignored, even by the few cops I knew. Some gave me a nod, others plodded along. I walked to the glass doors, opened them, and walked outside, only to run into Richard and Chance.

"Going somewhere?" Richard grasped my shoulder.

"I thought you were lost." I tried a smile but it was met with a frown. "Alright, I watched all the officers circling the rooftop and got to wondering why. Obviously, you haven't found where Jay went off."

"We found the spot." He looked at the Sheriff.

"So what is everyone looking for?"

"None of your damn business," Chance hissed and walked away.

Richard pushed me away from the doors and backed me up against one of the large outdoor windows.

"Mick, sometimes the less said the better." He ran his hands through his hair.

"Rebecca is missing and Chance doesn't have the time or patience to put up with you."

“They searching all the rooms?” I knew there were almost two-hundred rooms in the hotel.

“The idea was to catch them all, Mick,” Richard mumbled, in frustration.

“So you think they’re still in the hotel?” What I was thinking to myself as I said this was how stupid it was of me to leave my cameras in the Jeep. I should have known better.

“I think they threw Jay off the roof as a diversion.” He was angry. “We were depending on Rebecca to ID ‘em. Without her, they could’ve walked out the back when we evacuated the hotel.”

“If you’re right, Rebecca is still somewhere inside.”

“Yeah. Maybe they didn’t leave and are hiding in one of the rooms with her,” he said without much conviction. “We checked the basement, first floor, and all the rooms on the second floor.”

It was going to be a long operation, but one of their own was missing, and in danger, so it didn’t matter. I looked out across the rooftops of Key West. The springtime sun shined and boats moved across the Gulf of Mexico. Half way down Fleming the sign for Fausto’s sparkled and I thought of the Jimmy Buffett song that mentioned the family-owned market. Buffett didn’t write about this side of Key West.

“What can I do?” I knew Rebecca and thought I might help.

“Get the fuck out of here and let me do my job,” Richard grumbled. “Chance is already pissed because you’re here. When I know something, I’ll call you.” He opened the glass door and we walked to the elevator.

“Richard ...”

“Don’t say anything, Mick, just go.” He pushed the elevator call button. “This is turning into a shit-storm and I don’t need you in the way.”

The elevator door opened and Richard hit the button for the first floor, pushed me in, and walked away.