

Chapter 3

Harpoon Harry's is on Caroline Street, a parking lot away from the city docks of Key West Harbor and an upscale, private marina. The popular eatery serves good portions of tasty food at reasonable prices and is a local favorite. Richard and I ate there regularly though not necessarily together.

Richard sat at the end booth, his back to the wall with his *café con leche*, a mixture of espresso and steamed milk with sugar and a copy of the Key West Citizen spread out on the table. I pushed past those waiting for a seat and sat down across from him.

Ron Leonard the owner brought my *con leche*. "You guys want your regular order?"

"Please Ron," I said and Richard nodded as he finished reading.

"Thank you." Ron wrote the order as he walked away.

I tasted my *con leche* and added one more sugar. "Something interesting?"

Richard slid a manila envelope toward me as he folded the newspaper. "An editorial on what the city commission needs to do this hurricane season." He fixed his glasses on his nose and put the newspaper on the seat. "I'd like to see some of the editors stick around during a hurricane. Maybe help out with the aftermath and then let 'em write the damn editorial."

"You guys tell us to evacuate," I reminded him, "so don't criticize those that listen." I smiled as I took another sip of coffee, knowing most locals didn't evacuate.

The current hurricane season had been busy with five named storms crossing the Atlantic already and the sixth, Hurricane Fred approaching the Bahamas. Most locals in

the Keys kept their TVs tuned to the Weather Channel tracking the storm's movement and watching it grow in intensity. As Fred got closer many would stop by the Grotto at St. Mary Star of Sea and whisper a silent prayer that Key West would be spared a direct hit. So far the prayers seemed to be working since four of the hurricanes tracked up the center of the Atlantic to die and one had hit the Carolina coast as a category two storm.

Sister Louis Gabriel had the Grotto built after the 1921 hurricane devastated Key West. "As long as the grotto stands Key West will never again experience the full brunt of a hurricane," she is quoted as saying at its dedication on May 25, 1922. She is often misquoted as saying "devastating hurricane" in her talk but it doesn't matter to the locals who believe in the power of the Grotto and whisper their silent prayers as hurricanes approach the island. And that includes the atheists.

This season the Florida Keys had escaped even a tropical storm but with Fred the Lower Keys remained in the tracking cone.

I opened the envelope and pulled out a typed copy of the statement I had given to Det. Morales yesterday. Another loose sheet of paper came with it.

"No ID on the shooter." Richard sipped his coffee. "The vic is a Reynoldo Gilberto Santos from Miami."

"Big surprise there." I read the few lines on the loose sheet. It named Reynoldo's CPA firm, his address and business partner's basic information. "Nothing here is familiar," I said and signed the written statement without reading it. "This is good?" I held up the Luis' typed statement and Richard pulled it from my hand.

"Luis wrote it so I am sure it's accurate," he smiled.

Ron brought our breakfasts. Richard had a Denver omelet with a side of beacon and rye toast. I had two eggs over easy, home fries and wheat toast. Richard watched and shook his head in disapproval as I added salt, hot sauce and catsup to the food on my plate.

“The vic’s name or his partner, this Feliciano, they don’t ring any bells?” Richard handed me back my signed statement.

“Nothing, unless he’s José Feliciano the flamingo guitar player.” I scanned the two-page, single-spaced document I had signed.

“You know José Feliciano?” Richard began eating.

“Saw him to TV a few times.” I handed back the document, mixed my eggs and home fries and began to eat. “Like I said yesterday, I was at the wrong place at the wrong time. I’ve got no dog in this fight.”

“That’s good to know.” He raised his empty cup as Ron walked by.

“When can I get my Glock?” I ran a piece of toast through the egg yoke on my plate and ate it.

“You need it because you’re going back to the mainland?” Richard started at me as Ron brought him a new *con leche*.

“Nope, I just don’t want you guys to lose it.”

“Thanks for the confidence,” he mumbled. “Sherlock took it to FDLE for testing, so maybe tomorrow or the next day.”

FDLE, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, is the state’s version of the FBI. Its technology far exceeds anything small Florida communities like Key West could ever afford so it often assists local law enforcement in serious crime investigations. Murder in

Key West is about as serious as it gets. Fortunately, violent deaths on the island are few and far apart. We may only be a three-hour ride from Miami and South Florida, however Key West is a million miles away from the crime that plagues many Florida cities.

I finished my breakfast not realizing that Key West was about to see the beginning of a horrific crime spree that would make hardened Miami cops cringe.

“Thanks for bringing the statement for me to sign.” I left money on the table for the bill, my thank you to Richard as we got up to leave.

“If Luis has more questions you still need to come in,” he said. “He may want you to view the surveillance videos.”

“Yeah,” I answered without enthusiasm. “He can count on me.”

Traffic moved slowly along Caroline Street, it had to be locals driving because we don't rush anywhere. The late morning sun beat down from a blue sky and the temperature was in the low 80s, with promises to go higher. September was off-season due to the heat and being peak hurricane season for the Keys but compared to mainland Florida, Key West had little humidity. The island is not a swamp like most of the state; Key West borders the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico and more often than not has a daily breeze that keeps the humidity bearable even in the summer.

The parking metered spots along Caroline were mostly empty and the city parking lot across from the restaurant had less than a dozen vehicles in it.

“What time does Tita get in?” Richard's glasses turned dark as soon as we stepped outside.

“Six o'clock.” My glasses were supposed to go dark in the sun too though I couldn't tell if they did because it didn't affect my vision. “You'll have to deal with her

about the car.” I turned to see my reflection in the door window and my glasses were gradually getting darker.

“Hopefully she’ll have it back on Monday.” He looked around the street checking those that walked by just like a cop. “Have her call me Monday morning.”

“I think she’ll do that without my having to make her,” I laughed. “Me, I’m the one that’s gotta tell her it’s been shot up,” I griped because she loved that SUV. “Where are you parked?”

He pointed toward the city parking lot. “You?”

“I rode my bike.” I walked to the bike rack and bent down to unlock the chain on my bicycle when a long burst of gunfire exploded in the quiet morning, mixed with the sound of shattering glass. I fell to the ground. When I looked up I saw a black SUV speed away.

Richard sat against the restaurant wall bleeding from his left shoulder. The French door windows in the front of the restaurant had shattered from the gunshots and people inside fell to the floor or tried pushing their way out the side entrance. I ran to Richard while looking back over my shoulder, pulled my cell open and punched 911, telling dispatcher what had happened.

“Where the hell did that come from?” Richard moaned as he reached out his right hand and had me help him up. He took a handkerchief from his back pocket and pressed it against his shoulder wound. “You call it in?”

“Yeah. What are you doing?”

He turned and walked slowly through the glass door rubble back into the restaurant ignoring my question. Two people who had been paying their bill lay on the

floor, the glass display case in shards and liquor from broken bottles that had been on sale behind the register covered the floor mixed with blood and panic.

Chapter 4

Richard ignored the panic in the room as people picked themselves up off the floor where they had ducked when the shooting started and rushed through the side exit. He knelt slowly to check the couple bleeding by the checkout register and shook his head with an angry expression ironed on his face when he couldn't find a pulse in either of them. He reached out and I helped him up. Broken dishes, shards of window glass that sparkled like diamonds and food scraps were scattered across the floor.

“You need to have that looked at,” I said as we heard the first sirens.

“Let's see if anyone else is hurt.” He continued to ignore my concern and walked to the center of the empty restaurant as blood trickled down his arm.

A man in a gaudy Hawaiian shirt and pressed shorts stood over a woman wearing a colorful summer dress at the booth closest to the front window; her head rested on the table while he spoke calmly and stroked her auburn hair, removing pieces of glass from it. Blood and dishes with half-eaten food covered most of the table. Richard found a pulse in the woman's neck.

“Get a paramedic to her,” he ordered and I assumed it was meant for me since the man was obviously in shock and unaware of us. Summer tourists.

The other booths were empty, half-eaten eggs and grits and toast and unfinished cups of coffee spilled across the tabletops. Ron Leonard came out from the kitchen, his thin face expressionless. He stared at the disaster but said nothing understandable. He sat on a stool and mumbled to himself. All the glass doors that made up the front of the restaurant were shattered. People began to gather on the side street gawking at the scene.

Richard leaned against a stool at the counter and nodded to Ron.

“He was no marksman, he was shooting wild.” Richard thought aloud and I figured it kept him from thinking of his own condition. “Why?” He looked coldly at me. “Where you the target?” He turned and looked at the two bodies on the floor. “Or where they?”

We had both seen the black SUV and made the assumption it was the shooter from the car wash.

“Richard I have no connection to the bodies at the car wash.”

“Unless we can connect those two to the shooter,” he looked at the bodies, “my guess is he thinks you can I.D. him.” He tried to repress a moan but the pain showed on his face. “Why would he think that if you didn’t know him?” He closed his eyes. “This can’t be two different shooters.”

“Over here,” I yelled as Harry Sawyer a fire fighter-paramedic came into the room.

He looked at the two bodies on the floor, saw Richard and came to him.

“Not me,” Richard yelled and pointed at the table, “the woman.”

Craig Fraga another fire fighter-paramedic came in and checked the two bodies, found no pulse and joined Harry shaking his head as he passed Richard.

Two police cars stopped out front, their lights flashing. The officers ran in saw their chief and stopped. An ambulance parked in the middle of the street and the man and woman that got out had been leaving the restaurant earlier when I had arrived. One of the police officers tried to find a pulse on the dead couple, stepping around the puddle of blood.

The paramedics rushed in carrying their medical bag and one checked the two bodies on the floor, moving the cop out of the way while the other took over the care of the injured woman. The man with her muttered to himself as the medical team prepared to put her on a gurney. Harry Sawyer came to Richard cut away his bloody sleeve and applied bandages. Satisfied the couple was dead the paramedic went to the table with the injured woman.

“You need to go to the hospital, Chief,” Harry said applying pressure to the wound.

“Jesus, don’t say that in front of Murphy,” he sighed in pain. “Now the asshole will think he’s a doctor.”

“Why’s that?” Harry added another bandage in an attempt to slow the bleeding.

“He told me it needed to be looked at,” he sighed gritting his teeth.

“Lucky guess,” Harry laughed. “But he’s right.”

“What the hell happened Chief?” Det. Luis Morales came out of nowhere and stood next to Harry.

“Hell if I know.” Richard sat on the stool and looked at the destroyed windows. “I came in for breakfast.”

A second ambulance parked in the street and two paramedics ran into the restaurant. One of the cops waved them off stopping at the two bodies and pointed toward Richard.

“Morning Chief,” Bunny said with a smile, holding her medical bag.

She was all of five-foot-four and involved with so many community events on the island that most everyone knew her and they all called her Bunny, I doubt anyone knew

why or what her real name was. She was cute in a pixie way with shoulder length brown hair and pale blue eyes.

“Maybe it is for you Bunny.”

“He needs to take a ride,” Harry said.

“You want a gurney?” Bunny knew Richard would argue.

“Give me a minute and I’ll go with you,” he said surprising me. “Luis the shooter was in a black SUV. I couldn’t read the plate.”

Bunny checked the bandage Harry had applied to Richard’s shoulder.

“The guy from yesterday,” Luis finished Richard’s sentence.

“Be my guess,” he winced and both Richard and Luis looked at me. “Have Sherlock check the shell casings with those from the car wash. And, I.D. these two and see if there’s any connection with Santos.” He pointed to the bodies on the floor.

The first group of paramedics rolled the injured woman out and a cop helped her companion to the ambulance. One of the paramedics shook his head as he passed Richard.

“Jesus, help us.” Richard placed his large hand on my shoulder. “Walk out with me.” He stood carefully and we walked slowly out of Harpoon Harry’s with his armed draped over my shoulder.

Bunny was right behind us.

“My siren is better than yours,” Bunny said.

“Bunny everything of yours is better than mine,” he said between deep breaths and got into the ambulance. “Pick me up at the hospital Mick.”

“What are you in to?” Luis’ tone demanded an answer.

The ambulance sped off, its siren wailing. I hadn't even heard the first ambulance leave.

"I don't know what's going on Luis." We stood in the middle of Caroline Street surrounded by police cars and a crowd that continued to grow. "I have no connection to the bodies at the car wash or this."

"But the shooter came back to get you," he huffed out the words, frustration carved on his face. "Why?"

"I don't have an answer." I felt as frustrated as he looked. "You need to check out the two victims inside, see if they are connected to the Miami group. You can't focus on me Luis."

"Get in," he ordered and opened the door to his unmarked police car.

