

Five

Padre Thomas had smoked his cigarette when I came out of the restaurant. Most of the curious were gone and people walked along the sidewalk, ignored by the police, who still had the streets closed. The coroner had removed Jay's body, but the damaged car, pulled over to the curb, waited for a wrecker.

We stopped at the corner of Duval and Sweetzer streets, and Padre Thomas lit another cigarette as he stared across the street at Hotel Key West. Even though most of the cops were elsewhere, the coffee shop was busy. Across the way at Excess, the young girls that had giggled at Jay's death were with customers.

"They haven't found the cop." He dropped the smoldering butt into the street and we crossed.

"That deputy's name is Rebecca Connelly and I know her." I took a cigar from my pocket, cut the end off, and lit it. Padre Thomas was making me nervous.

"I'm sorry." He lit another cigarette and kept walking. "I wish I knew more."

"Me, too."

Police continued to turn traffic off Duval onto Eaton Street, where we stopped. He glanced up at St. Paul's Episcopal Church and slowly shook his head. The old church's stained-glass windows were open for the afternoon breeze, and tourists walked in and out. Key West's free-range chickens, two roosters, a half dozen hens and too many chicks pecked at the manicured lawn and tossed up the flowerbeds.

"I need a favor." We crossed with the light. "You know Captain Maybe, right?"

Captain Maybe had to be in his eighties and spent most of his life on the water, the last forty years in Key West. When asked a direct question, especially one that required a yes-or-no

answer, he always replied *maybe, maybe*. He was Captain Maybe when I arrived more than twelve years ago and that is how most people knew him.

“Yeah, I know him. What’s the problem?”

“You remember the kid’s story about the little train that thought it could? *‘I think I can, I think I can,’* it responded when asked if it could make it over the hill.” For a brief moment, he smiled. “That’s Captain Maybe’s story. He was never sure of what he could do, so he always replied, maybe, and now it’s kind of his trademark. Some people think it’s a joke because he’s an old man.”

“A sick old man, I hear.” We were close to the two-hundred block of Duval, and the tourists were everywhere. It was a chamber-of-commerce spring afternoon, with warm sun shining and a clear sky above. Hints of honeysuckle wafted in the breeze.

“Yes, a very sick old man.”

We stopped at the intersection of Duval and Greene streets, in front of Sloppy Joe’s where the crowd inside yelled and laughed as the two comic-musicians on stage strummed their guitars and told off-color jokes. Padre Thomas lit his last cigarette and tossed the empty, wrinkled package into a trash container.

“Do we have a destination, Padre?” I enjoyed my cigar, but the honeysuckle was gone, replaced by the stench of spilt beer, sweat, marijuana and restless excitement.

“Hog’s Breath Saloon.” He crossed Duval Street toward Rick’s Bar and then crossed Greene Street, and we continued along Duval toward the saloon.

“Do we have a purpose?” It was rhetorical, because Padre Thomas always had a purpose.

“Yes, I have to remove a burden from me and give it to you.” He stopped and opened a new pack of Camels. “Captain Maybe has very little time to live and he doesn’t want to die in a hospital. He wants to die at sea.”

“Is it cancer?” I heard months ago that he had gone to Miami for treatment.

“Yes.” He lit the cigarette. “And he has decided against treatment. He feels there is no hope and the treatments will only take away what quality of life he has left.”

“Cancer does that, Padre. I remember my father dying in Boston.” A flash of anger shot through me. “The shitty doctor at the Catholic hospital was about as sympathetic as a Nazi at the death camps. He told my father, in front of all of us, that he was gonna die and could give him something for the pain, but not enough so he could kill himself. I wanted to punch the son of a bitch.”

“I’m sorry, Mick.” He inhaled deeply and let the smoke come out his thin nose. “But the Church wouldn’t allow him to help your father kill himself.”

“My father would never have killed himself.” I bit down on the stub of my cigar. “It was the cold, careless way he said it, the way he treated my father.”

“I’ll pray for your father’s soul.” He looked at me, his eyes too red to show their true color. “And for your forgiveness for the doctor.”

I said nothing, letting the long-ago hate rush through me. We had stopped in front of a T-shirt shop.

“I tried to convince Captain Maybe to go for the treatments.” He dropped the butt onto the sidewalk and stepped on it. “But he has a strange story to tell and I can’t deal with it, not with everything else that is coming down.”

“You lost me there, Padre. What is coming down?”

He took a cigarette from the new package and lit it. I had never seen him chain-smoke like this. Something was eating away at him, and it made me nervous thinking about it.

“The evil, Mick, the evil.” His eyes bulged as he hissed the words. “What is happening at the hotel is part of it.”

We were only yards away from Hog’s Breath Saloon, so I grabbed his arm and we moved on. “Let’s deal with Captain Maybe and then you can tell me about the evil.”

