

May 4, 1995  
2:05 p.m.

### *chapter THREE*

After Seámus left, I carefully placed his old clothes in a hotel laundry bag and tossed it in the trash bin down stairs. There were no hairs in the sink, so Padre Seámus somehow managed to flush his cropped beard and buzzed head hair down the toilet. I was grateful.

At the hotel bar, I talked with the owner, Luis, about the three *matadors* who would fight that weekend. We both considered two to be good, but I knew nothing of the third.

“First year coming north,” Luis said. He was tall and light skinned. Most of his black hair had gone with middle age. His brown eyes darted about as we talked, keeping track of the few afternoon customers. Every year at this time, we began an argument about the *matadors* that continued through the summer. We agreed on some, like today, but not all.

“Last year was his first year as a *matador*. An excellent *novillero*.” He spoke as if he had followed this *matador* as an amateur. “He fought in the south and along the shore. Once in Mexico.” Mexicans refer to Mexico City as Mexico, as New Yorker’s refer to New York City. “So, so reviews,” he said, raising his hand and making half circle motions with it. “We will talk this evening,” he said, excusing himself. He went and sat at a table with two other men.

Thoughts of Seámus and the things he said played around in my head. I pondered story possibilities and felt ashamed of myself for being so selfish, considering what I thought was his paranoid condition. But, kept popping into my thoughts. But, if he wasn’t totally paranoid and what he said held some truth, even half true, what a story.

How hard could it be to cross the border? I’d done it for years and the only annoying prospect was the U.S. Customs delay. That delay was one reason I didn’t cross until Monday mornings. If there were a private police force there looking for him and the others, I could talk with the chief of police and handle that. We could walk right into the American consulate. Maybe not. He could be right about them returning him.

I surprised myself by putting together scenarios of how to get Padre Seámus out of Tijuana with his information. I became excited with the idea of exposing the Salvadoran death squads. Their leader, *Roberto D’Aubuisson*, was long dead and the civil war over, but the true story still had to be told. Political and military decisions in that small country were being decided and the expose could change some minds.

There was an hour left before I had to be at *Tia’s* to meet Seámus. I finished my beer and went to the front for a taxi. The lobby was empty, except for the employees who smiled and wished me good afternoon. I looked around as I got into the taxi and didn’t see anyone sinister. Maybe it was their *siesta* time too.

Good, I thought to myself, stupidly, after I told the driver where to take me, because it was too early for rum and coke.

*Tia's* is the locals name for *Tijuana Tillie's* sidewalk cafe. It was located next to the *Jai Alai* stadium on *Avenida Revolucion* and usually filled with tourists in the afternoon. The large open patio looked out onto the busy street and served Mexican fast food and liquor.

On Thursday afternoon, there were only a scattering of American servicemen, boys really, seated, eating tacos and drinking.

Horse drawn taxis waited out front, on the *avenida*, for some romantic fool. The taxi drivers dosed and the horses looked board. I sat by the railing, close to the sidewalk, from where I could see up and down the busy street. I ordered a beer, just the bottle, no glass and waited. The beer was ice cold, the bottle damp and I sipped. I didn't want to have to order another one.

Seámus stood in the shadows of a restaurant parking lot, half a block up the street. When I noticed him, it was ten past three. He stood there, not moving. I raised the beer bottle in his direction, toasted him silently and drank. He exited the parking lot, looking carefully around, and walked toward 7th Street. He looked into shop windows and then up and down *Avenida Revolucion*. I caught him staring at the tables around me, all empty and then at the few with the servicemen.

Even from this distance, he looked a lot different than he had earlier. He looked like a tourist. Busy Tijuana residents passed by, ignoring him. Street urchins tried to sell him trinkets and Chiclets. When the light changed at the corner, he crossed over.

The weariness was still in his walk. He passed the horses and dosing drivers, passed by me and walked toward the *Jai Alai* entrance. He stopped, stared at the servicemen, and then entered the sidewalk bar from the far end. A waiter said something to him, he shook his head no and pointed toward me. The waiter left and Seámus came, sat down, and forced a tired smile.

"You're okay," I said and realized how wrong I was. He looked exhausted. "Want something to drink?"

"No," he mumbled, scanning the patio. My old hat helped cover his eyes. Something was wrong.

"What's wrong?" I said, nervously. After all my planning, was he going to turn out to be crazy? All a made up story of some burned out, paranoid, priest?

"I made contact," he said to assure me. "First I found a room." He looked at me and then turned his eyes down. "I need to sleep."

"I can tell," I said, trying to hide my anxiousness.

"Two friends did not make it to Texas," he sighed.

"What's that mean?"

"They did not make contact at the border." He looked at me, a grim expression on his tired face. "Two days late means they are dead." He didn't take his eyes away this time. "If they are lucky."

"I'm sorry." I was at a loss for words and my belief was close to being lost.

"Thank you. I cannot get the articles until later. I need you to believe me, Mick," he pleaded. "I might not make it, but what I have, you must get across. I know you think I am insane or whatever and I do not blame you. Humor me, if that is what it takes."

"I believe you, Seámus," I lied and took a drink of beer. "I'm also concerned." "

“Someone will contact you this evening and bring the proof you want.” He scanned the street knowing if they showed up, he couldn’t run. “You will be where? Not your hotel,” he said after a moments thought.

“From here I’m going to *Café Américan*, later I’ll be at *Alfonso’s*. You can find them?” The thought that this was all a hoax, irritated me. I finished my beer.

“Someone will find you,” he said.

“Why not you?” I said and a little frustration came into my tone.

“You still do not believe me,” he sighed.

I looked at him and tried to see the Seámus of old, but found it hard to remember what or who that was. In front of me was a tired, beaten man. Long ago expelled by Rome, if not his brethren within the Jesuit community. This was an important weekend for me, friends from the States and Mexico were to meet here, and it should turn into one hell of a party. Not one you’d want to take a priest to, with, or without Rome’s blessings.

“Padre Seámus,” I began, looked at him, and searched for something I could remember, without success. “I want to. I really do. I want you to have the documents and I want to get you and them, safely across the border to Rockport and home. That’s God’s truth.”

“You know, Mick, it sounds like you have faith about the size of a mustard seed,” he said clearly, almost with a smile.

I smiled back, remembering our duels in Boston and thought that maybe I was seeing a little of the old Seámus. “. . . if you have the faith the size of a mustard seed, you shall say to the mountain, move from here to there, and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.”

“You still remember,” he grinned. “Some things stay with you.” He was stating a fact, not asking a question.

“I remember, Seámus, Sister Patricia Alicette saw to that. What’s more important, do you still believe? A priest is a priest is a priest?”

“Remember once you told me you never left the Church?” He spoke clearly, but sill kept his voice low. He checked the street again, waiting for my answer.

“The Church left me,” I smiled. “I’m still waiting for it to come back for me. Maybe when another Pope John comes around?” I was asking him for an answer.

“Maybe it will pick me up then too?” he smiled his tired smile. “Between us, Mick, maybe we can pull this off? I have run out of options and am quickly losing friends.

“Copies of everything I have are being made for you. But you must understand to make copies of these things is dangerous. People are risking their lives and I do not want anyone of them to be wasting their time . . . *for nothing*,” he said as firmly as he could.

“Believe me, trust me and you will get your proof. If you have a doubt, any kind, say so and you are out. You will not be bothered by me again.” He waited for my answer.

“How do we keep in touch?” I hoped my question assured him.

“We will keep in touch with you.” He hesitated and then said, “They will get to you, Mick. Believe me, they will.”

“The secret government’s police?”

“Yes,” he mumbled. “Be careful with them. Do not lie to them, just be careful what you say.”

“That’s why I can’t contact you?”

“You will have no secrets from these men,” he said again. “What you know, you will tell them.” He sat up, yawned, and ran his fingers through his stubby beard. “Feel naked,” he joked. “Do not watch which way I go,” he said and stood. “For you, Mick, when you are contacted, the person will give you something green. You do not accept it, I will know it is not safe. Okay?”

I looked up at him, standing there, holding the wrought iron chair for strength. I knew there were blue eyes behind his squint.

“Okay,” I answered, wondering what I was agreeing to.

“Something green,” he mumbled with a soft laugh as he walked behind me, out of my vision.