

Chapter Eleven

I heard from Ralph that night. He called about ten o'clock and said, "Judge, Mr. Waldrip is not who he says he is. There really is a Joe Waldrip who is ex-FBI. He retired as Agent-In-Charge of the Denver field office. He lives in San Jose, Costa Rica, now. He was there all last week for certain. Which leads me to the identity of the fake Waldrip.

"His prints belong to Constantine DeMarco. The closest he ever got to the FBI was their top ten most wanted list. I'm not sure what you've got going with him, but I don't like the looks of it. His rap sheet is bad. Dozens of arrests but only two convictions. Those are big ones, however. He was nailed twice for conspiracy to commit murder. Background says he was a contract killer, working out of Detroit. He spent eighteen years in Joliet and was released in 1999. He never reported to his P.O. He just disappeared after that. The only reason I can conjure up for him to be associated with Grant is that the FBI has recruited him for some sort of covert work. Bottom line, old friend, is that I wouldn't trust this guy to feed my dog."

I was not feeling happy. I tried to sound casually interested as I said, "Hmm. Strange stuff. I'm glad I asked you to check on it. Let me give you my home fax number. Could you send me a copy of his sheet and his mug shot?"

"Sure thing, Judge. I'll shoot it out right away. Be careful."

"Thanks. I will. And Ralph, I can't tell you why, at least not now, but I may not see you again for a long, long time."

He paused before responding. "I'll try to make it on visitor's day. Goodbye, friend."

Fifteen minutes later I had a photo not suitable for framing, and a two-page printout of Mr. DeMarco's life story. The picture, while not the best, was that of the man I knew as Joe Waldrip. A bad boy indeed. Now I knew more than Grant thought I would. But what to do about it? I wished I could take Cotter's advice and just back out of the deal. But of course I couldn't. So I would have to use the knowledge to my advantage somehow. And in a perverse way, it was comforting to know a convicted murderer was my backup. I thought I might confront DeMarco at our next meeting. But to what end?

As I sat sipping coffee in my kitchen, it slowly dawned on me that having a contract killer following my every move might lead to a denouement that I had not foreseen. It might be that when I had completed my last assignment for the group, I might become DeMarco's next assignment. Not a pleasant thought. The assassinations I was to complete were more than likely political bombshells. If, for instance, knowledge of them could bring down a government, then getting rid of me would be the prudent thing to do. I was becoming a real worry-wart, but never a dumbass. My knowledge of Demarco's true identity would remain my secret.

Joe Waldrip called me the next morning. "Duncan, it's Joe. Have you had a chance to study that file thoroughly? If so, I figure you might have a question or two."

"Yeah, I do."

"Okay, Let's meet at the Moody Parking Garage on the SMU campus. It's across from Moody Coliseum. I'll be waiting in a green '99 Towncar. Bring the file with you. Be there at one." He hung up without waiting for an answer.

Before I could get out of my chair, the phone rang again. It was Bitsy Wagnall. At 43, She was a childless widow, and a handsome woman at that. She had lost her husband

in a horrendous traffic accident, the result of a drunken driver swerving into Greg Wagnall's lane, killing him instantly. She was clever and a dedicated Republican volunteer. Her fresh beauty made her a gorgeous addition to the North Texas body politic. Perhaps it was the commonality of our backgrounds or our mutual loneliness since the passing of our spouses that had drawn us together. What began as friendly coffee dates had become a semi-courtship on my part and was recognized as such by her. She did nothing to discourage me. In the political milieu of Dallas County, we became an 'item'. Not quite a steady thing, but close. Some time later, when I took up my new vocation, our time together became limited, but more prized. As I became more deeply involved in bringing raw justice to the world, whether it wanted it or not, our time apart caused Bitsy to be increasingly impatient with me. I, of course, had not leveled with her. I couldn't. And my excuses were seen, I'm sure, as the paper-thin sham that they were. I had told her that I traveled as part of my research on a book I was writing. More than once she had hinted that she would like to go with me when I traveled and each time I had weaseled out of it. I tried to stay in touch with her no matter where I was, but she wanted more than phone calls and deep down, so did I. I foolishly told myself, *who knows, perhaps when this business is completed...*

Bitsy said, "Duncan, you're as difficult to get a hold of as money. Where in the world have you been this time?"

I purposely sounded flippant as I said, "Well, Bitsy, m'love, it was Idaho this time."

Her words took on a stiletto-like sharpness. "A fun trip, I presume."

I was glad she could not see my expression. I was in an uncomfortable box of my own construction without an obvious exit. “No, it had to do with research again. And the hell of it is I have to leave right away, this time for New York.”

“Oh, not immediately I hope. I wanted to invite you to go with me to the Dallas Music Hall. They’re playing a revival of *‘Showboat’*.”

I was tempted to take her up on the offer, but I couldn’t. “Bitsy, I can’t think of anything I would rather do, but there’s simply no way. Let me take a rain check and I’ll call you as soon as I’m back in town.”

“If you can’t, you can’t. Do call me.” It was obvious that I had chapped her. I could hear the disappointment in her voice.

I was really beginning to regret my course. “I will, I promise. And thanks for thinking of me. I love *‘Showboat’*. It would have been fun.”

“Yes, it would have been. Goodbye.”

“Bye.”

It might be a year or more before I would be through with my assignments, and returning to Dallas permanently was not going to be probable. My life was getting more screwed up by the day. When I had originally embarked on this crusade against evil and malevolence, it was much as if I had rejoined the military. Now I would again leave hearth and home for a long time. That included the abandonment of friends. Dear friends. If you have comrades you have come to love, you must realize this was for me the bitterest hurt of all. Friendships are a precious thing. We are not born into these relationships. They evolve through experience, supportive behavior, love and trust. That I

discarded this part of the heart of my life is the true test of my devotion. Was it a wise choice? I don't know, but it was the one I made.

When I returned from my first war, from Vietnam, I was met by my parents at the airport and by an ambivalent and sometimes hostile nation. Mom and Dad were overjoyed to have me back all in one piece. Since they could not see inside my head they didn't know that part of me was forever gone, wrested from me in the paddies and elephant grass of 'Nam. Most Americans I met later had little first hand knowledge of the war in which I had been involved. Further, for the most part they didn't want to know about it. That was my homecoming. There would be no such return this time. A different war with no publicity. Me against all the bad guys. *Mano a mano*.

I pulled into the Moody Coliseum Garage at Southern Methodist University thirty minutes early. I wanted to see who might be coming and going and if Joe Waldrip arrived alone. It was hot in the structure. Early September in Dallas is usually warm, but this was unseasonably sweltering. The garage was nearly deserted except for flocks of starlings that fluttered and flittered in and out of the open sides of the building. It was that time on campus between the end of the summer session and the arrival of students for the fall semester. The few cars there probably belonged to coaching staff and folks employed in the gym as support workers. No one came or went while I waited. Twenty minutes after my arrival, Waldrip pulled into the slot next to mine. He signaled me to join him in his Lincoln. He reached back and opened the rear door behind the passenger seat. I got in and said, "Hot as hell. Why don't we go find a nice air-conditioned café?"

"No can do, Duncan. I picked this place because no one will bother us, and because we can see everyone who comes in the garage."

“Okay. So what’s next?”

“Grant seems to think you are a genius at getting next to people before they know what’s going on. He says you’re like a chameleon. Me, I’m not sure about that. But anyway, he says to listen to you and see if you have a plan to take out Mr. Said. Do you?”

“Maybe. I’ve got some questions first. Answer if you can.

“Top of the list, why is Said an officer in a Central American bank? That seems out of the ordinary.”

“The home bank of *El Banco J.G. de Honduras* is a sham organization. It consists of an office in the back of a bodega in Tegucigalpa. The ‘J.G.’ stands for Jorge Guzman. He is *un abogado*, a lawyer. He answers written inquiries, but conducts no business. Of course, there are very few inquiries. The *banco* is chartered by the Honduran government. Said sends a retainer of \$2,000 per month to Guzman. Said operates under the imprimatur of a phony institution. Makes him appear legitimate.”

I asked next, “How does Said stay in contact with the cells in the U.S.?”

“He doesn’t. He is simply the money man. The bank pays the invoices submitted by the terrorists. Everything, including shifting money around, is handled through the mails. No wire transfers for the NSA to pick up on. Said does occasionally visit the Muslim American Society at a mosque in Brooklyn. We don’t have anyone in there so we are not sure who he talks to.”

I said, “Alfred Said enjoys the life of a wealthy American. He has lived here most of his life and can see what a great country this is. He doesn’t seem to be religiously or ideologically driven. Is there a chance he could be turned?”

Waldrip shook his head. “We don’t believe so. Even if we did, it would probably not be worth the trouble. It is much simpler to kill him. That’s what we want done.”

“Have you given any thought to possible unintended consequences? Some of those results might be good, and some not satisfactory at all. Now, what if we knock off Said and he is replaced somewhere else in the system by someone of whom you have no knowledge. Couldn’t this unintended outcome work to your detriment? At least you know what Said is doing. You can use him to your advantage if he is alive.”

Waldrip shook his head in the negative. “Judge, you’ve missed the point. When he dies it will send shock waves throughout the terror network in the U.S. It will do so because we will let them know it was not by some accident that he was killed. They will know it was deliberate and that more is to come.”

I gave that some thought and then said, “Okay, I get it. I am to be your terrorist.”

Waldrip smiled. “Now you’ve got it. What else do you want to know?”

I said, “Tell me what actual terroristic acts have been committed by the people receiving funds from Said. I have to be sure that these individuals are the bastards you say they are.”

“Grant thought you might ask about that. He said if you did to give you this.”

He handed me a manila folder. I looked through it. It proved conclusively that monies from Said had paid for flight lessons for four of the 9/11 hijackers. It also provided strong evidence that Said’s funds had been used to purchase over two tons of high nitrate fertilizer which were sitting as yet unused in a warehouse in Bayonne, New Jersey. There was also convincing substantiation that two weapons bought by members of a radical Islamic mosque in Detroit had been used to murder three police officers.

Altogether, over two dozen instances were listed, many of which had backup verification consisting of either newspaper clippings, FBI files or witness testimony, extracted from court records.

When I finished examining the material, I handed the folder back to Waldrip. “Okay. Thanks.”

Waldrip asked, “What else?”

I said, “That about covers it. Now, I’ve given some thought to how I might meet Mr. Said. Since the bank is a bullshit institution, I can’t go in to open a Christmas account. However, I have one interest in common with him. We both are sailing enthusiasts. I believe I can get next to him by exploiting that.”

“Go on. That sounds like a plan.”

I spent the next thirty minutes detailing my strategy. Joe took notes on a yellow pad as I talked. I could tell that Joe was becoming enthused. It was also evident to me that he was a journeyman and not an architect. I was going to get little or no help in devising schemes. That was going to be left to me. He would supply the materials and personnel I would require to be able to pull them off.

When I was through, he said, “Duncan, I believe this will work. I’ll have everything you need. I’ll call when it’s ready.”

“We need to move fairly quickly. There are only a few months left in the New York sailing season.”

He said, “I’m on it. It’ll take about a week. You will have a new identity, complete with passport, birth certificate, Army DD214 and everything else a man might accumulate in a lifetime.” He handed me an envelope. “This is expense money to get you

started. Don't go to Vegas." He started to laugh at his own joke, but endured a small coughing fit instead.

I opened the door of the car and got out. Joe drove slowly out of the garage. I got into my car and turned on the air conditioner. The starlings had left two milky deposits on my windshield. If this was an omen, it was not a pretty one. The ball was rolling, and I was feeling the old excitement forming in my gut. Or maybe it was the chili I had had for lunch.

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