

Chapter Fifty-three

I found their last three copies of *Up Country* within minutes of entering Barnes and Noble. The checkout clerk commented that I must be a real fan of Nelson DeMille. I said, "Isn't everyone?"

On the way out to my rental car, I called Grant who in turn alerted Kane. My next stop was my bank. I talked with Walter Gottfried, the man I had dealt with there for the last ten years. The first thing I asked him to check on was the half million deposit from Grant's group. That amount had been deposited overnight from a corporation called Elimination, Incorporated. Not very damned subtle. I gave Walter specific instructions regarding closing my accounts and converting my certificates of deposit to cash. I gave him the routing instructions to the bank in the Caymans. He promised to clean out the accounts before the day was over. He was the consummate banker and even though he must have been eaten up with curiosity, he didn't ask any questions. And I didn't offer any explanation. By nightfall, a tad over three million would be on its way.

We were all back in the hotel room by ten-thirty. By eleven-thirty, we had deciphered enough to realize that something damned bad was about to take place in two days in North Carolina.

I had ordered coffee from room service. As I poured for the three of us, Grant slapped closed his copy of the book and said, "I think that Sunny Point is a red herring, either deliberate or not. I am almost positive they intend to do something on Bald head Island. I don't have a clue as to why they picked that place. I've never even heard of it. On the map it's just across the Cape Fear River from Southport. Let's check it out."

Grant Googled Bald Head Island and a wealth of information came over the ether. Grant read, "On Thanksgiving Day, Bald Head Island will play host to several thousand visitors at the the First Annual Bald Head Island Fish Fry Festival."

He looked at me with an unspoken question on his face. I looked at Kane the same way. Kane asked, "Do you have to be bald to go there?"

I couldn't help grinning as I shook my head. "Able, I had a pal with a sense of humor like yours when I was in the army. Off the wall about half the time."

Able asked, "Yeah? What's he doing now?"

"Nothing. He's still there. We never found enough of him to ship home."

"And the moral of the story is?"

"No moral. Just a comment. I always thought that Jack let his good nature distract him at times when the circumstances were deadly serious. I wouldn't want you to change, except that you might be a bit more focused, at least when my welfare depends on you being on the ball."

"Good advice, I guess. Not much different from the guidance I used to get from my mom. *Now, you be serious, boy, you hear me?* I'm working on not being a total wise ass."

"Your mom is the best friend you will ever have, Buddy. It would be a hell of a good idea if you concentrate on what she told you. And I mean, really think hard about it."

Kane contemplated his folded hands. He was indeed thinking hard about it.

I knew I had probably come across as slightly chicken shit and domineering, but I wanted Kane to concentrate. Hard, and a lot.

Grant dragged us back to the subject at hand when he said, "I think you two ought to go there, and the quicker, the better. I'll get you into the Wilmington International Airport on a flight this afternoon. Wilmington is only about forty miles from Southport. I'll put you aboard with Air Marshal's credentials. You'll be able to carry a small arsenal on board without any hassle. But this is strictly voluntary. Do I see any raised hands?"

In spite of the old military maxim that I had always lived by in 'Nam, never to volunteer for anything, I raised my hand, as did Kane. He glanced at me and said, "This doesn't say much for our I.Q.'s, does it?"

I said, "There you go again. And no, I guess it doesn't."

Our meeting was interrupted by the telephone. Grant answered. His usually serious face took on the hint of a smile. When he hung up he said, "That was a friend. He just got word that Seyed Mahmood has eaten his gun. You guys have knocked over a big domino."

I observed, "My, my, isn't that too damned bad. Since the Koran forbids suicide which does not lead to martyrdom, it is fair to assume that Seyed Mahmood missed the boat to paradise when he pulled the trigger. And now pity his personal allotment of the virgin population in the after life who must forever get by with no Mahmood lovin'. For their sake, let's hope they're all lesbians."

Kane said through his laughter, "Judge, now who's being funny?"

Grant said, single mindedly as usual, "Yeah, good one, Judge, but I've got one last thing. At the airport, I'm going to give each of you a pair of binoculars and confiscated MAC10 .45 caliber submachine guns with three loaded 32-round magazines. I don't know what the terrorists will be packing, but it can't be any better than what you

will have. And remember, no warning shots. If you find them, kill them before they know what's going on."

Kane smiled again. "Just your style, Judge."

I answered without a smile. "Don't get in my way."

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