

CHAPTER 22

Cindy did her best inside the station. She'd stuck to Rocky's script, but unfortunately, she monotoned her way through their statements and the filing of the restraining order with all the inflection of a third-grade Christmas play.

So Henry wasn't surprised to see Hansen in his rearview, tailing them in a '87 Ford F-150 pickup as they drove south on the I-5.

He stayed calm, though. Rocky had foreseen this possibility.

They'd told the detective, that as soon as they left the station, they were on their way to Rosarita Beach Hotel, a short drive southwest of Tijuana. They told him they planned to elope and then head further south for their honeymoon, camping on a secluded stretch of beach in the

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back of his flower-power-painted VW van. As long as he kept driving toward the border, he wouldn't give Hansen any reason to doubt their story. Or probable cause to arrest him.

Henry admired Hansen's persistence.

The detective followed them south past Old Town and the historic homes in Mission Hills.

He followed them past the airport, adjacent to downtown, through the S-curve, and past the exit for the Coronado bridge.

And he kept right on following them until National City and Chula Vista were behind them and the San Ysidro border crossing lay just a few miles ahead.

With a badge that was useless in Mexico.

No doubt carrying a firearm that could land him in Mexican jail.

Satisfied that Rocky had anticipated and planned for every possible contingency, Henry turned his attention to Cindy. He couldn't stay angry with her if he tried. And even if she'd cheated on him with one of Mercy's 'success stories,' the torture she'd endured on the boat was punishment enough. It was time to put this bump in the road behind them and move forward with their relationship.

"Cindy, why don't you talk to me. Please. I swear to you, I had nothing to do with those men hurting you. I would have gladly traded places." Successively bigger lies, Henry knew, but exactly the kind of thing a man in his position might be expected to say.

Cindy stared ahead. Mute. Soulless.

"Please Cindy? One word? Something so I know you're alright."

He couldn't take her silence personally. She must be suffering from shock—pun intended—and that brought a smile to his face, as well as a measure of pride in his ability to amuse himself amidst such trying circumstances. He would try connecting with her again in another mile or two. Right now, he needed to focus on carrying out their instructions to the high standard of precision Rocky demanded of them.

Henry signaled and took the exit marked: “CAMINO DE LA PLAZA. LAST USA EXIT AND PARKING.” Detective Hansen did likewise, from what Henry considered to be an almost arrogant distance of two car lengths back. Ordinarily, he would make a show of spotting Hansen's tail. He hated it when people acted like he was stupid, and rarely missed an opportunity to correct their impression. But Rocky had made it clear he was to show absolutely no sign whatsoever if he discovered a tail, and Henry wasn't about to agitate the man again.

At the bottom of the off-ramp he waited until the light turned green and drove straight through the intersection onto a dead-end street. Hansen did the same, right on their back bumper now.

More than persistent. The detective was stubborn.

He had to be puzzling over that maneuver, because the only available option on this road was short-term paid parking. It would have made more sense to the detective if they'd have turned right, in the direction of gas stations and restrooms and supplemental car insurance vendors. That would have jived better with their statement.

Henry turned right into the lot and took the first available space. So did Hansen, only he found a spot as far from his van as possible, back in the corner of the lot. For the sake of discretion, Henry mused.

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He turned his attention once more to Cindy. “You still giving me the silent treatment sweet stuff?”

She didn’t even blink.

Guess so. “Well, it’s time to get out. We’ll walk the rest of the way.”

Rocky had given them an address a short distance from the border crossing in downtown TJ where they would rendezvous with the two thugs from the boat. They would take over the operation from there. It would be interesting to see how they handled the detective’s presence if he continued to follow them into Mexico on foot.

‘Interesting,’ it turned out, wasn’t the right word.

Detective Hansen’s end was nothing short of horrifying.