

## Chapter 15

*Is this guy that dumb or is he that smart?*

Ted looked again at the papers in his hand. *Oh well, better report this to Cat.*

He got up from his desk and walked to Catrina's office. "Cat, I've got some good stuff for you," he said.

Catrina looked up from her computer monitor. "C'mon in. Whatcha got?"

Ted surveyed Catrina's office. Her old battered desk, the beat up lawyer's book case, the garage sale table and mismatched chairs. He was once again grateful for Jeff's good taste. He was surprised that Catrina hadn't taken Jeff's office for herself.

"This is on the Randall case. I've been doing some digging. I can't decide whether Randall's really smart or really dumb."

Catrina swung her monitor out of her way. "Sit down." She motioned to Ted. "What're you talking about?"

"Well, I've hacked into Randall's bank records. There's no activity on any of his charge cards since he went missing. There are no airline tickets in his name."

"That doesn't mean anything," Cat said. "If it were me, I'd have another identity set up. Have charge cards in my new name."

"Could be. But I found a bank account in Randall's name in Puerto Rico. Why would this guy be putting money away in PR?"

"Puerto Rico? That doesn't make any sense."

"That's what I thought," Ted said. "Here." He handed her a sheet of paper. "Here's his bank statement. He made three deposits of ninety-nine hundred dollars. Just under the ten thousand dollar

limit for taking cash out of the country. For a total of twenty-nine thousand nine hundred and seventy dollars”

“Less than thirty grand?” Catrina rubbed her right cheek bone with her index finger. “What good would that do him? If he were planning on disappearing, that’s not enough to live on. Has he touched the money since he disappeared?”

“No. But think about it for a minute. If you were really devious and wanted to disappear, to throw the authorities off, you might set up a dummy bank account. Puerto Rico is part of the United States. They have similar banking laws. You can’t hide money there. If you really wanted to hide money, you’d do it in the Cayman Islands or Belize or someplace. But Puerto Rico? It’s almost like he wanted the account to be found.”

Catrina scooted forward in her chair to listen.

“So,” Ted continued. “You set up a dummy account to make the police look for you in Puerto Rico. Then you set up the real numbered account somewhere else. You go there. No one would ever find you.”

“You do have a devious little mind, Mr. Higuera,” Catrina said. “I like it.”

“So, if he did fake his death, we need to be looking elsewhere.”

“Yes,” Catrina agreed. “But where? He could be anywhere in the world. *If* he’s still alive, that is.”

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Clayton Johnson-White’s heart felt like it was going to burst out of his chest. He flew over the Jefferson County International Airport once, to establish that there was no activity on the ground. No one should be there at this time of night, but he had to be sure.

He guided the stolen Cessna out over the bay, then turned back to the airport, flight manual in his lap. He throttled back and let the small plane settle onto a gentle glide path. He entered the pattern on downwind at twelve hundred feet and pulled back slightly on the throttle. The plane continued to sink. He trimmed the plane slightly to give it a nose-up attitude. The airspeed indicator showed that he was slowing down.

He reached for the flaps lever and dropped forty degrees of flaps. The nose of the plane bucked violently up. He had to fight to add enough pressure on the yoke to keep the plane from stalling. He spun the trim wheel until he could fly without the nose tilting up.

He was breathing fast now. His arm pits were soaked. He wiped the sweat off of his forehead and pushed on the left rudder pedal and turned the yoke slightly. The plane turned ninety degrees onto the cross wind leg.

He was descending rapidly. Would he make it to the end of the runway? He crossed over the hill at the east end of the runway and turned onto final. He held his breath.

The plane continued to settle. Closer. Closer. The runway rose up to meet him. He could see the big white numbers two and seven painted on the end of the runway.

At the last minute, he remembered to look at the windsock. It stood out at an angle to the runway in a spotlight. Cross wind. What was he supposed to do in a crosswind? He panicked for an instant, then gulped a breath and grabbed his manual.

The runway rose up. He didn't have time to react. He was there. He pulled back on the yoke. The stall warning horn blared in his ear. The plane dropped onto the runway with a resounding thud. It bounced, then settled down again.

He fought to keep the plane going straight down the runway, but it had a will of its own. It wanted to turn. He jerked at the yoke. Big mistake. The upwind wing rose and a gust caught it.

The plane started to turn off the runway. He stood on the brakes. The plane jumped through the grass at the side of the strip and down a gulley, crashing into a stand of trees.

Clayton was thrown forward in his safety harness, but thankfully it held. He switched off the ignition.

*Better get out of here.*

He reached behind him for his backpack, popped open the door and climbed out.

The plane was a mess. One wing was severed completely from the fuselage. The propeller was bent up like a corkscrew. The front of the plane crunched up.

*Oh well, they say any landing you can walk away from is a good one.*

Clayton didn't walk away. He ran.

Through the trees, down to the road and down the road. Finally, he burned off the adrenaline and started to feel weary. He stopped and bent over, hands on his knees. He'd done it! He'd flown a plane. His escape from Orcas Island was complete.

But the cops weren't that dumb. They'd find the plane in the morning. They'd know he was in Port Townsend. He had to make tracks.

After walking down the road for half an hour, he came to an isolated house. The lights were off. No dogs barked when he approached.

There was an old Ford Fiesta in the driveway. He pulled the small mag light out of his pack and checked the door. Unlocked. People out here in the country rarely locked their doors.

He hotwired the car and was off before anyone took notice.

He left the car in the marina parking lot and went looking for his next mode of transportation.

An old Bayliner Victoria command bridge cruiser was just the ticket. At twenty eight feet, it was small enough for one person to handle, but it was fast and tough enough to cross the Straits.

He broke in, hotwired the Volvo Penta in/out diesel and shoved off.

Daylight found him tied to a float on Camano Island.

No point in letting moss grow under his feet. He was beat, every step a struggle, but he kept going. He found a bicycle leaning up against a marina building and helped himself.

By noon he was safely ensconced in a vacant vacation home. He rummaged through the fridge and cupboards and found bread, peanut butter and jelly. He turned on the TV set and plopped his DVD of *Catch Me if you Can* in the player.

DiCaprio had nothing on him. DiCaprio had imitated an airline pilot, but he hadn't really flown a plane. Clayton had. He was an honest-to-god fuckin' pilot.

He fell asleep halfway through the movie.

When he woke, he showered and found clean clothes in the bedroom. Nice of the owner to be his size. He even had a sense of style. Clayton donned khaki's and a Hawaiian shirt. There was even a cool Panama hat in the closet.

He looked good. This called for a selfie.

He took his time drawing his *Fly Away Bandit* bird on the wall. This time, he added a Cessna 172 to the picture. He took photos of that too. This called for a visit to the Internet.

He sat down at the computer in the corner of the living room and brought up Facebook. He went to his page and posted photos and told about his harrowing escape from Orcas Island.

That should give the bastards something to think about.

But it was getting too hot for him here in Washington. It was time for him to branch out.

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The College Glen neighborhood was an old, established district with middle class homes. Green lawns, tricycles in the front yard and tree houses all spoke of the stable families that lived there. Catrina expected Wally and the Beaver to come around the corner at any minute.

The house on Lake Forrest Park Drive was painted light gray with dark gray shutters. Flowers lined the path from the sidewalk to the front door. The lawn was immaculately manicured.

Josey Randall lived in Sacramento, California. According to court records, she had only been married to Dick for three years; their divorce had been final two years ago. When she answered the doorbell, Catrina was taken by how much like Karen Randall Josey looked. Did Randall go around marrying every tall, good looking blonde he could find?

“Hello, Mrs. Randall. I’m Catrina Flaherty. I’m the private investigator from Seattle that you talked to on the phone the other day”

“Oh, yes. I guess you better come in.” Josey held the door open for Catrina. “I just brewed a fresh pot of coffee. Can I get you a cup?”

Catrina looked around the front room. It was an older home, probably post-war era. Fresh paint and neatly maintained furniture spoke of the care with which the home was loved. “Yes. Please. I take it black.”

“Sit down.” Josey motioned towards a stuffed, flower print covered couch with dark polished legs. “I’ll be right back.”

Catrina checked out the room. A side table under the front window was filled with pictures. A young boy, a boy and girl. Josey and Dick in a wedding pose. Did Randall have children Catrina didn’t know about? Maybe he had a second family Karen didn’t know about. Was it possible he had a third family somewhere? A family that he faked his death to join?

“Here we are.” Josey entered the room with a tray with two china cups, a creamer and a sugar bowl.

“Thanks.” Catrina took a cup. “It smells wonderful.” She took a sip. Phew! Catrina, like so many people in Seattle, considered herself a coffee aficionado. She knew good coffee. This wasn’t it.

“Your house is lovely,” Catrina said. “How long have you lived here?”

“I’ve had this house for twenty years. I bought it with my first husband. He was an electrician. He was killed in a work accident.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“It was a long time ago. His life insurance paid off the house, so I’ve been pretty lucky to stay here. I couldn’t afford to buy it today”

“You have children?” Catrina nodded towards the photos.

“Oh, yes. John and Darlene. They’re from my first marriage.”

““I see.” Catrina took the notebook out of her bag. “Let’s get back to your ex-husband. As I told you, he’s gone missing. I’ve been hired by Dick’s wife to find him.”

“Ex-husband? Dick? Wife? What are you talking about? I’m his wife. Dick and I are separated, but we’ve never divorced. He moved to Vegas, then Seattle for business. He calls me once a month or so, but I don’t see him that often.”

Catrina nearly fell over. Was Randall a polygamist too? “But, you’re legally divorced. I’ve seen the papers.”

“What papers? I never signed anything. Dick never asked me for a divorce.”

“When was the last time you heard from him?”

“It must be a month or so. He said he was having some legal problems up in Seattle. He said his lawyer couldn’t fix it, so he was going to have to take care of it himself.”

“Take care of it himself? Do you know what he meant by that?”

“No. Not really. Dick, he always kind of made his own rules. I’m sure he has a plan to take care of his problems. The bastard. He really filed divorce papers?”

“I’ve seen them. They have your signature on them.”

“Not my signature. This is Karen’s doing. That bitch is capable of anything. That woman is ruthless.”

“Richard, Dick, hasn’t been heard from in over two weeks. His burned out pickup truck was found in the California high desert.”

“Oh!” Josey’s hand went to her mouth. “Is he. . . is he okay?”

“We don’t know. That’s why I’m here. His wife, Karen, hired me to find him.”

“That bitch.”

“You know Karen?”

“Yes, Dick was married to her before me. She made his life a living hell. She’s totally ruthless. She was always after him for alimony. If he was a day late, she’d call him, threaten him.”

Catrina sat forward on the couch. “How would she threaten him?”

“She always said she knew things about him. That she had ways of getting to him.”

“What kind of things?”

“I don’t know.” Josey chewed at her fingernails. “Dick never told me. Whatever she had over him, it must have been pretty bad. He lived in fear of her.”

“Is there anything else you can tell me about her?”

“She’s a hell-bitch. You say she hired you? That she said she was married to him. She’s lying. Dick’s still married to me. He hasn’t been married to her for five years.”

“Have you met Karen?”

“Oh yes. I nearly clawed her eyes out.” Fire flashed in Josey’s eyes.

“I have to ask this, but you did notice the similarity between you and Karen? You could be sisters.”

Josey laughed. “You obviously haven’t met Dick’s ex-wives club yet.”



“Ex-wives club?”

“Yeah, I was his fifth wife. He’s got a type. We’re all tall, leggy with big boobs. Mine are real, but I can’t speak for the others. But we’re really nothing alike. Karen is a hell-bitch, next to her I’m Mother Theresa.”

“So Dick keeps marrying the same type of woman?”

“Yeah, I guess he keeps trading us in for a newer model.”