

Kyle Hendricks worked out of the Columbia PD Metro Region office located on Bull Street. His travel distance to the Capitol Center Building was far shorter than Tommy Marks and he was waiting in the lobby with Linda. Several inches shorter than Tommy's own 6 feet, Kyle tipped the scale at well over 250 pounds. His shiny baldhead was easy to spot. For once, he was without his customary cup of takeout coffee with the Double D's logo imprinted on the outside.

Tommy seen the worried look on Linda's face and took her hand as the three walked off to the side of the lobby near one of the outer windows. Kyle pulled several stapled sheets of papers from his suit coat pocket and handed them to Tommy. Releasing Linda's hand, Tommy accepted the papers and quickly scanned the information.

Linda finally broke her own silence. "Well, what is it. Have they found Armando?"

Tommy shook his head as he continued to read the information. "No. His is missing. They found his identification on a boat rented from a dive shop down near Islamorada in the Keys."

He looked from the papers to Linda. "Where is Kelly now? I only want to go through this once."

Linda stood with her arms crossed beneath her breast. The lobby temperature was too cold and the news that her friend's fiancé might be dead sent new shivers throughout her upper body.

"She is in a meeting with her father discussing our joint project about the restaurant. I had to excuse myself from the same meeting to come down here to meet you."

Tommy placed his right hand on her arm above the elbow. "Okay, lead the way. This is my first time in this new building."

They crossed the large lobby to the stand of eight elevators. She pressed the call button for the elevators serving only the upper floors, and they waited among a group of people for its arrival. When it arrived, they entered the open door.

Most people would think having only one stop until they reached they own floor would be a good thing. However, when you are about to shatter the life of a friend with bad news, the upward flight went by far too quickly.

Linda led the way off the elevator and walked past the receptionist indicating that Tommy and Kyle were with her. She turned down a wide, carpeted hallway smiling at coworkers. All were oblivious of the dire information they would soon relay and shatter a young woman's life.

Near the end of the hallway was a set of heavy wooden doors with a thick shiny brass nameplate for Garner James. Kyle took a quick step forward to open the door.

On the other side, Ruth Tubbs glanced up to see the visitors for the CEO of James & Thornton Construction. The outer office was large enough for two leather sofas setting at a ninety-degree angle to the floor to ceiling windows. The furniture faced each other with a heavy polished oak coffee table in between covered with a nice selection of local and national magazines and newspapers. Linda slowed only briefly to speak with Ruth and to ensure Garner and Kelly were still in his private office.

Linda moved past the secretary and opened the right door to Garner's office. Inside they found the CEO and Kelly James sitting at a conference table capable of seating four on each side. In the massive room, the table consumed only a small portion of the office space.

Garner and Kelly James looked up from the tabletop covered with blueprints, schematics, and several business portfolios filled with their written notes. Both were expecting Linda to be alone, but stopped their conversation when Tommy and Kyle followed in close behind their associate.

Garner and Tommy had met many times before but Kyle was a stranger. Tommy opened the conversation by extending his hand to the older man. "Garner, sorry to meet you again under these circumstances. This is Kyle Hendricks, a friend and a detective on the Columbia Police Department."

Kelly James had risen from her chair along with Garner, but suddenly moaned and sank back down to her chair. Linda hurried to her side.

Garner turned back to his daughter and placed both hands on her shoulders to help ease her worry. Turning his head back towards Tommy, he worked the muscles in his jaws. "I can only assume you have bad news about Armando."

Linda stepped away from Kelly and moved to clear space on the tabletop. "Everybody, please take a seat."

Garner took a chair at the end of the table and held on to his daughter's right hand. Tommy assisted Linda with the chair to the other side of Kelly. He quickly moved around the table to take the chair directly across from the young woman. Kyle squeezed his heavy body into the last chair at the opposite end of the table. He could watch Garner and Kelly's facial expressions and body language from his position. They might be dealing with a tragic death or foul play.

Tommy laid the stapled papers on the tabletop. "We have news from Florida. I will not kid you. It is bad, but perhaps we still have hope. Do you know where Islamorada is located in the Florida Keys?"

Garner was quick to answer. "Yes, Kelly and I both have traveled several times in the Keys. Islamorada is located south of Key Largo in the upper portion of the Keys, but stretched over four or five of the actual keys."

Tommy nodded. "That's correct. We received notice from the Monroe County Sheriff's department. The Coast Guard responded on Thursday morning from the owner of the Islamorada Dive Shop in Upper Matecumbe Key. One of their dive boats chartered for a Wednesday afternoon dive was overdue. The owner called the sheriff's department when he came to work on Thursday and found the boat slip was still empty."

James broke in. "I do not understand. How could the owner close up his shop when a boat was still out on the water?"

Tommy never took his eyes away from Garner. "Because the owner's son was on the boat and he was an experienced diver. The son and Armando are both still missing. The Coast Guard found the boat late yesterday in the Gulf of Mexico, miles away from where it was supposed to be.

Armando signed the rental papers and they took a photocopy of his driver's license and credit card. When they found the boat, all the dive equipment was missing, but they found a small duffle bag containing Armando's wallet, watch and other jewelry. They cannot be sure if any of his personal possessions are missing, but nothing on the boat indicates any foul play. They are continuing the search."

Kelly Garner collapsed in Linda Marks arms. Her body shook with heavy sobs.