

Chapter One

Quietly, softly, I lift my body from the bed, trying hard not to disturb my sleeping beauty, Wendy. This is an often occurrence because I don't sleep well. It's been that way a long time. It's still dark outside our condo unit and a few of our resort's lights reflect on the Sea of Cortez. In the master bath I put on a golf shirt, my jeans, sneakers without socks, and make my way to the great room.

So I'm sitting in the great room recliner reading a Nelson DeMille book when I come to a part in the book that grabs my attention, a most sad and somber section. It makes me do a fast slide show in my mind of the bad and good choices in my life, of the bad and good luck, of the friends and bad characters who have entered my life – some still around and some long gone.

Lately it's been bothering me, this aging thing. The older I get the more of my past comes back to me, haunts and mystifies me. Being a product of the old south, guilt can weigh heavily...and, yeah, I know it's a huge waste of time. I do get a bit tired of people and their easy rejoinders of, 'You can't live in the past. You must live in the present.' Well, gee whiz! I get that, and I hate the past interrupting my present. It gets triggered one way or another and it just comes. Don't get me wrong. It's not all that bad, but I do too much self-wallowing... Call it early morning reflecting and blame it on some form of insomnia.

Guess it's natural as one gets older to go back over the follies and fun of life. Define me daffy but part of the fun was chasing the bad guys as a part-time detective, those scum receptors that muck up our days and nights with their hedonistic and downright criminal ways...even found myself too close to some of them – too close in the sense of liking them, believing their bull croppy, thinking maybe they could be better human beings.

Now, again, don't get me wrong! I'm far from Sainthood. I was a lotus eater of the really big kind, drank my booze, loved the ladies – the Willie Nelson and Julio Iglesias way, and presented myself poorly on too many occasions. There was, and, is, some oddity in my makeup. Through some peculiar osmosis, some weighty measuring of my insides, I righted my ship and got back on a good course. My buddies at the Phoenix PD gave me a hard time about my mercurial behavior patterns and still managed to be my friends. We're still in touch now and then. A few have come south of the border to visit me in my retirement.

Hell, I married one of them! Wendy was one of the finest cops with whom to be partnered. She saw me through a heart-tugging divorce and some later affairs before we decided that her love was the only one that really mattered. She is the sanest person I know, and I love her dearly.

Ah, the thoughts of a grown man can sometimes be gagging. Call it southern by-products of mobility and a lot of emotional crap... Enough said.

About to put the book and thoughts away and give sleep another shot on the sofa, there comes a loud sharp crack and a spark of light from outside, followed by more sharp cracks and sparks of light. Having been a sleuth much of my life, it quickly comes to me that those are gun shots my ears are picking up...more like a live war zone.

“Bailey!” the scream comes from the master bedroom and Wendy where big arcadia doors are just next to the king-size bed and close to the sharp cracks and sparks of light I am now hearing.

I get up and run out of the great room to the hall leading to the bedroom when I collide with Wendy. She is crouched over as though ducking gunshots. I pull her quickly to the isolated master bath area and we sit on a long Cantera-tile bench between the sinks and the big Jacuzzi tub.

“What’s going on, Bailey?” her query is uttered with a sad and wrinkled expression. “I was dreaming we were...”

Giving her a warm embrace, I interrupt her: “I’m half afraid to assess what’s happening out there, Wen. My worst fear is that it has something to do with the Cartel business... You stay here for a few moments and let me take a look from the deck.”

“Will it do any good for me to try and talk you out of that?” she asked sweetly.

“None whatsoever, my dear, but I can assure you I will most certainly be careful.”

I give her a peck on the cheek and snake back through the great room and approach the arcadia doors in a crouch.

Nothing can be seen from our condo’s fixed windows because we are on the upper floor of tower four of the five towers and villas that make up the ‘Mar y Sol’ Resort complex. A huge complex with 220 owners, four pools, spas, and swim-up bar/grill, the resort sets on six acres of land by the Sea of Cortez. We have 200

owners in the five tower buildings and 20 owners in the 8 seaside villas and 12 interior villas. 6 villas are on one side of the large green grass campus and 6 on the other, all beautified with 1000 varied palms, the pools, and other amenities, each with its own cobblestone drive. We have owners, full-time and part-time, and we have renters from the states and throughout Mexico.

Our 'Mar y Sol' Home Owners Association had some problems in the past with renters who had not been very well vetted. Even with walled-in security, gates, and guards, it is not impossible to breach safety measures.

One other odd bit of information relating to 'Mar y Sol': somehow or other, I am president of the HOA.

The shots still ring out as I very carefully crouch and slide open the arcadia doors. The noise factor increases considerably. Our sweeping deck has a short stucco wall with wrought iron openings, and I kneel and duck-walk to the short wall next to a wrought iron section.

There is something I find strange, almost in the eerie category. I hear no shouts of pain or protest. There are only the bursts of gunfire and flashes.

When I raise myself for a look-see, the site appears under siege. Much of the shooting is coming from an interior villa, and I can see bodies, some moving, some on the ground, probably dead or dying. To my surprise, on one of the balconies on building 3 to my left, there is a machine gun set-up. The firing that reaches my ears is coming from pistols, semi-automatic rifles, and AK-47s. Clearly there is a presence of Federales and there are criminals with guns, most assuredly members of the cartel.

Stunned by what I am seeing at this early hour of the morning, my post-stunned thoughts are replaced by thoughts of our homeowners and our resort staff. I have to find out more clearly about the health of our people and just what the hell is going on.

I slowly retreat to the inside of our unit, close and lock the arcadia doors, and return to Wendy.

She still sits on the Cantera-bench in the master bath with a look of fear and sadness. I sit next to her and hold her hand. "This is new for us, Wen, but it would appear we are smack in the middle of some kind of drug war situation. My guess is we have cartel members renting one of our villas, and there are Federales all over the grounds. There are some tank-like vehicles and vans on the interior villa roads.

In one instance it appeared that some bad guys were trying to make it out in a van while some others were going over the wall onto 'La Pescada's' grounds."

Wendy starts to say something but I hold up my hand to stop her. "Look, sweetheart, I believe we are perfectly safe here. I believe what we have going on is a Federale 'sting' on some bad guys of the cartel..." I pause, and continue. "Look, I've got to leave the unit for a few minutes to check on our people, the staff, security guards, and others. Don't worry. I will take no unnecessary risks. I will be very careful. It's part of my responsibilities around here. I need to know that our people are okay..." I get up, kiss her on the cheek. "Lock the door after me and only answer when the knocks are two short raps twice in succession. Got it?"

Wendy nods, but still wants to cling to me. She finally realizes what she has known for years. There will be no stopping me. She weakly smiles, nods, and squeezes my hand. Domesticity and a mood-changing bible-belt reject have softened my once intrepid beauty...still, the world must not get her angry.