

No. 1 in the Recipes for Murder Series

PRUDY TAYLOR BOARD

Murder  
a la Carte



A Clyde Colby Mystery



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# Murder A La Carte

*Book One in the **RECIPES FOR MURDER** series*

By

**Prudy Taylor Board**

# Murder A La Carte

A Novel By

**PRUDY TAYLOR BOARD**

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“Murder A La Carte, a fitting title for a book that from the first pages of the prologue pulls mystery fan readers deeper and deeper into the action, leaves romance readers aching and yearning, and avid readers of any genre—even foodaholics, drooling and hungry. The final moments of Prudy Taylor Board’s fast moving mystery novel left me gasping, and mortally afraid for our world as we now know it.”

**VIRGINIA B. ELLIOTT**

Author of *How to Board up Your Kitchen and Cook from a Hammock* and *The Romantic Tomato*  
Former South Florida Television talk show host  
and frequent cooking show guest.

“This book is a non-stop fun ride through mayhem, delectable menu items and some delightfully quirky romance neatly mixed together in a deliciously malicious treat. Don't miss it. Don't even be late.”

**STUART M. KAMINSKY**

Author and former President of  
Mystery Writers of America

# Dedication

For B. M. Foster

# Acknowledgements

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# PROLOGUE

## THE LAST RESORT

He struggled awake, disconcerted by the sensation that the bed was moving. He strained to see, but the dark was impenetrable. *Where was the window?* Rolling over onto his side, he pushed back the sheets and groped toward the nightstand to turn on the light, but recoiled when his hand struck something solid.

A wall. Rough. Gritty. Unfinished concrete.

He sat upright in bed. That wall hadn't been there when he'd gone to sleep. The air in the room was different, too. Stale. And cold. Much colder than when he'd fallen asleep.

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*Was this a dream? Was this a nightmare?*

He touched his face. The familiar wrinkles and furrows were warm, solid, real. *You can't touch or feel in dreams*, he reasoned. Puzzled, he thrust aside the sheet. He turned away from the wall, and with arthritic joints complaining, he tried to get out of the king-sized bed, but collided with a barrier on the opposite side as well.

Another cement wall.

Crawling on his hands and aching knees, in the void dense with darkness, he moved across the broad expanse of the spongy mattress to the foot of the bedstead.

Blocked again.

Panic pumped surges of adrenaline through his body. His heart throbbed and rushed. An icy sweat laced his brow and he shivered. He was trapped in a concrete vault barely large enough to encompass his bed.

*But why? And where am I?*

He struggled to remember. The fear made it difficult to think and reason, but he couldn't give up. Think. The night before he'd consumed a splendid dinner, prime rib, and in addition to three or four Scotches before and during dinner, he'd consumed several Drambuie's after dinner. He'd gone to sleep in his room. He should have known he'd feel this bad in the morning.

*Morning.*

The concept of a new day aroused an incredibly poignant awareness of his life, which he now realized was not a limitless span of time. He had taken the concept so terribly for granted. He envisioned blazing sunshine. Blue skies. Imagined the fragrance of fresh, clean air. The taste of life and freedom.

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*What kind of cage or pen was this? And who would do this to him?* He had enemies, but that was just business. Surely his foes weren't this inhuman.

He pummeled the abrasive surface of the wall with his fists, desperate to make a noise, to attract attention. His knuckles stung and bled. He sucked them to make them stop hurting, acutely aware of the taste of his own warm, salty blood.

Surely this was a joke. An expensive practical joke. A wave of relief followed by anger swept through him. He sank back against the pillows. That damned Sam! It had to be him. Such a prankster. Surely this was one of Sam's jokes. And they would laugh about it later. But not until he had chewed Sam's ass. This stunt pushed the limits, the envelope of friendship and—

A sound shattered the stillness: a hissing.

He pressed his back against the headboard of the bed. *Could there possibly be some kind of snake in this cage?* He held his breath for several moments and listened, concentrating intently, but he sensed no life force other than his own.

The air. There was a subtle change. Oily. *Could air be oily?*

His throat tightened and he clutched his chest. His eyes burned and watered. He grasped his throat with both hands as his esophagus began to spasm. *What was happening? Shit.*

Now he couldn't breathe.

His lungs burned and ached, praying for air. Images of his loved ones crowded his thoughts, but only briefly. As the need for air became desperate, bargains, deals,

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mediations, negotiations swam through his mind. *If God will let me live, I'll—*

A pain ripped across his chest. Gasping for the precious oxygen, he clawed at the cold, unrelenting wall with bloodied fingertips.

*Got to get OUT!*

Striations of pain flooded his body and the need for oxygen burgeoned so rapidly he could no longer think coherently. Like an animal, he raged and tried to scream for help, but didn't have sufficient air in his lungs to manage more than a croak. Although he fiercely battled to inhale, his lungs issued the final indignity, the final betrayal. They ceased to function, failing to draw in the air he so desperately needed. They were dead in his chest. Unmoving. Unresponsive in their final paralysis.

Barely conscious, he listened as his heartbeats, at first reverberating in his ears like a slow, deliberate jackhammer, slowed and faltered.

*My God, he thought, I'm dying...*

His brain succumbed to the nothingness. An eerie silence enveloped the chamber as his bodily functions shut down one by one.

Outside the Florida sun smiled, the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico kissed the sandy beach and a new day began at Far Horizons.

## CHAPTER ONE

### OCTOBER 31—THE FLORIDA EVERGLADES

“If Clyde Colby can’t hack the cooking show, buy out her contract and dump her.” She’d recognized the voice on the phone immediately—the station owner in Philly talking to WTBR’s general manager in Miami. A hundred and twenty-five miles and two and a half hours later, the words still scorched her ears.

*Damn the bastard.* She’d worked too hard, taken too much shit to give up now.

The rain thrummed on the roof of the Bronco, mesh-

ing with the static of the police scanner on the front seat next to her. She glanced out the window ignoring from habit the more routine 10 signals. “Ten-four. All okay. Ten-eighteen. In service.” The Tamiami Trail between Miami and the turn off to Rattlesnake Key was a narrow, antiquated ribbon of asphalt that grazed the edge of the Everglades, twisting through miles of uninhabited swamp—although civilization was eating away at the crusts of the Everglades much as if they were a delectable pizza pie.

Clyde sighed with relief when she drove off US 41 onto the causeway that led to Matecumbe Road, the main highway girding the perimeter of Rattlesnake Key. A small, discreet sign positioned between torturously entangled trunks of two Queen Palms bore the stylized logo of the Far Horizons Resort, assuring her she was headed toward her destination.

“Car One, what’s your ten twenty? Come in, Car One,” the voice on the scanner asked. *Uh oh*, she thought. *Lost your police chief, have you?*

Four or five miles down the road she reached the resort. Maneuvering past a parking lot crammed with BMWs, Mercedes Benzes, Bentleys, Lincolns and Cadillacs, she pulled in front of the entrance, stopping next to a Rattlesnake Key police car. Her instincts as a former police reporter kicked in. *Now why would a police car be here*, she wondered as she turned off the motor. Since there was only one cruiser, the problem couldn’t be serious and she had a hunch she knew Car One’s location.

A quick, stinging gust of rain drenched her as she stepped out of the Bronco even though she was partially

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shielded by the canopy over the resort's entrance. Shoving through the double glass doors, she slogged across the tiled lobby floor, silently cursing her squeaking Nikes. Her favorite shoes and they were ruined. She brushed back damp, unruly chestnut curls that framed her heart-shaped face.

Shifting from one wet foot to the other as she waited in front of the registration desk, she banged the service bell. The sound jangled her nerves and the headache that had lurked behind her eyes all afternoon pounced with all the zest of heartburn after a particularly spicy gazpacho with jalapeno peppers.

"I'm sorry, we have no vacancies," a young, gruff male voice said to her right.

She whirled and choked back a gasp. Confronting her was a creature with the letters "*m a e t h*" scrawled in the putrescent flesh of his forehead. The creature looked at least seven feet tall, but she glanced down and saw that he wore cumbersome shoes with thick, built-up heels and a heavily padded, long-sleeved shirt and trousers. The face and clothes were covered in a plastic substance that glistened like wet clay.

"I'm Clyde Colby," she said, dumping her shoulder bag on the desk. "Of Gourmet Galley. The TV show. We're doing a shoot here." She scrounged through her leather Gucci purse looking for a Tylenol. "Who are you? Frankenstein?"

"Clyde?"

"Clyde," she said, silently cursing her mother for the millionth time.

The creature stepped behind the desk, punched sev-

eral keys on the computer terminal, and studied the screen with the bilious green letters. “Your reservation is for November one. That’s tomorrow.”

Her head ached. Her clothes were sopping and her patience was in its terminal stages. *Okay, you cretinous mud pack*, she thought, but smiled sweetly and said, “I know tomorrow is November first, but you’re expecting me tonight.” Rifling through the contents of her purse, she pulled out a fax bearing the return address and logo of Adkins & Lowry, a Miami public relations firm. She slapped down the letter, pointing to a paragraph, which read, “Your stay at Far Horizons has been confirmed with an arrival date of October 31.”

“According to our records...” He splayed his big hands on the desk and she saw that the nails, although meticulously clean, were bitten. The cuticles were red and gnawed.

Clyde gritted her teeth, but smiled with as much charm as she could muster. “I’d like to see the manager. Please. Now,” she added as the clod stared at her. Finally he nodded and left.

*What a lout.* Clyde studied the lobby as she waited for his return. One entire wall was coral rock with a huge fireplace. On the other walls were larger-than-life murals that depicted scenes from the Everglades: deer bending to drink from a creek, craning their graceful necks to avoid cypress knees that surged up from the water like wooden stalagmites and unaware of a bobcat perched on a tree branch above them, waiting to pounce; glassy-eyed alligators sunning themselves on the banks. Wicker rockers, chaises and Areca palms lent a flavor of the late

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1940s and reminded her of a scene from the classic film noir *Key Largo*. *If Humphrey Bogart were here, he'd know what to do, she thought. Naw, Lauren Bacall. She'd get some action for sure.*

Clyde glanced outside beyond the tiled patio, beyond the sandy beach to the restless water beyond. The Gulf was grouchy today, choppy with rolling waves.

She paced restlessly past a piano bar in the dark corner, also bordered by potted Arecas. Despite everything that had happened, she could hardly wait to get into the kitchen and watch Henri Doucette, the resort's chef. He had a recipe for Acapulco Lime Snapper that, while simple to prepare, reportedly rivaled anything James Beard had ever created.

Sniffing, she detected the odor of charcoal. Someone was cooking on a brazier and it reminded her of the week she'd spent in Haiti shortly before young Papa Doc fled to Paris. She'd been doing a piece on political unrest in the Caribbean for the *Herald's* op-ed pages. Everywhere she'd traveled in Haiti the air had been rife with the scent of charcoal cooking fires.

A flurry of movement.

She half turned in time to see two tanned, muscular blonde men in their late twenties or early thirties step onto the patio. The men glanced around. Seeing no one, they vanished only to reappear a few seconds later. This time they carried an awkward burden wrapped in a white cloth. A design had been painted in bright red on the sides of the cloth. As they grew nearer, Clyde found it difficult to believe what she was seeing. It looked as though they carried a body.

*Couldn't be*, she chastised herself. *You need more rest.*

But as they passed, the cloth jerked back revealing a hand that bounced lifelessly in an eerie rhythm with the strides of the men who carried it. She'd seen her share of bodies, but she'd never conquered that first wave of shock.

From the corridor behind her, she heard men's voices and turned to see the clerk standing next to two men. The heavy-set man wore a police uniform. He was about five-ten with a paunch and black, graying hair. The other man was at least six four with a full head of bushy white hair. Their conversation was punctuated by laughter. The policeman balled his fist and pretended he was going to slug the older man on the chin. The older man ducked, but he was smiling.

She hurried across the lobby. "You," she said to the policeman, "come with me."

Irritated, he asked, "What do you want?"

She grabbed his sleeve. "Two men," she said. "They've got a body."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

The clerk who'd been waiting nearby for a break in their conversation, interrupted. He grasped the taller, white-haired man's arm and nodded toward where she stood. "Father, this is that TV person," he said. "She says we were to expect her tonight. Not tomorrow."

"Listen," she said to the cop, "Two men out there are carrying a body. I saw the blood."

After a pause that lasted two, perhaps three heart-beats, the policeman cocked an eyebrow. "Well, what about it, Horace? Are you doing something with a

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body?” The words were spoken in a serious tone, but the left corner of his rather full mouth twisted upward in a wry, half smile.

The older man looked puzzled, not worried. He stood quietly for a moment. Then the gelid blue eyes widened and a laugh worked its way up from deep in his stomach. “Yah,” he said, pounding the policeman on the arm. “Come. Let me show you.”

He walked toward the patio in strides so long she had trouble keeping up. “Todd,” he called as he slid open the glass doors that led onto the patio. “Raymond. Stop. Come back. And be sure to bring the body.”

By now she had caught up with him, as had the policeman and the clerk. The two blondes responded like soldiers, but wearing the uniform of the resort—khaki shorts and shirts bearing the Far Horizons logo. They about-faced and carried their bloody charge to where she stood.

“Show the lady the body,” Horace ordered and they lowered the sheet and its contents onto the *Salttillo* patio tile. One of the men bent and pulled the sheet back. She stared into a mannequin’s painted blue eyes.

“You see,” Horace pointed to the corpse which looked like a department store dummy, “our body is very dead, but tonight he’ll be the life of the party—the Halloween party, that is. He is the victim for our murder game. A surprise treat for our guests.”

Clyde felt her face grow hot.

The policeman grinned. The two blondes stood expressionless, waiting for instructions. The clerk looked mildly triumphant. “Now Davy, what were you telling

me about this lovely lady?"

The son smiled nervously as he explained who she was and how she thought she had a reservation for this night. Followed by his father, Davy went back inside the lobby and pushed through an old-fashioned wooden gate into the area behind the desk. "She has this letter." He pointed to the crumpled fax lying on the desk.

Beck glanced at the fax. His face grew taut with barely concealed irritation. "Find a room. Take care of it," he snapped. "Do your job." A condescending smile eased his stern features as he turned back to Clyde. "We can always find room for such a lovely guest," he said. "I am Horace Beck." He extended a tanned, leathery hand. "The owner." She gazed into ice blue eyes peering at her from beneath thick, frost-colored brows and a face with the appealing tan of a crusty Beef Wellington. "Unfortunately, we are full. Because of the special Halloween promotion," he added. "But we can certainly find something."

In contrast to his son, Beck was not in costume. He wore khaki slacks and a casual shirt with a pattern of large red hibiscus. His bearing was rigidly erect.

"Thank you," she said as Davy again consulted the computer.

Had she imagined it, she wondered, or had Horace Beck's blue eyes chilled ever so slightly when Davy told him she was with the media? She'd learned over the years that not everyone was thrilled by reporters and cameras. If that was the case with Beck, he was quick. He had collected himself in less time than it would take to shake salt on a rack of lamb.

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“But father,” Davy interjected, “the only room we have is,” he paused and almost whispered, “room nineteen, next to room seventeen.”

But the policeman had approached the desk and he and Beck were chatting and Beck seemed not to hear.

Davy splayed his hands nervously on the countertop. “I don’t know if it’s...suitable,” he said lamely.

“For God’s sake,” Clyde said, her patience exhausted. “I’m soaking wet and I’m tired. It’s suitable.”

Davy glanced apprehensively at Beck who had walked to the front doors with the police chief. “I really shouldn’t. Not without father’s approval.”

Clyde gritted her teeth and grabbed the registration card. She signed her name and under the blank left for the room number, she printed nineteen in huge numbers.

“Horace,” the chief was saying, “Have fun at your party tonight. I’ll catch ya later.”

She couldn’t resist. “Call your office,” she said. “They don’t know your ten-twenty. I picked it up on the police scanner as I drove in.”

The chief, for she could tell by his uniform that he was indeed Car One, looked at her in surprise. “How do you know about ten signals?”

“In a past life, I was a police reporter for the *Miami Herald*.”

He said nothing, but looked toward Beck who shrugged. The cop gave her a half-salute then turned on his heel and left. For a moment she felt lucky to be out of the news business. Getting quotes from cops had been a pain in the ass.

Horace Beck turned his full attention on her again. “Even though we didn’t expect you until tomorrow, we’re delighted you’re here. We are always honored when lovely ladies grace our humble establishment.”

*Bullshit*, Clyde thought. Aloud, she asked, “What about my crew? They’ll arrive tomorrow. You *are* expecting them, aren’t you?”

“We will check, Miss Colby,” he answered coolly, and she suspected he was not accustomed to his charm being rebuffed. “Davy? Check the computer, please.”

Davy nodded and returned to the computer. The keys clattered and he announced, “We have two rooms for them. In the annex.”

“Good.” Smiling pleasantly, Beck asked, “Perhaps you will indulge us and join our Halloween festivities this evening? Having a TV personality would add such luster to our little party.”

*More bullshit.* Clyde shook her head. “Sorry. I’m bushed. And I had a long drive in the rain.”

“But Miss Colby,” the elder Beck persisted, “it would mean so much to our guests. You have quite a following on this coast. And you will see the good use to which we put your corpse.” He smiled again.

She could almost hear the WTBR general manager’s voice in her ear. “*Think public relations, Clyde. To get this show into America’s living rooms, you’re going to have to eat, sleep and drink promotion and public appearances.*”

She said, “I don’t have a costume.”

“I’m sure Grace, my wife, can find you something.”

When his father was out of earshot, Davy reached below the counter for a keycard and pushed the registra-

tion card back toward her. Once she had filled it out, he came from behind the desk to lead her down the hall. "I'll show you to your room. Staff's setting up for the party."

"What are you?" she asked again.

He straightened so that he towered above her. "The *golem*." He paused in the corridor and pulled an oversized, old-fashioned metal key from his pocket. "Wait here a minute." Opening the door to what she could see was a supply closet, he disappeared a few moments then reappeared with towels over his arms. His hands were filled with bars of guest soap, shampoo and conditioner.

The *golem*. She'd heard of it, but couldn't remember what she'd heard. Had to be some kind of a monster.

Immediately adjacent to the closet, Davy paused in front of a door with a small metal plate engraved with the number seventeen. He moved on to the next door, to room nineteen, opened the door and ushered her inside, placed her luggage on the rack, put the towels and soap and other toiletries in the bathroom, checked the air conditioning, drew the draperies and moved to leave. She fumbled in her purse for a tip, but he shook his head.

"Not necessary," he assured her, closing the door carefully as he left.

The headache attacked. She retrieved the Tylenol container from her purse and headed for the bathroom where she swallowed the tablet with a sip of water. Shrugging out of her wet clothes, she left them piled on the floor and toweled off before returning to the bedroom.

The luggage. She knew she really should put her clothes away and get organized. But the queen-sized bed was so inviting. She slipped beneath the covers, luxuriating in the feeling of the crisp, starched sheets against her bare skin. *For a moment*, she told herself. Only long enough for the medication to take hold.

The pain eased and she dozed, dreaming of bloody, dismembered bodies that turned into Barbie dolls wearing red thong bathing suits. It seemed only minutes later that she struggled awake, roused by a rapping on the door. She glanced blearily at her watch. More than an hour had passed.

Half awake, she scrounged through her bag for her robe, donned it and hurried to the door. The woman standing in the hall wore a dirndl skirt and ruffled drawstring blouse—the costume of a peasant. Her blonde hair was pulled back in thick braids. Blue-eyed and apple cheeked, she looked as if she were her early to middle thirties, but Clyde guessed she was in her forties because of the fine lines around her eyes and mouth. She carried a garment bag.

“I’m Grace,” she explained. “Mr. Beck said I should bring you this costume and make sure it’s okay.”

“Please, come in.” Clyde unlatched the guard chain and stepped aside so she could enter.

The woman shook her head. “Oh, no. I’ll just leave this.” Her cheeks grew crimson and she lowered her gaze. Clyde realized the woman was either incredibly shy or frightened and that the color in her cheeks was not rouge, but natural. Clyde nodded and accepted the costume. “I’m sure it’s fine.”

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After Grace left, Clyde realized she had called her husband Mr. Beck. Some marriage, Clyde thought. *Mister Beck*, she decided, *really cracked the whip*. And apparently he didn't have much use for his son either.

*What kind of place was this anyway?*

It took only moments to slip into the fishnet hose and the abbreviated French maid's costume with its mini skirt. The black uniform fit a bit too snugly. There's the *Drambuie mousse*, she mused patting her hips. And there's the *crepes suzette* from lunch last week. She patted an incipient double chin. Better use a darker foundation make up to draw attention away from that area. When she'd finished her makeup, she studied herself in the mirror. Not too bad for thirty-five. Still, given the shelf life of TV anchors, it was just as well she'd moved out of news and into food. She thought of Julia Child, ninety years old and only now slowing down.

Party sounds beckoned as she walked down the narrow corridor a few minutes later. She followed the music onto the patio overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. The afternoon cloudbursts had cleared the atmosphere and the air was fresh. The Gulf was peaceful. In a party mood tonight, she thought. Japanese lanterns were strung around the perimeter of the patio, but their light was pale compared to the full moon. With Creedence Clearwater's version of *Bad Moon Rising* as a backdrop, the area was crowded with gyrating ghouls: red-mouthed vampires in black cloaks, werewolves wearing *faux* fur, the *golem*, even an outdated O. J. Simpson wearing a football costume and brandishing a long, shiny fake knife.

A tall, well-built Popeye in a sailor suit lounged against the railing almost directly across the terrace from her. His arms bulged with padded muscles and a can of spinach dangled from a rope around his neck. His sailor hat was tilted at a rakish angle. *Too bad I'm working*, she thought idly.

Popeye was deep in an animated conversation with the Emperor Nero. A laurel wreath crowned Nero's white hair and his pudgy body was sheathed in a toga. As she watched, a man wearing a periwig and a colonial costume with tiny square glasses perched on his nose joined them. Benjamin Franklin.

At the northern end of the patio, a white-uniformed chef stood behind a row of braziers on which he roasted chunks of meat on skewers. Next to him were tables on which a variety of appetizers had been artfully garnished with sea grape and croton leaves. The traditional entrees such as Rumaki were displayed, but there were also some interesting, innovative canapés. The ice sculpture in the shape of a Tarpon was impressive. She pushed her way through the crowd until she reached the food tables.

"Henri Doucette?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I'm Frode, his assistant," he answered, offering her one of the skewers. "Care to try the specialty of the island?"

"Love to." She took the skewer, carefully biting into one of the small chunks of white meat. Crispy and hot. Mild flavor. It tasted like chicken, but it wasn't. She gave up at last. "What is this?"

He grinned. "I should have warned you. It's rattlesnake."

“Not bad.”

She sampled other appetizers—coconut fried jumbo shrimp, smoked mullet pate served with chopped chives—then sidled through the crowd to the bar festooned with plastic jack-o-lanterns and black cat silhouettes. She ordered a vodka tonic from the bartender who was dressed as Robin Hood. As she waited, Popeye crossed the patio to stand beside her.

“Got any Glenlivet, Sullivan?” he asked.

“For you, Sam? Sure.” The bartender reached beneath the bar. “On the rocks?”

Sam nodded. “One rock. And Nero wants a Manhattan. Makers’ Mark. Up.” He turned to face her, leaning an elbow against the bar. “Recent arrival?”

Clyde sipped her drink. “Are you going to ask me what my sign is?”

“No.” His bone structure was strong and prominent. His black hair was thick and slightly unmanageable. “What’s your name?”

“Clyde Colby. Like the cheese.”

“Clyde. That’s an unusual name for a woman. But I like cheese.”

She felt her face grow warm. “What’s *your* name?”

He extended his hand. “Sam. Sam McKenzie. I have the local sailing school. Can I interest you in lessons?”

She shook his hand. Callused. “No, thanks.”

“Why the look?” When she didn’t answer, he said, “You just wrote me off. The right eyebrow. It nearly soared off your forehead and it said I failed the test.”

She cleared her throat uneasily. “It’s simply that most of the wind jockeys I’ve met are arrogant and

pompous, but then I prefer the power of the horses. I like to get where I'm going." Then, thinking of her image and her less than adequate PR skills, she added lamely, "Of course, there are exceptions to every rule."

He laughed and blew on his fingers as if he had picked up a hot saucepan without a hot pad. "What do you do, Clyde Colby, when you're not putting down wind jockeys?"

She mustered the energy to brighten her smile and explained about the Gourmet Galley.

"Of course. You're quite the celebrity in South Florida. It's that costume. Otherwise I would have recognized you. I get a kick out of the way you *grill* the chefs. But it works. You get more inside information out of them than any other interviewer on TV. So you're going to be here a week?"

She nodded.

"Join us?" he said pleasantly, gesturing to the table where Nero waited. The cleft in his chin deepened when he smiled. "Nero and I like food and people who like food."

"Nero?"

"Arthur Pennington Dunn, the third. I've taken him sailing a few times and we've become friends. Although Nero is CEO of a Fortune 500 company, he's not much for parties so we've been chilling out together."

Without waiting for her answer, he took her hand and led her to their small round table at the edge of the patio. Benjamin Franklin had joined their table. Short, about five-four, with balding gray hair and a weak chin, he said his name was Greg Lanken and Sam whispered

that he was CEO of Lanken Images, a major printing company with branches in ten states. An interesting man in his late fifties, she soon learned Lanken had traveled around the world and could tell wonderful stories of skiing in the Alps and tarpon fishing in the Bahamas where he'd barely escaped having his yacht hijacked. He'd spent six months living on a junk in Hong Kong, had spent several months in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt on an archeological dig, and could tell revoltingly fascinating tales of eating dogs.

Now that she knew Lanken was a printer, she realized his Benjamin Franklin costume was appropriate. "I've chartered the boat for a deep sea fishing trip tomorrow," he said. "There's plenty of room."

"Thanks for the invitation," Sam McKenzie responded quickly, "but I've got lessons scheduled. Now Nero here..."

"...would love to go," Nero agreed. "What time are you booked to leave?"

"Six."

"Sounds good. I'll kick in on the cost," Nero offered, adjusting his toga, which was slipping off his shoulder.

"No way. It's all taken care of."

"Then I'm getting the next round of drinks and dinner tomorrow night."

Lanken said, "Miss Colby, you're included."

"No, thanks. I'm here to work." Finishing her drink, she rose. "Heavy day tomorrow."

Sam McKenzie shoved his chair back and rose, too. "I'll walk you to the lobby."

They made small talk as they walked down the cor-

ridor, but her mind was already on the next day. She was sorry she'd missed Doucette, but he was supposed to be available first thing in the morning. And she wondered which cinematographer Rod the Clod would send. She hoped it wasn't that preppie Mark Sawyer. She'd requested Andy Zabinski, but Rod—

Her thoughts were interrupted as she realized they had reached the lobby and that Sam McKenzie was still talking. She shook his hand, but he wouldn't release hers.

“Are you sure I can't change your mind about sailing with me tomorrow?”

“No, thanks. I told you I have to work.” She pulled her hand free.

“Then we'll have dinner tomorrow night. On my boat. And I'll cook. Now that's an offer you can't refuse.”

“Why can't I?”

“Because if you do, you'll always be curious about the man who had the stones to offer to cook for you, the discerning cooking show host. Besides you'll wonder how good a cook I really am.”

“I don't even know you.”

He straightened and stood as if at attention. “Name's Sam McKenzie. You already know that, of course. I'm forty-three, so if anything should happen between us, you won't be corrupting a minor. I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and went to school there. Served my country as a Marine during Desert Storm and I was a stock broker in Baltimore before moving to Rattlesnake Key. Feel better?”

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When she hesitated, he said, “Tell you what. I’ll invite Penny to join us. As chaperone.”

“It will have to be a very early evening.”

“Great. I’ll pick you and Penny up at seven.”

“Do you always get your way?”

He leaned over and brushed her on the cheek, a light whisper of a kiss. “I try,” he said.

She could feel his eyes on her as she walked down the corridor to her room.

Unlocking the door, she was delighted to see the maid had turned down her bed. She freed herself from the skintight costume, breathing a sigh of deliverance. She shrugged into her nightshirt, battling with herself over whether or not to eat the mint on her pillow. She lost.

Licking her fingers delicately, she slipped between the sheets and turned off the light, hoping this was not going to be one of those nights when she replayed every mistake and every pivotal scene of her life. She closed her eyes and tried to focus on the next day’s shooting, but she kept seeing the expression on Josh’s face.

When her ex-husband had dumped her eight years ago for a much younger check-out clerk from the local Publix, he’d accused her of being too cold and driven to be a good wife. He said he wanted a wife who was “a simpler, less complicated woman.” And then, six months ago, the station manager had dumped Clyde from the six o’clock anchor slot. “You get too involved in your stories,” he’d told her. “You care too much, take too long, lack objectivity.”

He was right. She’d done exactly that. It had started

in part because things at home had been so bad. Josh had been so controlling that she'd used her work as an escape, which had become a habit. It was the one place where she was more or less in charge of her own destiny. But those days were over and the cooking show...what a godsend. She'd loved food and its preparation since she'd been a little girl, and had helped her Dad in the kitchen. Cooking had been his hobby. As a circuit court judge, he'd needed a way to unwind and escape the images of the tragic people who populated his courtroom. The kitchen had been his sanctuary. How wonderful now to make a good living doing something she enjoyed.

The *golem*. Why couldn't she remember the golem?

She groaned and punched the pillow. She was not going to do this to herself. Not tonight. She breathed deeply, forcing herself to empty her mind, to relax until at last she dozed off.



The moon was low in the sky when the muted rumble of a motor somewhere close awakened her the first time. She groped for the travel alarm on the nightstand. The clock's luminous hands indicated 4:00 AM. The sound might have come from either the next room, room seventeen, or the parking lot. At least it didn't last long. Beginning with a grinding start-up burp, it segued into the rhythm of an oiled, smoothly running engine. The entire sequence lasted no more than a minute.

She'd just dozed off when she was aroused again by

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the same barely discernible rumble. Again it lasted no more than a few minutes, and again she looked at the clock. 4:19. Curious and more alert, she sat up and waited, but the sound did not repeat.

The next time she was awakened by thuds and bumps outside her window. *Now what?* Fumbling in the somber, semi-darkness, she clutched the clock. Six-thirty. The light filtering through the Venetian blinds was gray. She hated mornings. Her years on the news side had conditioned her to work afternoons and nights because that's when most news stories broke. Would she ever get used to the early hours?

She straggled from bed and stumbled to the window. Pulling back the draperies, Clyde peered through the slats of the Venetian blind. Two white-clad figures wheeled a stretcher out the double-doors leading from the darkened restaurant.

Rattlesnake Key Emergency Medical Services.

Ambulance attendants.

And their burden was clearly a body with a sheet pulled over the face. A body, not a department store dummy left over from the murder game. And no body bag. But then again, this was a small town. They probably didn't have to deal with many corpses.

As they rolled the gurney along the sidewalk in front of her room, one of the attendants tripped on the white sheet covering the corpse. The cloth fell away revealing the blue, lifeless features of Greg Lanken. He was as dead as Ben Franklin.

An hour or so later when Clyde was on her way to the Gulf for a quick swim, she overheard two waitresses

talking. They were taking a smoke break on the terrace and standing on the other side of a Carissa hedge.

“Another guy bought the farm last night. Heart attack,” the first waitress said.

“Another one? That’s the second in six weeks. What’s going on here? Is this an unhealthy place or what?”

“Beats me,” the first waitress replied. “But if anybody else around here dies, I’m boogying on down the road.”

“Yeah,” the second girl said, “and you’ll have to boogie fast to catch up with me.”

The water was warm even though the breeze was a little brisk and the swells were gentle. It should have been a peaceful, relaxing moment, but it wasn’t. Was something going on at Far Horizons?

## CHAPTER TWO

### NOVEMBER 1

An hour or so later, Clyde sat at one of the tiny wrought-iron, glass-topped tables on the terrace at Far Horizons resort. All traces of the Halloween party had been cleared away. She'd enjoyed a brisk swim and now the sun had risen and was gently toasting her shoulders. The sultry air felt good. She sipped her coffee and nibbled a fresh croissant lathered with butter and sea grape jelly that had been served in seashells.

*Good presentation*, she thought. The peach-colored linen napkins were starched and ironed. The napkin

rings were made from coral and decorated with tiny coquina shells. A nice touch. And using shells as servers, another interesting idea. Even her father, a circuit court judge in Miami, would appreciate the table this resort laid. Big Clyde was a closet chef. He'd even had taken several courses at the *Cordon Bleu* in Paris. She'd lived with him after her parents' divorce and he had taught her to appreciate good food and attractive presentation as well.

Turquoise waves tipped with whitecaps surged toward the resort's pristine beach. To the right, a path meandered through the dunes following the shoreline. The breeze, laced with a hint of brine, played tag with stands of sea oats that fringed the dunes.

*Beautiful.* And she should have been happy as a clam in marinara sauce, but she couldn't erase the image of Greg Lanken's body from her mind. He'd seemed fine the night before. Full of life and enthusiasm. He should be fishing for tarpon at this very moment, not lying on a slab in a mortuary in Rattlesnake Key.

Heart attack? Probably. That's what the waitress had said. Wasn't that what killed most men his age? But why had Davy been so nervous when she'd asked what happened? Simple answer; a death at any resort was bad business. Even worse, this was the second death in six weeks. Of course, he didn't want to discuss it. Still, it was curious. Far Horizons wasn't that large a resort.

As she watched, Todd and Raymond raked the beach. Blond and deeply tanned, today they wore crisp white briefs bearing the Far Horizons blue and peach logo. A sea gull swooped low over the waves while a fat

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brown pelican perched on a piling at the resort's dock. The scene was peaceful until Todd picked up a shell from the beach and pitched it at the awkward bird, driving it away.

A sailboat skimming across the horizon reminded her of Sam McKenzie and their dinner date that evening. It would be interesting to see if his cooking skills matched his guts in offering to cook for her.

She glanced at her watch. 8:00 AM.

Her crew should be arriving from Miami within an hour or so. Time to get to work. She folded and placed the napkin on the table, stood, stretched and inhaled. The air was so clean. What a treat. But it was time to get to work.

On the way to her room, she paused in the lobby, scanning the huge room for possible sites to film. It looked so different in the morning light...cheerful, inviting. But the serenity was disturbed by the sound of angry voices and, as she watched, a blonde woman emerged from one of the offices. She was carrying an armful of fresh cut gladiolus blooms and she was crying. Clyde recognized Grace who began arranging the flowers in tall vases, which she placed on driftwood coffee tables, positioned in front of oversized leather sofas. As she approached, Grace looked up, and wiping her eyes, fixed a nervous smile on her face.

"Was the costume all right?"

"Perfect." She wanted to ask what was wrong and if she could help, but she sensed Grace would be uncomfortable if she pried. And besides, it wasn't any of her business.

“Did you have a nice time at the party?” Grace asked pleasantly, but then turned her head away and Clyde knew she didn’t want to talk.

“Very nice,” Clyde said as she continued toward the elevator. Her reporter’s instinct kicked in and she stopped. “Are you all right?”

The already distressed woman took a deep shuddering breath. Her already pale skin grew even paler. “Oh, yes. Yes! I am fine. Everything is fine,” she insisted as she forced a smile, then her eyes widened in concern. “Please. You must not mention this to Mr. Beck. He would be very displeased.”

Clyde nodded slowly. “I won’t say a word,” she promised as Grace scurried away. *Beck should be upset*, she thought. Because his wife was obviously terrified and very unhappy. She passed the Surfriders cocktail lounge on her way to the elevator. *Open at 11:00 AM* read the gold leaf letters painted on the door.

On the far side of the fireplace near the entrance was the gift shop named Knicks and Knacks. Clyde wandered over and peered through the window. A gray-haired woman with a short, mannish haircut had the cash register open and was transferring cash and coins from a bank bag into the drawer.

The merchandise was typical. The shelves were crowded with out-of-town newspapers, magazines, paperbacks, notions, tanning lotions and sunscreen. One display case contained interesting coral and shell jewelry and the racks of swimsuits, beach coats and casual dresses warranted a closer look when she had time.

Back in her room, Clyde stripped off her bathing suit

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and donned slim-legged jeans and her favorite orange and blue University of Florida Gators tee shirt. Slipping her feet into comfortable moccasins, she pulled the case containing her laptop computer from the closet and placed it on the wicker table near the window overlooking the tennis courts. On the other chair, she stacked her supplies: extra disks, legal pads, 3 x 5 cards, chamber of commerce brochures on the resort and Rattlesnake Key.

Booting up the computer, she started to work. She couldn't write the voiceovers until she'd talked with Doucette and knew what recipes he'd be preparing. However, while a lot would be ad-libbed live on camera, she wanted to get at least a rough draft of an opener and closer scripted.

Time passed quickly. When the telephone jangled, she jumped. Notes slid from her lap; papers scattered on the carpet. Hurrying across the room to the phone on the nightstand, she picked up the receiver.

"May I speak to Dade County's answer to Julia Child, please?" The welcome sound of Andy Zabinski's voice resounded in her ear.

She felt an overwhelming sense of relief. "Zee man! So Rod the Clod came to his senses and sent the best man for the job. I was afraid he'd send that new guy, Mark Sawyer, just to spite me. Where are you?"

She and Andy had worked together for several years. They thought alike. And he was so damned bright that sometimes it scared her. He could make an overflowing trash can look like a piece of art. The other guy Rod had threatened to send was good, but he didn't have Andy's willingness to dive off the deep end—photographically

speaking—to get a shot from a different angle or to try a new concept. Everything would go better now.

“In the lobby.”

“Registered yet?”

“Habitation processing in progress.”

“Enough already. I’ll meet you there in half an hour. We’ll check out the kitchen.”

“By the way,” Andy said, “Dade County’s answer to Judge Wapner called me at the station and left a message for you.”

“What did Dad want?”

“Seems a certain tomcat, the one named Tyler. You know, one of the four that your father’s babysitting while you’re off playing Mizz Important TV Star...”

“Oh, shit. What did Tyler the Terrible do now?”

“Sprayed Big Clyde’s briefcase. It was open. And had important papers in it. While Tyler is still alive and well, I’d worry about his future.

“Is this an FYI or am I expected to return home immediately to discipline Tyler?”

“Just an FYI although you might think of taking old Dad some very expensive single malt scotch as a peace offering. MacAllan would be appropriate.”

“At thirty bucks a shot, I’d think so. You didn’t explain that Tyler was actually expressing his approval of Dad, that Tyler was just staking out his territory?”

Andy cleared his throat. “No, when your father is in that frame of mind, I listen and agree. But I emphasize that something in the way of a reward or expensive gift of appreciation is definitely called for.”

“Got it.”

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Replacing the receiver, she returned to the table and shut down the computer. She ran a brush through her hair, freshened her lipstick and plowed through the piles of papers and notes strewn around the room searching for the room key. She finally found it in her jacket pocket.

*I've got to get a system so I don't spend two-thirds of my life looking for my keys and my purse. Now where's my damn bill-fold?* She found it in the drawer of the bedside table where she'd stowed it the night before. Picking up a notebook from the table, she hurried from the room.

In the corridor, she closed her door just as a uniformed maid emerged from the adjacent room. The maid grabbed the handle of the laundry cart to wheel it down the hallway, almost running into Clyde.

"Watch it," Clyde snapped wishing immediately she could take back the harsh tone. But the feisty tone came naturally. She was the product of two different styles of child rearing and the real world. Her mother, a product of the 1950's, cautioned her to be pleasant and sweet, constantly reminding her men did not like outspoken girls. On the other hand, her father who'd brought her up after the divorce hadn't told her anything, but by his example cut through the crap of every day life, dealing with things head-on. And then, of course, there was the reality of life in the media business.

Management—at least in the Miami market—was ninety-five percent male and treated women, despite the emphasis on political correctness, as if women weren't terribly bright and had to be led to the appropriate conclusions, had to be helped to think. She'd learned early

on that if you didn't stand up and speak out for yourself, you were considered a mushroom—kept in the dark and drowned in bullshit for fertilizer.

The girl whirled quickly, concern registering on her pleasant face. “Oh, I’m so sorry. Did I hurt you?” The maid was slim, a little taller than Clyde, and her hair was a vivid red. She had a tiny, crescent-shaped scar on her chin. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine. You surprised me.” Clyde started toward the lobby then remembered the events of the early morning. “By the way,” she said, turning slowly, “Have you heard whether or not Mr. Lanken’s family has been notified? Are they coming down here?”

The girl’s deep-set eyes looked troubled. She said, “Mr. Beck doesn’t like the help talking about our guests and their business.”

Clyde shrugged. “Thanks anyway.” Bemused, she strode down the hall toward the lobby and her meeting with the chef and Andy, thinking about the conversation she’d had with Lanken the previous evening. He’d been so enthused about his vacation that he’d told her was a birthday present paid for by his twin sons. The sons were officers in the family printing business.

*How sad for them*, she thought. His death made her appreciate the upturn in her own fortunes even more. Never mind that she was under pressure, she had worked her way through the anger, hostility and damaged self esteem resulting from the divorce and even from the demotion from six o’clock anchor. She still hated that airhead Mindy who’d sweet talked herself into the anchor spot. Mindy’s professional background

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was limited to modeling eye makeup for a cosmetics manufacturer in New York, for God's sake. But she'd always wanted to be in TV and now she was.

Clyde had to give her credit. She learned fast. And it didn't hurt that the camera—any camera—loved Mindy's face. From any and every angle. But, Clyde smiled sweetly, Mindy had very fine skin. It would age quickly.

Clyde brightened when she spied Andy beneath the huge mounted silver tarpon that hung, centered, over the registration desk. His long, thinning light brown hair was parted in the middle and drawn back in a ponytail. A day's stubble dusted his cadaverous face. He wore jeans and a white shirt, sleeves rolled up, open at the neck revealing a chest of curly hair. A light meter and a St. Christopher's medal hung around his neck. When he saw her, a grin stretched his wide mouth almost the entire width of his face.

"Hi, Babe," he said, giving her a quick hug. "How ya doing?"

"What's new at the station?"

"You mean since yesterday?"

"Things were sort of edgy when I left. I wasn't sure for a while whether I'd still have a job after the way I left Rod the Clod's office."

"Hey, Kiddo, you're talent. We management types expect a modicum of temperament. However, you didn't have to call him an asshole." He shook his head.

"But I didn't," she protested. "I distinctly remember commenting that he was an outstandingly well-formed anal cavity. That's not the same thing at all."

He smiled, displaying even white teeth. The one front tooth had a slight nick. “What about telling him his ideas were bullshit?”

“Andy, I was definitely misquoted. I said most of his ideas were bovine defecation.”

“Remember, Clyde,” he gestured with his light meter, “Rod’s the new kid on the block. The company didn’t transfer him from our sister station to tell them everything’s in great shape. He’s got to prove himself. But here’s a reassuring bit of office intelligence garnered from an impeccable source at the water cooler. They’re designing a Web site for you. Even hired a hotshot Webmaster. There’s going to be the cutest little animated Clyde cooking up her favorite dishes as a promotion. It’ll feature a new recipe every week—which you have to provide. Now where’s this wondrous kitchen?”

“Why didn’t anybody say anything to me?”

“I told you. You’re talent. They’ll tell you when you need to know.”

As if summoned, Horace Beck emerged from behind the key rack at the desk. “Miss Colby, Mr. Zabinski.” he addressed them. “I hope your accommodations are satisfactory.”

Andy nodded. “Fine, Mr. Beck.”

“I was sorry to have to put you in the annex, Mr. Zabinski, but we are very full. The season begins early. What about your room, Ms. Colby?”

“Noisy.”

The same expression of barely concealed irritation she’d seen earlier reappeared. “Noisy? What room you

are in?”

“Nineteen.”

The expression on his face darkened and Clyde decided she was glad she wasn't Davy.

“Davy put you near the auxiliary generator?” Beck was saying. “I cannot believe he did that. We use it to power our air conditioners when the weather's unusually warm and also if we lose power during a storm. We can solve that problem easily. Davy will move your luggage to the room we had reserved for you while we're in the kitchen with Henri.”

Grace appeared and timidly tugged on her husband's jacket sleeve. He turned.

“Yes, what is it?”

Grace colored, but smiled. “Mr. Beck,” she said, looking up at him from beneath white blonde lashes, “Did you want to talk to that salesman about new uniforms for the maids?”

“I thought you cancelled that appointment. We discussed it and decided now was not the time to buy new uniforms. And I am very busy. I was just talking with Ms. Colby and Mr. Zabriski. We are about to go into the kitchen.”

“Oh, I told him, but the salesman said he needed to talk to you. He said there was a sale.” She looked at Andy and Clyde. “I'm sorry to interrupt.” She glanced back at Beck and started to leave.

“Wait,” he said as she turned to leave, apparently thinking she had been dismissed. “I will talk to him, but first I must arrange with Davy to change Ms. Colby's accommodations. Can you imagine? Davy put our spe-

cial guest in one of the rooms near the generator. What was that boy thinking?”

“But we were full last night, Horace.”

“No excuses. You’re *always* making excuses for that boy. Now go tell the salesman I will be there in a few minutes.” His voice was final. He turned back to Clyde. “I’ll make arrangements with Davy to change your room. Go straight to the dining room. Tell the lady behind the cash register to take you to Henri in the kitchen.”

Moments later as they entered the kitchen, Clyde paused, glanced around, took a deep, deep breath, exhaled and smiled. “I love kitchens.”

Andy walked past her and stood a few steps ahead studying the room. “You better. You’re going to be spending a lot of time in them.”

Commercial kitchens were no-nonsense places. Utilitarian, ugly chambers where beauty resided in the end product—the food—not the process. However, she mused, there could be beauty in the efficiency and symmetry of a cook’s crew that knew what it was doing.

She watched as Andy took the measure of this kitchen. It was a challenge to set up shots so that a kitchen looked interesting, but Andy was terrific. Sometimes, depending on the kitchen, he used mostly close, tight-in shots. Sometimes he photographed the pots and pans and stoves, the rows of metal tables, the hanging racks of spatulas and other kitchen utensils so that their forms and shiny, metallic hues and textures were appealing. This one would be tough because it was small and the natural light source, which was high and off the

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beach, would be difficult to control. She walked over to where he stood. “Wow. Look at that.”

“What?”

“The stove.” She pointed to what looked like a counter with coils under glass. “It’s one of those electronic induction cook tops. Portable. Doucette must be trying it out. These things are hot in Europe, but slow catching on here.”

“Why?”

“Why what? Why are they hot or slow catching on?”

“Hot.”

Clyde smiled. “I’ve only read about them, but they’re hot because they’re not. They won’t even turn on let alone heat up unless the proper pot is placed on them.” She pointed. “Those coils form an electromagnetic field and that agitates iron molecules in the pots to create heat. So you have to have the proper pots, cast iron or steel, to generate heat. After a while, the heat from the pot warms the surface right next to it, but most of the surface remains cool.” She studied the stove, reading the manufacturer’s name. “Molteni. That makes sense.”

“Why? It sounds Greek to me.”

She laughed. “French. And it makes sense since Doucette is a very French chef who’s never deserted his roots.”

“How about his tubers?”

“Enough of the bad jokes already.” She waited a beat or two and asked, “What do you think?”

He shushed her with a hand gesture and paced the perimeter of the room. When he was back at her side, he

said, "We'll make it work. Not to worry. Do you know where you'd like to do the stand-up intro?"

She shook her head. "When you're through here, let's take a look at the terrace. Also there's that gorgeous coral fireplace in the lobby." As they conferred, a short, plump, dark-haired man with a thin, handlebar mustache approached. He looked exactly like the television version of the Belgian detective Hercules Poirot except that he wore a chef's cap and a wrap-around apron.

"I am Henri Doucette," he said with a very pronounced French accent. "And you are Mees Colby? *Oui?*"

"*Oui,*" she responded.

"Shall we get to the work?"

She nodded. "Chef Doucette..."

"Henri, please," he interrupted.

She smiled. "Henri, this is Andy. His job is to make us both look good."

"For me," the chef said patting his ample middle disparagingly, "Mr. Andy, you have cut out your employment." Henri's chocolate brown eyes crinkled and the ends of his mustache twitched. He put his finger alongside his nose. "You know," he said, pretending to be serious, "I am a very, very famous chef. My friends tease, but I am in Larousse's *Gastronomique*."

"Larousse's *Gastronomique*? Henri, that's the culinary bible. I had no idea..."

"Just a leetle mention," he demonstrated by holding his thumb and forefinger about half an inch apart. "If you look under Doucette, you will see that it is another name for corn salad." He burst into laughter, a hearty

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sound that filled the kitchen. “So, with such a name, how could I not have been a chef?”

Andy looked puzzled.

Clyde relaxed. A chef with a sense of humor. What a treat. “Indeed, Henri, you were fated.” She turned to Andy, “Henri was saying you have your work cut out for you,” she explained.

Henri nodded.

“Nothing we can’t handle,” Andy said.

She couldn’t resist asking how he liked the new stove and saw his eyes widen with surprise. “*Mais oui*, I like it, but...” He shrugged, “I don’t know if I would like the entire kitchen dressed with the electronic stove. They have no,” he searched for the word, his eyebrows surging upward while he thought. “Heart,” he said after a pause. “I would miss, how you would say...the sight and sound of the flames kissing the sides of the pots.”

Beck burst through the kitchen doors, impersonal and full of business. He immediately directed the conversation to the menu and after considerable discussion of possible dishes, Clyde felt comfortable with their choices. Henri agreed to a menu featuring Florida’s tropical fruits. *Gasparilla Papaya Soup*, *Avocado en Gelee Salad*, *Acapulco Lime Snapper* and *Calabaza Flan* for dessert\*. The preparation of the dishes would be dramatic and interesting to photograph. The meal would be the last segment of the show and shot in the Far Horizons dining room.

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\* Chef Henri’s delicious recipes can be found in the Appendix to this novel.

She turned to Andy. “Then if Henri agrees, we’ll start shooting in the morning.”

“*Mais oui*,” Henri agreed, nodding enthusiastically to underscore his agreement. “The morning is fine.”

“Yes, we can do that.” Beck interjected his approval, Clyde felt sure, to establish the fact that it was his resort and he was in charge.

“Splendid, gentlemen,” she said. “That will give me time to drive onto the mainland and do some research.”

“Research?” Beck’s thick white eyebrows rose so high they almost touched his hairline. “What research? I can tell you everything you need to know.”

She smiled pleasantly. “I’m sure you mean to be helpful, Mr. Beck, and I appreciate it. But I won’t tell you how to run a resort if you don’t tell me how to do my job.”

Behind her, she heard Andy groan.

Beck’s face folded into a carefully created mask. His voice was chilly, but he merely responded with, “I see.”



After lunch, it was early afternoon before Clyde could get away. The sun was beginning its downward journey as she drove off the island. Once on Rattlesnake Key Causeway, which led to the mainland, her thoughts shifted from her destination to the previous conversation she’d had with Horace Beck. She was still curious why Horace had been so reluctant to appear on camera with her in the final segment.

Actually, reluctant was an understatement. “No,

no,” he’d told her. “No cameras.” His frosty blue eyes and pursed lips radiated stubbornness. He wouldn’t even discuss it.

When she was having dessert a little later—the Calabaza Flan, which Chef Doucette had insisted she try, Grace had joined her for a glass of iced tea. Grace mentioned almost immediately that the PR account exec in Miami had made a mistake, convincing Clyde that Grace was the family peacemaker.

“Mr. Beck’s regular account executive at Adkins & Lowry was on vacation,” she said, toying with her napkin. “Mr. Beck says his substitute was only supposed to take care of the print ads while he was gone. Mr. Beck understands the need for print ads, but he has never liked having people from the media here. Except for travel writers.” She blushed. “Not you. I mean he doesn’t dislike you.”

Her discomfort was so obvious and so painful Clyde suffered for her as Grace took a sip of her tea before adding hurriedly, “It’s nothing personal, Miss Colby. One time a reporter for a major newspaper interviewed him. He was so badly misquoted that he’s avoided the media ever since. The new advertising man didn’t know that when he committed the resort to doing your show. Mr. Beck says he was trying to make himself look good while his boss was out of town.”

“Knowing that helps, Grace. I’ll check everything with him to be sure he’s happy.” Clyde smiled. Grace’s sweetness shone through the shyness. “But there is something you can do for me.”

“What’s that?” Grace had said, flushing again.

“Call me Clyde.”

Grace nodded, but Clyde knew she was asking too much and regretted saying anything.

Later, Clyde realized Grace’s comments still didn’t explain why he was so adamant about not being on camera. Especially since she had offered to give him every question ahead of time so he could even write out his answers if he wished.

As she left the resort after going upstairs to change, she’d seen Grace again, this time at the far side of the terrace. Grace had been staring across the waters of the Gulf and weeping, her shoulders gently shaking. She had dried her tears when Clyde approached, but her red, swollen eyes had given her away.

“What’s wrong, Grace? Is there something I can do to help?” Clyde had asked. “You’re obviously very upset about something—this is the second time today...”

At first, Grace refused to answer, twisting her head from side to side. Her face had flamed scarlet to the roots of her white blonde hair. Even her body language, the way she leaned away from Clyde told of her panic at being caught in such an emotional state.

Looking away from the tortured woman, Clyde said, “This is one of the most splendid views in all of Florida. How fortunate you are to live here, to see this wonderful spectacle every single day of the year.”

Grace had wept again, but not noisily. The tears had spilled quietly. “It is beautiful and I love it here. But...”

“Yes,” Clyde probed gently.

Grace paused and when she continued, the words came in a rush as if she had wanted to say them aloud

for a long time. “But it is not as beautiful as it used to be. Underneath there is much ugliness. If I didn’t love Mr. Beck and Davy so much...”

“What do you mean?”

Grace’s face blanched. She clasped her hands together in her lap so tightly the knuckles were white. “Please, Miss Colby. Please. Don’t tell Mr. Beck I said anything. He gets furious when we discuss anything personal with outsiders. Please, promise you won’t say anything.”

“But you haven’t told me anything,” Clyde started. Then realizing how distraught the woman was, she agreed. “I promise, Grace. I won’t mention what you said to anyone if you don’t want me to.”

“Oh, thank you. Thank you.” Her gratitude was almost embarrassing.

Now as Clyde drove across the causeway, she wondered what was so ugly. Was it Beck? He appeared to be a dominating, condescending macho asshole, but ugly? In doing her research at the Miami Public Library while deciding which restaurants to feature on the show, she’d found an article about Far Horizons published in a travel magazine several years earlier.

In a sidebar, Beck had been profiled as a real comer in the resort business. In a few short years, despite the fact that his background was in engineering and that he’d made his first fortune by inventing a superior stabilizing system still used in all BMWs, he’d taken Far Horizons from a debt-ridden has-been of a motel and turned it into a profitable, world-class resort. The article also described his early years growing up in Argentina

and his move to the United States in 1974. Beck had been quoted as raving about the beauty here and how deeply he loved Rattlesnake Key and the resort.

*What ugliness?*

## CHAPTER THREE

The wheels of the Bronco droned rhythmically as Clyde drove the two-lane concrete span that linked Rattlesnake Key to the mainland. The five-mile causeway had been built in the early 1930's and the lights were strongly influenced by the design of Colonial coach lights. The bridge's concrete side rails resembled the rungs of a staircase. And, in contrast to modern bridges and causeways, its sidewalks were at least five-feet wide. It had been dubbed the "World's Most Fishingest Bridge" because so many locals dropped lines over its

railing catching an impressive variety and quantity of fish.

Ahead, cars slowed and stopped. The drawbridge was stuck in the upright position, jaws agape like a monstrous, metallic maw. As Clyde coasted to a stop, she looked at her watch. One-thirty. She'd gotten a late start and now this. She hadn't scheduled any appointments, but she had planned on getting to the newspaper, the library and maybe the mall.

Clyde waited a few moments then turned off the motor so it wouldn't overheat and got out. A blonde head gleamed in the sun as a driver leaned out the window of a nondescript green Chevy four or five cars back. Was that Todd from Far Horizons? Squinting, she saw that it was and smiled, then waved. To her surprise, he ducked his head back in the car without acknowledging her greeting. *Screw him*. She was about to turn away a few seconds later when he stuck his head out the window and nodded.

The crazy idea that he was following her popped into her head, but Clyde immediately dismissed it as nonsense.

She wandered to the bridge's railing. The pale green waves surged and subsided, surged and subsided. The movement was mesmerizing. She yawned and stretched. She was sleepy. Must be the combination of getting up so early and the salt air. She leaned back against the railing and stared at the sky.

White puffy clouds scudded by reminding her of how people scudded into and out of her life. One day they were there, the next day they were gone. Greg

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Lanken came to mind. Of course, most of them didn't die—they moved on. Sometimes there was a reason. Like Josh, her ex-husband.

She thought about the men she'd been involved with since her divorce. God, she had lousy taste. There'd been Ritchie, the up-and-coming attorney, a dynamo in bed, dynamic at parties, and ultimately a dud. He was delighted to be out with a television personality—because he figured it would help his career. Even her Dad had warned her about him. Then there'd been Carr, the actor: wavy blonde hair, gorgeous blue eyes, great physique, great dresser. Carr had lasted until she figured out he was also seeing his personal trainer, Bryce. She scrunched her face gazing up at the sun and enjoying its warmth despite the ever-looming danger of wrinkles that Jinks, the studio makeup guy, was always warning her about.

She liked the freedom of being divorced now, but the selection of men available for meaningful relationships that didn't necessarily lead to the altar had a lot in common with a supermarket shelf filled with dented cans.

The problem, she reasoned, was that she was a sucker for a handsome face. *Why? Why were looks so important?* Was it because she'd never felt attractive, never felt quite good enough and being on the arm of a good-looking, desirable man told the world she counted? *Counted?* As if math entered this equation. Character, Clyde, she reminded herself. Character is what counts. She'd have to remember that because Sam McKenzie, the sailing instructor, was another pretty face. Too bad,

Sam. Your loss, Sam. She would not repeat her mistakes of the past. One dinner. A pleasant, properly chaperoned evening and that was that.

A grinding rasp cut the air. The driver in the green VW Beetle ahead of her car cranked his engine as the drawbridge slowly, noisily descended, registering a complaint with each twist of the winch. She slid back into her car, switched on the ignition and looked at her watch. One-forty. Not too bad. If traffic moved briskly, she'd get everything done she'd planned.

Unfortunately, the traffic moved about as rapidly as a snail threatened with ending its existence as *escargot a la bourguignon*. It took her another half an hour to get off the causeway because an old Mustang had rear-ended a maroon Ford Crown Victoria. When the Crown Vic was struck, the force of the collision propelled it sideways so that it partially blocked both lanes. She had to drive with two wheels on the sidewalk to get past. Edging cautiously around the accident, she passed a green and white Everglades County Sheriff's patrol car and a tow truck creeping to the disabled vehicles.

*Scratch the trip to the mall.*

It was well after two when she finally drove past the Royal palms that lined the off-ramp, followed Main Street to Carson Avenue, turned left and then right onto Gulf Boulevard.

Palmetto Bay was a delightful old town, she thought, shifting her attention to her destination. She'd learned from her research that it was established as a military fort during the Seminole Indian Wars. Fort Carson had been renamed Palmetto Bay and deactivated for the last

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time following the War Between the States in 1868. She'd been here once or twice on get-away weekends so the town wasn't totally unfamiliar. As a native of Sarasota, there were few corners of the state she hadn't traveled and investigated.

Despite the sprawling growth encircling it on three sides, Palmetto Bay remained an enclave of the past, a good-sized city with a small town mentality. The streets were lined with palms, and blossoming hibiscus, and homes that told the history of the town's growth. In the outer fringes of the town, the houses were newer and larger and had obviously been built in the 70's and 80's as the result of the influx of Northeasterners who flocked south after the completion of I-75. A few blocks closer to the heart of town, the houses were rectangular concrete boxes with lots of glass typical of modest homes in the 1950's. As she neared the downtown section, the homes showed the architectural influence of the Mediterranean villas so popular in the 1920's. In the center of the downtown area, most of the buildings were the old two-story frame Southern Colonial homes built at the turn of the century from durable heart-of-pine lumber.

Gulf Boulevard was the main drag. The joke around town was that if you ever got on Gulf, you couldn't get lost because sooner or later you passed anywhere you needed to go.

Driving down Lee Street, which intersected Gulf, she spotted the yellow brick Everglades County Courthouse with its Doric columns and wide granite steps, and then the Palmetto Bay Public Library, a modest frame, two-story bungalow on Hancock Street. She pulled into the

parking lot, grabbed her purse and notebook and emerged into the sweltering heat of the afternoon sun as Todd drove by. This time she didn't wave.

A bell jangled as she entered the library. The air-conditioned interior was so chilly she shivered then looked around. At one time the library had obviously been someone's home. The enclosed porch where she waited was the reception area. A desk stood at a ninety-degree angle to the door. The black plastic nameplate on the desk read Lillian Albritton. And in smaller letters was printed the title Librarian.

As Clyde stood on the sisal rug waiting for assistance, a woman entered. Petite and imperious, she was dressed in a pale blue, raw silk shirtwaist dress. She wore her gray hair long and loose, drawn back on the one side with a barrette. An ice queen.

"May I help you?" Her blue eyes were friendly and her tone cordial belying the cool image she presented.

You've got to stop judging people by their appearance, Clyde scolded herself mentally. "Ms. Albritton?" The woman nodded. "Yes," Clyde continued, "yes, you can help me."

"Good." The librarian gestured to a wicker chair next to the desk. "Do you want a library card?"

"Oh, no, I'm just staying a few days. But I need to use your reference section. I'm staying at Far Horizons. We're doing a television show there and I want to learn more about Rattlesnake Key and the resort's history."

The librarian said pleasantly, "So you're staying at The Last Resort. A television show. How interesting." She paused thoughtfully. "I don't know how much help

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I can be,” she said, toying with the heavy silver and turquoise ring she wore on her right hand. “We have very little information on Far Horizons. The owners stay very much to themselves. Seldom come to the mainland. I don’t even think they buy any of their supplies here. But I can help with Rattlesnake Key.” She led the way into what had been the living room.

The room was filled with shelves containing fiction and reference books, three exits and a staircase. Small placards over two of the three doors indicated the functions of the rooms beyond. On the right, the room was labeled “Children’s” and inside Clyde could see small wooden tables and chairs. The walls were plastered with bright posters of Winnie the Pooh and Barney the Dinosaur. Three children were reading. One tow-headed, pigtailed tot was sprawled on the rug.

The staircase was adjacent and Lillian Albritton led her upstairs into a small room, which housed the historical collections. Carefully skirting a desk, file cabinets and shelves holding books of all shapes and sizes, new and old, some ragged and discolored, the librarian pulled out a cane-bottom straight-backed chair.

Clyde sat at the desk, plopped down her notebook and searched in her purse for her pen. Lillian opened a file drawer and removed a thick, legal-sized file folder, which she placed on the desk. It was crammed with newspaper clippings, brochures and booklets.

“This will get you started,” she announced. “When you’re finished with this, I’ll get more. I’ll be downstairs.”

In the quiet room surrounded by the delightful

aroma of old books, Clyde submerged herself in the past.

Rattlesnake Key had gotten its name because the island looked like a coiled snake with its rounded shape and winding canal supposedly dug by the Caloosa Indians. The tip of its tail was serrated as though it ended in rattles. A small island looked like the button or tip of the rattle.

Settled by Cuban fishermen in the 1880's, the island had later been the site of a castor bean plantation because castor oil was in demand both for medicinal and industrial purposes. The crop, she read in a newcomer's brochure printed by the Chamber of Commerce in 1921, was destroyed during a hurricane when a tidal surge bathed the plants in salt water. During another period in the island's history, farmers planted acres of vegetables—celery, green peppers, tomatoes and citrus—especially Key limes. *Check to see if vegetables used at Far Horizons are home grown*, she jotted in her notebook.

According to a yellowing newspaper clipping from the *Herald*, the resort business had originated in the 1880's when an early settler started a boarding house for vegetable brokers who came to the island to inspect and buy the crops. Once Thomas Edison began wintering in nearby Fort Myers, international attention focused on the area and soon an exclusive boys' school, founded and headquartered in Philadelphia, had been built on Rattlesnake Key. The boys wintered and roughed it on the island. A hotel was built to house visiting parents and the primitive island developed a *panache* that attracted even jaded European royals seeking adventure. A lighthouse had been constructed because there was so

much boat traffic in the Gulf.

During World War II, the island was notorious because many German U-boats had been sighted in the waters off the lighthouse, which was, she read with surprise, still in operation. Supposedly pro-Nazi traitors had infiltrated the area drawn by the island's proximity to two Army Air Corps bases.

The sound of footsteps interrupted her reading and Clyde glanced up as Lillian Albritton returned. The librarian moaned. "Those stairs are going to be the death of me yet. Finding what you need?"

Clyde nodded. "Great stuff," she said gesturing toward the stacks of clippings. Putting down her ballpoint pen, she looked at her watch. "Four o'clock. I had no idea it was so late. Is the newspaper far from here?"

"A few blocks." As they walked down the stairs, Lillian in the lead, the librarian looked back over her shoulder and asked, "What television show are you filming on at Far Horizons?"

"A cooking show," Clyde responded. "Clyde Colby's Gourmet Galley. I'm Clyde." She knew that's what she was supposed to do, but it made her uncomfortable. She enjoyed the food, enjoyed the technical end of the business, and even delighted in meeting the chefs and watching them work, but the promotional part was pure misery.

She hated the candid photos people took because she knew she didn't photograph well in a spontaneous situation. She needed the studio with controlled lighting and a cameraman who knew her best angles. She was also on the tail end of a generation of women who'd been

taught it was inappropriate to promote oneself. She had to fight her early training constantly haunted by the time her mother had informed her that well-bred women had their names in the newspaper only four times—when they were born, married, had children and died.

As they reached the bottom of the stairs, Lillian turned. “I thought you looked familiar,” she said, a delighted smile curving her prim mouth. “I enjoy your show very much. We get *Broadcasting and Cable* magazine here and I read where you are hoping to start showing it nationally.”

“Thank you,” Clyde said. She groped in her purse for her car keys.

“I wonder, Miss Colby...” the librarian began, then hesitated.

Not an autograph, Clyde thought with dread. She’d been asked for an autograph a few weeks earlier and really screwed it up. She’d thought the young woman who asked was kidding and jokingly signed it, “Best wishes, Julia Child.” The young woman was insulted and she had lost a viewer. Clyde vowed she wouldn’t foul up this time.

She pasted a smile on her face. “You wonder what?”

The librarian’s face flushed, but she forced the words. “Ah, I was wondering...if you’d...that is, I was wondering if you ever... Do you ever make public appearances doing cooking demonstrations?”

Clyde hesitated then said, “Of course, but I’ll have to check my schedule with the station.”

The librarian’s eyes brightened. “We have an organization called the Palmetto Bay Marching and

Chowder Society. It's pretty big. More than four-hundred members. Our meeting is next Thursday."

Clyde made a mental note. In the future, she'd book some appearances before she arrived in a new town. Even better would be Rod the Clod freeing up a budget for a PR person to help her.

"Thursday," she said slowly. It would take more time to set up a demonstration than just do a talk as she was accustomed to doing.

"Tell us what you want to fix and we'll get the supplies," the librarian continued. "One of the members will work as a liaison to make sure you have everything you need."

"Where would you do this?"

"That's no problem," the librarian said. "One of our members is the fashion coordinator at Burdine's Department Store. They have the perfect setup for cooking demonstrations. They do them when they introduce new products or small appliances."

By this time, they had reached the door. As Lillian opened it for her, she made her final pitch. "It would be a wonderful treat for us." She extended her hand.

Despite her bravado, Clyde's stomach trembled with trepidation. She'd never done a live cooking demo. Part of her insisted it would be just like doing it in her kitchen. The hell it would. What if the recipes didn't turn out? What if she burned something? The ever-present threat reverberated in the forefront of her mind. *Dump her. Buy out her contract.* The hell they would.

"I'll do my best," she promised. "I'll check with the station tonight and let you know first thing tomorrow.

Now where's the paper?"

Following the librarian's directions, a few minutes later she pulled into a driveway past a huge blue and white sign that read *Palmetto Bay Observer* in Courier typeface. She angle-parked in front of an awkward, two-story concrete building finished in sparklecrete. Consuming the entire block, the building had developed in stages. One wing had the 50's square, blockish look with the thick cubes of glass to admit light. Another section, obviously built in the late 70's or early 80's, had no windows and looked like a prison. Relieving the architectural schizophrenia was a hedge of brilliant purple bougainvillea.

Clyde pushed through the double glass doors and halted in the reception area. Behind the receptionist's empty desk, a display of bronze plaques from the Florida Press Association bore mute witness to the paper's quality. The awards the *Palmetto Bay Observer* had won for spot news, in-depth reporting, feature stories and photography as well as layout and graphics were impressive. Framed copies of the *Observer's* front pages marking historic events—the end of World War II, Kennedy's Assassination, astronauts landing on the moon, Nixon's resignation—dominated the area.

A half-full coffee mug and a pile of unopened mail made it clear the receptionist was around somewhere. Clyde picked up a copy of the day's paper from a stack on a coffee table. Settling on the leather couch across from the desk, she searched for Greg Lancken's obituary. It was too soon, of course, but she got a nice feel for the newspaper. Foreign news dominated page one, but

county and local news were also played including a feature on a lost pet recovered after an intensive search.

“Where’s Marcy?” a male voice demanded from behind her shoulder.

“If you’re talking to me, I don’t have the vaguest notion.” Clyde answered without looking around.

A tall, skinny man with a head full of bushy dark hair and wearing over-sized horn-rimmed glasses blustered into her view. She judged him to be in his late twenties.

“You’re not Lesley,” he accused.

“I know that,” she said.

“From the back you look like her.” He patted the pockets of his corduroy jacket until he located a pack of cigarettes. He lit one, took a deep drag and sighed. “I’m quitting next week,” he said, disregarding a no smoking sign posted on the wall.

“Since I’m not Lesley, I’ll read the paper.” Clyde slapped the paper in front of her face to blot him from view.

He laughed. “I’m Eli Nussbaum. Lesley is Marcy’s best friend. Lesley’s supposed to cover a special county commission meeting this evening. She wasn’t in the newsroom so I assumed she’d be out here talking to Marcy.”

Clyde put down the paper and stared at him. “Should I care?” Did it again. The guy was trying to be friendly.

Nussbaum raised his long, bony arms heavenward as if in despair. His sleeves were about an inch too short and his wrists shot forward. “Forget it. Can I help you?”

“Help me?”

“Yes. You came to the newspaper for something. You’re sitting here waiting for somebody to help you.”

“What do you do here?”

His intense face brightened. “I’m a reporter.”

Clyde shrugged. “Maybe you can. I want to look at some files in your morgue.”

He shook his head. “Sorry. The paper’s policy doesn’t permit the general public access to our morgue,” he said. “We provide free copies of the paper to the library and they have them transferred to microfilm. Try there.”

Clyde stood. He was tall, at least six five, and so skinny that he loomed over her like a five-tier wedding cake. She tilted her head back and stared straight into his eyes. “So much for professional courtesy.”

“Professional courtesy?”

His blank expression was irritating. She rummaged through her shoulder bag, drew out her billfold and flipped it open. She held her press card up for his inspection.

“WTBR-TV out of Miami,” he said, arching his neck like a hook so he could read it. “And you’re Clyde Colby.” His manner changed. A smile smoothed his sharp features. “I love your show. Follow me.”

She followed him through a maze of portable partitions, narrow corridors and a newsroom crammed with reporters, desks, and computers and everywhere piles of newspapers, file folders, press releases and notes. In marked contrast to the reception area, the room was alive with ringing telephones, the underlying hum of

many different conversations, the clatter of computer keys. A TV set was tuned to C-SPAN.

“Almost there,” he said and finally, on the far side of the photo department, he ushered her into the newspaper’s morgue. The librarian, busily cutting clippings from the day’s paper, barely looked up.

“What do you want to see?” he asked, angling around the counter where huge rotating shelves stood in rows like beige pillars.

“Anything on Far Horizons.”

“Far Horizons Resort?” Eli Nussbaum paused. A curious expression brightened his owlish, yellow brown eyes. “Far Horizons,” he repeated.

“We’re taping a show there.”

Eli placed his elbows on the counter. He cocked one eyebrow and doing a rather tortured but identifiable Groucho Marx imitation, said, “Have I got a deal for you.”

“I don’t want a deal,” Clyde said. “I want to see your files on Far Horizons.” She was beginning to find coping with Nussbaum rather tedious, but remembered Rod the Clod’s admonition to eat, sleep and think image. She didn’t need to make an enemy of a print journalist.

“What I mean is I’d love to do a feature story on your show for our paper.”

Clyde shrugged. Rodney Delmont would be so proud. One day in town and she was lined up to do a cooking demonstration and now a newspaper feature. Then caution prevailed. “What’s the deal?”

“You TV types are as paranoid as we scribes have

been led to believe,” Eli responded. “You let me come out to Far Horizons to interview you and I will make available to you our morgue and my extensive knowledge of the area and incredible intellect. Deal?” He stuck a bony hand across the counter. “Tomorrow morning?”

“Why not do it here? And now? We start shooting the show tomorrow and I’m going to be really busy.”

“Nope. It’s gotta be on the scene. You’ve gotta get me into Far Horizons,” he insisted. “That’s part of the deal.”

“Why do you need me to get you into—”

“Long story,” he interrupted, and his expression made it clear he wasn’t going to explain.

She shrugged. What did she have to lose? “Deal.”

He motioned for her to come around the counter.



Later that afternoon Clyde found herself reluctant to return to Far Horizons. Horace had been friendly and pleasant, but she wasn’t blind. The maid and the other employees seemed almost frightened of him. Even his wife and son treated him with inordinate respect. And what did Lillian Albritton mean about locals calling Far Horizons, *The Last Resort?* She should have asked Eli. There was the dearth of information in the *Observer’s* files. For a world-renowned resort, amazingly little had been written. At least locally.

She chastised herself. She was so uptight about the show it was making her crazy. She wasn’t going to be at Far Horizons that long so what difference did all this

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stuff make to her even if it was true? For good measure, she chastised herself for chastising herself. Her mother, God bless Iris Medea Colby's conscientious soul, had so endowed her with the female essence of guilt she even felt guilty for feeling guilty.

At the resort, her room had been changed. Her clothing and equipment had been unpacked and everything had been neatly stowed away. She was now on the second floor with a stunning view of the Gulf of Mexico framed by lushly green, tremulous Royal palm trees. The room was larger, more luxurious. The pastel colors of the design scheme were sea foam green, delicate peach and ivory with gold as an accent. The draperies had a seashell pattern carried over into the fabric of the bedspread and the chaise, which was accented with peach and ivory throw pillows.

In addition to a table with a hanging light fixture, the room boasted a large television set with a wicker chaise positioned so she could watch in comfort. She stretched out on the chaise and clicked the remote, then rose restlessly. She was in no mood to watch television. She wandered onto the balcony and luxuriated in the panorama of surf, waving palms and white beach sprawled before her. Even that didn't relax her and Clyde grew impatient with herself.

Then she realized what was bothering her. The neatness was so precise, it made her uncomfortable. Even her notes and papers. Now why would anyone go to the trouble to straighten her papers, forming them in neat piles, aligning them with the corners of the desk?

Unless it had given someone an excuse to go through

them.

Ridiculous.

There was nothing the least bit unusual or even interesting about the rough notes she'd drafted as a very preliminary working script for the show.

Absolutely ridiculous.

She'd even imagined Todd was following her. What was it Eli Nussbaum had said? Something about paranoid TV types. Was the shoe beginning to fit?

She forced herself to think about the evening ahead. Dressing carefully as the sun exploded into a huge orange orb that edged closer and closer to the precipice of night, she smiled. Dinner prepared by Sam McKenzie was sure to prove most intriguing.

Once downstairs, she decided to see if she could find Horace Beck. Part of her, the TV cooking show host, accepted as none of her business the fact that Beck was so determined to stay out of the limelight. However, she'd been a reporter longer than a cooking show host, and her reporter's curiosity wouldn't rest. She wanted to know why. It would definitely be to his advantage to have a presence in the community. Resorts and clubs as luxurious as The Breakers and Mar-A-Lago in Palm Beach, while certainly not accessible to the typical tourist, often opened their doors to charity benefits or community affairs. It was known, she thought sarcastically, as generating good will.

Davy, who was in the process of being relieved by the night clerk, told her somewhat abruptly that he didn't know where his father was, making it clear he didn't intend to find out for her either. Miffed, she

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headed down the corridor to the patio. But she paused by the door of his office. On a whim, she pushed gently and was surprised when the door opened inward. She glanced around. The office was empty. *What could it hurt?*

She entered Horace Beck's domain.

His desk was so neat she shuddered. The in/out box on the corner of the desk contained a few letters and miscellaneous papers, but they were as neatly stacked as the paper in an unopened ream from an office supply store. The pen/clock/calendar set on his desk was so highly polished the gold shimmered even in the dim light from the hall. As she drew nearer, she saw that it was in the shape of a three-pointed star wreathed with laurel—the Mercedes Benz logo. *Interesting.*

The executive chair was positioned parallel to the heavy mahogany desk. The chair to the side was straight and carefully lined up with the edge of the desk. It was also much lower than Beck's and she smiled in recognition of the oldest management trick in the world, tower over people and you could intimidate them. Subtle, but effective.

A workbench stood against the wall to the right. A plain wooden stool, looking out of place, was pushed beneath the workbench. A fluorescent work light was affixed to the wall over the bench, which was outfitted with a vise. Very utilitarian.

Dangling neatly from hooks mounted on the wall was an array of tools—pliers, hammers, saws, different-sized wrenches, screwdrivers, drills. Schematic drawings of a mechanized fishing rod pinpointing power sources

and gears had been neatly tacked at eye level and she judged from the various components left in plain view on the workbench that he was making progress on his current project. She was surprised because even though their meeting had been brief, she gained the instant impression that Horace Beck was not a man who knew how to relax. Somehow she couldn't envision him going fishing.

She turned her attention to the walls where framed glossy photos of classic Mercedes-Benzes and BMWs hung. Next to each was a schematic drawing of that particular auto's transmission and gear system. Clyde studied the photo of a beautiful powder blue and white model 380K, introduced in 1933 according to the caption. The engine was an eight-cylinder and it had a pointed radiator, she read. It was a two-door model and she was surprised to learn that as early as 1933, car designers had built the seats so that they bent forward to allow passengers to get into the back.

The office door was suddenly opened so forcefully it slammed against the wall. She wheeled around. Horace Beck was standing in the doorway. She could see that his face was red with anger even from where she stood.

"You—" he said, struggling to find words. "You. What are you doing in my private office? This is not open to the public. Out." Quickly he crossed the office and grabbed her by the upper arm, almost shoving her into the corridor.

Before she could explain, he had slammed the office door behind them. Reaching into his pocket, he produced a ring of keys and jammed one into the lock. The

sound of the lock clicking into place seemed so loud to her it reverberated up and down the empty corridor.

“I was looking for you,” she said awkwardly. “I just wanted to ask you—”

“Yes?” he hissed. “You wanted to ask me what?”

Desperately she searched for some reasonable explanation. “Uh, I wanted to know if I couldn’t convince you to go on camera with your chef. When we do the final shots of the meal being served.” She smiled and tried to look as guileless and innocent as she didn’t feel. “You would photograph beautifully.”

“Absolutely not,” he said. “No.” And then, he smiled and it was as if a charm switch had been turned on somewhere in his mind. “I understand you and Mr. Dunn are going to have dinner on Mr. McKenzie’s boat this evening. I understand he is a very good amateur chef.” Beck bowed from the waist. “I hope you find it most enjoyable.”

Without another word, he turned and walked away from her toward the front desk. She waited a moment, and then followed him to the lobby where she sat down to wait for Penny and Sam. She rubbed her arm where he had grabbed her. His grip had been so tight she knew she’d have bruises.

What a strange encounter, she thought. Why had he gotten so angry? It wasn’t as though she’d been going through his papers. She’d just been looking around. And what a temper he had. It was almost as if he were hiding something. *But what?* Then reality returned. She’d been nosing around in his private office. Of course, he was upset. He had every right to be.