

Chapter XV

Grimaldi slipped into the room closest to the bathroom.

Before closing the door behind him, he stopped to listen for footfalls. His heart pounded in his chest, the throbbing deafened him.

He tried to listen over the din of his blood pounding.

It was difficult to distinguish whether the noises came from within or outside him. Was that someone climbing the stairs? Was that the throbbing in his ears?

He waited and a new sensation came over him.

Something was getting closer and closer to him. Sweat beaded on his forehead. His hands dripped.

Then, as swiftly as the sensation had come over him, it was gone, down the stairs and through the door.

The pastor was calling him from the second floor landing.

Grimaldi came out of the room as the pastor took the last step and flipped the lights on.

“Jack,” he called. “Jack, is that you?”

“Who did you expect? The Fuller Brush Man?”

Grimaldi closed the door and walked over to him.

“What are you doing in that room? You don't belong there? Please, stay out of the room?”

Grimaldi started to explain, but stopped as got a closer look at the old man.

The priest raised his hand, but it was the pale and washed out look of the old man that really stopped him. He thought for a moment that it must have been the glow of the lights that did it, but it wasn't.

“I try not to ask any questions about what goes on here,” Father Fallon said. “I try not to get too involved here. It was the same way with Father Lemay. I left him alone. You leave him alone now. I just ask that you stay out of that room.”

The old man looked at him and then right through him.

“Father Lemay,” he murmured.

He raised both his arms in a greeting, then a look of utter confusion crossed his face, and his arms dropped to his sides.

“Forgive me,” Father Fallon said. “Sometimes I think I've going out of my mind. I hear noises. I see things. I see people that are gone. There's nobody here to confirm these things. How many nights have I woke up and climbed the stairs and found nothing? That's what makes it worse. That you're here tonight in some ways is a blessing. It tells me I'm not going crazy.

“But it still doesn't give you the right to carry on as though this is open ground. You're walking on sacred ground here. Please remember that. Now, I'm going back to bed. Good night, Jack.”

Grimaldi sat on his bed wondering if he should have told the old man about the figure outside and what he thought was the door opening and closing. He waited until the lights went out and he crossed the hall, instead.

The room was like his in many ways, simple, limited in its possessions, but lived in. A pair of neatly ironed khaki pants lay at the foot of the bed.

On the dresser there were several black and white photos of a matronly woman and a worn old man with a beaming smile. A colored photo, wallet-sized, captured the likeness of a little nine- or ten-year old boy. It was tucked into the lower right hand frame of the larger picture of the man and woman.

Grimaldi looked for other photos, any indication of who the occupant had been. Nothing on the other bureaus or, for that matter, the walls. Only a picture of the Smiling Christ and a crucifix.

Then he realized there was no dust, and he tried to remember if his room was as well kept up when he arrived. He thought not.

No dust. Pants on the bed. Was this a shrine to a man long gone?

Whoever Lemay was, it occurred to Grimaldi, whatever he had been up to, certainly, he was not a man on the move, not with his pants laid out like that. Father Fallon implied that he had left Lemay alone. What did he mean?

What was going on here? he asked himself. He'd have to find out without getting the old man too upset.

For that matter, he wondered if he would have to explain what was going on at three in the morning. He decided he'd wait and see how to react. The old man mentioned other things that had been going on, making him think his mind was going. Maybe, he could help the priest by reassuring him that there were things going.

How comforting would that be? Grimaldi asked himself.

He moved quietly on slippers feet from one bureau to the other, to the one with the mirror and then the standup one, and began opening drawers. Clothes, handkerchiefs,

socks. It looked to him as if here was an entire wardrobe. He found several photo albums in the bottom drawer.

The volume, bound in leather, started with pictures of the same young boy in the colored photograph stuck in the picture frame with the photo of the man and woman. Grimaldi guessed the color photo was from what had to have been First Eucharist or First Holy Communion, about second grade.

There were similar ones in the photo album, which began about that time and continued through what was the man's ordination. All indications were that the man led a fairly normal childhood, with birthday parties, graduations, friends and girl friends, and a few proms.

A second volume, much more tattered than the first, picked up with ordination and looked to have covered from five to ten years of activity as a priest. Parties and smiling faces proliferated, confirmation kids and youth groups, men and women abounded.

Lemay kept pretty close ties to the members of his graduating classes, too. For each year, there was a photo of the class, or what remained of it. If Lemay had followed many of his classmates into secular life, would not have surprised Grimaldi.

Yet, he left his pants on the bed.

Grimaldi looked at the khakis.

A third and fourth album had more even more specific topics, youth groups and work in what looked like some type of project or community.

While he looked through these, Grimaldi questioned whether or not Lemay could have invested so much time and energy for such a long period of time and simply walked away.

He thought of his work at the Chronicle.

It was possible. Anything was possible. Sure.

A manila folder inside the last album contained yellowed newspaper clippings. The clippings began about four years before and ended abruptly the previous spring, when Lemay disappeared.

The clippings and the subjects showed Lemay with the likes of Prygocki and Johnson.

Ms. Watson and Chris were there, too.

One photo that stuck with Grimaldi included the priest, Johnson and Prygocki. They were identified in the caption as the people who were responsible for mediating between two rival gangs. Their talks resulted in the signing of a covenant promising to preserve the peace in the neighborhood surrounding St. Boniface Church community and the school.

Grimaldi closed the drawer, flipped out the light, and headed back to his room.

He took the manila folder with him.

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