

Chapter XVI

Grimaldi and Paradis met at the deli down the street from the chancery. They sat at a table by the front window. Outside tables with white umbrellas sat in the cool, spring air.

“Not much is happening with our anonymous man,” Paradis said. “There isn't much to go on, and the boss isn't going to go with the story until I clear up a few things.”

“Namely,” Grimaldi said.

“Namely, he doesn't believe this was part of a ritualistic sacrifice.”

“Try the sour dills. They're the best I've come across,” he said.

“The whole thing spooks him. Of course, he says he doesn't believe there are people out there who would do something like that. And he doesn't really want to find out. There must be some other explanation he says. He calls it comic book stuff.”

He stuffed more of his chicken salad sandwich into his mouth.

Grimaldi meditated over his own tuna on whole wheat.

“Those umbrellas out there had me fooled,” Grimaldi said. “They're metal. I thought they were canvas.”

“I feel a little cheated.”

Paradis grunted.

“The food is good,” he said.

“Yea,” Grimaldi answered. “But there's something about this place that I'm familiar with. I can't remember.”

He started to say something about Katie, and stopped.

Paradis looked up from his plate.

“How long has it been?” he asked, his mouth full.

“Two years.”

Paradis grunted.

“She was a helluva woman,” he said.

“Seems like she's still around, you know. From the day she died, yesterday, and today, I've still felt her around. Makes me a believer,” Grimaldi said.

“Believer in what?”

“The communion of saints.”

“For sure,” Paradis said. “For sure.”

“I know she's in heaven. I know she's happy. Funny, I can't look at a beautiful woman without thinking of Katie and what she went through. If the woman's attractive, I think maybe there's lump in her breast. It makes her more beautiful and mysterious. It makes life more precious.”

“Thing is Katie knows that, eternity is open before her, and there isn't anything she doesn't know.”

He paused.

“Forgive me, big guy,” Grimaldi said. “I just get carried away sometimes.”

“No problem,” Paradis said.

“How can I feel such exhilaration and sadness? I'm happy in a way and sad in another,” Grimaldi said.

Paradis finished his last bite.

He looked at Grimaldi's sandwich.

``What's the matter? You don't like the food."

``It's like working on a story. Sometimes you know where it's going and you really don't want it to go that way, but you've built up such anticipation that you can't wait to find out how everything ends. Katie's done with her story. We're still working on ours. I hope I never lose the sense of exhilaration. But there's this moment when you're working on the story and your sense of judgment is gone. You should be pulling out, but you keep going," Grimaldi said.

``Eat," Paradis told Grimaldi. ``Eat for Chrissake."

``You doing all right at the rectory?" he asked. ``Don't talk. Shake your head."

Grimaldi grunted.

``It's supposed to be a secret," he said with his mouthful.

``You eat, I'll talk," Paradis said.

``Somehow, buddy, you've been implicated in this. You know it. I know it. They know it, whoever they are. You got people who are genuinely upset. They lost a friend. They live here. They want to know what you know. Somehow they think you've got the answer. They are afraid you know too much. They want to pick your brain, shake you up a little. They want to get to you because they are a little greedy. They think you might be greedy, too."

Grimaldi felt Paradis' eyes boring into him.

He didn't look up.

``I just don't know which of these can be pinned down. And I don't know how anyone can profit from a murder."

Grimaldi sipped his diet Coke.

He put the cup down.

“Paradis, you are absolutely no help at all.”

“I don't get paid to figure things out. I get paid to report them as they happen. And if I weren't such a good friend of yours, I'd be reporting on this now, and I'd have a great chance to land my first Pulitzer.”

Grimaldi leaned forward.

“You may still have a shot at a Pulitzer. I've got a hunch. It looks like it's going to pay off.”

He picked up the trays and threw the plates and plastic forks on them.

“Let's get out of here. Metal umbrellas give me the creeps.”

Outside the air was crisp. Grimaldi pulled up the collar of his coat.

“Walk with me,” Grimaldi said.

“You going to give me a hint about what happening here?”

“You're the reporter. Somebody's got to give you a little help.”

They headed up the street toward the chancery.

“Richard Lemay, does that name mean anything to you?” Grimaldi asked.

Paradis shrugged.

“I could find out if we have anything on him,” he said.

“Great,” Grimaldi said.

“You know,” he continued, “I've been through this a million times. A kid gets shot, and there's nobody around.”

“Maybe not. There was a woman. I assume a pro working the streets.”

“You and I both know what assume means,” Paradis said.

``How in the hell are you going to find her?"

``There are ways, and what does Lemay have to do with it?"

``When you find out something about him, I'll tell you."

``You'll tell me."

``I think the kid is simply a victim," Grimaldi said, returning to the Chris Brown case.

Paradis nodded.

``Tell me more."

``Most of the time, it's money that makes people crazy. Find the money, you find the problem. What if it's something else?"

``For example?"

``Jealously. A lover's quarrel. Some guy's hot for the kid, makes a move on him, is rebuffed, and doesn't want anyone to know."

``The killing was too cold. No passion," Paradis said.

``Killing," Grimaldi mumbled. ``Here's a thought: wherever human life is devalued, demeaned, denigrated, for whatever reason, not only journalists, but every human being is required to cry out, `This is wrong, and we won't stand for it.' "

Paradis slapped Grimaldi on the back.

``Yea, and I'm the tooth fairy," he said.

Grimaldi laughed.

``So I'm on the verge of a mid-life crisis."

``You've got every reason to be," Paradis said. ``Look, you need me for anything, give me a call. I've got to get back to work."

``I guess, if it's any consolation," Grimaldi said, ``I'm on the inside now. Maybe I've got a vocation. Hell, it's not unheard of. A married guy whose wife passes on becomes a priest. There's more than a few of them floating around. God, you wouldn't believe the rectory."

Paradis tapped his watch.

``I'll only take a minute."

``Shoot."

He described the high ceilings and peeling plaster.

``Neglect," Paradis said. ``Gross neglect of property and people."

``I'm not supposed to get involved," Grimaldi said. ``I can't help it. I'm not supposed to make an item of myself."

``He's supposed to play a little ball," Paradis said.

``Might work off some stress."

``I hear the school's got a pretty good gym."

``I'll set something up," Grimaldi said. ``Walk me over to the archives."

They crossed Main Street. The chancery came into view.

``This is where we split," Paradis said.

He shook Grimaldi's hand.

``Next lunch is on me," he said.

He hesitated.

``Hey sport," he said, ``I'm still betting that the guy holding the bag is the one who did it, church or not. Something's never change."

``The only investment the church has is in people, and it beats the hell out of them."

``Sounds pretty much the same thing to me," Paradis said.

``You're a capitalist," Grimaldi yelled. ``You start digging and you come up with a few bucks and assume you have the answer. I start digging and we come up with a few dead bodies."

``Welcome to the real world, Jack."

``I never left it. The chancery is still a workplace in the world. Just because a bishop walks through the front door doesn't make it any better or worse."

``A lot of people would argue differently."

``I know," Grimaldi said. ``I know."

dfort001@yahoo.com