

Chapter V

Chancellor Joseph Sullivan raised up his full six feet six inch frame and extended his right hand.

“Jack,” he said, “it’s unfortunate you had to be involved with this. The circumstances are really regrettable.”

This is the man that insisted on being called Joe and liked to play a little hoop in his spare time. Grimaldi shook Sullivan’s hand. Grimaldi had spoken to him only briefly since he took the communications job.

“Yes, it was regrettable,” Grimaldi said.

He was in for another surprise, too. The chancellor’s hand swallowed his, something he expected. But he’d also expected to shake a hard, calloused hand. Instead he got a soft, smooth one.

So much for having expectations.

“There is a good deal of sorrow in the world,” Sullivan said. “I see it in the letters the bishop receives.”

“You know he answers every one personally,” he said and waited. Perhaps he wants me to say something, Grimaldi thought, and sat there.

“Now, I see it in the death of this young boy at a very critical time in the school discussion.”

He released Grimaldi’s hand, pushed his chair aside, and motioned for his guest to sit down at one of four arm chairs around a glass-topped table.

“Have a seat,” he said.

The chancellor offered him something to drink, but Grimaldi refused. He had a few questions to ask, and he wanted to ask them so he could get back to work.

“Chancellor,” he began, but was stopped before he could say another word.

“Please,” the tall man said, “my friends call me Joe.”

Grimaldi smiled. He was sure it looked more like a grimace.

“I don't really think I qualify as a friend,” Grimaldi said.

“Joe,” the chancellor demanded.

“Joe,” Grimaldi said, “what do you mean it's unfortunate that I had to be involved, for one, and secondly, that the circumstances are regrettable. For sure, a boy dying is regrettable, but I'm not sure I know just what you mean by it.”

Sullivan sat down in the chair next to Grimaldi's. He plopped his right ankle on his left knee and grabbed his ankle.

“You really can't do anything about this,” Sullivan said. “Of course, cooperation with the law enforcement people is a given. That's why I asked the diocese's attorney to sit down with us today to discuss just what you saw.”

“Before I ask Attorney Collins to come in, though, I wanted to tell you that what happened may be intimately linked to the fact that the diocese may be closing the high school. People don't like it. They've made threats. It's really not a pleasant situation.”

Sullivan rose from his seat and buzzed his secretary.

“Helen, please send in Attorney Collins,” he said.

Grimaldi stood up.

Mike Collins was the legal council for the diocese. Grimaldi had run across him during the course of the interviews leading up to his appointment, but then their

conversation was brief. At the time, Grimaldi was impressed with the attorney's sophistication. But now he would reserve further comment until after they finished their work.

The door opened and in walked Collins. He carried a slender brown brief case which he proceeded to set down on the glass table and pop open.

"This will only take a moment," Collins said.

Grimaldi looked over at Sullivan for some kind of reaction. Sullivan had an odd smile on his face. Grimaldi figured he was highly amused and had a strange way of showing it, or perhaps he was thinking about doing something else and this was his way of being polite.

Collins got right down to business.

"You were leaving your office about 9 p.m. You were getting in your car and you heard the shot. How did you know it was a shot?"

"If you hear a shot once, you know a shot," Grimaldi repeated for the third time.

"Do you hunt?"

"I was in the service," Grimaldi said.

This line of questioning continued.

If he admitted to being impressed by this guy, Grimaldi quickly regretted it. He was finding that Collins was a royal pain in the ass.

"So you raced over to the school building where you found the body."

Grimaldi nodded.

He'd waited for something to happen since he found the body, but this was ridiculous. The attention was supposed to be on a suspect, not him.

``How long did it take you to get to the body?"

``A minute or so."

``One minute, two minutes, five minutes?"

``Three minutes, 22 seconds," Grimaldi answered.

Collins began to ask another question, but Grimaldi stopped him.

``I know you've got your job to do," he said to Collins, ``but I'm getting more than a little fed up with this. If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were accusing me of being an accomplice in this mess."

Sullivan put up his large hands.

``Hold on, Jack," he said. ``We're just being careful."

``Give me a break, Joe. This isn't careful, it's ridiculous."

He pointed at Collins.

``You're a talented guy. Anybody who can get an alleged rapist and murderer off the hook when it's pretty obvious the man was culpable — you like that word, Joe? — has got to be pretty talented. But I don't need any of this badgering."

Grimaldi had seen Collins at work in the Bellamy case. He knew it was inappropriate to bring it up here and now. He just wanted to end the interrogation.

``Did you hear anything else?" Collins asked.

Grimaldi shook his head, no, and smiled.

Bastard, he thought.

``I think I'm through here," Collins said to Sullivan. ``Thank you, Mr. Grimaldi. Please don't get up."

``Always nice talking with you, Joe. Perhaps we will talk soon."

Then, the attorney disappeared and Sullivan was pacing, back and forth, back and forth.

Finally, Grimaldi had to say something.

“Is this some kind of B-movie, a comedy or something?”

“This is all very unfortunate,” Sullivan said. “The plan is to move the school out of the city. This just makes it look like the church is abandoning the city altogether. This death and the attention that it will draw focus even more attention on what has to be done. Your involvement doesn't make things any easier.”

The tall man walked around Grimaldi and settled his hands on the back of Grimaldi's chair.

“Jack, when we hired you we took a chance, not only because you were and are a lay man, but because you are a former newspaperman. You have contacts out there we hoped that you could tap, you know, use your influence to help with public relations. That's all fine when the stories are all the good news variety. It's just that the stories aren't always good news, happy, rosy colored stuff that people expect. It was obvious to us that you might be tempted. Let me rephrase that. There would be times when you would feel a tension between your role here and your former approach to work. This is one of those times.”

The chancellor began pacing again, hands clasped behind his back.

“So how's your mother?” Grimaldi asked.

Sullivan stopped.

He came around to look Grimaldi straight in the face.

“This some kind of joke?”

``How's your mother?" Grimaldi repeated.

``She's fine, thank you," Sullivan said. ``She's just fine. Thanks for asking."

``So I guess we're all done here," Grimaldi said and stood up. ``I understand you still play some hoop," Grimaldi said and shook Sullivan's hand. ``Let's get over to the school some day soon and play. Playing always helps me clear my head."

He turned to leave but looked back.

``Helps relieve tension, too."

Sullivan smiled.

``Let's do that," he said.

Before he could open the door, Sullivan called to him.

``Jack, you're made for this job. It's about time the church really opened the windows and let some fresh air in. But there are people who question your sincerity. They think you've seen too much and consider you a liability."

It was Grimaldi's turn to smile.

``I can't say, without question, that this little episode today is something that I can keep entirely quiet."

``Jack," Sullivan said, his face stern, ``lie low."

dfort001@yahoo.com