

## CHAPTER ONE

He stood patiently outside the entrance to the cruise ship pier, as he had done on many other islands, watching for a man fitting a special description. Forman Blocker had been on this Caribbean island for almost three weeks and it was time to move on before the island police became aware of his illegal activities.

Forman searched through the people coming off the ship for a man who shared his general age bracket and similar physical characteristics to himself. He checked their approximate height, weight, hair color, and facial features. Several men met those requirements, but they were in the company of a wife or girl friend. He required a loner to avoid having to kill them both.

The morning sun was bright and the temperature was already over eighty degrees. A bead of sweat dangled from the end of his nose until the tickle became unbearable. He wiped it off with a quick brush with his shirt sleeve and resumed his watch.

Around the dock area, sea gulls and pelicans were skimming the water busily looking for something to eat. Tourists were pouring off the giant cruise ship carrying water bottles and cameras. A mixed bag of ages and nationalities, most of them were heading for the small shops of old San Juan.

It always amazed him, as he looked at these huge ships, how something that large could float. Considering it was three city blocks long and about thirteen stories tall, he thought it should sink like a rock. If not sink, it should at least tip over on its side. He had to force himself re-concentrate on the task at hand.

At last, a fellow wearing sunglasses and carrying a bottle of sun screen walked through the control point. He wore flip flops, Bermuda shorts, and a loose fitting T-shirt. Careful observation of his physical characteristics confirmed that this was the person he had been waiting for, amazed at the resemblance.

Forman watched his quarry navigate the gauntlet of souvenir sellers, stroll through the long row of tourist shops, then hop in a cab. Forman jumped in his rental and followed. The fellow's first stop was the Paradise Beach Lounge, an open-air bar overlooking the beach where he ordered a Bloody Mary.

Smiling as he watched, Forman knew that drinks would loosen his prey up and make him more receptive to his plan. He took a seat at the bar where he could keep a watchful eye. To be successful, he had to get a feel for the man's interests. When the waitress came by, he ordered coffee.

He watched as the man's eyes follow the waitress when she delivered his coffee. Forman knew that this was normal for a single guy and it assured him that the man wasn't gay.

At 10:30 AM, the sun was high enough to encourage the usual beach activity of sun bathing and dips in the crystal clear water. Some people were boarding a glass bottom boat for a tour of the coral reefs. Others formed a line at the parasail booth for a flight over the island's showcase beach.

He watched the man finish his Bloody Mary and order a second in a paper to-go cup. The fellow then strolled onto the beach towards a group of bikini clad girls. Hearing their laughing and loud talking, he concluded the girls all knew each other and it seemed obvious that his prey had an interest in meeting one of them.

From his vantage point in the lounge, Forman could see the man strike up a conversation with a couple of the girls, but they soon went back to laughing with their friends. The man strolled on for about a hundred yards, then he turned back toward the lounge.

Forman stood up and stretched as the man approached. He smiled and said, "Teeny-boppers in a group are a tough sell."

"You noticed, huh?" The man answered.

"Yeah, I was thinking about doing the same thing, but I decided to wait and see if you had any luck."

"Well, the day is young," he replied. "Lunch time may offer some better opportunities."

"I get the feeling you're experienced at picking up gals on cruise ships," Forman said.

"Well . . . I love these singles trips, but I learned that girls are much more approachable off the boat for some reason."

"You really think so?" Forman asked. "How about I buy you a drink and pick your brain."

The man grinned and held out his hand, "I'm Jay Bridges."

"Forman Blocker," he replied as he shook his hand.

They picked a table and each ordered a Bloody Mary when the native waitress came by.

"Where're you from?" Forman asked.

"A suburb of Miami . . . I get to frequent South Beach a lot."

"No wonder you're a pro at picking up girls."

Jay laughed. "I wouldn't go that far, but I get my share."

Forman sipped at his drink while Jay finished his.

"I'm gonna hit the head if I can find one," Jay announced, "these drinks, ya know, and the call of nature."

"I'll get you a refill while you're gone," Forman offered.

"Great," he said as he ambled off toward a sign that pointed to public restrooms.

When the waitress brought the Jay's next drink, he retrieved a pill from his pocket and dropped it into Jay's glass. He stirred it with the swizzle stick while he awaited Jay's return.

"You on our boat?" Jay asked as he sat down.

"No, I've been here for three weeks just enjoying the island and its features. I fly out tomorrow for Jamaica for two more weeks."

"What attractions kept you here for three weeks?"

"Tourists, man . . . tourists. People rent cottages for a week at a time and live it up. The resort hotels also attract good looking gals. They do things here that they wouldn't think of doing at home."

"That's very interesting . . . I never thought of that."

"I found one really wild gal at the Plantation Paradise Hotel that literally wore me out. Maybe you could keep up with her for a while if you have time."

Jay almost guzzled his drink. "Hey man . . . just point me in the right direction," he said, "I'll be forever grateful."

"When do you have to be back on the boat?"

"Four o'clock . . . that should give me enough time, shouldn't it?"

Forman nodded. "Tell you what . . . you seem like a good guy and I'm bored with this beach. I'll drive you to the hotel . . . it's about two miles down the beach."

"Man, that would be great," he said as he stood up. After a couple of steps, he wobbled a bit, "Wow, those drinks must have been pretty strong . . . I'm feeling a little woozy."

"A little walk will get your bearings back . . . it's about a block to the rent car."

Jay staggered a little as they left the lounge and trudged through the sand. Forman had to steady him a couple of times on the way to the car. He opened the passenger side door and Jay flopped into the seat. Forman helped him fasten his seatbelt, then got in on the driver's side.

After riding about four blocks, Jay passed out. Further down the road, Forman turned off the main highway onto a narrow side road that led up into the mountains. A twenty minute ride over ruts and bumps brought them to a steep cliff overlooking a thickly wooded ravine.

He parked and tugged the unconscious Jay out onto the ground where he stripped him of his clothes. He then pulled him over to the cliff's edge and watched him tumble down into oblivion. He knew that if the body was ever found, it would be noted as just another careless tourist.

Looking through Jay's belongings, he examined the contents of his wallet. Pleased, he discovered that it contained eight one-hundred dollar bills, several credit cards, and the usual identity cards. He found Jay's shipboard credit card, some loose bills, and some change in the right pocket of his Bermuda shorts. He quickly donned them in place of his bright red swimsuit.

He tossed his clothes in the back seat and climbed back into the car wearing Jay's flip flops, shorts, and his T-shirt. Checking his appearance in the mirror, he added sun glasses and a Panama hat. He decided that with his three day stubble, he should easily pass for Jay when he went through security scan as he re-boarded the ship.

Forman abandoned the car near the pier, unconcerned about returning it. The identity he used on the island was now history and a new era had begun. He entered the gate to the pier by flashing Jay's shipboard credit card and made the long walk down the pier to the ship. The real test was yet to come.

It was about 12:35 as he approached the security checkpoint just inside the ship. A couple of groups were ahead of him, so he mingled and began a conversation with an elderly woman. He assisted her as she stepped up the ramp and walked with her up to the crewmember manning the scanner.

He continued the conversation while casually handing over his card for the scan. The crewmember glanced at his face to match it with the photo on record. With sunglasses, the Panama hat, and the beard stubble, there was little to compare.

"Take off your glasses, please," the crewman requested.

He looked at Forman, then at the photo that popped up on his computer screen. Satisfied, the crewman returned the card and "Jay" passed through the checkpoint.

Hungry, he went to the huge buffet restaurant on deck nine and selected his lunch. He picked a window table and requested a glass of Chardonnay, knowing they would ask for his charge card. It was a necessary step while the ship was still in port, knowing the drink chit would show his room number.

The next task he would encounter was probably the most difficult. He had to avoid a meeting with the housekeeping person, since they always made efforts to be personally acquainted. If Jay had been friendly with one of them, his impersonation could be detected.

He decided to walk the corridor of deck six where the room was located to see if the cleaning crew was still at work. The corridor was empty, so he elected to check out the room. Dropping his shipboard credit card in the slot, the green light flashed and he opened the door.

Pleased that it was a small suite with a balcony, he explored the closet and bathroom. The bed was already made and the bathroom looked spic and span. Jay had plenty of clothes in the closet and several nice accessories, such as an iPad, binoculars, and a camera. He found a bathing suit in one of the drawers, donned it, and caught the elevator to the pool deck.

He took a deep breath of fresh air. It had been a good day.