

Life or Death

By

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I strolled into Bank of America, locked the doors, and placed the *Closed for Hurricane* sign in the window. I was on the verge of doing something against everything I stood for to get money to save my daughter's life. The lobby smelled of the same industrial floor cleaner as the hospital. An older lady with a purse large enough to put a small child inside, was in line. I moved past her and joined a woman at the teller's window. The Scream mask I was wearing caused her to jump and then melt.

"Don't get weak in the knees on me," I said. Then I gave the stunned teller a glimpse of the Glock 9 inside my jacket. "Listen, if you touch that button, everyone in here will be sorry. Do you understand?" I asked.

She nodded and cut her eyes toward the Key West PD officer, who was engaged in a debate with a muscular, no-neck guy.

The other teller had not noticed my mask until now. She did a double take and looked as if her breakfast would come up. Her customer, a frail man with glasses, clutching a bag from Kermit's Key lime Cookies, turned to see what was upsetting her.

"Sit down on the floor and hand me your cell phones. Do not create problems, and there will be no problems! Nod if you understand," I said to the customers in the bank.

The Key West PD officer leaped up and reached for his gun. No Neck put a Smith & Wesson against the officer's right kidney and took his weapon. "Sit down" No Neck said. He then took the officer into the restroom and handcuffed him to the toilet.

The tellers quickly filled the duffle bags with the money that would pay for my daughter's life-saving surgery. Looking out of the tall windows, I could see Flagler Avenue. It was a ghost town as people prepared for the arrival of Hurricane Wilma. There were no police in sight.

Next, we moved cautiously down a hall towards a side door and the van that would take us to the next phase. The hairs on my neck stood up, and the floor cleaner mixed with a copper smell. I stepped in something sticky. A dead armored car driver was sprawled out in front of me. Carlos, our getaway driver, was also dead a few feet away, still clutching his Sig Sauer with the silencer attached. Inside the Brinks truck was a third guy with a bullet hole between his eyes. Damn! A tear fell from my eye as Muscles backed into me. Looking down and then out at the truck, reality hit him, a three-way shoot out, ending in three deaths. Stepping over the carnage and slipping around the armored car, we jumped inside the van.

Hours later as I walked up the concrete pavement toward Garrison Marina the wind howled and the boats rocked back and forth in their slips, all dancing to different beats. Then, a Coast Guard official suddenly appeared. With sweaty hands, I handed her my ID and told her I was moving my boat to a dry slip. She took a copy of my fake credentials and said the system was down so she could not officially check them but gave me permission to move the boat. I maneuvered out of the wet slip and set off on the ninety-mile journey to Cuba. The system must have come up, because I could see her in my rear view coming after me. I sped up, trying to make it to the land of no extradition. She was closing in on me, so I abruptly shut off my engine and lights. I held my breath as my heart almost jumped out of my chest. The wind and water burned my face as she sped past me on the right. Her lights were angled towards the coast, so she never saw me.

I crept into Marina Chapelin in Varadero, Cuba with the skill of a seasoned spy. I quickly dropped off the money at Bar Fernandez to be cleaned, then headed to the pediatric hospital. The money would have to be ready when it was time to pay for Joy's surgery.

I entered Joy's room and handed her a handmade doll from Mrs. Godfrey. Mrs. Godfrey loved to knit and sew beautiful dolls. She carried around her colored yarn and fabrics in a colossal knitting bag. I showed her the sack that Mr. Newsome had sent containing Key Lime butter cookies. "You can't have them until after your surgery," I said.

"Alright, daddy," she said weakly. I kissed Joy on the forehead and stepped outside the room to speak privately to my wife.

"I'm glad you finally made it," she said with a crooked smile.

"Nothing would stop me from giving our precious Joy a chance at life," I replied. I told her that Muscles would arrive later with new ID's and papers for us.

"I wish Carlos could have joined us in this fresh start," she said as she hugged me.

"I do too, my love; no one was supposed to die," I said.

We planned for everything, even placing friends in the bank, who would purposely be poor witnesses later. The Brinks pickup was a surprise we had not thought of, and I would have to live with the guilt of the death of Carlos and those two armored truck drivers for the rest of my life.

Joy, Hope, and I received a new lease on life but for me, absolution would never come.