

POINT DECEPTION

Jim Gilliam

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First Edition

Dedicated

To

Lieutenant Junior Grade David C. Brostrom, USCG

And

Engineman Second Class Jerry Phillips, USCG

Killed in action by elements of the U. S. Air Force in the
predawn hours of 11 August 1966 while serving aboard the
USCGC Point Welcome WPB 82329 on patrol in the waters
near the mouth of the Cua Viet River, Vietnam

YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

BOOK ONE
Innocence Lost

ONE

YOU HAVE NEVER LIVED ‘til you’ve almost died. For those who fight for it, life has a flavor the protected will never know.

Deputy Sheriff Dave Holt had been asleep for almost five hours.

It was by no means a restful sleep; what there was of it had been a fitful sleep, born of stress, fatigue, and fear for his young partner Tim Kelly’s life.

The question—always at the forefront of his mind—*Had he encouraged Tim’s decision to go undercover; knowing that he was possibly sending him to his death*—robbed him of sleep.

At first Kelly refused the undercover assignment. His personal code of honor would not allow him to betray a friend, especially one who had saved his life, on more than one occasion.

That might have been the end of it, but for subsequent events sealing his decision to enter the shadow world of drug and human trafficking as an undercover narcotics agent sponsored by his old friend and mentor Rodolfo Guzman, a kingpin in the powerful and ruthless Campeche Cartel.

Rodolfo’s restored seventeenth century Spanish hacienda, located on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande River, approximately fifteen miles inland from where the current of the Rio Grande collides with the tidal surge of the Gulf of Mexico, was heavily fortified, and reputed to be vulnerable only to an attack by an organized military force with air and artillery support.

The proximity of the hacienda to U.S. territory would be the crucial element for Kelly’s backup rescue team; standing by around the clock, to rescue him if he became a prisoner, or recover his body, if he had been killed.

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Somewhere in the twilight-world between sleep and wakefulness, Holt's conscious mind began to stir; eyes still closed, he wondered if he was dreaming. *What is that annoying buzzing sound? It can't be time to get up. I just got to sleep.*

Suddenly Holt sat bolt upright in bed, staring in disbelief at the small beeper as it loudly buzzed and vibrated its way across the top of his bedside table, coming to rest against a half empty bottle of Wild Turkey, his favorite brand of Bourbon, taken neat, without the muss and fuss of ice or mixers.

The device had been silent for fourteen months. Holt almost forgot why he wore the damn thing. That it was alarming now disturbed him to the point of nausea.

His jaw dropped as he snatched the noisy small vibrating plastic enclosed, electronic device from the nightstand. Silencing the annoying buzzer, he stared at the two word message on the small screen in shock and disbelief:

NO JOY

The universal meaning: no show, not found, no luck. Take your pick.

According to a pre-arranged plan, Kelly was supposed to contact Holt through a secure telephone drop at least every five days; passing on any new evidence he had, also reassuring his handler that his cover was still intact.

Allowing for a day of grace, a total of six days without contact would be taken to mean, Kelly's true identity had become known to the cartel and he was either a prisoner within the confines of Rodolfo's hacienda, or dead.

Neither possibility gave Holt a good feeling.

Picking up the bedside telephone, Holt dialed a number committed to memory fourteen months earlier; praying as he did so that his young partner was still alive.

The coded number activated a volunteer team of Texas lawmen sworn to carry out a tri-fold mission committing them to an illegal,

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clandestine, armed incursion onto Mexican sovereign territory, from which some, or possibly all, of them might not return. It was a bold and dangerous plan. Not even the most elite units of the Mexican federal police dared attack Rodolfo Guzman's hacienda—a renegade state within a state that did not answer to the Mexican government.

Six days prior to the rescue team's activation, Kelly's old friend and mentor, Rodolfo Guzman, angrily confronted him with damning evidence of his deception.

A red faced and visibly angry Rodolfo was yelling at a bewildered Kelly, "I would be very interested in your explanation of these photos of you and Deputy Holt of the Cameron County Sheriff's Department."

Attempting, unsuccessfully, to control his rising anger, Rodolfo was wildly jabbing his right index finger at several grainy black and white photographs covering the top of his massive seventeenth century Spanish oak desk.

The photos Rodolfo was so excited about, showed Kelly and his soon to be stepfather, Dave Holt, having a relaxed lunch at a local Mexican restaurant. There was no apparent attempt by either of the men to conceal the encounter.

From the beginning, Kelly realized his dangerous double life in the violent, shadow world of drug trafficking depended not only on guile but his equally essential communication lifeline to the civilized world.

Always a realist, he accepted the fact that the life expectancy of an undercover narcotics agent was often measured in days—he had been under for over fourteen months. This fact made him wary; forcing him to live moment-to-moment with the gut wrenching fear that one day his real identity would be discovered. *How much longer can I keep up the charade? I should get out now; that would be the better part of valor.* That was never going to happen. He was an adrenalin junkie, pure and simple; like any addict, deep down, he craved the high, living on the edge provided—if there was a better thrill, it was news to him.

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Curiously, the fear—his constant companion—was not for his own life, but that he would be discovered before he finished his mission. The loss of something he cherished more than life itself fueled his passion to punish the Campeche Cartel or die in the attempt.

“That’s simple!” Kelly snapped back adopting the indignant tone of one who has been falsely accused, at the same time fearing that Rodolfo would see through the transparency of his lies.

Maintaining eye contact with Rodolfo and striving to keep his voice free of panic, Kelly continued, “Dave and my mother are getting married in a couple of months. So I took my future stepfather to lunch. What’s the big deal? Just because I work for you now must I get rid of all of my old friends? Besides, Rucho and I have been sworn enemies since junior high school. He has a strong motive to discredit me since I whipped his ass in front of his gang of schoolyard bullies back then.”

“Just try to kick my ass now *cabron!*” Rucho snarled, moving menacingly towards Kelly.

Rodolfo checked Rucho’s advance with a wave of his hand.

Although he lacked the polish and finesse of the legendary fifteenth century Italian diplomat, Rucho was extremely intelligent, possessing guile and cunning worthy of a twentieth century Machiavelli.

The façade he allowed those around him to see was really the part he played best. For all intents and purposes he was just another muscle bound thug.

However, nothing is ever what it seems, especially in the dark world of drug peddlers and arms smugglers; the last person foolish enough to underestimate Rucho, had simply disappeared.

Rucho, coveting Rodolfo’s piece of the Campeche Cartel for years, was patiently biding his time until he could safely make his move. *Soon! It would be soon*, he promised himself.

Kelly’s entry into the Campeche Cartel under Rodolfo’s sponsorship fourteen months earlier had begun to play an integral part in Rucho’s plans to violently overthrow his boss.

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Rucho maintained that Rodolfo had grown progressively soft over the years and was no longer hard enough or ruthless enough to survive in the violent world of drug trafficking and arms dealing—*this softness will be Rodolfo's downfall*, he predicted.

As Kelly was speaking Rodolfo appeared pensive, as though recalling happier days. Suddenly he asked, “Remember the first time we met?”

“I saved your ass when that gang of older boys was preparing to attack you.”

“We became friends that day, and since then, I have treated you as if you were my own son. Have I not?”

“That’s why, *mijo*, your betrayal of our friendship and my trust has broken my heart.”

“At first I didn’t believe Rucho when he came to me with his, what I thought to be trumped up charges of your treachery. I decided to give you a little test; unfortunately, you did not pass.”

“I told you about a drug deal that was so big that you couldn’t possibly resist passing the information on to your friend Deputy Holt, if you were truly an undercover narcotics agent.”

“Evidently you didn’t realize that you were the only one that I confided in. So, please do not continue to desecrate our friendship with your pathetic protestations of innocence.”

For the moment Kelly remained silent, his mouth dry, his heart pounding. It appeared, for the time being, at least, that there was no possible escape, except for the escape of a quick death, releasing him from the pain of the torture he knew would come.

As he listened to Rodolfo’s angry words he broke into a cold sweat; a wave of nausea came over him, with great difficulty he managed to choke back the burning bitter taste of bile refluxing up from his stomach into his bone dry throat—the feeling was raw fear.

His mind was like the confused sea of a hurricane; *I’m dead if I don’t get out of here now; but how? There’s Rodolfo, Rucho, and at least three enforcers between me and the door and if I make it through*

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the door, I'm still in the compound. I should have set up an escape plan; too late now. Damn it.