

WATCHING THE BEACH

I was sitting on the balcony of my hotel penthouse, smoking a Filipino deluxe cigar, and watching the sea birds dipping and diving in the ocean for a mid-day meal. It was another one of those typical gorgeous days in paradise. The big, white fluffy clouds were billowing and bouncing off the horizon. I was supervising the beach. I am very dedicated to my job. Saipan is a wonderful place to live and relax.

Our three children were off at school. I was taking an afternoon siesta after helping my wife, Cocina, finish up the month-end bills for our hotel. She was satisfied with the 90% occupancy rate, and knew that we were beginning to turn a healthy profit for all our hard work the previous year. Just as we predicted, eco-tourism was popular and attracting guests from all the world. Tourists wanted a little adventure with their trips, and were equally concerned about the future of the oceans and the fragile reefs.

Cocina was relieved that our son, Anthony, had fully recovered after being shot by an assailant, whom I had been investigating for drug sales, bribery and fraud. My money manager in Los Angeles, financial wizard Angel Cho, said that I was right on track in doubling my millions. Our in-house accountant Mario I was doing a bang-up job and worked closely with Angel on a monthly basis. I was trying not to be one of those worry-warts that get all nervous and jumpy when things are just going too well.

This was a long way from the mean, dangerous streets of South Los Angeles. I had survived physically and emotionally after twenty years of fighting gangs and trying to suppress the high homicide rate. The big win in Las Vegas at the slots gave me this new start in life... and maybe karma.

The hotel was in tiptop shape after the maintenance and security supervisor, Mario II, selected the right people for the jobs, and trained them, and got the supplies that they needed. The bright rose-colored paint job on the hotel reminded our guests of the Navajo pueblos in New Mexico. Thanks to Yoshi, the new landscaping was immaculate, and much appreciated by the tourists, especially the senior citizens coming regularly from Japan. In December, they came from the cold, snowy mountains of Sapporo into our warm Garden of Eden, with its thousands of colorful flowers. Their cameras get a real workout.

I watched Lola cleaning and manicuring the beach to perfection. The white lounging chairs were laid out in perfect symmetry. The hammocks were freshly washed. She took a personal interest in how the beach looked, and worked steadily without any supervision. Our Korean chef, Guangman, was the same way in the kitchen. He was continually creating and serving the most luscious, scrumptious dishes. When Carlos and I hit it big on the fishing boat, we'd take our catch to the hotel kitchen. His favorite question always was, "Boss how do you want the fish prepared? You want it barbequed, baked, sautéed, fricasseed, deep-fried, sashimi and sushi style, stewed, or grilled?" My response was usually to the effect, "Use your own judgment. How do you remember all that?" Guangman's wife Seuchill and their child Bora were two of the top female athletes on Saipan. Mostly they were the jocks of the family, while Guangman liked to do needlepoint and *origami*. They helped out in the kitchen when Guangman and his assistant Miguel, were overwhelmed with a full hotel or a celebration.

Most all of our employees were working at a high level of competence. I knew that the profit-sharing, bonus plan helped to motivate the work ethic, but I also knew that Cocina was a fair and likeable boss. As I had planned from the beginning, “The Beach Hotel” partially belonged to the employees, and they believed in the motto for our guests “Your Home for Fun and Health.” They had a vested interest.

I left the penthouse, and used the six levels of stairs going down for exercise. I walked past the pool. There were dozens of guests playing and tanning, and the pool was crystal clear, and the sharpest *azul* blue of the spectrum. I waved at Cocina in her office in the lobby area, as I walked into my PI office next door, the International Private Investigations Agency. My friend and fellow detective, Carlos Montano, was on the phone having an intense conversation. He had just returned from a temporary job working as a Deputy Chief for six months at the Department of Public Safety. He had previously retired from the Attorney General’s Office as a Senior Investigator, but had gone back to help out the new commissioner at DPS, until she got her new command staff hired and trained.

I whispered to Carlos, “What have you got? Need a diversion to get you off the phone?”

He nodded, and mouthed, “Its okay, Tom. We’re almost done.”

As he was hanging up the phone, he said, “Yeah...right...I’ll tell Tom Parker that you called. Yeah...yeah...” to the other person on the phone. He shook his head.

I asked, “What was that all about?”

Carlos replied, “Just an asshole lawyer. You know Jim Walcott. He’s representing one of the crooked DPS cops, and he wants us to reconsider several of the charges. He knows better than to call me. I told him to get hold of the prosecutor. He said that he already tried that, but it was a no-go.”

I said, “You did right, amigo. He knows he has to go to the prosecutor to adjust court charges.”

Carlos added, “Wolcott said his client, Sonny Ramirez, is going to be real mad. I asked Wolcott if I should take that as a threat or just a thought in passing.” Carlos had picked up his ever-present baseball bat, and was taking practice swings.

I smiled, “And how did he answer that?”

“That’s about when you walked in, Tom. He stammered and stuttered a little, and said that he didn’t mean anything. He was just thinking about his client.”

I said, “Outa our hands. Fuck him and the horse he rode in on. Let the lawyers work it out. Meanwhile, what do we have on the agenda today in the PI business?”

I noticed that Carlos’ desk was covered with pages of notes from ubiquitous yellow pads. Several of them had doodling and scribbling, and a few had legible phone numbers.