

# **The Cross and the .357 Magnum**

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## Chapter 1

# Two Steps Back

Warm raindrops splashed against my face as we lowered the coarse rope over the roof's edge. From the top of a Fort Lauderdale apartment building, my eyes nervously searched the parking lot five stories below, and I silently prayed I wouldn't spot any security guards coming by on patrol. My partner, Tom, and I were dressed completely in black, blending perfectly with our starless-sky backdrop.

I tried to remain calm but my mind was doing flip flops. After snorting much more cocaine than usual that afternoon and evening, I had attempted to come down by toking on a joint of Columbian Gold, a premium form of marijuana. Instead of bringing me down, the stuff just made me paranoid.

"Look down there!" I yelled. "There's a security guard, and he's looking up here!"

"Shhhh, hold it down," whispered Tom, "that's just someone who got out of that car! They'd have to have bionic eyesight to see us."

It was time to descend to the now-darkened apartment below, whose occupants had earlier departed. Before gaining access to this wealthy gated community, Tom and I had lay in wait in a grassy field adjacent to the complex. With the help of a pair of military binoculars purchased earlier at a local Army Surplus store,

we had monitored the movement of the couple who lived in the apartment and watched as the lights went off and, later, when they walked across the parking lot, entered their car, and drove away. As soon as the patrolling security guard was out of sight we made our move, successfully scaling a chain-link fence that surrounded the complex then crawling to the edge of the parking lot. Using the parked cars for cover, we slowly maneuvered our way to the building, boldly took the elevator to the fifth floor, then climbed a ladder to the roof. Thankfully, no one crossed our path.

Tom had brought along a rope that was 40 feet long. After tying one end around an air conditioner vent, he slowly lowered the other end over the edge of the roof.

I insisted on being the one to scale the building. I took a deep breath and eased over the edge. “No problem,” I thought to myself. “I’ve seen this done on detective shows many times before.”

Perspiration trickled down my face as I fiercely gripped the rope. I had no trouble as I inched past the fifth floor on my way to the third floor balcony. The relative ease of my progress temporarily erased my fears until I suddenly froze in terror.

My heart raced while my breath stood still.

There before me—less than six short feet away—stood a woman on her fourth floor balcony, silently smoking a cigarette as she gazed into the night.

For a moment I thought I was hallucinating, and a million thoughts raced through my mind. Was I losing it? How long had she been there? Had she walked out while I was climbing down? How could I have been so blind? What was I going to do?