

Chapter 7 Drinks with Dare

Walking into Global Grill on a Tuesday night is pot luck. The bar can be packed with attorneys and their “nieces” or have only a few movers and shakers trying to take the edge off the day. Tonight, Dare Evans is holding court at one end of the long mahogany bar sipping on Cabernet Sauvignon and fending off a county bureaucrat.

“Walker, you look like you’ve been playing a sandlot football,” she says as I pull up a stool and Chase, the bartender, hands me a Corona with a lime. “Tell me that you’ve put the paper to bed.”

“No way in hell. Dennis is still proofing the last few pages, but he should be down here in thirty minutes.” I look at my watch. It’s 7:13, over an hour past the printer’s deadline. Grantham will be lucky if Mal doesn’t castrate him. Big Boy had already gone upstairs to the loft to avoid any collateral damage.

I take a long sip as the political hack leaves the bar as quickly as possible. Dare doesn’t even bother to introduce us. She senses that I’m not in the mood.

“Do you ever change your shirt?” she asks with a wink and half smile that makes we look away before I melt. I remind myself to look at her eyes when I look back, not her chest.

“There aren’t any holes or stains. The wrinkles give it character.”

I look around the place. Global Grill is a tapas restaurant that sits about 80 people. It’s long and narrow. The white walls are covered with the works of local artists. The food is fantastic. The service is impeccable. It’s where young couples go when they want to celebrate, and it’s where the rest of us take out of town guests or just have a great dinner.

The bar is near the front door. There is a cluster of five attorneys at the end of the bar right by the front door. A couple of cute, long-legged blondes, are sitting in the no man’s-land area in the middle of the bar trying to get Chase’s attention for another drink.

Stay away. They probably went to school with my nieces.

Between the bar and the dining area, there is a jazz guitarist playing softly. The dining area is packed with tables of four to six people, except the one table near the guitarist. Its occupants are two beefy guys drinking Budweiser long necks and picking at a plate of Mozzarella sticks. Their biceps are the size of my thighs. I see the words “Red Alert” peeking out from one of their short sleeves. They aren’t looking our way, but I will try to remember their faces.

“Let’s first talk about Bruce Manchester, Walker. What’s he upset about this time?” Chase fills up Dare’s glass without being asked. He hands me another Corona. I inhaled the first one.

“It’s the article on the Beak Family Charitable Trust. Manchester apparently plays golf with Jan Beak.”

“Walker, you knew that article was going to stir things up. Everybody has trusts, even the Evans family. Granted, some of us actually make donations. If I didn’t know better, I’d suspect that you included the Beaks just to upset Bruce.”

I smile and take another long sip of my Corona. There is huge mirror behind the bar. I can keep an eye on our beer drinking visitors.

“I’ll call Jan,” Dare offers, “And tell him that the family should be a platinum sponsor of the Cancer Society’s Cattle Baron’s Ball. Jan can wear cowboy hat and boots. The American Cancer Society will get \$25,000 for cancer research, and Bruce will get off your back.”

“Just like I planned it, Dare.”

“Yeah, right.”

“Dare, we’ve got a few minutes before Dennis gets here. So before we talk about Clarence Wilson and the jail death, tell me what you know about someone buying up land around the Main Street Sewage Treatment plant.”

She takes a sip of her wine and pauses for a few seconds, trying to remember what she had heard.

“I think one of our agents mentioned something last week about a land company out of Birmingham making calls on the properties in the area.” She gets her cell phone out of her purse and makes a call. “Let me see if Betsy knows the name of the company.”

While she’s dialing, I take a long look at Dare. She is wearing a Kelly Green satin blouse that is fitted, not tight...fitted. There is a difference. The green really makes her hair appear even redder. She is wearing gold dangling ear rings and a gold necklace.

Nothing too flashy. Dare doesn’t wear or need to wear a lot of jewelry. Good thing that Dennis is coming down to Global Grill. After a few more drinks, things could get complicated. Complications can ruin a friendship.

Betsy doesn’t answer so Dare leaves a message.

“Email me what you find out.” We sit and listen to the music. The attorneys appear to be breaking up. Two have walked down to the blondes and have started a conversation. The Bubbas at the table are on their cell phones.

“What did the troll tell you about Thursday’s county commission meeting?” Dare knows I’m talking about Mikey Head, the pudgy, butterball that was talking to her when I walked into the restaurant. Head is the administrative assistant to county administrator.

“Listen I know you can’t stand him, but Mikey is a handy person to know. I’ve got two variances coming before the commission that need to be approved before I can build our next condo. I couldn’t tell if he was more upset about seeing you or Chester and Lester that are sitting behind me.” Dare is too much the politician not to notice who else is the room.

“What does he say about Frost’s request for funding for deputy raises?” Chase waves a Corona at me. I nod for him to pop the top and bring it over.

“Before those two got here, he was saying it’s still a toss up. The auditors say that Frost had the money in his budget for the raises but spent it on refurbishing his office and a mobile command center. Then Head clammed up the minute those two guys came in.”

“They must be deputies,” I say discreetly nodding towards the pair. “The question is – are they here for the troll or me?”

“Since they are still here, they must be here for you, Walker.” Dare is more amused than worried.

“Thank God, I walked here,” I say loudly and stare directly at them. They stare back. I probably spoke too fast for them. The Global Grill is conveniently one block north of my office so it meets my new requirement of no driving in the county after a few beers.

Finally Dennis walks in. Chase pours him a Jack Daniels and Coke has it at his seat before Dennis sits down. There’s a reason why we come here on Tuesdays. He kisses Dare on the cheek and sits down. He nods at me. We silently agree not to talk about the issue. Dennis and Dare chitchat for a few minutes. I look around the restaurant. The attorneys and the blondes are getting a table for dinner. The guitarist is packing up his equipment. The place is thinning out. Dennis notices the deputies and winks at me.

Not too loudly, but loud enough for the deputies to hear, Dennis tells Dare, “Well, there is no way the county commission will pass the raises for the sheriff’s office. Four of them told me that they are adamantly against it, but they don’t plan to tell the sheriff before the meeting. They also plan to pressure Frost to fire Peck.”

The deputies quickly call for their check and head out of the restaurant. We barely hold our laughter until they are out the front door.

“You two are made for each other,” Dare says as we toast the deputies and this week’s issue. Chase brings us another round.

Dare and I fill Dennis in on the death of George Polk. She remembers a few points that I forgot. Dennis asks some questions. He reminds us that this isn’t the first death in the jail infirmary. There was another two years ago.

Dare yawns and looks at her watch.

“Fellas, it’s time for this beauty queen to go to bed. I think I should leave before you two start talking too much about strategies. It’s always best I can plead ignorance when it comes to the Pensacola Insider”

She gives each of us a kiss and hug. Chase walks her out to her car, while we talk about what steps we want to take with the story. I tell Dennis about lunch with Gordon and afternoon coffee with Sheriff Frost. We agree to meet at the office at 8 a.m. and talk about our upcoming meeting with the Tucker family. We will need to figure how much time and effort it will take to do the story. Can we finish the reporting before next Tuesday?

Dennis is parked behind the restaurant so he leaves out the back door. As I walk toward the front door on to Palafox, the hostess hands me a sealed, thick envelope. It weighs at least five six pounds.

“A man dropped this off for you earlier, Mr. Holmes,” she says. “I almost forgot to give it to you.”

“What did he look like?”

“Funny, I can’t really remember. I was busy taking reservations and he was only here a few seconds.

Jim Gordon. It had to be. I open the folder and pull out the first few pages. It contains the autopsy report on George Polk.

So much for going to bed.

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