

Elena met Rose at Turtle Barn just before sunset. They had a little ritual that was just for the two of them; Rose had invited Stevie the first time, but it turned out that Stevie was afraid of heights. Rose suspected it had something to do with growing up in central Nebraska, where if you stood on a milk crate you could see all the way to Japan.

“Dan?” Rose said to the night manager, who had just come on duty. “Tower key?”

He grimaced and took it off his key ring. “I don’t know why I let you do this.”

“Because,” Elena said, “you are a prince among common men. Muchas gracias.”

Rose smiled at him and led Elena up the stairs to the Tower Bar, which had been built on the roof of the restaurant. The tower it was named for was like a fire lookout, just a skeleton of thick beams and cross-braces supporting a small, covered observation deck.

Rose had never been able to find out why the tower had been built; it hadn’t been there when she was in Key West the first time, and no one currently employed at the restaurant had worked there long enough to remember. She suspected that someone had thought it would be a tourist attraction, and then come to their senses when they realized that it loomed over a bar, where people were drinking, a lot. No doubt the insurance company had pointed out the obvious issues.

So now the tower was just a landmark and a namesake for the bar at its feet. As far as Rose knew, she and Elena were the only people ever to go up there. There were other places they did this. But this was Rose’s favorite.

Rose stood at the tall gate barring access to the stairs with the key in her hand. She looked around at the people drinking and chattering. No one was watching them. Occasionally she had to fend off inquisitive tourists who wanted to follow them up. It was usually enough to say that she was doing her daily sweep for large, poisonous scorpions—and yes, there were always some up

there. They seemed to like high places, and Rose's job was to make sure they didn't leap down on the customers. So please step back, sir, if you don't want to get scorpions in your hair.

There were no scorpions, of course, but it was an effective story.

Rose unlocked the gate, they slipped inside, and she pulled it closed behind them. She led the way up the zig-zagging staircase that ran along the outside of the tower like a fire escape. Elena, despite being much shorter and curvier than Rose, was having no trouble keeping up. After four courses of stairs, they reached the observation platform, which had solid wooden half-height walls and a peaked, corrugated metal roof.

"The air smells better up here," Elena said.

"Yeah, you can't smell the fish frying."

Elena laughed and they looked out over the harbor. One of the sunset cruise boats was just leaving its mooring. Rose could hear the music and the laughter even from up here. In a few moments the sounds faded as the boat rounded the breakwater. Without a word they turned west to face the sun, which was still some way above the horizon.