

# Frog Head Key

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By Eric Douglas



## Chapter 5

Randy Littlebear entered the dive shop slowly. He knew the news he was bringing wasn't going to do anyone any good that morning. He was a federal officer with the Bureau of Indian Affairs—a cop. He worked on the Seminole reservation to the north, but spent his spare time in the keys fishing and diving. He had been at the local hospital that night looking in on a friend when they brought Jake and Bo into the emergency department. They were both beaten up so badly he hadn't recognized them at first.

“Hey Jackson, you in here?” Littlebear called out.

“Yeah, man, you know I get here early,” Jackson said as he walked out of the back office.

“You looking for a cup of coffee?” When he saw the look on his friend’s face, he stopped cold.

“What is it? What happened?”

“It’s Jake and Bo, Jackson. I just left them at the hospital,” Littlebear said. “Jake didn’t make it. Bo is in pretty bad shape, but he still has a chance. I’m sorry, man.”

Jackson stood stock still. It wasn’t the first time he had lost a friend, but that was on the New York City Fire Department. Not here in the keys. Young men weren’t supposed to die like this.

“How did it happen? Was it a car wreck?” Jackson asked when he found his voice.

“I’m not investigating, but I spoke to one of the local deputies. He said a fisherman found them by the side of the road, headed out toward the old marina. It looked like they had been beaten up pretty badly and dumped there,” Littlebear explained. As he finished saying that, Kia walked in the door.

“It’s the guys, isn’t it?” she said, her voice soft. “Are they dead?”

“Kia, what do you know about this? Do you know what happened? Where were Bo and Jake last night?” Jackson asked.

“Jake was pretty mad that you didn’t want to check out that island yesterday. He made Bo go with him last night to check it out,” Kia said. “That was the last I saw of them. I went home and went to bed.”

“What’s this?” Littlebear asked. “They were checking out some island?”

Jackson briefed his friend in on what they had discovered the previous afternoon. He explained that he had given the water sample to a friend for analysis. He had also confirmed with

Fish and Wildlife that they weren't operating in the area. He had planned to report it all to the sheriff today for further investigation.

"Sounds like this is all tied together somehow," Littlebear agreed. "We can handle this two ways. We can tell the sheriff about what you've found and let them sort it out. Or..."

"Or we can go out there and check it out for ourselves and maybe find out who did this to the guys," Jackson finished.

"I'm going with you," Kia said defiantly.

"No, Kia. It's too dangerous," Jackson started to argue.

"Don't tell me that, Jackson. Bo and Jake were my friends, too," Kia said. "I could have gone with them, or talked them out of going, but I didn't. And now this has happened. I'm going."

"Sounds like the lady has made up her mind, pal," Littlebear agreed.

"You're right. Apparently she has," Jackson said. "Littlebear, the part you don't know here is that our young friend used to be a street cop in New York. She's as tough as they come, just another runaway from the real world. Like the rest of us."

"Pleasure to meet you, then," Littlebear said with a nod of his head.

"All right. Give me an hour. I've got to make some arrangements. I'll call Captain Larry to see if he can fill in for Jake today. Meet me at *Daydreamer* and we'll go for a little boat ride," Jackson said as he walked out the door.

Littlebear was smiling at Kia as she stood watching Jackson go.

"Is he always like that?" she asked.

"He gets pretty focused when something like this happens," Littlebear said with a gruff laugh.

“Does this sort of thing happen to you guys a lot?”

“You’d be surprised.”

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It only took Jackson, Kia and Littlebear about a half an hour to get everything ready to go. They were on Jackson’s boat *Daydreamer* and headed out as the sun rose over the horizon. They were well underway before any of them spoke.

“You got a plan?” Littlebear asked Jackson. Littlebear was a Seminole who served with distinction in the first Gulf War as a Navy diver and had returned home after his military service. The two first met when Littlebear was undercover, working to break up a drug smuggling ring and had become good friends. Jackson knew Littlebear could handle his own when things got dicey.

“Not really,” Jackson said. “I want to get on that island and see if we can find anything. I want to know why they’re pumping out all that dirty water and messing up the reef around the island so bad. And I need to know why it was so important that they would kill a friend of mine and put another in the hospital.”

“It’s pretty early in the morning and it sounds like they were up pretty late last night. Maybe they’ll still be asleep and we’ll get lucky,” Littlebear agreed. “You know, we could’ve turned this over to the sheriff. They do a pretty good job.”

“Yeah, I know. But this is personal, so it won’t hurt my feelings to check it out a bit more first, if you know what I mean,” Jackson agreed. “That’s the island up ahead. Get out the binoculars. I’m going to back off and go around slow.”

Littlebear and Kia leaned against the side of the boat and studied the small island as Jackson made a slow, lazy circle. He made sure to stay close to another smaller island not far away.

“It looks like that little inlet is about the only way inside,” Littlebear said, pointing. “The rest of it is pretty overgrown.”

“Then that’s how we go in. Littlebear, you stay with *Daydreamer*. I want you out here if we need some help. I plan to slip in and out without causing any trouble, but I’ll be happier knowing you’re out here watching our backs,” Jackson said, moving toward the stern of the boat. “Come on, Kia. Let’s gear up. We’ll swim in,”

“Fair enough. I’ll be waiting,” Littlebear agreed.

Noiselessly the two divers slipped into their gear as Littlebear brought the boat a little closer to the island. He was doing his best to keep the noise down and stay away from the obvious sight lines from the inlet. He wanted to look like a boat out enjoying the morning. On a signal from Jackson, Littlebear slipped the engines into neutral and let the boat drift for a moment. Jackson and Kia tumbled backwards off the side rail that faced away from the island. Without hesitating, the two divers dropped below the water. They quickly pulled themselves together from the disorientation of the moving entry and leveled off about 20 feet underwater. Jackson had taken a compass heading so he found his bearings again and they began swimming for the opening.

Littlebear continued moving forward until he got to the other island. As casually as he could, he got out a fishing rod and dropped a line in the water. He sat down to watch and wait. There really wasn’t any way for Jackson to signal him if they needed help, so he would have to be ready.

Jackson and Kia swam slowly toward the island. Unable to speak, they were lost in their own thoughts. Both, though, were thinking about Jake and Bo. It took them about 10 minutes to enter the inlet opening. As they did, it got darker. The heavy mangrove kept the sunlight out. It took a few moments for their eyes to adjust. When they could finally see again, they realized they were underneath a small dock and what looked like a boat house. They could see the hull of a boat underneath the enclosure.

They were only in about five feet of water so Jackson signaled to Kia and they took off their dive gear. They left it at the bottom of one of the dock pilings and slowly ascended to the surface, careful to stay underneath the dock. Jake and Bo had been on the island the night before and it had ended badly for them. Jackson and Kia were taking every precaution to stay out of trouble. They knew they were in enemy territory.

