

Depths of Deceit

A Jamie Rush Mystery #2

By Laura Oles

Excerpt

The mermaid in the truck bed was what caught Jamie Rush's attention. The cast-iron figure peeked over the hatch, her carved, flowing hair and demure smile in view. This was supposed to be a standard identify-and-repo job. Jamie was certain she hadn't seen a mermaid on the itemized paperwork. Brody Rutger, in addition to hiding from creditors, had added theft of a local celebrity to his resume.

The day had started strong, with a lead on Rutger and an opportunity to catch him between fishing charters, using a boat he'd quit paying on months before. Suddenly, Marian the Mermaid was caught up in the mix.

And something was going on with the weather.

The month of November normally brought a steady stream of long-term vacationers from the north—affectionally called Winter Texans—who fled harsh winters for the promise of more tepid temperatures. Those who'd already set up residence in Port Alene were likely to be disappointed. Port A, usually quite predictable in her warmth, had suddenly changed her mind. That day, she was trading humidity for frigid air, and the wind, once laced with a warm, salty breeze, was offering only a cold shoulder. The palm trees lining Island Main bristled from side to side, and the town seemed to have turned inward in response. The icy wind whistled in the gap of her Tahoe's window.

Jamie shuddered at the weather's frigid downturn, while her partner, Cookie Hinojosa, all but cursed Mother Nature. He believed anything under seventy degrees was downright blasphemous. Jamie tilted her head toward the gray sky and welcomed the sting of air on her cheeks, her head briefly popping out the driver's-side window. Cookie glanced over and shook his head. “

You're very grumpy this morning,” Jamie said. She gave him a once-over, taking note of the large Dallas Cowboys logo on his chest, the silver star claiming almost all the space between his shoulders. “I see you found your favorite winter hoodie. Probably more fun to wear when they're winning.”

Cookie turned to her and scowled. “Et tu, Brute? You’re going to dump on our favorite team? Really?”

Jamie reached over and gave her partner’s meaty shoulder a squeeze. “They need to earn our love by playing better. And we’ve been damned patient.” She rubbed her hand up and down his sleeve, noting the fabric felt cold. “You should probably break down and buy a proper winter jacket.”

“This is South Texas. Only snowbirds wear ‘proper’ winter jackets.”

Cookie dismissed the idea of wearing anything that added additional bulk to his substantial frame. “My Hawaiian shirts are sad from neglect.”

She had to agree. A long-sleeved Hawaiian shirt would look ridiculous on anyone. She rubbed her hands together and hoped the cold snap would soon dissipate, returning the balmy temperatures Port Alene normally delivered.

“I’m going to pull back a bit,” Jamie said.

Their skip of the day, Brody Rutger, owed their client, AAA Repo Services, \$15,027. Brody had ducked all attempts at collection, so Jamie and Cookie had been hired to locate him and return the boat. Jamie and Cookie specialized in skip tracing, which essentially meant finding people who didn’t want to be found. They worked skips but also some surveillance—which paid well but was boring beyond belief—and some divorce cases, which also paid well but renewed Jamie’s resolve to never get married. In Jamie’s experience, if a person disappeared, the reasons involved money, private information, or violence. And secrets—always a secret.