

33 Sacrifices

Britannia Morgan stifled a scream when she heard the rat-a-tat-tat of rapid-fire gun blasts. *No matter what you hear...* Whitte's instructions echoed in her mind. But she hadn't expected gunfire and she knew what the instructions had been: Don't kill Whitte.

Why the hell was she here? But Salvador had been charming in Cannes. He'd treated her like a proper lady he had. She stifled a giggle: Eliza Doolittle. Anywhere but L.A., though: the phoniness, the putting on the good face, the being a good little trooper. She was sick and fucking tired of it. She didn't give a damn if she ever stared in another film. Well, not quite.

Hell, she didn't even know where here was. She had been stoned. She had called Cordero. He had flown her into Nassau and she had passed out on *La Araña*. She hadn't even known that Salvador was aiding and abetting a fugitive at the time—nor entertaining a tramp—but here she was, playing goddamned James Bond. Well, one of the Bond girls.

What good was she to Whitte? She was a fucking wreck. She had done her job but now all bets were off. Let's say they made it; let's say they were walking down some street in the outside world and someone recognized her. That was undo attention that Whitte didn't need. But then again, who would ever suspect a Hollywood star to be keeping company with a fugitive? It could be one hell of a cover. But would she slow him down? But if she didn't go... Would Salvador hit her again?

To stay or not to stay? That was the fucking question, now wasn't it? Damn it.

Stop. Shakespeare. She hated fucking Shakespeare and the phony stiff in Hollywood who claimed they gained their craft through intense study of Willy. Bullshit. She tore a small hole in her trash bag and, from her purse, retrieved a pen—she always carried a pen, it still thrilled her when they asked for autographs—and a large note card—in case people didn't have a piece of paper. She wrote:

Sorry. Chickened out. Be safe. Good luck. Love you Jack.

Love you? Stupid. Jack would never love her. She was a goddamned wreck. Wait, Jack was a good man. Maybe in time? She wadded the card and tossed it into the brush and as she did, something moved. *Oh shit!* Her heartbeats thumped loudly. Oh God, he made it! As Jack made his way into the clearing she jumped up and kissed him.

They made their way in silence. Jack studied the bay. It had worked. Well, partially. The patrol boat that had been just offshore was gone but there was another on the other side of the bay, 200 hundred yards away. If they stayed low, they would pass undetected. They carefully picked their way over a natural rock jetty that protected the bay; Whitte helped Brita with her footing, and slipped into the water. They swam quietly until reaching the floating dock. They both dove, totting their bags, and came up beneath it. They had to grab hold of the wood to keep their heads from bobbing against the top.

Brita began to speak but Whitte hushed with his finger. "Now we wait," he

whispered.

When Whitte had led the guards to the cliff, he had staged a show. The day before he had rolled a sizable boulder to the edge of the cliff and propped it up with a stick. He had tied a piece of rope he had stolen from a dock. The plan had been simple: climb down the cliff face away from the boulder and when the guards drew near, pull the rope and the boulder would crash into the sea below. It had worked as planned. Then, after waiting for them to go back down to the beach, he bushwhacked through the jungle, staying away from the paths, until he made it to the waiting Brita. Hopefully, the supply boat would be along soon.

Their skin was wrinkling from being in the water but as the sun began to rise, the putt-putt of the supply boat could be heard making the turn into the bay. Ten minutes later, it tied up on the dock. Whitte was hoping that money talks. A dinghy came from the shore and tied up opposite the supply boat and the off-loading began. Two men from shore helped the crew transfer the supplies into the dinghy. There was no chitchat; only brief instructions in Spanish. Now, it was the moment of truth. Whitte motioned for Brita and the two dove under the supply boat and came up on the other side. Whitte retrieved ten water soaked \$100 bills from his pocket. He could sense movement above and just before he could make a noise to get the man's attention he heard a boat power down behind him. He grabbed Brita's arm and pushed her down in the water and they swam back to the safety under the floating dock.

Whitte mouthed out the word *shit*. Brita made a hand gesture to Whitte telling him to dive down and go back the starboard side of the boat. Whitte shook his head. Brita let go

of her floating trash bag, kissed Whitte, and dove under the dingy. Whitte could hear a splash and then, “Help me, I think I’m drowning!” Brita splashed around and began screaming. The patrol boat revved and headed toward the actress.

Whitte took a breath and dove back under and came up on the starboard side of the supply boat. There was a man standing just above him watching the commotion on the other side.

“Psst. Por favor señor,” Whitte whispered.

The man turned and saw Whitte treading water with a wad of bills in his right hand. He quickly looked around and then held his hand down and assisted Whitte over the side and quickly snatched the cash from his hand. Whitte stayed low and followed the man’s pointing toward the small cabin in the front of the boat. There was a hatch and he opened it and climbed down the short ladder, quietly pulling the hatch closed behind him.

There was a narrow plank that stretched to the stern of the boat. Whitte crouched, trying to keep above the oily water that smelled of diesel and bile sloshing around beneath the plank. He glanced back and there was a small toilet with a pump lever. He hoped to God he didn’t contract hepatitis. There were three boxes stacked haphazardly at the end of the plank, in front of the motor and Whitte slid in behind them. After ten minutes, he heard another slew of Spanish and then the crew cast off and the engine behind him chugged to life. Carbon monoxide flooded his nose and he made his way back to the bow, cupping his hands over his nose as if that would save him.

After thirty minutes, the hatch opened, “Aquí,” came a rough voice. Whitte grabbed the proffered hand and climbed back into the cabin. The skipper nodded at him and then

held his hands down. Whitte sat and looked to the stern. The cliff of Genesis Cay stood like a giant gray wall against the deep blue water. There were no longer any boats searching for him. He guessed he was now presumed dead. Well, unless Brita talked. But somehow he believed she was still an Oscar worthy actress.

The sun was high overhead as the small supply boat shuddered toward a man-made jetty of crushed rock covered in oyster shells and cement. As the boat neared, Whitte jumped off with another man and helped secure the lines. He smiled, nodded at the skipper and began walking toward a grouping of deteriorating buildings at the end of the pier. A few men were out and about, moving boxes with manual dollies and carts. As he neared, a man leaning up against an adobe-style one-story building was examining a stack of papers. He saw Whitte and did a double take. He smiled. Maybe there were a few teeth left in his mouth somewhere in the back.

“Hey, white man. You come from the rich man island?”

Whitte nodded. “Si.”

“You speak English?” the man questioned him.

“Yeah, I do. Where am I?”

“Manzanillo.”

Okay, Whitte thought, didn't help much.

“You don't look so rich. You work for the main house?”

Whitte nodded. “I did but it didn't work out.”

The man laughed out loud. "I'm Hidalgo. I can help you wherever you need to go."

Whitte hadn't thought that far ahead, basically because he didn't know where the hell he was.

"You look hungry. Come, I get you some rice and beans and we'll discuss."

Whitte followed the man, his knapsack hitched on his shoulder. As they turned the corner of the building with exposed rebar on the side, Whitte spied a cement wall holding back an excavated hillside. On the wall was a large, fading mural. Two men's faces were seemingly evaporating into the sun-baked cement. In the middle were Spanish words, only two he understood. On the left, a man's hairy face was roughly tucked under a beret and on the right, a man's wispy beard was flaking off the wall. He wore what appeared to be a military hat. The two words he recognized were *La Revolución*. He was staring at the portraits of Comrades Che and Fidel.