



MEMOIRS OF THE  
BROWNING MAN

JOSEPH HALE

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by  
Joseph Hale



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# Dedication

*This novel is written for my wife, Margaret Ann, and our three children Lisa, Joel, and Jason. Much love, Dad.*

# Acknowledgements

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# CHAPTER 1

The narrative begins on the 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1994.

Discharged from the Royal Marines, Anton Dale contemplated his future from the confines of the Drum Major public house. It was situated on the Dover Road, Deal, Kent, adjacent to the now defunct Royal Marines Deal, Officers Mess, main entrance. Deal can be found in the southeast corner of England within a few miles of the port of Dover. Dover is a busy English Channel crossing point used by passenger and vehicular traffic. It was two in the afternoon. Anton was the sole occupant of the smoke room.

The weather outside looked ready to rain, which was common so close to the sea. Raising the pint beer glass to his mouth, Anton drank deeply and belched loudly before swallowing the last drop of liquid. He decided to refill his empty tumbler. The door to the room opened enough for a head to appear and look directly towards Anton. A smile creased the middle-aged face, with ordinary looks which portrayed a friendly, intelligent air. The door closed momentarily then opened and admitted a man six feet tall, slimly built, smartly dressed, and oozing confidence. He marched to the bar.

Anton could have sworn he halted in a manner conversant with the military tradition of bringing the trailing foot smartly in line with his front foot and standing rigid whilst awaiting the arrival of the pretty barmaid.

“Pint of mild for me and whatever that gentleman is drinking, thank you,” a confident, clear, well-spoken voice expounded, loud enough for Anton to hear.

Anton made no attempt to cancel the order. He decided to wait, interested in what the man had in mind. Turning, the newcomer made his way to Anton’s table.

“Pint of bitter for you, my good man, may I join you? I have something to say which I’m sure will be of interest.” A smile creased the speaker’s face.

“Who the fuck are you, and what could you tell me that I could possibly want to know?” Anton retorted with no intent to show hostility.

“Anton Dale, forty years old, ex-warrant officer, twenty-two years service, retired fifth March this year. Platoon weapons instructor, parachute trained, Special Boat Section explosives expert 1976 to 1984, then reverted to general duties list. Oh yes, your HALO-trained active service experience, this includes clandestine ops all over the world. ‘Mention In Dispatches’ awarded during Falklands War 1982. Mother lives in Worthing in old folks home, brother and sister in the West Midlands, both married with families. Shall I continue or have you heard enough?”

The stranger drank from his glass, replaced it on the beer coaster, and looked expectantly at Anton. Anton Dale was never easily surprised; on this occasion he was flabbergasted. Who was this man? How did he know so much of my antecedent history? It was frightening. The man continued to speak.

“Anton, choosing the police or customs or the diplomatic service would not suit your talents. Please listen to what I can offer you; I’m more than sure you’ll think twice about our offer. Agreed?”

“I’ve asked you once who are you?” said Anton, his interest beginning to grow.

“You can call me Frenchie, that’s all you need to know for the present. I work for a clandestine organization called DEATOS—Drug Eradication And Termination Of Suppliers. The organization is run by men of unique talents, men in very high positions of power; two of those people can’t go much higher. Our funding is bottomless, the rewards mouthwatering. Your monetary gain for a completed mission is very good indeed. Anton, you can rest assured you can become very rich, and quickly. The down side is you will

be required to kill on our say-so. Our main aim is the defeat of suppliers in narcotic, the big leaguers, not the small fry. Shall I go on?"

Anton was in the process of taking a drink. The part about killing had shocked him. The statement made him mis-swallow, and he gagged on a mouth full of beer, which caused him to splutter. His unsolicited visitor shifted quickly backwards in his chair, avoiding the flying liquid. The beer left his mouth in a wide, arching spray; his right hand attempted to mask the discharge of amber liquid. The man was unruffled by Anton's predicament. It wasn't everyday someone told you that part of your job requirement was killing people.

"Are you for fucking real?" spluttered Anton, wiping his chin with the back of his hand then brushing the droplets of beer off the front of his jacket.

"Most definitely, my friend, most definitely. Here, take this. Go on, check it out." He handed Anton a bulky brown envelope; it was quite heavy.

He slit it open with his thumbnail and moved his thumb across the edges of numerous crisp new fifty-pound notes. There were forty in all.

"All yours, my good friend, whether you accept or not. Now here's my full proposition. Put the money away, there's a good chap." Anton obliged by stuffing the packet inside his jacket pocket and spoke.

"Now tell me just exactly what the job entails. I'm all ears." said Anton. He had decided to listen to the interesting man; it was the least he could do.

"Fire away," added Anton as he sat back in his seat with folding arms.

The room was still bereft of other customers; they were very much alone. The sound of laughter came from the public bar. At least some people were happy.

"We are an organization dedicated to ridding society of the curse of drugs on a global scale. Far too many innocent people die as a result of this vile trade in human misery. In 1992 Colombian authorities killed Pablo Escobar. He was

perhaps the world's leading exponent in the cultivation and supply through his worldwide distribution network. You've heard of the man, yes?" Frenchie paused, awaiting a reply. A loud cheer erupted from the adjoining bar, the reason they could only imagine as celebratory

"Yes, I did read somewhere that he was shot to death by police," answered Anton, now becoming more interested in what was to come next.

"Good riddance to the bastard, he deserved to die. Anyway, I'll continue. Colombian cartels are still our top priority. Our American friends feel just as we do. We do have a problem, however. We are not an organization which is officially recognized by ours or any other government agency. This does cause a certain amount of sensitivity amongst the echelons of power, but our own government turns a blind eye. Having said that, our board of Five Trustees is well versed in international brinkmanship; you'd be most surprised who comprises the board. They are impeccable individuals, very astute, powerful people. We are realistic enough to know we cannot rid the world of all the despots involved in running illegal drugs. The drug runners do know, however, that someone is hunting them down, but who, that's what bugs the bastards."

The stranger excused himself for a toilet break. Anton replenished their glasses during his absence. He returned, a determined look about him. He seated himself down and reached for his drink. Having sated his thirst, he was about to speak again.

"Hold on just a minute, stop right there. I'm impressed, to say the least," said Anton, "it's not everyday someone interrupts your drinking with an offer of employment involving killing people, you see my point?" stressed Anton. The stranger nodded understandingly.

"I don't even know your name, other than you call yourself Frenchie. What is it just for the record?"

"For now Frenchie will do," he replied, looking directly at Anton. He was deadly serious.

“Fine, it’s a start.” They shook hands. His grip was firm, which Anton liked. It showed him that the man appeared to be confident and engendered trust. Anton then reflected on what had transpired so far. Killing people had been part of his job as a professional soldier, but what he was being offered as a means of employment amounted to cold-blooded murder. Active service meant there was always the threat to fire in anger when the need arose; it was kill or be killed, with the legal backing of your respective government. What was expected of him now was killing to order, up close and personal.

“Frenchie, hear me out, okay? I don’t like despots, drug dealers, crime bosses in general, or anyone else for that matter whose sole purpose in life is living off the misery of others. Oh, I forgot child molesters; they I particularly despise and detest. You understand what I’m saying, Frenchie, I hope?” A purposeful nod of the head indicated the man was listening intently.

The door opened, allowing a bedraggled individual to enter and begin shaking his opened raincoat forcefully; as he did so moisture flew in all directions. Anton and Frenchie looked through the window at the teeming rain that was causing gutters to flood and folk to scatter in pursuit of cover. The drainage system could barely cope with the deluge. The man purchased cigarettes then departed. He raised a hand in acknowledgement of their presence as he left, closing the door firmly.

“Well, what you are asking of me is to participate in murder, right? You say I’ll be working for well-intentioned, high-profile people, whom I’ll likely never get to know, and have no proper official backing to carry out your bidding. That worries me, Frenchie. Okay so far?”

A further nod of the head accompanied an expression on his face which told Anton his visitor was still attentive.

“The money side of things we haven’t discussed so far. It will have to be very lucrative, very. I’m in no hurry to put my life back on the line. You get my drift, Frenchie?”

Anton picked up his glass, drinking quickly. Frenchie pushed back his chair and stood.

“What about a double scotch?”

Anton liked the idea; he was beginning to warm to the man.

“Why not?” said Anton, handing over his empty glass, which was taken from him by his smiling, mysterious visitor.

“Here’s to us and what we have said and what I am about to say. Don’t drink your scotch until I finish what I am obliged to tell you. The fixed smile as Frenchie sat down worried Anton; it was as if the man was satisfied he had recruited him already. This was not the case. Anton sat and waited for Frenchie to speak.

“Fifty thousand pounds per successful mission. In the event of failure the board will consider the circumstances surrounding such a rarity, and if satisfied 20 percent of the full fee. Monies to be deposited in an offshore account of your choice within seventy-two hours of the mission. A weapon of choice will be supplied and where necessary, will be delivered to you anywhere in the world and retrieved immediately after use. This will help protect your identity and lessen any chance of you being implicated. Should you fail and not return, your demise will be compensated by a payment of two hundred thousand pounds to a person of your choice; we would presume your mother or siblings would benefit? Death we sincerely hope will not befall you whilst in our employ, and you will retire a wealthy man.”

Frenchie fixed Anton with a look, eyeball to eyeball; he leaned forward expectant, his glass raised as if about to propose a toast. Anton, in turn, sat motionless deep in thought. The amount of money on offer was a fantastic opportunity to do things he had only dreamed of achieving. His mind made up, he looked across the table. The calm face and air of expectancy facing him caused Anton to smile ever so slightly, the corners of his mouth the only sign he was enjoying the moment.

“Here’s to us, Frenchie, to a long and successful partnership, cheers?” Anton tipped the glass of strong highland whiskey towards his waiting mouth, anticipating the sharp tang as the liquid passed over his taste buds and gently warmed the sides of his throat before exploding pleasurably inside his welcoming stomach. It never transpired.

As the glass touched his mouth, Frenchie quickly leaned across the table and expertly knocked the vessel and its contents against the far wall. The glass shattered and the alcohol spilled downwards, staining the wallpaper. Anton sat as if transfixed. He was in two minds as he fought with the idea of retaliating in response to the man’s actions. He decided that now was not the time for violence, better to find out why the person had acted in such a manner.

“What the fuck was that all about? Be quick!” uttered an angry Anton Dale.

“Believe me, my friend, you would not have liked that particular drink one little bit. Not good for your health, Anton,” Frenchie replied, a satisfied look compensating the broad grin which alighted his face.

“Tell me, what if I’d have said no, would the glass have ended up in a similar fashion? Well?” asked Anton between clenched teeth, two of which oozed a slight trace of blood, evidence of just how close the glass and its contents had been to his mouth. He was thankful the blow had missed.

Frenchie drained his drink in one quick swallow, his tongue ran round the inner edge of the upturned glass savoring the last traces of the whiskey, ensuring none missed his mouth. He placed the empty vessel quietly on the tabletop and spoke softly to Anton, who awaited his reply with interest.

“That particular drink is best forgotten; it’s better on the wall over there, believe me As to the question you have just asked, I think it best you never ever know, my friend. Welcome aboard, I’ll be in touch, enjoy the rest of your day.”

With that, Frenchie shook hands once more and left Anton somewhat bemused, wondering just what might have

transpired had he taken the drink. He shuddered for no apparent reason and headed quickly for the toilets, where he commenced to empty his stomach of this morning's breakfast for no other purpose than that of just making sure all was okay!

\* \* \*

Phuket, Thailand, on a deserted beach, the time of day, mid-afternoon. There was the impending threat of stormy weather as the large gray clouds lazily drifted across the blue sky, blocking the sun's warmth. Laying beneath the scurrying clouds, a beach towel protecting him from hot sand, a well-honed man of bronze rested his arm over the naked midriff of his beautiful female companion. All about them was the pristine beach, clear blue water, and balmy sea breeze elements which enhanced the setting for the happy couple. Anton looked down in absolute adoration at the beautiful senorita that lay alongside him, eyes closed in apparent sleep. In actual fact she was gazing at her lover through eyes almost closed, watching his handsome face eat up her form. She knew just what to do next. Raising her arms skyward she embraced the laughing man and pulled him towards her welcoming face, their lips meeting hot and passionate, their tongues interlacing, teasingly probing the inner recesses of each other's mouth.

Anton deftly lifted the lithe creature gently upwards ever so slightly and undid the tie securing her bikini bottom; it fell apart, exposing her lower body, and she was not embarrassed at the way she allowed him to probe within her most secret region with his fingers. Isabella moaned in sheer pleasure, welcoming him with her own upward thrusts as he entered into her. Delirium ruled as they gyrated on the beach towels oblivious to the world, their only thoughts and actions directed towards fulfilling their sexual union, an act of pure love. Too soon they were besotted, but each of them was fully satisfied. Neither spoke as they gathered their belongings,

then arm in arm began to leave their tropical paradise. Stopping, Isabella looked at the man she was sure she loved.

“Anton, tomorrow we go our separate ways. It is so very sad . . . I will miss you so much.” Isabella rested her head against Anton’s shoulder, sobbing softly; hot tears spilled onto his bare flesh and ran down his tanned arm.

“My darling, don’t cry, we will meet again, you’ll see. We both agreed we have separate lives and careers. Come, we will be late for dinner.” His words were of little consolation to Isabella, who continued to sob quietly as they began to leave the beach. Most men would have thought twice about leaving such a beautiful woman. Anton had no such thought, other than that he would miss this particular beauty, more so than any other he had ever met in his life. There would remain happy memories for them both and memories only of sadness at their parting.

\* \* \*

Anton opened his eyes; the steady drone of the powerful aircraft engines reassured him that all was well. He was bound for Johannesburg in the Republic of South Africa. Looking out of the window he watched as small clouds rushed by, the only feeling of the plane’s eight hundred kilometer per hour speed. The altitude of thirty-three thousand feet ensured a smooth path as the plane flew over the Indian Ocean some five miles below. Smiling inwardly to himself, he thought of Isabella. She was a dream come true. All a man could wish for: charm, wit, beauty in abundance accompanied by a happy, confident manner, and most important of all, she was a friend and fantastic lover. ‘Now hold on,’ he thought, sitting up straighter in his seat, ‘this wasn’t love, surely?’ Nah, he remembered he had said he did, but was it for real? Surely not. He relaxed once more, settling comfortably into his seat. ‘You’ll get over her soon enough,’ he convinced himself. A slight smile edged the corners of his mouth. “Sure will,” he mumbled quietly out loud.

“Did you say something?” asked an elderly lady seated next to him.

“No, sorry, just thinking out loud, sorry to disturb you,” said Anton respectfully. He settled himself once more and began to recall how he had met Isabella. He gradually drifted off to sleep filled with pleasant dreams. Isabella became the central character.

\* \* \*

Daydream Island is situated some fifteen minutes by motor launch from Shute Harbour, Calamvale, North Queensland, Australia. It is one of the Whitsunday Group of islands that boasts a tropical climate all year round. Anton had met Isabella when they became neighbors at the prestigious holiday resort. The five days they spent together was indelibly etched into his mind. It began to dawn on him that perhaps he had let slip someone who could have changed his life forever.

Now, his dream headed in another direction. The healthy bank balances he had accumulated, with deposits in accounts in the Cayman Islands and Switzerland, were expected to receive more funding should his next mission be successful, and he had no doubt it would; after all, he was a professional, yes? He calculated he was worth close to two-hundred thousand pounds sterling, not bad for the relative short time in his present employment. Twice that amount he had lost gambling in Las Vegas and Monte Carlo. Only twelve short months ago he had been discharged from the Royal Marines with the rank of warrant officer second class, his pension reasonable but not enough to enjoy the lifestyle he was now accustomed to.

He had been a member of the marines' Special Boat Section as a trained swimmer/canoeist and underwater explosives expert. As a HALO (High Altitude Low Opening) trained parachutist, he had been involved in numerous clandestine operations all over the world. His service record carried For Your Eyes Only classification content. His crowning achievement was his Mention In Dispatches, awarded for duty in the 1982 war with Argentina, which had invaded the

Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic. They would rue the day they had done so.

The war had been the culmination and high point of his distinguished career. He was confident his second career path would be just as successful. He was determined to achieve financial independence. Being rich was a dream he harbored. Yes, he enthused to himself, being able to play with the high rollers appealed to him very much.

Thoughts of his last assignment awoke him from his slumber with memories that were not pleasant to recall. Killing people was an integral part of his job. He had adapted quickly. He didn't relish what he did, the means he found distasteful, but he agreed it was right. The rewards were generous, and the people taken care of were just scum. He sometimes examined his moral ethic, then he would remind himself of the damage drugs and acts of terrorism caused innocent people. He had conditioned himself to stop believing he was both judge and jury, preferring instead to accept he was one of many, all determined to rid the society of an evil presence.

His ambition to be rich and secure in his retirement years willed him on. The rewards were lucrative, and the job could last a long time. He estimated that in five short years he would be in a position to settle down somewhere a wealthy man. It was an ambition worth pursuing. It motivated him.

Anton recalled the look of amazement on the face of his last victim. His orders had been quite specific. Advise each victim, whenever possible, the reason they were being terminated. Barbaric as it may seem, this was the only type of justice these people understood. They were just as ruthless when dealing with their own enemies. DEATOS insisted that each victim understand why they were about to die, a gruesome end the organisation deemed necessary.

News quickly spread of the organization's sinister punishment methods. Manufacturers, suppliers, and couriers became apprehensive, knowing they could be next in line. Raphael Cortez was a prominent member and a reliable mule

for his employer. He had been responsible for the supply and demand of narcotics on a global scale. Weeks of painstaking undercover work by DEATOS's agents had finally located him. Singapore was to be his last transaction. Anton had advised him of his fate as he knelt on the rotting jungle vegetation. Raphael had listened head bowed. Anton could not but admire his resolve and defiance at the point of death.

"I will be replaced, senior. The cartel has many like me. Do it, you bastard, go on, do it!" he said defiantly, in anger. The Browning 9 mm was fired. The bullet entered the back of the man's head, blowing away a sizeable portion of the right side of his face as it exited to bury itself in the jungle floor.

Cortez collapsed, rolling onto his side, the sudden relaxation of his muscles involuntarily emptying his bowels. Anton felt nauseated from the stink of excrement. It was a fitting end, he thought, shit from a shit hole. Turning, he made his way from the scene of execution, leaving the body to rot and decay alone. Insects and animal foragers would ensure the body disappeared quickly. As he approached his waiting vehicle, he heard the sound of traffic coming from Old Thompson Road. Singapore was coming alive. Another day was dawning.

Anton received a welcome drink of lemonade from the friendly hostess. He had contemplated a beer but on second thoughts remembered how beer at altitude clouded his way of thinking. Settled once more, he began to recall Isabella and the more pleasant side of what had transpired.

## CHAPTER 2

Early May 1982, somewhere over the South Atlantic.

The C130 Hercules aircraft of Royal Air Force Transport Command flew towards pre-arranged coordinates to liaise with *HMS Conqueror*, a submarine of Her Majesty's Royal Navy. The time was 2340 hours. The rendezvous was set for 0001 hours, the place, the cold uninviting waters of the South Atlantic Ocean.

The operation was designed to parachute a team of elite Royal Marine frogmen of the famed and much revered Special Boat Section (SBS) into the sea at midnight, for retrieval by the silent-running atomic-powered submarine. Their destination: A clandestine landing on the Falkland Islands by sea. Their mission: To report on the movement and disposition of enemy troops prior to the arrival of the task force. They were to work as a four-man team independent of the equally famous Special Air Service (SAS), who would be operating in a similar role on another part of the islands.

Anton was twenty-eight years old with the rank of sergeant. He sat thoughtfully, remembering his training, confident he would perform his duties to the best of his considerable abilities just like other members of the team, and hopefully live to tell someone of their exploits. No more the realistic pre-operational scenarios of what was to occur, this was now, he was airborne, minutes from being propelled from the aircraft to pitch his wits against the ocean, then the Argentine land forces, illegally occupying a British territory by force. His orders were clear-cut. He knew what was expected; they were a team quite capable of working individually should the need arise. He hoped he could remain with his friends. There was safety in numbers, and as a unit they

were much more lethal. His country expected nothing less than success.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had made it very clear that the islands would be repatriated, and the full force of British naval and land forces might was on its way to do just that. The country had rallied round their charismatic leader. War was once more forced upon a British people who preferred peace but showed the world they were more than capable of responding to any aggressor. Though the task force would take weeks to arrive, the population of the Falklands were assured they were not forgotten. Anton and his colleagues knew they had plenty to occupy themselves before land forces began the serious task of recapturing the islands. It was known that a small detachment of Royal Marines of troop strength with ancillary support had surrendered against overwhelming odds. They would be avenged. It had been a bitter pill to swallow for civilians and servicemen alike.

The flight sergeant dispatcher moved forward, informing Sergeant Ennis to ready his team. Five minutes to drop zone (DZ). The noise inside the fuselage made normal talk difficult and most actions were acknowledged by hand signals. Anton, like the rest of the team, wore his frogman suit over thermal underwear to combat the intense cold of the ocean they were about to parachute into. He would be carrying equipment weighing over one hundred pounds, which contained ammunition and his personal weapons, an M-16 ArmaLite rifle and sidearm, plus a commando dagger attached to his belt. The weighty equipment would be kept afloat by a floatation device primed to inflate when it hit the water.

“Action stations, equipment check,” bellowed the flight sergeant over the din of the engine roar. Each man in turn checked the ties of his comrade’s chute, ensuring that no obstruction would prevent the smooth pull of the static line, which in turn deployed the parachute. The check complete, the team faced the direction of travel.

“Four OK!” “Three OK!” “Two OK!” “One OK!” roared each team member.

“Red light on. Stand in the door!” commanded the flight sergeant.

The team moved as one. Sergeant Ennis positioned himself in the doorway, his left hand outside. The cold night air rushed by, and the noise made talk impossible. The night was starless. Six hundred feet below the ocean was running with a four-foot swell, a condition which did not concern the swimmers. Their main worry was how long before retrieval by the submarine. It was only natural they worried a little. The navy, on the other hand, had everything under control: the sub was running on the surface, a rubber motorized boat and crew ready for their guests’ impending arrival.

“GO! GO! GO! GO!” the flight sergeant shouted.

The four-man team quickly left the aircraft in close formation. Anton released his container which hung twenty feet below, only seconds after he felt the strong tug as his chute deployed. In less than thirty seconds he hit the water. The strobe light attached to each swimmer’s suit helped confirm his three comrades were safely afloat, having ditched their chutes to avoid drag. The team awaited rescue.

As the last parachutist disappeared the flight sergeant began the task of pulling in the static lines and parachute harness. The wind resistance required him to pull hard in order to retrieve the gear and close the port door. Door closed, the sound of rushing air diminished. He spoke into his head-  
phone.

“Our guests have departed, skipper,” said the flight sergeant. Better them than me, he thought. He held nothing but the greatest admiration for the brave young men who by now, he envisaged, would be battling the elements. The aircraft banked gently to port and headed for their base in the USA.

“We have them, skipper,” said the coxswain from his position on the conning tower. The ship’s captain trained his binoculars onto the surface of the sea in the direction his coxswain was pointing. The rescue craft was hauling aboard the last of the marine commandos.

“Well done, coxswain, when they are all aboard let me know,” the skipper stated as he disappeared below, expertly negotiating the narrow iron stepladder.

The team swam ashore some distance from Port Stanley seven days later. Their mission proved a complete success, having provided valuable information for Major General Jeremy Moore and his second in charge, Brigadier Julian Thompson, Royal Marines. Their brilliantly executed landing strategy and subsequent land operations resulted in the surrender of the Argentinian Army a little more than six weeks later.

Countless acts of heroism were performed by members of the task force, which saw the islands wrested back from the invaders. It would be impolite not to mention the supreme sacrifice of the Second Parachute Regiment’s commanding officer, Colonel “H” Jones at Goose Green and the gallant Sergeant McKay of the Third Parachute Regiment at Mount Langdon. Their gallantry resulted in the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross. Two-hundred fifty-six allied servicemen gave their lives during the war. The enemy dead numbered in excess of six hundred. Sergeant Ennis and his team were awarded a Mention In Dispatches citation, a fitting reward for a job well done.

\* \* \*

Anton stirred and decided to stretch his aching legs. The long flight was taking its toll. He was programmed to regularly exercise and disliked being confined. At a little under six feet tall Anton looked fit and athletic. His sex appeal to the majority of woman had often made his friends shake their head in admiration at his pulling power. It was as if he had magnetic capabilities, so often was it the case that a night out with fellow marines would see him escort a gorgeous female home. It happened so often that at times friends shook their heads in despair at his good fortune. Anton rarely saw the same woman twice.

His daily regimen consisted of running, swimming, and circuit training to a level that most other people would try

to avoid. Not so Anton Dale, pain he enjoyed. He knew that fitness was a condition he must retain; it could be needed to outrun and outfox a determined enemy. The ten-kilometer run would be followed by a thirty-lap pool swim in under sixteen minutes. Two hundred push-ups with abdominal and upper body workout over a forty-minute session would ensure his heart rate exceeded one hundred fifty beats per minute. The recovery he monitored until it returned smoothly to its normal sixty BPM. Fitness to Anton Dale was a way of life; he greatly respected his body and knew that he required it to perform to extraordinary levels of fitness, on demand. Above all else, he felt good both inwardly and outwardly and feared no one. His line of business being what it was meant danger was never far away. Quick wits and the ability to react without hesitation demanded training above and beyond that of the ordinary person; it ensured you remained one step ahead of the opposition. It was a position he intended to maintain, it meant he would live to tell the tale, and each new day brought about a new challenge.

\* \* \*

The beautiful young woman who lay alongside him on the pristine, sandy beach of Phuket, Thailand, bore testament to his prowess as a womanizer. He rarely flirted since there was no need; he always used the direct approach and found honesty combined with his charismatic appeal seldom failed to land him his desired female target. Anton was polite, conscientious, devoid of conceit, and very understanding. He was capable of making decisions whether under pressure or when asked some pertinent question. His decision-making technique had saved him on several occasions from both domestic embarrassment or serving on operational duty.

The seniorita opened her arms, stretched and laughed at him teasingly. She was a self-confident individual. Beauty was the only way to describe her; deep, sparkling, black eyes enhanced her lovely, alluring features. She was motivated, one of many traits that helped hone her talents. Jet black

hair, olive complexion, and a mouth bearing voluptuous lips described as kissable by men fortunate enough to have achieved the pleasure, Isabella Lopez was a prize any man would be proud to say was his.

Born in South America she spoke with the slightest trace of an accent. Isabella Lopez looked at her handsome male companion adoringly. She was smitten.

“Umm, darling, you are magnificent. Love me again, si?” she purred softly.

“You read my mind *senorita*, we think alike,” he replied, smiling lasciviously.

“Now, now,” she moaned, urgency in her tone, and sighed deeply. Her audible show of pleasure enhanced his own sexual awareness. He discarded his swimming trunks and straddled her. The sharp intake of breath and pleasurable sting as her sharpened fingernails indented his back made the act memorable, for them both.

They lay side by side, quite naked, gazing up at the encircling seagulls performing acrobatics on the thermals before swooping seaward on some unsuspecting fish that was devoured in an instant. Both were sexually sated and at peace with the world.

“Anton, that was wonderful, my darling.”

“That’s what I like to hear, no complaint,” said Anton, trying not to sound conceited as he laughed happily.

“Don’t say that you hear me,” Isabella replied, playfully punching his side as she sat upright. She looked down at his upturned face. She remembered their first meeting only ten days ago, in Australia, she sighed with pleasure, smiling happily.

\* \* \*

Anton awoke with a start. “Fasten your seat belts. We arrive in Johannesburg in 20 minutes,” the captain announced. Hostesses hastened their efforts, removing empty beer cans and glasses. They helped passengers back to their seats, checking that safety belts were fastened. The plane landed without incident at Jan Smuts International Airport twenty

minutes later. As the plane touched down Anton recalled his first meeting with Isabella on Daydream Island, memories he would cherish always.

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Daydream Island was an ideal setting for Anton and Isabella to meet. For that matter, it was a tropical paradise for any couple to begin a relationship. As a cartel enforcer she had been instructed to locate and eliminate a certain Lee Chow. Mr. Chow was a past acquaintance of her father. He had been a trusted lieutenant responsible for collecting considerable amounts of cartel monies from clients. The problem was he had misappropriated many, many such payments in excess of two million dollars US. This had infuriated Pablo Lopez to such an extent he had ordered his immediate execution. The wily Lee Chow had anticipated his fate and fled Colombia, thinking Australia was far enough distant for him to be forgotten. Unfortunately for him, the cartel power brokers never forgot or forgave someone as devious and distrustful as Lee Chow. Lee Chow had begun to relax more and didn't look behind him so often as he had done.

Confident he had gotten away with the theft and outfoxed his former employers, carelessness had been his downfall. With the help of contacts, which the cartels of Colombia had in abundance, he had been located after a tip-off from a resort employee. Lee Chow, it appeared, was enjoying life as a rich tourist flitting about from one tropical island to another. At present time, he was happily ensconced on Daydream Island. His lucrative lifestyle was about to take a change now that Isabella had been sent by her father to retrieve what money was left. Isabella had no qualms about the task ahead—the man had transgressed, he was a thief and traitor in the eyes of the cartel. For that the punishment was quite clear—he must die. What she didn't have in mind was the impact a certain Englishman was about to have upon her very existence.

Lee Chow had noticed the beautiful woman who had recently occupied the apartment next door to him. Being the

man he was, he had no doubts he would meet with her and satisfy his longing for sexual gratification. He was always ready to get what he wanted, and money was no object, it was a means of breaking down barriers, no matter how difficult. Money opened many doors. He had been especially successful at getting what he wanted since becoming financially independent. Lee Chow had not recognized the woman. How would he? She was a scrawny, gangly nineteen years old when he had last seen her two years earlier. He had taken only a fleeting interest. She was the daughter of his cartel head and very much a protected species. Her transformation to a beautiful young woman would have fooled most. Isabella had not missed the lustful look she had received from her new neighbor. She fully intended to use his obvious interest in her to succeed in her mission. It looked so easy, she mused, smiling in anticipation of what she was preparing to do, the surprise factor would be enjoyable. She particularly hated the likes of Lee Chow and what he stood for. His fate was in her hands; she had no doubts it was a fate he would not enjoy. Isabella's quest was made easier the following morning as she left her apartment to take breakfast, and their paths crossed at the front doors. Her charming smile was all Chow needed. He asked her to join him, she agreed, and the trap was closing much sooner than she had planned. Tonight was as good a time as any to complete her mission.

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Isabella was sunning her body near the swimming pool. She glanced towards the poolside bar, and her heart missed a beat. She looked more closely at the profile of a man sitting alone sucking a drink through a straw. She had no idea why her heart was beating so furiously. She had her pick of any man she wanted. It was as though some telepathic connection was enticing her to get to know this man in particular. She watched as he turned and met her stare. Isabella could have sworn the man gulped, not his drink but more in wonder at the female form he espied. He immediately stood up

and left the pool, heading in her direction. He brazenly approached where she lay. Their eyes locked on one another as if an invisible energy passed from one to the other. She knew what was to transpire and blushing slightly, anticipated his arrival. This man, she thought selfishly, would be hers no matter what. Her breathing shortened as he arrived at her side

“Good morning, I couldn’t notice such a beautiful woman without coming over to say hello. I hope I’m not intruding?” Anton was smiling, his face a mask of obvious interest and hope.

“Why no, *senor*, I was thinking the same thing myself when I saw you at the bar,” replied Isabella without the slightest hint of immodesty. Anton sat down beside her, and they conversed for several minutes. The air between them was electric with each of them wanting to express their desire to know the other’s innermost secrets. It was as if they had known each other much longer than the short time they actually had. Anton came to the point quickly and with no trace of shame or conceit.

“My apartment is close at hand. Perhaps we could continue our conversation on a more personal note. Please don’t interpret what I have said wrongly, I’m not usually so forward,” Anton said, half expecting a rebuttal.

“Mine is just a short distance away. Let’s go there,” Isabella replied without hesitation. They both stood and held hands. No words were spoken as they made their way towards her apartment. Isabella had no doubts that what was to happen was meant to be. She felt no remorse over her quite open, provocative behavior towards this relative stranger. The magic generated when their hands touched only confirmed the sensuous feelings pulsating between the happy couple.

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They had arranged to meet later that evening directly behind the apartment block on the forest walk pathway. Lee Chow

was dressed in T-shirt, tracksuit pants, and Adidas training shoes. He waited expectantly for the beautiful woman to arrive. His thoughts were abuzz, with a desire to have this woman with or without her permission. Chow was a determined man, and the very thought of refusal, from any woman, was unacceptable. She would see it his way, there were no doubts in his mind. He turned and watched as Isabella approached where he stood. The sun was beginning to set, and night was moving in quite fast. It would be dark soon and negotiating the track not so easy. His mind was set on seduction, and he had no intention of walking too far with the lady before making his move. It was, however, his intention to be far enough away from the main buildings of the resort so that any cry for help she may attempt would be quickly stifled and the chance of detection minimal. He felt for the knife in his pants pocket, making sure it was ready for use when needed.

Isabella saw her target standing, patiently awaiting her arrival. She giggled audibly, placing her hand over her mouth so the sound wouldn't travel to the waiting man. She wanted him to be at ease; after all, she was a vulnerable young woman on a lovers tryst, wasn't she? Again hiding her delight, she drew closer to the man, who had spotted her presence and began to move towards her, his keen desire obvious to Isabella. They exchanged pleasantries and agreed it would be best if they moved farther along the pathway. It suited both their purposes, each confident the other had no inkling of what was about to happen.

They had travelled far enough to satisfy Isabella that here was as good a place as any to carry out her task. Stepping over a fallen log, Isabella felt a hand grasp hold of her left ankle. Lee Chow had watched her swaying hips as she walked slightly ahead of him. Her tight-fitting denim jeans accentuated her delightful slim hips. Her buttocks moved tantalizingly from side to side, and the more he watched the more sexually aroused he became. He watched as she stepped carefully over a fallen log. Now was the time to make his

move. She would agree to his demands one way or the other. She would die anyway, so it didn't really matter either way. He reached out and grabbed her trailing ankle. What happened next surprised and bewildered Lee Chow. Isabella felt the grip tighten around her ankle. She immediately deposited all her weight onto her leading right leg, pivoting expertly and drawing her left leg quickly upwards, breaking his grip. Her body turned so she was now facing her adversary, she straightened the leg with force, kicking the unsuspecting Chinaman square in the midriff. It was a move her martial arts instructor would have been proud to witness. Chow collapsed in a heap, exhaling loudly, all breath knocked from his lungs by the powerful blow.

He gasped for air for what seemed like a long time. Isabella stepped neatly back across the fallen log and waited for him to recover enough to hear what she had to say. Chow thrashed about fighting for breath. Eventually he began to gather his wits and attempted to rise. A forceful kick discouraged him from making any further move. He looked up scowling, teeth bared in an evident show of anger.

“You fucking bitch, for that I fuck you twice before I slit your pretty throat, you bitch.”

“Mr. Lee Chow, you were a trusted employee to my father, Pablo Lopez, a full member of the Bravos Cartel before you fled Colombia with two million dollars that didn't belong to you. For that you were sentenced to death. I am to carry out that sentence. Do you have anything to say?”

Chow was stunned at hearing this beautiful woman speak so. It seemed surreal that such a thing could happen to him. Hadn't he thought of every means of avoiding detection? Backtracking several times? Using disguises that he knew were good? Changing his name several times and always on the move? It had come to this, he thought. Carefully withdrawing the knife from his pocket, he released the four-inch blade and it sprang open. He was troubled but felt no fear. How could this woman kill me? The knife hand exploded in pain, the kick delivered precisely on the tendons of the wrist

directly above the fleshy part of the palm, near to the thumb. The knife whirled away and landed in scrub nearby. Chow now felt vulnerable but still confident he could better this mere woman. He attempted to rise, and another savage kick sent him flat on his back, his senses disoriented, panic now beginning to cloud his thoughts. The she-devil straddled his upper chest, her delicious thighs either side of his head, her crotch rested against his chin. His senses became more lucid, his tormented evil mind thinking that at any other time having this woman like so would have pleased him, but not now. He felt the full realization of fear. As beautiful as the woman was, she was now the cause of the fear de facto, and he knew death was close and began to sweat.

“I have money, please spare me, I am so sorry, please . . . . The last syllable faded as the man died, Isabella’s knife blade buried deep within his face, the blade finding no resistance as she deliberately forced it downwards through the man’s left eye socket. Death was sudden; he convulsed twice, then lay still. Quickly dragging the lifeless body into the bushy terrain, Isabella covered it with fallen foliage. She was back in her apartment fifteen minutes later and fast asleep by 10:00 p.m. It would be three days before the smell of rotting flesh alerted a forest ranger. His findings put in motion the only murder inquiry in the history of the island paradise.

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Isabella had unlocked the apartment door and entered. She quickly began to disrobe and was in the process of discarding her bikini briefs when Anton entered and closed the door behind him. Turning, he looked in awe at the sight of the beautiful woman standing naked before him.

“I hope you don’t think me too forward?” said Isabella in a quiet, seductive voice.

“Not at all, I like a woman who knows what she wants,” replied Anton, stepping from his swimwear and standing naked and proud. His physique took her breath away. He was magnificent, she enthused to herself. They came together quickly

and embraced with passion, mouths agape, tongues seeking to probe the other's waiting mouth, the kiss long and wanting. Scooping up the willing partner by placing his hands beneath her firm buttocks, her legs entwined about his midriff, and he carried her towards the bed, taking care not to break their embrace. He guided his manhood into her, she gasped in sheer pleasure. They coordinated each other's attempts to please as they gyrated on the bed in savage, passionate lovemaking. They excelled in their show of love with heavy breathing and a feeling of spent emotion as both drained the other, ensuring a climax that would be long remembered.

They remained entwined long enough to recoup their desire and repeat the process all over again. Anton walked from the apartment later that night a tired but happy man. He was keen for the sun to rise. They had agreed to spend the day together, fully intending to enjoy what time was left. Neither had asked anything of the other. Only time would tell if there was a future. The odds were against it being permanent, and both were mature enough to understand life's ups and downs.

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Isabella Janita Lopez was the only daughter of Pablo Lopez. His wife had died during childbirth, making her extra special in her doting father's eyes. A deep and loving relationship for each other ensured she had a carefree, happy childhood. Her tomboy mentality during those years meant she preferred boys' company to those of her own gender. Football was her first love, competing with young active males her idea of fun. She more than held her own during the rough and tough excitement of match days. Age thirteen was when playing with boys ceased. At puberty, more of the young lady was expected of her, rather than the robust individual content to roll in the dirt and take her chances with the opposite sex, which was considered by many as not befitting her gender. She became quiet and withdrawn. Pablo attempted to placate his troubled child. He played football with her on their spacious lawn, but

it wasn't the same. Isabella remained moody, and her self-imposed exile from other children continued. Her teenage years were troublesome and lacked the normal, happy growing up all her past friends were enjoying. Eventually Isabella buried herself in study. School results soared dramatically. She graduated with honors. Father was so very proud of her achievements that he purchased a car for her eighteenth birthday.

Isabella then requested employment with her father's import/export business and eventually persuaded him to employ her as a junior clerk. The business was a front for her father's thriving first love, that of cartel head for the Bravos consortium. Dealing in drugs was a way of life in Colombia. Pablo Lopez was astute, ruthless, and very successful.

Pablo was proud of his daughter's dedication and determination to succeed. She had his drive and enthusiasm at whatever she set her sights upon. She had by the age of twenty risen within the organization to departmental head. By now she was fully aware of what father really did and was more determined than ever to prove her mettle and become a full member of the cartel fraternity. Pablo was undecided about her wish to pursue a career within the dangerous business of narcotics. He would have preferred she settled down to married life and raised a family. He quickly realized his daughter had no such intentions; she wanted her own career path, and no one would alter her way of thinking. Her life took a dramatic turn shortly after her twentieth birthday.

Arriving home one night she could hear raised voices coming from her father's study. She knew he was holding a meeting with his partners. Passing the study door she saw it slightly ajar. A loud voice proclaimed, "Pablo, he has betrayed you and all of us. We have undeniable proof to that effect. We must silence him before too much damage is done, and quickly. You must see that, si?" Isabella recognized the voice of her father's friend. His tone was urgent and demanding.

"I can't believe he would betray us all. He has been our friend since childhood. Is your information correct? You must be very sure, my friend," pleaded Pablo.

“Very sure, there is no mistake, Pablo, Rico is a traitor. He must, should die for his treachery. Give the order now.”

“Rico, is my friend, a traitor, I can’t believe he would do such a thing. Let me think,” said Pablo, sadness in his voice.

Isabella made her way to her father’s bedroom. She knew the combination of his wall safe and removed the .32-calibre Berretta pistol. She checked it was loaded and attached the silencer device. Stowing the weapon into her purse she looked at her appearance in the nearby mirror, applied fresh lipstick then quietly left the house. She would resolve father’s problem for him, then perhaps he would realize she was not just a pretty, obedient daughter but someone more than capable of being of extra value to the organization. The line of business they were engaged in was cruel and required strict observance of the rules by which it and many other cartels existed. Punishment for betrayal was death; there was no other way to command the respect and obedience necessary. Isabella looked forward to the task.

Rico Alves resided not far away, three streets west to be exact. Knocking on the large ornamental wooden doors, she composed herself and gave serious thought as to what she was about to say. Rico opened the door. He was a large, imposing figure with a gruff, petulant manner about him.

“Why Isabella, how nice to see you, as beautiful as ever, do come in, please *senorita*?” Rico said, a suggestive look creasing his flabby face. Isabella felt revulsion stir in her stomach. She breathed deeply, then looked directly at the man she had come to kill. Reaching inside her purse she withdrew the firearm. Rico watched, his mind thinking how desirable this young woman was. He had no idea how deadly she was about to become. Rico continued to observe with interest as she deftly flicked off the safety catch. Alarm bells began to ring, surely not, he thought.

“Rico, you have betrayed my father’s trust he had in you. You have cheated the cartel. You are a low life, a person without honor or integrity. You are sentenced to death for your dishonest ways. Make ready to meet your maker, you

