

Trouble In Paradise. . .

He spoke through clenched teeth. "I think you make friends too easily. I think you make friends like a whore."

She stopped. The blood drained from her face.

Her eyes flashed fire.

She pivoted, turning her back on him, and began to walk slowly away.

He put his left hand over his mouth.

He pulled the hand away again. "Wait!" he shouted. "Tell me your name!"

She did not turn. She kept walking toward the road, across the field.

He stepped forward, reached to the bar at the top of the fence, and quietly pulled himself up. He carefully straddled the top, changed grips, and lowered himself to the ground on the other side.

She had not turned around, and had not gained much ground. He sprinted after her.

As he came up on her, she at last heard him and began to turn.

He grabbed her wrist. "Tell me your name," he repeated, panting.

She swung her other hand around toward his face. He caught it, too, by the wrist.

She brought up a knee toward his groin. He blocked it easily with his own knee, then he hooked a foot behind her legs and tripped her over it, dropping her to the ground.

He sat astraddle her, still holding her wrists. "Your name," he said.

Also by John Enright:

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Unholy Quest

John Enright

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To Marsha

Part I: Clouds of Glory

Chapter 1

His name was George Galanopoulos.

Tonight was a night for celebration. He was flush with cash for a job well done. A job that had involved killing two people. Not for the mob. He was not a gangster. He did not join gangs. He organized forces. He was an international mercenary, a soldier of fortune. As a way of life, it had its rewards.

One of those rewards was power. Not political power, but presence, charisma, power of personality—which served to amplify his natural, barrel-chested, physical strength. Something about living on the sharp edge between life and death—it gave off an aura of danger that was instantly sensed by others, both men and women. In this case, a woman.

What her name was, he did not know.

Her beauty was dark, Mediterranean. Greek? Turkish? Spanish? He did not know.

He was not sure how he had picked her up, or whether it had been the other way around. He had intended to have a woman tonight, but he had fully intended to pay for it, with a professional. This woman was not that. What was she? He had run into her on the street. Their eyes had met as they passed. Her gaze locked on his. All this was common enough. What was odd was that *his* eyes had locked on hers—on those dark, bottomless wells of understanding. For he felt, as he looked at her, that she had known him all his life. Not that he had known *her*, but that she had known *him*. For even now, he did not feel that he knew her. Perhaps later. Yes, later.

The street where they had met was in Chicago, on Michigan Avenue, glittering in the autumn evening with the splendor of expensive window displays. At first he had thought she was just another wealthy young female shopper, pampered and privileged, looking for a thrill. . . and he had experienced a sudden desire to take her some place. . . more primitive. “Let’s go to Greektown,” he had said, and they had taken a quick cab ride to

that boisterous neighborhood that reminded him so much of his own boyhood, full of the kind of people he felt comfortable with. They had gone to a place with live music and a loud crowd. They had danced together, on the floor, with the other couples, and the feel of her body had been good. She was supple and smooth as he held her in his arms.

There had been a performance by belly dancers, and their gyrating hips had whetted his appetite for her.

Now—much to his surprise—she was taking the floor, by herself, as the belly dancers departed. She held up her hands to him, gesturing that he should stay at the table. She beckoned to the band that they should play on.

She began to dance.

It was belly dancing music, but she was not belly dancing. Her body undulated with the rhythms, and she flowed across the floor with wild abandon—her arms spinning, her hips swaying, her legs smoothly leaping. He felt her eyes locked on his own. But he knew that every man in the room would be feeling the same effect—each imagining that he alone was the one for whom she danced. It was some overpowering illusion. As her eyes flashed around the room, each glance scored a hit.

He thought, they all think she's theirs, but she's mine. What an enchantress! Dancing the ancient dance of desire—the dance of the seven veils! "Gigi!" A harsh taunting voice roared above the din of cymbals, reeds and clapping hands. The voice contained a threat. The music stopped. The girl stopped dancing.

George Galanopoulos stood up. He knew what "Gigi" meant. It was an old ironical nickname of his, taken from his initials. He had never cared for it.

Standing 20 feet away was a tall, fair man, with short-cropped golden hair, wearing dark slacks and a light khaki jacket. In his left hand was an automatic pistol which looked a bit on the thin side. A .22 target pistol, guessed Galanopoulos. An accurate weapon, but not really a man-stopper.

Galanopoulos smiled, and waved a meaty hand. "Don't point that thing at me, Thor. What's got into you?"

But Thor kept it trained on Galanopoulos. "Don't ask. Just make your move, Gigi."

"But, Thor, what am I supposed to do? I'm not armed. Besides, I thought we were friends."

“Were’ is right.”

“Is that why you’ve come after me? Are you still sore over that business in Rhodesia?”

“You went AWOL, Gigi.”

“AWOL, hell! I wasn’t a goddamned conscript! I’m a professional contractor!”

“You didn’t honor your contract, Gigi.”

“Thor, business is business. I had a better offer in Thailand.”

“I was counting on you, Gigi. On your honor.”

“Thor, you’re nuts. I sent you back the money! What else do you want me to do?”

“Draw your gun, Gigi.”

“Thor—honest—I don’t have one. All I have is a knife. Here, look!” He pulled up his right pants leg and drew a gleaming double-edged knife from its sheath. With a casual, perfect motion, he flipped up his wrist in an underhand throw and the blade shot toward Thor. Galanopoulos took a rolling dive for the floor.

Thor dodged sideways, to the left, trying to keep Galanopoulos in his sights.

But Thor’s dodge was not quite fast enough. Even as he moved, he felt the queer impact on his right hand as the blade went through it and sunk right up to the handle. It did not hurt, yet.

Galanopoulos came out of his dive with a 9mm automatic in his hand. Thor shot before Galanopoulos could aim. It was a trick shot. Galanopoulos dropped the gun and looked at his hand. The base of his trigger finger was partially severed, and it dangled loosely. It hurt. In a mad rage, he charged at Thor, head down, like a bull.

Thor smiled and put three quick shots into the top of the oncoming head. The legs stopped charging. The body sprawled to the ground and lay slack and still, just short of the spot where Thor was standing.

Thor put his pistol back into his waistband, and tugged the knife out of his right hand. It was bleeding seriously, but not arterially, from the wound. He wiggled his fingers. The ring finger did not respond properly.

He reached down with both hands and cut off the man’s right ear. He frowned. “This would have been much easier, Gigi,” he

whispered, “if you had just drawn your gun when I asked. But you were never one for following orders, were you?” Then Thor buried the blade in the right kidney, and left it there. The body arched violently. There was still some life in it.

But not for long. The body went slack again. Thor stood, and took two cloth napkins from a nearby table. He wrapped one napkin around his wounded, bleeding hand. He wrapped the other napkin around the severed ear, and stuck it in his back pocket. Then he strode calmly out of the restaurant. There were several men carrying guns in the restaurant, including two Mafia members and an off-duty cop working as a bouncer. But no one tried to stop Thor.

It had all been fast. Slowly, people began to move again as the shock wore off. A woman threw up at her table. Another began to sob hysterically.

The dancer, still standing alone on the dance floor, did not look at the body of George Galanopoulos. She stared, with a stunned expression, at the door through which his assassin had disappeared.

Chapter 2

The morning was sunny, as most of the mornings on the island promised to be. Even the wet season here consisted of afternoon showers that cleared before nightfall.

The sun was still low, hiding behind the long-fingered leaves of the coconut palms. The moist air, which blew neverendingly, was not yet hot. Hook-nosed blackbirds squawked in the trees. Powder blue lizards darted about in the grassy brush, hunting for insect prey, scampering away at the approach of human feet.

He jogged at a leisurely pace, enjoying the cool of the day. Out of habit, he lifted his feet high as he ran, kicking up a trail of dust as he smacked them down on the dry dirt road.

“Hey, big guy, haven’t you ever heard of running shoes?” The call came from a young woman, a redhead, who was gardening beside one of the mobile homes he was passing.

He slowed to a walk as she arose from her gardener’s crouch. She was wearing jeans and a T-shirt, suitable for garden work, that hugged her form and showed her curves. Twenty or younger, he thought. But old enough to make up her own mind, he decided, as he studied the firm glance of her eyes and calm set of her mouth.

“You’ll never make your best speed in those,” she said, pointing to his feet.

He had stopped, and stood 10 feet away from her. A little too far to stand, she thought, but it afforded a good distance to look him over.

He was wearing high leather combat boots, crinkled with wear and dusty from the road. His knees were bare beneath his khaki shorts. His flat stomach and broad chest were bare, and he was fair skinned, very fair, not yet tanned—as he soon would be if he ran around like that for long.

He wore a close-cropped golden beard that extended rather than hid the jut of his jaw, and the hair on his head was close cropped, too. There was something distinctly icy in the pale blue eyes that repaid her gaze. Something icy that gave her chills that

were not entirely unpleasant. She dropped her gaze and noted that he had a large gash scar on his chest, just under his left nipple. She had thought he was carrying a towel in his right hand, but now she noticed otherwise. It was a gauze bandage that wrapped around his palm and left his fingers free.

He smiled, flashing his teeth. "When you do all your running in running shoes, then you're not used to running in anything else. But when the time comes that you have to run, you might not have your running shoes on. So it pays to get some practice in other footwear. I figure if you can run in heavy boots, you can run in anything."

She listened to what he said. "What about barefoot?" she asked.

He smiled again. "Sure. I've had to run barefoot. But I only practice that on the beach."

"That South African girl, the track star, she ran barefoot."

"Those South Africans are all a little crazy."

"What about you? Are you a little crazy?"

"Only when I want to be."

"Really? It must be nice to be able to turn it on and off like that."

"Sometimes it comes in handy."

"So do you do everything in your boots?"

"No. Not everything."

"Swimming?"

"No. Not swimming. But I have jumped into deep water with them. Just to practice taking them off in a hurry."

"You're quite a character," she said. "What's your name?"

"Thor. Thor Johnson."

"Mine's Wendy. Wendy Drake."

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance," he said. Still, he had not moved his feet from the spot where he had planted them.

"Would you like to come in for a cup of coffee?" she asked.

"You bet."

She walked to the door and held it open. "What happened to your hand?"

"A knife. I was careless."

"Does it hurt?"

“Not really. I’ll just be glad when I get this bandage off. All this ocean and I can’t do any of that swimming you mentioned.”

She smiled. “You’re definitely an exercise nut. But keep it up. It looks good on you.”

Inside, the mobile home was the usual model of cramped efficiency. He sat opposite her, at the little Formica table, and took a swig from the mug she had prepared for him.

“That’s good,” he said.

“I suppose you should hurry,” she said, an uncertainty in her voice. “You’ll have to be getting ready for church soon, won’t you?”

He shook his head no and took another swig.

She said, “It’s Sunday. Don’t you go to church?”

“They don’t have any churches here that are my denomination.”

“Which one is that?”

“An old one.”

“A lot of the newcomers here are LDS. Do you know what that means?”

“Latter Day Saints. Mormons. Straight arrows from Utah. Are those the folks?”

“Yeah. Only they’re a bit more forward-looking here. They’ve cut themselves off from the old Utah church, and they’re calling themselves the Modern Day Saints.” There was something bitter in her voice.

Thor shrugged. “Well I’m just here to do a job, and today’s my day off. I didn’t figure on spending any time in church. How about you?”

She looked down into her coffee, as if the answer were there. “I suppose I might skip it,” she said. “I can always tell them I was sick.” She looked up from her coffee with a sparkle of fierce determination in her green eyes.

He suddenly felt naked before her. As, indeed, from the waist up, he was.

She felt a shiver run through her body. She whispered, “I could use. . . some adventure.”

There was only one thing for it. He put his cup down. Without a word he got up, walked around the table, behind her, and began to roll up her T-shirt from the waist.

Later, so much later, when her release came, and he knew it and let himself go, his strength was such that she momentarily worried whether the mobile home's ceiling was really shaking like that, and about to come down on them.



Like so many red haired people, she had freckles all over her body. Thor was lying on his side, studying the ripple of freckles on her chest as she breathed in her sleep.

The mobile home's door burst open. "Wendy, are you ready for church? I tried to call but—" A sputter. "What is the meaning of this?" The tall white-haired gentleman in jacket and tie shot a look of moral outrage at the couple in the bed. Wendy shook her head awake, red hair tossing, and looked back and forth between Thor and the intruder.

"It means the phone was off the hook because the lady didn't wish to be disturbed," said Thor, speaking slowly but distinctly. He sat up in bed and crossed his hands behind his head in a posture of relaxed mastery. "Why are you disturbing us?"

"Because—because, I was worried. Because—this is my girl, God damn it!"

Thor looked at him, uncrossing his arms. "Daughter, sir, or mistress?"

Additional shock registered on the older man's face. "No! That is, we're engaged to be married."

Thor cast his eyes to Wendy. "True or false?" he asked.

"They—they won't let me leave!" she replied, a plea in her voice.

Thor looked back and forth between them. "The answer, I take it, is true with extenuating circumstances. . . That's all right, Wendy. . . I won't hold it against you. It's not as if you were married already. At least this guy didn't come in shooting and get himself hurt."

Wendy opened her mouth but said nothing. She gathered the sheets higher, to her neck, the better to cover her breasts.

Thor addressed the man. "Sir, would you do me the kindness of stepping outside while I dress? I'm sure that you and your fiancé have a lot to talk about, but I don't think that you would find me to be a very helpful participant in the conversation."

The man's head flinched back, as if he had been slapped in the face. His eyes narrowed. "I'm going to find out who you are, young man, and when I do—"

"The name's Thor Johnson, and I'm not hard to find," he called as the older man slammed the door behind him.

"At least I'm not hard to find as long as I'm cooped up on this bloody island." He muttered this to himself.

"Listen, Wendy, we've got to talk, but this isn't the time or place. Let me ask you one question. Is this guy likely to slap you around bad or anything like that?"

"No," she whispered.

"Good. Give me your hand."

She extended her right hand to him. He took it.

"Give me your other hand."

She extended her left hand as well. The sheet dropped from her neck to her waist.

He held both her hands and looked at her. "I like you," he said.

He kissed her once, on the lips, and began to get dressed.



Daniel Sears leaned forward in his chair and clasped his hands together on top of his desk. This interview was not going the way he had planned. No, it was worse than that. Interviews never went as planned. But usually the disrupting factor was the other person's resistance. This time it was his own attraction.

"Suppose you tell me what you want," he said. He tried staring her in the eye but gave it up when he felt his own eyes betraying his yearning.

She uncrossed her legs, and crossed them the other way. She said, "You don't want lots of women, do you?"

Perplexed, he looked at her.

She went on. "I don't mean that you don't like women, but that you're very picky, aren't you? You sit back, and you evaluate, and you have hidden standards of your own, that you don't advertise. So that usually, when you meet an attractive woman, you find something you don't like about her. Am I right?"

Compelled by truth, he nodded.

“Because of this, you are not used to being possessed by the overwhelming urge to lay down a strange woman. Am I getting warm, Daniel?” She smiled, deliciously. Her lips were large, he thought.

He arose from his chair, and stepped out from behind his desk, walking somewhat stiffly.

“And you,” he said, “are used to being so desired, and so laid down. Aren’t you?”

“I like it,” she said.

“Are you making an offer?” He continued to stand in front of her.

She nodded, solemnly. She glanced about his office, noting its closed door and shaded window, and reached a hand toward his belt, to pull him forward. He stepped back.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“We can talk about it later,” she said, her voice low in her throat, as she rose from her chair and clasped her body to his.

Fever burned in his frontal lobes. He reached around, grabbed her buttocks, and ground her groin into his. He let the pleasure surge. What a taste of paradise she was! How did she do it?

He took his hands from her rear, brought them to her shoulders, and pushed her away. He felt dizzy, very dizzy. “We talk about it now,” he said. “What do you want?”

She stepped back, with a gasp, using her own hands to knock his off her shoulder. She looked at him hard. He was looking at her the same way, desire written all over him, from the bulge of his eyes to the stiffness in his pants. She studied him, became absorbed in him, began to drink up his presence, and she did it without effort. He was prematurely gray and balding, tall without being very muscular, long-waisted, long-armed. She imagined how they would fit together in bed. This was a man who lived mainly in his brain, but he stood now as if he lived in his body as well. He would be good, and it would be a spiritual experience for both of them.

He repeated, “What do you want?”

“You are tougher than you look, Daniel.” She went back to her chair and sat. “Fine. I will tell you what I want.

“This man, this Thor fellow that I mentioned to you, I would like to know one thing about him.”

“And that is?” Daniel leaned his hands back onto his desk, and sat on its edge, his feet still flat against the ground.

She raised her left foot to the seat of her chair, and removed her shoe. “What have you done with him?” She raised her other foot and took off her other shoe. She lowered both her feet and extended her legs.

“Nothing.” He smiled.

She smiled back. “Don’t be silly. Of course you did something. He came here three days ago, met with you, and that’s the end of the trail. If he’s left town, he’s done it much more quietly than when he left Chicago for D.C.”

“You know about Chicago?”

She nodded. She undid her skirt and slid it down her legs to the floor. Thumbs at her hips, she started to peel off her pantyhose.

“Then you know he’s hurt.”

The peeling hesitated at the knees and her eyes widened momentarily, as if she felt a stab of fearful concern. Then her hands continued the smooth stripping away of the nylon sheen.

“Only his hand,” she said.

There it was! he thought. The real thing. Instantaneously squelched reaction. Emotional leakage. Almost unfakable.

She was beginning to unbutton her frilly white blouse. It buttoned up the back, so she had to reach both arms behind, thrusting her petite breasts forward. He wondered what color her nipples would be, given her olive complexion.

He said, “I found a job for him.”

“Where?” The blouse was on the floor with the rest of her clothes. She wore no bra. The nipples were cinnamon.

“St. Barnabas Island,” he said, forcing the words out. “In the Caribbean. Working for the St. Barnabas Tourism Bureau, which is not what it sounds like. It’s a small island. It belongs, on the books, to a larger island, St. Camelia. But it’s being operated on a very independent basis lately. He should be easy to find. All you have to do is get there.”

She stood naked and spread her arms, beaming a smile of pleasure at him.

He shook his head and smiled wryly, though his eyes still dwelled on her body. “Not today,” he said.

“Tonight I’ll go home and hump the living daylights out of my wife before we sit down to dinner. But I’ll save it till then. Put on your clothes. You have what you came for.”

She crooked one index finger and raised it to her lips, looking him over carefully. Clearly, his body was still ready for her. She moved the hand from her lips and gestured with a flip of open palm, as if tossing something away.

“You are even tougher than I thought,” she said.

He shrugged his shoulders. His eyes never left her as she put her clothes back on in efficient silence.

When she was dressed, she picked up her handbag from her chair, and turned to him. “My compliments to your wife, Mr. Sears.”

“She won’t know what hit her,” he said, ruefully shaking his head.

“By the way, what’s your name?”

“Alma,” she said.

“Alma what?” he asked.

“Just Alma.” She walked to the door and opened it.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Any time.”

She shut the door and was gone.

In his mind’s eye, he followed her out of the building, past the unmarked doors in the drab hallway, past the receptionist, out onto the street, into the bustling noonday world of Washington, D.C. There were, of course, no signs admitting that these were the offices of a government agency. It wasn’t exactly a top secret, but neither was it something the agency advertised to the general public.

She had found the place rather quickly. She did not seem to be a professional. Nevertheless, she was good. Who was she working for?

Herself, he thought.



Thor had been waiting for this. For almost two weeks. Now, what would it be?

He had been working with the dogs when the interruption came—working with Rommel, one of the three Rottweilers. The

guy who came for him, the aspiring tough guy in the neatly pressed security uniform, did not seem to like dogs. At least, he didn't seem to like big black two-hundred pound dogs with jaws designed to crush rock.

So the young man had stood discreetly on the other side of the training yard fence, and shouted his request. "Johnson! They want you at HQ! Now!"

Somehow, the young man's voice lacked authority, perhaps because he was watching Rommel chew up the groin of the canvas dummy.

Thor held up his hand in a wait-a-minute gesture. "Just let me call off this beast," he muttered. Actually, the beast wasn't really trained to be called off, just pulled off, so Thor had to walk over to the Rottweiler and yank him hard by his stainless steel choke collar. "C'mon boy. That's *enough*. ENOUGH! Let go. Good boy. Good puppy." Rommel had let go after only one yank and two "enoughs." That wasn't bad. Like most Rotts, Rommel enjoyed chewing things up, and didn't really need too much praise for it. It was something he liked doing. But letting go of a victim, even a bloodless canvas dummy, didn't come easily to him, so Thor scratched the slavering brute behind the ears and gave him a few more words of praise as he walked him back to the kennel.

Thor washed his hands of dog drool, then stepped outside the kennel to join the waiting messenger from HQ. The man's neatly pressed uniform was that of the St. Barnabas Tourism Bureau Security Force, which was allowed to operate as if it were the island's official police force. Technically, St. Barnabas was merely a possession of St. Camelia. But in practical terms, the leaders of St. Camelia seemed to have sold off the sparsely populated island of St. Barnabas to the wealthy investors from the United States.

After two weeks at the place, it was clear to Thor that there was no wall of separation between the Tourism Bureau and the Modern Day Saints Church. On paper, they were completely separate. But the same people were in charge of both.

The security man, a Corporal Tucker, had come in a Jeep. It was two miles of dirt road to the modern three-story Administration center that housed the Tourism Bureau's headquarters.

They rode together in silence. Tucker volunteered nothing, and Thor kept his mouth shut.

End of the line was a third-floor conference room. Three men were already seated at the table. Tucker indicated a fourth chair to Thor, and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Thor sat straight, his hands folded neatly in his lap, and looked around the table. To his left was the white-haired gentleman who had walked in on his encounter with Wendy Drake. He was neatly dressed in jacket and tie, and barely deigned to look Thor's way, preferring to study a class ring on his hand. This, as Thor had taken the trouble to find out, was Jonah Whitlock, board member of the Tourism Bureau.

Directly across the table from Thor sat a wide-shouldered, wide-faced man in the khaki uniform of the Tourism Board Security Force. On each of his shoulders, there was a gold star. This was Tom Burdick, head of the Security Force, and an old pro. Thor had run into him once before, years ago, in Vietnam. The close-cropped hair had receded, and turned gray. Burdick's face, with its scornful mouth, twice-broken nose, and threatening brow, had simply creased more deeply into a permanent mask of aggressiveness. A light of recognition glinted in Burdick's eyes as Thor's met his.

To Thor's right, sat Trevor McKeon, chief executive officer of the Tourism Bureau. McKeon was an old pro, too, but not at soldiering. At spying. Intelligence had always been his game. Even in Nam, he had been with the CIA. Come to think of it, wasn't he hooked up somehow with Burdick, even way back then? Thor's mind flashed back to the upside-down fairy land that Southeast Asia had seemed at the time, as his eyes swept over McKeon's narrow, determined face. McKeon's brows were arched in concentration, his lips were pursed in disdain, and his eyes seemed to stare right through Thor's face. But his eyebrows went up and his eyes opened wide with recognition as he looked at Thor. The corners of his mouth tugged down, to a nagging frown, then up, to a superior smile, and his eyes took on a dreamy, faraway look, as if he too were remembering the land where they had met long ago.

It wasn't the kind of place you could forget, thought Thor. He spoke one word, addressing Burdick. "Sir?"

Burdick eyeballed him. “Thor. What’s this Johnson doing after your name?”

“That’s the name I’m going by now.”

“Back in the service it was Anderson, wasn’t it?”

“Yes sir.”

“Why did you change it?”

“I liked Johnson better.”

“Was it that you liked Johnson, or was there something you didn’t like about Anderson anymore? Maybe that Anderson name had gotten a bit tarnished?” Burdick allowed himself a knowing smirk.

Thor frowned deeply, and looked away to his side. “Not tarnished, sir. Muddied. Gold doesn’t tarnish. But when it’s dunked in a mudhole, it doesn’t come out clean.”

Thor looked back at Burdick. Burdick shrugged, scratched his chin, and glanced down at the pile of papers before him.

Jonah Whitlock, the white-haired gentleman who claimed Wendy as fiancé, chose this break to speak up. “I’d like to know what in hell is going on here,” he said quietly. “I take it that you *know* this clown, Mr. Burdick?”

Burdick looked up from the papers and spoke through clenched teeth. “Jonah, lay off the ‘Mister.’ This isn’t a Sunday school class, and I’m not impressed. Call me Colonel, call me Burdick, or call me Tom. You got that?”

Whitlock shrugged. “However you want it, Tom. The point is that you know this guy from before, and he’s some kind of troublemaker, right? So why is he working for us? And if you didn’t know who he really was till you saw him just now, what does that say about the security of your hiring practices?”

Burdick’s lopsided smile was gone. Holding back his anger, uncertain what to say, he glanced at McKeon.

McKeon spoke, his tone controlled and gentle. “Jonah, you know we depend upon our friends in Washington. I think I should tell you that this man came highly recommended by one of my sources. As it happened, neither Tom nor I interviewed him when he came to work here. If we had, we would have recognized him. We both remember him from Vietnam, and we both remember the kind of trouble he was in. But that doesn’t mean we wouldn’t have hired him. I believe some charges may have

been leveled at the time, but I don't think our man was ever convicted of anything. Is that right, Thor?"

"That's so, sir." Thor was beginning to feel better about this. McKeon and Burdick apparently weren't ready to throw him to Whitlock. The relationship among these three, the internal politics, looked interesting. After the incident with Wendy, Thor had made a point of finding out who was who in the island hierarchy. He had remembered McKeon and Burdick from Vietnam. Only when he saw them seated together did it flash back to him that they had somehow been connected. For the moment, it escaped him what that connection had been. He would have to do some more digging in his memory.

"As I recall the case," said McKeon, "you never even stood trial. Is that right?"

"That's so, sir."

Burdick kept his eyes on the papers before him, a slight frown on his lips.

McKeon continued. "But that's not the case we're here to discuss today. We're here to discuss this matter of Wendy Drake."

"Hold on," interposed Whitlock. "I'd like to at least know what this charge was and why it was dropped."

"Of course, Jonah. Thor, you can answer that question yourself."

Thor's hands gripped the edge of the table tightly, turning his fingertips white. Nuts. This still wasn't easy to talk about. He spoke very slowly, staring at his fingertips. "The charge was stealing weapons and selling them to the enemy. Somebody set me up. I didn't do it. I didn't stand trial because the brass decided to hush the whole thing up. Does that answer your question?" He raised his head and looked at Jonah Whitlock with eyes of cold, white fury. Whitlock, shocked both by the answer and the emotion behind it, merely nodded dumbly.

Burdick addressed Thor again. "Look, Thor, whatever your name is this week, let's keep this simple. You sort of fell through the cracks of our training program due to the way you came in. I mean, you're not a full-fledged member of the security force and you're certainly not an investor. So you didn't get the usual grand tour and ground rules presentation. But let's begin by getting the facts straight.

"Now did you cohabit with Wendy Drake in her trailer?"

“Yes, I did.”

“What did you know about Miss Drake’s status at that time?”

“Status? Nothing. But I could see she wasn’t wearing anything that looked like a wedding or engagement ring.”

“Since being informed, by Mr. Whitlock, that she was his fiancé, have you had occasion to see Miss Drake?”

“No sir. As a matter of fact, I’ve avoided running into her.”

“Why is that?”

“Because I want to stay out of trouble.”

Burdick grinned. “Good. Has it occurred to you that you might have gotten Miss Drake pregnant?”

Thor looked surprised. “No.”

“Why not?”

“I used a contraceptive.”

“You always carry one with you when you’re out jogging?”

“Two, sir.”

“I see. Well let me explain this to you just once. We’re trying to keep this place clean. Real clean. So you’d better stop sticking your pistol where it doesn’t belong. If you get the overwhelming urge, there’s a house at the other end of the island. We imported a bunch of Venezuelan girls to keep the place humming. Any of the boys in the Security Force can tell you about it. But otherwise I want you to consider the women on this island as off limits. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And hands off Wendy Drake! Understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you have any problems with these rules?”

“No, sir.”

“Then you can go.”

“Thank you, sir.” Thor rose.

“One more thing,” barked Burdick.

“Yes, sir.”

“You’re not a soldier here. You’re a dog-trainer. You will not be allowed to carry or use weapons of any kind while you are on this island. Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Dismissed.”

Thor turned, and stepped out the door. The Security Force corporal who had escorted him in was nowhere in sight. Nuts.

He would have to walk back to the kennel. On second thought, that was fine. He could begin to sort things out as he walked. The first problem, he supposed, was how to get in touch again with Wendy.

When Thor had gone, Whitlock spoke again. "What are you two doing, letting in guys like that? I know this is a rough business, but selling weapons to the enemy? A *traitor*?"

McKeon spoke. "Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. The important thing is that Washington said he's okay now and asked us to keep him out of sight for a while. We're doing someone in Washington a favor, see? That means we collect a favor back, later on. That's the way the game works. You're just bent out of shape because you didn't give this filly what it takes to keep her happy. I wouldn't want news like that to get out, if I were you. I suggest you pay more attention to her, and less to our security procedures."

Burdick said, "If he touches her again, he's gone. In the meantime, leave him alone. End of discussion. Satisfied?"

Whitlock had blanched. McKeon's veiled threat, to make a laughingstock of his manhood, had hit home. "No. I'm not satisfied. I can see you've closed your eyes to the problem. But I don't think we've heard the end of this joker. I just hope he keeps his hands out of my girl's pants, or you'll both be very sorry."

"No sorrier than you," said McKeon, very softly.

"Good-bye!" said Jonah Whitlock. He picked up his brief case and marched rapidly out of the room.

Burdick and McKeon sat together in silence. For a minute, two minutes, five minutes. Neither looked at the other.

Finally, Burdick spoke. "What is he doing here?"

"After all this time," said McKeon.

"How much does he know?" asked Burdick.

"That's what we have to find out."

"Who sent him to you?"

"Daniel Sears. An old friend from the agency. He's in one of the smaller spin-off agencies now. I've worked with him several times. Maybe he's setting me up. I never did trust the bastard."



The yacht rocked gently in the waves of the little bay. Alma lay on a towel on the deck, face down, sunning herself. A pleas-

ant wind from the west blew over her back. On open sea, she had sunned herself naked. Being at sea, alone with Frank, her current man, there had been no propriety to worry about. There had been only her wishes and Frank's wishes, and he liked to look at her body bare.

A floating, sailing, Garden of Eden, she thought. A man and a woman, alone in a world of lapping blue water. That was how it had been in the day time. At night, the stars had come out, and the feeling of solitariness was gone. Then she and her man seemed to stand in the center of the twinkling universe, and the stars were friendly lights that merely waited for someone to reach out and touch them. And making love at night with Frank, on deck, the boat rocking with and against the rhythm of their bodies, she had felt herself explode outward to the stars, joining them. A billion bursts of brightness, filling the sky.

That trip was over now. They had docked. Orange Bay, St. Barnabas Island. The destination she had given to Frank, way back in Miami. That was before she had allowed herself to be swept away by him. Long ago, it seemed. Three weeks ago, in fact. She had wanted very much to come here, to St. Barnabas. She had found there were problems with coming here by plane. Security problems—people coming in by plane had to be cleared in advance. And she really didn't care to have them knowing too much about her in advance. If they knew too much about her, it was altogether possible that she wouldn't be allowed to come here at all. But the desire to come here had consumed her, had driven her, and she had found a man who said he would sail her here. "We could have fun along the way," he had told her, lust in his eyes. "Yes," she had whispered, a warm wave of relief washing over her, relaxing her, melting away the cold panic.

The cold panic seized her whenever she did not know what to do, but had to do *something*. For the past few days, it had been seizing her more. It was this Thor thing. It had got a hold on her, and she couldn't shake it off. It kept coming back. It was coming back this minute.

Basking in the sun of the Caribbean, she tried to regain her composure. But it was evaporating—gone. She forced herself to lie still, but every muscle in her body seemed to cry out, "Move!"

It's all a dream, she told herself. An interesting dream, yes, but one you need not enter. Her body was having none of it, and still cried out: Move!

The dream is invading my body again, she thought.

Footsteps along the pier. Frank's footsteps. Footsteps along the gangplank. Footsteps along the deck.

"You call this a place to have *fun*? The whole thing is members only!" Disgust dripped from his voice.

Alma raised her head and looked him over as he stood there. A sturdy, round man, about 40. Sweat dripped from his brow. He stood confidently and easily on the undulating deck of his yacht. Yes, she could almost see how she had found it in her heart to love him. He was a powerful man, powerfully built, and quite intelligent in an impatient way. Very impatient in general, she thought, as their time together on the cruise replayed fast-forward through her mind. When he had wanted her, he had wanted her that instant. It was good in a way. It had made her feel very wanted.

She tried to concentrate on what she had felt for him. There was still something there, but her sense of mission had reawakened, crowding out lesser feelings. Her affection was slipping away, and in its place was an impatience of her own. She tried to concentrate on what he had felt for her. Perhaps that would make this easier. Easier on him, if not on her.

The time for tanning and lazing in the sun was done. She stood now, retying the straps of her black bikini top. She saw his eyes focus on her chest. He was very fond of her nipples.

"Frank," she said, "I'm going now. Let's say good-bye and be nice about it." Her voice was cool and gentle.

"What?" His eyes flicked to hers and bored in.

She spoke slowly. "You heard me. This is it. Good-bye. You knew this was coming. We had a good time together. Now it's time for me to go."

His mouth opened. "But you—you said you loved me."

"I did, Francis, I did."

He took her by the shoulders. "Honey, we've got something together—that we can't just throw away."

"It's gone already. And I'm gone, too." She twisted her shoulders out of his grip and stepped past him, toward the gangplank.

The deck seemed unsteady beneath his feet. Hell, he'd thought he *owned* this woman! He reached for her and caught her wrist.

"What am I supposed to do?" he asked.

"Sail away. Let go of my wrist."

"Can't we talk this over?"

"No. That's the last thing in the world we want to do. Let go of my wrist."

"Are you afraid I'll talk you into staying? Is that it?" He tightened his grip.

She winced. He frowned and released her wrist.

She looked at him with pity in her eyes. "No, dear. I'm not afraid. But you should understand something about me. I'm not the kind of woman that you can hold onto for long. After you love me, you've got to let me go."

He looked at her hard, up and down her body. "Are you going to offer me a kiss good-bye? Below deck?"

She shrugged. "Sure."

They went down the ladder to the sleeping quarters. He took her. He came, she came.

He cuddled next to her on the bunk, and tenderly kissed her cheek.

She climbed out of bed and began putting her bikini bottom on again.

Drained, listless, he stared at her from under heavy eyelids. "You're really going now?" he asked.

She nodded as she tied on her top again. "Both my bags are packed and waiting by the gangplank." She waved one hand. "Bye."

She turned, and left. He watched her leave the bunkroom and start up the ladder.

Great legs, he thought, as they vanished from view.

He rolled onto his back and shut his eyes. Fast women, he thought. Easy come, easy go.

Sleep fell over him like a blanket.



As the hand clamped over her mouth, Wendy Drake awoke. In the dark.

She tried to sit up.
The hand held her down.
She screamed.

The sound went nowhere, muffled out of existence by the palm against her mouth.

“Wendy, be quiet—it’s me!” said the voice in the dark. The palm lifted off her mouth, but the powerful fingers remained, lightly touching her cheek. Poised, she thought, to clamp again if she tried to yell. She let out a breath, reached her hand toward the voice, and touched the man’s face.

“Thor?” she asked softly.

“Let’s talk,” he said. “What kind of mess is this, Wendy?”

“It’s a mess I’ve got to get out of,” she said, a quaver in her voice.

“What are you afraid of?”

She ran her hand over his shirt, and down his arm. “I’m afraid of these people. They’re . . . a little crazy, I think. A lot crazy, maybe. But that’s not so bad by itself. It’s—I’m pregnant.”

He thought that one over. “They called me onto the carpet a week and a half ago. One of the things they asked me was whether I might have gotten you pregnant. I told them no. Are you worried over whose baby it is?”

She rolled over and put her face down in her pillow. “It’s Whitlock’s,” she said, raising her head. “I’d rather it were yours.” She dropped her head again.

“Why?”

“Because I like you better.”

“Then why are you engaged to him?”

“It’s a long story. It seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“I had an experience like that recently,” he said. “Making love to you seemed like a good idea at the time. Now I’m not so sure. I thought you were a girl who knew what she was doing. Was I wrong?”

She shook her head in the dark. “I always know what I’m doing, okay, from one moment to the next. I keep my eyes open. But I’ll be damned if I can ever tell what I’m getting into.”

“Is there something you want me to do for you?”

In the darkness she stared at the imagined outline of a man. “Hold me. Please.”

She moved forward, but his hand on her shoulder stopped her. “No,” he said. “Tell me what you want.”

“I want out.”

“So leave.”

“They won’t let me. It’s the law here.”

“What law?”

“I signed a contract. A contract to be engaged for a year in a kind of trial marriage. It’s fair enough on the face of it. Either party can break it off at any time. Except there’s a complication that has to do with children. It’s not spelled out in the contract, but it’s part of St. Barnabas law, that a child belongs to the father as well as the mother. Right away. Not from birth, but from conception. Whether they’re officially married yet or not. You see?”

“Keep going.”

“It hadn’t been real to me before. It was some kind of adventure game I was playing, this whole St. Barnabas trip. But then, when my time of month went by, and I realized I might be pregnant, everything changed. All of a sudden, it was real. It wasn’t just a year of my life anymore. It was a whole life. My child’s life, stretching out for years and years, a life that would be in the hands of Whitlock and these people.”

“You don’t want to leave your child in somebody else’s care?”

“No, I don’t.”

“But it’s Whitlock’s child too, isn’t it?”

“Sure. But it’s not a child at all—not yet. It’s just a little thing that *could* be a child some day. But I don’t want it to be. I want to stop it now, before it grows into something I can’t help caring about. I want to flush the damn thing—that’s what I want to do. I want an abortion. But you can’t do that here without the father’s permission.”

“And why can’t you leave?” asked Thor.

“Because the baby’s inside me, and I can’t take the baby off the island without the father’s permission.”

“I see. And what’s your attitude about that contract you signed?”

“The contract’s not the problem. The contract said we could break it off anytime. It’s the St. Barnabas law that’s the problem. A law they told me about after they’d gotten me here under contract.”

“Let’s back up,” said Thor. “You’re telling me that your legal problems all come from being pregnant. Are you sure they know that you’re pregnant?”

“They know.”

“How did they find out? You didn’t do something as stupid as telling them yourself, did you?”

“In a way, I did. When Jonah burst in on us, and I told you that they wouldn’t let me leave—I guess that put the idea in his head that I must be pregnant. Because otherwise they would let me leave. Two security guys showed up first thing the next day, to ‘escort’ me to the clinic for a ‘medical check-up.’ I tried to hold out on them, but I never had a chance.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean they wanted a urine sample. They took away my clothes, put me in a hospital gown, handed me a plastic bottle, and asked me to make pee. I said I didn’t feel like it. They said to think it over, and locked me in a room with a single chair in it. I sat down and thought about it. The harder I thought, the madder I got. But I did need to go pee. I’d already had a cup of coffee when they showed up at my trailer, if you know what I mean. So I spotted this drain on the floor in one corner of the room. And, feeling pretty smart, I squatted over the drain and peed right down it. But that was what they wanted all along. The doctor told me about it, later. He thought it was funny. The room is set up just to trick women who don’t want to give urine samples. The drain feeds straight into a bucket in the basement. Anyway, they did a pregnancy test on my urine and it was positive.”

“Wait a minute,” said Thor. “Think back. This doctor. Did he specifically say the room was set up to trick women? You know, there are cases where *guys* might not want to give a urine sample. Drug testing, for instance.”

“He said it was for women, all right. I remember thinking he was a chauvinist son of a bitch when he said it.”

“Interesting. I take it that there are other girls here on a contractual basis, like you?”

“At least 20.”

“Well, I bet they never let any of you off the island without a pregnancy test. It’s a great set-up. Even if your year was up, you’d be stuck here if you were pregnant.”

She heaved out a breath of disgust.

He asked, "You're a U.S. citizen, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose what you want is to get back to the States. But next time you decide to take up residence on a Caribbean island, try to remember that it's not the same as moving from Idaho to Florida. The rules get changed down here."

"You're telling me."

"What you've got in your favor," said Thor, "is that this is an island, and there's really no navy to speak of. So the technical problems of escape are minor."

She laughed in the back of her throat. "Except that I don't know anything about boats."

"What's there to know? You find something that floats, and you aim it where you want to go. If it's a long trip, you bring something to eat and drink. I think that about covers it."

She sighed deeply. "You will help me, won't you Thor?" She drew out the sound of his name with a plea in her voice.

He paused. "I can't promise you anything, Wendy. But maybe I'll give it some thought. Meanwhile, please don't panic. It never does any good. Be careful. Be afraid. But don't panic."

"Okay," she whispered.

He stood in the darkness. His hand was no longer touching her face.

"Thor?" she asked.

"Yes?"

"Please give me a hug."

"Not now. Be strong by yourself. You need that more than a hug."

"You're never afraid, are you Thor?"

"Not much any more. Mostly I've forgotten how. Good night."

"Good night."