



UNIVERSEROS

by
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Prologue

At the end of World War II, a group called Organization Der Ehemaligen SS-Angehorigen (ODESSA) built a large and reliable network geared to secretly ushering influential and high ranking Nazis out of Germany to start new lives in foreign countries under new names. It continues to this day, while covering up the operation and those it saved.

Somewhere between the Golden Gate Bridge and the Farallon Islands off the coast of San Francisco, there are two forty-five pound leather bags, each containing two-hundred-fifty platinum one-ounce coins. They are worth a major fortune to anyone lucky enough to find them, although to do so would be a practical impossibility.

Chapter 1

Mark finished his evening martini while watching his wife picking up the late dinner dishes. He relished her beauty, especially when she wore her silk evening robe. It fit smoothly over her form, accentuating her round, firm shape; her breasts swaying gently with her movements.

His need overcame him. He put his martini glass on the coffee table, rose, and quietly came up behind her. He circled the belt around his wife's waist, and slipped his arms around her waist.

His caress thrilled her. She remained softly, closing her eyes, remaining still, for her movements disturb the magic.

"You're such an exciting woman," he whispered softly, as his hands moved downward, stroking, caressing.

She let her robe fall open, closing her eyes, biting her lips in the pleasure of increasing rapture. She turned around, and wrapped her arms around his neck to kiss him, to thrust her tongue into his mouth, searching.

"Even after five years you're still so damn romantic," she whispered, lingering after the kiss.

"Has it only been five years?" he responded, stroking the back of her neck. "It can't possibly be that long."

She laughed, drawing back from him, looking into his eyes. “Five years and ten pounds. You really can’t tell the difference?”

He chuckled. “Yeah, I guess I can. You’re even more beautiful.”

She laughed again and returned to the table. “Now,” she said with a broad grin, “if you’ll quit playing around, maybe I can clean things up a little before bedtime.”

“Bedtime?” he said with the lilt in his voice that always excited her. “You mean, after all that, I get to sleep with you, too?”

“Try to avoid it,” she said.

The next morning the aroma of brewing coffee drifted into the bedroom. Angelica sniffed the air, and yawned. She sleepily sat up and brushed a strand of her long blonde hair from her eyes. The movement loosened the electric blanket, and it fell to her waist, exposing her shape.

“Mark,” she said, rubbing her eyes. “Are you going to get up and pour the coffee? It’s ready.” She turned to her husband’s place in the bed beside her, and found it empty. “Damn,” she said. “I suppose he went out to get the morning paper again.”

She got out of bed, put on her robe, and stepped into her slippers to amble into the kitchen.

The coffee maker was automatic, set to turn on at 7:00 a.m., and this morning wasn’t unusual in that respect.

She got two cups from the cupboard. One she poured full of coffee for Mark before retrieving the milk container from the refrigerator. She half filled her cup with milk before pouring in coffee. She preferred to drink hers in the German fashion.

After a taste, and with satisfaction only the perfect cup of coffee brings, she carried her cup into the bathroom to have it ready after her morning shower. With yet another yawn, she turned on the water, and took another sip of coffee while testing the water temperature. It was just right, so she put down the coffee cup and dropped her robe. A quick glance in the mirror before stepping into the shower reassured her she was still an attractive woman, although she would soon need another ounce of wax.

As she ducked her head under the spray, she heard the jingling of the silver bell that hung on the inside of the front door. It emitted its musical note whenever someone opened the door. “Ah, good,” she said under the spray. “That must be Mark coming back.” She listened intently. “Mark?” she called. “Is that you, honey?” She waited for the reply. Getting none, she considered he didn’t hear her. “Mark,” she repeated, louder. “The coffee’s on the counter. I’ll be out in a second. Did you get the paper?”

The front door was opened, as she surmised, and someone did enter, as she heard, but it wasn’t Mark. It was an intruder, not an assassin, and in the assassin’s right hand was an automatic pistol, a Walther PPKs fit with a silencer, raised and poised.

The assassin crept through the front room, glanced quickly into the kitchen, and carefully continued into the bedroom. He saw no one, so he stepped across the thickly padded carpet to peer into the bathroom. Angelica’s nude form showed behind the translucent shower curtain, and he absorbed the view with a sneering grin.

Angelica’s senses hinted something was wrong. Something fearful gripped her. While in the middle of rinsing her hair with her eyes half covered with shampoo, she stopped. Her nerves tingled. She canted her head to one side, listening. She thought she heard something, or someone.

She listened. It's someone breathing, she silently confirmed, identifying the sound. "Okay, Mark," she said, easing her tension. "No games, hunh? You scared me half to death."

There was no response.

"Mark?" she repeated, thinking he couldn't hear her over the shower spray.

Still no answer. "Come on, Mark," she said, as she pulled the shower curtain aside and looked around it.

Staring at her were cold, close set beady eyes.

The assassin lowered the pistol at her, and fired.

She tried to scream, but she hadn't the time.

A small round hole appeared in her left breast right over her heart. She fell with her eyes frozen in terror and her scream locked in her throat.

The assassin stared down at her, continuing the sneering leer, reaching out to stroke her hair, forgetting the shower spray. "Damn it!" the assassin swore, quickly drawing back from the hot water.

Mark looked at his watch as he walked down the hallway of the apartment building. He went over the translation of the message he received through channels. He broke the rules by carrying the code booklet with him to make the call, and should have waited until he was safely inside his apartment to make the translation, but he found it easier to use the booklet just after taking the message, when the words were fresh in his mind. Besides, he didn't think there was much chance of the system being compromised by someone seeing him with a booklet, pad and pencil in the telephone booth.

Well, he said to himself, people carry notebooks in telephone booths all the time. Even with the advent of cell phones, telephone booths and public lines were safer to use. What was said on a land line couldn't be overheard without a wire tap. It could be the open broadcast of a cell phone.

It was the way he received the message, or the way he translated it, though, that focused his attention. He completed his last assignment with relative ease, and ahead of schedule, so he expected the message to be notice of several months idle time. Instead, because he was so good on the last assignment, the powers that be gave him another one right away. "While he was hot," the message read.

He was partially relieved, though, when he realized the new assignment was logistics work rather than one which required his active participation. However, it was still a nuisance that interrupted his expected time off. He was to make a plan for the voluntary defection of one of the leading figures from the most notorious drug manufacturing and distributing organization in the world. He would be told the defector's name at a later time, but the first step of the assignment was to co-ordinate with another agent who set up the plan, and arranged the escape process that would assure the defector's safe departure from Columbia.

He stuck the message and the booklet in his shirt pocket, and reached for the door to his apartment. He noticed it was partially ajar. "Hmm," he mused. "I must not have shut it all the way when I left. I hope none of the cats around here sneaked inside while I was out. It's just like Angelica to go right on sleeping and let half the suits in the neighborhood come in to puddle up the place."

He pushed the door open and entered. He never saw his assassin. Three bullets pierced his

chest before his third step.

The assassin removed the silencer from the gun, and put the weapon back in its shoulder holster before crossing the room to kneel beside Mark. He grinned when he found the booklet and the message in Mark's shirt pocket. The booklet was tossed aside, since the organization already had a copy. Finding the message was the important part of the assignment.

The assassin quietly left the apartment and shut the door, unmindful of the black cat slinking through the opening before the door was shut.

Quark XPRESS Demo

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Chapter 2

“What’s bothering you, Penn?” Tara asked, noting her lover’s despondent attitude. “You seem really down.”

Penn looked out from the cockpit of the Flyin’ Penguin, his 53 foot ketch in the Loch Lomond Harbor of San Rafael. He considered her question. She was always extremely perceptive. Perhaps that was why he was so close to her. Perhaps that was why he loved her so much.

“I don’t know,” he responded, taking a sip of his Korbel over rocks. Their cocktails on the aft deck was an evening ritual in the summer in the San Francisco bay area. “I seem to have problems getting over the case in Belize.”

“PZ was a close friend,” she responded. “I know. I remember when my mother died. I was devastated. But you know what? If I can quote my friend, Dr. Wall, you’ll never get over it. You just have to live with it.”

“But, how could I have been so wrong about him? We were partners in the detective agency for over five years.”

“I think it might be a good idea for you to get away by yourself for a while. You know, maybe go to Baja, camp out. Get back to nature, your feelings. Maybe put some more time on your Great American Detective novel? You have it in you. You only need the time to bring it out.”

Penn studied his lover. He thought her fantastic. “If I did that, what would you do while I’m gone?”

“My parents are going on a canal barge cruise in Europe. Maybe I can foist myself on them while you’re away.”

Penn gave her suggestion some thought. “That might be a good idea,” he said. He paused, took another sip of his brandy. “I’d miss you, you know.”

“And I, you. But I think it’s a good idea. You’ll come back a new man.”

“Where are your parents going on their cruise?”

“Next week.”

“That’s a bit sudden, isn’t it?”

“There’s nothing more important to me than you. I don’t care how quick, or how short, the thing is your emotional stability is the most important thing to me.” She took a sip from her Canadian Mist and Soda. “Actually, I think you should go as soon as possible. You need the vacation. The time off. You’ve been working too hard.”

Penn reached over and kissed her.

“Oh,” she said, in emotional response. “You’re going to spill your drink if you keep that up.”

“You’re complaining?” he asked.

She wasn’t.

The night was enjoyable.

The next day Penn loaded his Jeep Liberty with his camping gear, and headed for Baja California.

The brown two-story masonry house stood on the center of a small knoll in central Colombia. The red tiled roof glistened in the morning sun. The windows, arched in the Moorish tradition, were