

Chapter One

By the time the plane landed at the international airport outside Asunción, Diane Lang had a massive headache that threatened to go migraine; four Nuprin and two Maxalt in the last three hours had failed to diminish the pain. The penalty for having light-colored eyes, she thought: Everyone said they were her best feature—pale blue with specks of gray—but she paid for that with headaches.

As she waited in line for customs, the cigarette smoke in the arrival hall nauseated her. The heat and humidity weighed down on her head like a lead cloak. Far ahead, two customs agents were methodically ransacking the suitcases of returning Paraguayans, looking for smugglers apparently, and the press of anxious passengers was suffocating.

She shut her eyes for a moment, head tilted, viscous waves sliding in slow, sickening motion to the left side of her skull. *Just let me through*

to a bathroom. Dizzy, afraid she might fall, she opened her eyes and was startled to find a uniformed policeman standing in front of her.

He reached for her elbow, said, “*Señora Lang*,” waited for her nod, then added, “Come with me, please.”

Finally—out of this mob! Had someone arranged to meet her?

The policeman escorted her past a sign reading *Bienvenidos al Aeropuerto Silvio Pettirossi* to a small room off to one side. The nameplate read *Ibarras*.

She didn’t recognize the name but assumed someone from the *Universidad Católica* had prepared the way for her. An assistant professor of German at Yale, just a year away from tenure at the age of thirty-two, she was due to read a paper at an international conference of German scholars on Monday of the following week. One more invited paper to add to her *Vita*.

But it wasn’t a colleague. Instead, as the policeman ushered her into the room, he said, “*El señor Jefe de Investigaciones* would like to speak with you.” He nodded to an officer sitting behind a glass-topped, mahogany desk. “*Coronel, Señora Lang*.”

The colonel looked up from a file he was reading, his face expressionless, then pointed to a straight-backed wood chair against the far wall.

Breathing heavily in the unexpected heat, slightly alarmed, Diane took a seat and waited while the officer continued to peruse the file. Her anxiety was repressing the headache, but she knew it would be back when this was over.

She wondered how the policeman had identified her. No one was meeting her at the airport. She hadn’t told anyone in Asunción what she looked like. Had a flight attendant pointed her out after collecting the transit cards?

She knew summer was just beginning in the southern hemisphere and had dressed accordingly in beige cotton slacks and a white blouse, but she was still uncomfortably hot. Her thick, shoulder-length black hair,

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naturally wavy, had been pulled back into a pony tail held loosely by a barrette, but the bangs on her forehead were damp. The only jewelry she wore were hoop earrings of peach-colored enamel.

She thought about freshening her lipstick, then decided not to. She didn't want to suggest she was attempting to sway the colonel with her looks.

God, her head hurt. *Deep inside now, waiting to explode.* She wished the colonel would finish so she could get to the hotel and rest.

She stared at the officer, who continued to ignore her. He did not look like a man who would take kindly to interruption.

The colonel was a thin man, almost emaciated, with dark shadows in the pockets below his eyes. His lips were compressed so tight they were bloodless, and the well-trimmed mustache he sported lent a touch of cruelty to his face. He gripped the file with long, bony fingers, the nails in need of cutting, thick and slightly curved.

Looking away with a barely repressed shudder, she glanced around the room, trying to calm herself with an observation of detail—but there was little of interest to attract her attention. In fact, other than the one desk and three straight chairs, the room was empty. No filing cabinets, no wastebaskets, no typewriter, no coat hanger, nothing. Apart from the one file in the colonel's hands and a black telephone, the desk was bare. The only decoration in the room was a color portrait of the current president, General Enrique Zancon, in full military regalia, on the wall behind the desk.

Her headache was shifting from the center of her skull to a spot behind her left eye. The light in the room hurt: Sunlight stabbed in from a series of grilled windows high up on the wall. She shut her eyes and took a deep breath, then exhaled with her mouth open to hide the sound. A vein throbbed in her left temple, each pulse a painful hammer blow.

I haven't done anything, she thought. No drugs, no contraband, no prohibited books, no computers or electronic gadgets, nothing to be

nervous about. Sit and wait ...

The colonel's voice startled her, the tone knife-sharp: "*Señora, ¿quién le formuló la invitación para venir a Asunción?*"

Her eyes fluttered open and she cleared her throat, feeling a sudden constriction. Why should she need an invitation to the city?

"The authorities of the Catholic University—I was invited to read a paper. And then I'll be conducting research on the Mennonite settlements in the Chaco." She took a deep breath to calm the quaver in her voice. "I'm a professor of German at Yale University. I have the invitation with me in my briefcase." She fumbled for the case at her feet.

The *Jefe de Investigaciones* waved aside the proffered letter when she finally found it. "You are a professor of German, yet you speak Spanish very well. Why is that?"

"Why not?" Her voice was clipped, a touch of aggravation creeping in despite herself. "I also speak French and some Italian. And I've studied Latin and ancient Greek."

His eyes hardened. "*Señora*, what is the topic of your essay?"

He emphasized the term *señora* and she knew why; he was refusing to dignify her with the title *profesora*.

"I'm a specialist in the Protestant Reformation. I'll be speaking on Menno Simons. The Brotherhood of the Believers—*die Nachfolger*."

The colonel stared at her a moment and then extended his hand. "The essay, please."

She hesitated. "I—I don't have a written copy. I usually improvise when I speak; I've been teaching courses on Mennonite culture for at least ten years."

Which wasn't quite the truth. She had mailed a copy of the paper to the conference organizers, who had advised her not to carry it with her. Now she understood why. But she couldn't comprehend why something so innocuous would be subject to seizure by the authorities.

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She tried to meet the colonel's eyes, but his black, piercing stare unnerved her. Her throat had gone cottony and she licked her lips, catching the bottom one in her teeth and pulling at it.

The colonel lifted the folder in one hand. "We have a file here provided by your State Department that shows you have been involved in several questionable—possibly even subversive—activities."

Her heart beat accelerated. "Impossible." She frowned as the implication settled in. "Subversive to whom?"

"It says, for example, that you visited Yugoslavia in 1991 to read a paper in Belgrade. You had contacts with communist scholars—two professors from the Soviet Union."

She stared back at the man's dark, impenetrable eyes, her own reflecting anger. She wondered who reported the conversation. She had talked to the Soviet scholars about Jakob Hutter, a sixteenth-century Swiss minister who had proposed a community of goods for the Brotherhood of Believers, claiming that private property was a major obstacle to Christian love. Most of the Hutterian Brethren now lived in Canada. The Soviets had wanted to know if the authorities considered them communists. Who cared about the communists now?

"Does that make me a threat to the state?" she asked, a note of bellicosity in her voice.

"In 1996, you arranged for a delegation of Cubans to take part in a conference in Munich. And in 99, you chaired a session at a congress on agrarian reform and indigenous peoples."

"Those— All those activities were university-related. The congress on indigenous peoples was co-sponsored by the government. We received grants from federal agencies. There was nothing subversive about it."

"*Señora Lang, you offend me, you piece of cockroach shit.*"

Her mouth dropped open. Had she misunderstood him? Had he reverted to Guarani—used a word that sounded like Spanish? Paraguayans were bilingual, proud of their Indian heritage, even if most were of

European origin. But still, his tone ...

The colonel got to his feet and walked around the desk.

She straightened, unsure of the man's intentions, her eyes wary. Was that it? Now that she'd been insulted, was she free to go?

Despite her concentration, the slap caught her by surprise. Stunned, she found herself on the floor, ears ringing, the chair on its side at her feet. One of her earrings had broken and rolled lazily under the desk.

Shocked and disoriented, her first reflex was to protect her stomach. She crossed her arms in front of her, the letter from the Catholic University still in her right hand. She did not try to get up. Her cheek stung from the blow and her eyes were watery, as much from humiliation as pain.

"*Señora* Lang, we do not like people like you in our country." The colonel stood over her, his voice harsh, every *s* a sibilant hiss. "I advise you to leave. If you insist on staying, we will follow you every step of the way. We will investigate anyone who contacts you. In Paraguay, *señora* Lang, no two stones can come together without me hearing the click. Remember that. If my men find you alone in the streets late at night, who knows what might happen? A pretty woman—a *yanqui* ..." He smiled thinly. "*¿Comprende?*"

Anger flowed through her, driving out the fear, headache forgotten. She sat up, her eyes flashing as she waved the crumpled letter.

"I have an invitation from the *decano* of the Universidad Católica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción. I am a scholar with an international reputation. After I read my paper, my government will hear about your behavior. And if your men accost me while I'm here—or hurt me in any manner—you will have an international incident on your hands. Is that what you want? I know about your violations of human rights. If you violate mine—" She stopped, her jaws clenched.

The colonel laughed. "Go tell it to the Marines. I'm not through with you yet." He kicked the chair at her side and sneered when he saw her flinch. "Wait here, *puta*." He turned and left the room.

Chapter Two

A drenaline-shock ... disbelief ... anger ... fear ...
The surge of conflicting emotions left Diane feeling weak.
The colonel had called her a whore; there was no mistaking
his language this time.

Shakily, she got to her feet and righted the chair, then retrieved her broken earring. After dabbing at her eyes, she straightened the letter, put it in her briefcase, and sat down, numbly rubbing her cheek where Ibarras had hit her. Why her? What had she done to antagonize him?

The colonel had told her to wait. Were they going to take her to police headquarters? A shiver ran up her back and sweat broke out under her arms and on her forehead. She had no real gauge to measure the extent of the danger, but she'd heard what the secret police did to women. She didn't want to think about that.

Minutes passed, an eternity of waiting. Her headache was back, the tension making it worse; if she didn't get out of the light and lie down soon, she would vomit.

She looked toward the door, wondering if Ibarras was standing outside, waiting for her to make a move so he could arrest her.

Oh, Kim, she thought. What would you do if I didn't come back?

The sudden realization that she might die left her breathless. She tried to tell herself she was exaggerating the danger. She had no connection to any revolutionary movements in Paraguay; her talk had nothing to do with politics. Yes, she was studying the Mennonites—and, yes, they espoused a doctrine of non-resistance and, yes, by law they did not have to serve in the military. Still—

She stopped, willing her mind to calm down. It did no good to question why. The only thing that mattered was survival. Her daughter—

A vision of Kim in the parking lot of the marina came to mind, waving the letter now in Diane's briefcase. It was a Saturday, in the middle of October. When the mail with the Paraguayan stamps came, Kim had begged her grandmother to drive to Lighthouse Point Park, where they could watch for the sloop's return. Kim was only twelve, but she knew how much the news meant to her mother. For two years, Diane had worked through the State Department to establish a relationship with the Catholic University in Asunción. Now, with a formal invitation in hand, her research would be that much easier. And Kim would get to stay with her grandmother, where she was pampered, for a week or two.

That Saturday in New Haven, after a clear morning, clouds had scuttled across the sky in the afternoon, pushed by a stiff breeze that snapped the sails and rattled the lines of her twenty-six foot Orion sloop, a family boat, inherited from her father, who'd been a banker. Her boyfriend Russ had tried to convince her they shouldn't go out. It was too late in the season. But she had wanted one last day on the water before dry-docking the sloop for the winter.

And it was a good day for sailing, with just the right amount of danger to make it exhilarating, especially when sailing to windward, close-hauled, the jib sheet trimmed in flat and the boat heeled well over. Seas foaming past the lee rail. The invigorating sting of spray in the face.

By the time they returned to the harbor, the waves in Long Island Sound were cresting at over five feet, the wind was whipping froth across the troughs, and Russ was sick. At the harbor master's office, a red pennant was flying—the small-craft warning—and a squall hit while they were still at the slipway, getting the boat winched out of the water. All of which added to Russ's foul humor.

A good day and a bad day. There was the letter but also the fight with Russ. He'd been out with her before, but the storm had frightened him. He'd complained about everything she did, including the speed of the boat on the way back in.

"I'm racing that squall back," she'd said. "The sooner we get there, the better you'll feel."

"If you were any good, you could keep the boat even."

"Christ, Russ!"

"I'm sick."

Not as sick as he claimed. Most seasick people clammed up and froze, their eyes locked on some far-off point of land for stability. She had warned Russ to take two Bonine tablets before they cast off, but he'd refused.

And then at the dock, he said he'd never go out again—at least *not with a woman*. And that had angered her; she handled the boat as well as any man: Her ex-husband—Kim's father—had taught her well.

"Rich bitch," she heard Russ mutter.

She was tired of his constant harping, tired of his feelings of financial inferiority. Russ was a staff accountant in the bursar's office at Yale, but he earned half of what she did. Could she help it that women were courted with high salaries? Besides, she had a Ph.D. She got what she deserved and by managing her money she could afford to keep the boat. It had

nothing to do with him and she had told him so.

Fine, he said, he wanted nothing to do with her. He'd find someone who wasn't so self-centered. And with that he stormed off, not bothering to say good-bye.

Afterwards (Kim had stayed at the beach with her grandmother to ride the carousel) Diane drove to Richter's bar on Chapel Street for a cup of coffee. She needed to wash the acrid taste from her mouth.

The sidewalks were littered with leaves from the tattered elms, copper beeches, and maples. In the street, traffic was thick as fans left the stadium following the football game. This week's opponent was Lehigh, if she remembered right. Had the Bulldogs won? Apparently so, the bar was noisy with jubilant fans. Not the quiet haven she'd hoped for. Not the place to sort out conflicting emotions.

Sad about Russ, but elated at the chance to visit Paraguay, she left soon after, stopping by her office on the third floor of Harkness Hall to pick up some books before returning home.

Fate, she thought. An ending ... a new beginning. Both on the same day. Maybe it had been coming for some time. She'd lost a boyfriend but gained a chance for adventure.

The door behind her flew open, startling her as it banged against the wall. Colonel Ibarra strode across the room, tossed some photo enlargements on the desktop, and sat down. Without looking at her, he picked up the photos and began to lay them out on the desk, turning them to face her.

"Come here," he said, beckoning abruptly with his head. "Recognize her?"

Diane looked at one of the photos and then averted her head. A sick feeling passed through the pit of her stomach. The colonel knew she wouldn't be able to identify the person; she was battered beyond recognition. What was this? A veiled threat? Showing her what the police could do?

“Well?”

Diane shook her head. “I’ve never seen her before.”

“Look again.”

“Why?”

“I think you know her.”

She stared at the colonel, hating the man’s smugness. “Who is it?”

“You don’t recognize her? She’s a former graduate student of yours. She came here to study and got involved with revolutionaries. She was arrested by the secret police. Your name came up during one of the interrogation sessions.”

“Who the hell is it?”

The colonel’s thin lips parted into a half-smile. “Rosemarie Krupp, recently deceased.”

Diane closed her eyes for a moment, hand touching the desk to steady herself. Not her. Not Rose. She opened her eyes and looked at another photo. Swollen features … badly bruised.

The colonel tapped a photo. “That’s what she looked like after just three days. Most people last at least a week.”

He picked up a small notebook. “We recovered a diary she kept in confinement. It’s her version of what happened to her. Of course, if she had managed to smuggle the diary out, we would deny what she says.” He held it out to her. “Here, have a look.”

She didn’t want to know.

Ibarras opened the diary. “She says our agents blindfolded her and tied her to a bed. Six men raped her repeatedly. When they gave her water or food, still blindfolded, they slapped or pinched her, or hit her with their fists. They burned her feet, they carved *;Viva El Tigre!* on her stomach, they pierced her—”

“*That’s enough!* I can see what they did to her.”

Ibarras shook his head, his eyes narrowed to thin slits. “I’ve only covered the first paragraph of the first day. There are eight pages.” He

snorted. "Now you see why she's unrecognizable. She became another person the second she was blindfolded. She lost her personality. She lost her independence. She became an object. A horribly mistreated object. No longer a human. What was done to her—"

"Shut up," Diane screamed. "I've heard enough."

Ibarras stared at her, breathing evenly. He raised a finger. "Good, then listen to this. It's the last thing I'm going to tell you. If you complain to any other authorities about—" he gestured around the room—"about this, you will be arrested under the accusation of *querer atentar contra la paz y la seguridad de la Republica*. The same accusation lodged against your friend here. Do you know what that means?"

"I speak Spanish." She didn't like being threatened.

"You may understand the words, but not the meaning." His voice hardened. "Anyone who disturbs the peace and security of the Republic is charged as an international terrorist, *un agente provocador*. And in this country, *señora* Lang, we execute terrorists."

In the taxi, with the smell of acrid exhaust strong in the air, Diane closed her eyes and tried to blot out what had just happened to her. The driver was speaking—something about the city having 153 plazas—but she was oblivious to the view, his words washing over her, drumming on her head like rain beating down on tin. She had vomited in a restroom at the airport and couldn't control her shaking. Tomorrow, she told herself, she would laugh about this. With her migraine she had exaggerated everything. They were just trying to intimidate her. They—

No. The pictures ... She wouldn't forget and she sure as hell wouldn't laugh.

Oh, Kim, what have I gotten into?