

CHAPTER 1

Remembrance Of Times Past

The private jet plane came in to land at the small airstrip in the mountains. It turned at the end of the runway and taxied back to the few sheds and the fuel tanks, which were the only buildings. There were a few vehicles waiting. The door of the plane opened and the steps were lowered. Two tall blond young men in dark suits came out, carrying rifles. Looking around and seeing no threat, they came down the steps.

The door of one of the SUVs was open, and a couple of casually dressed young oriental women were leaning against it. The door of the other large shiny black SUV opened, and a tall older man got out and walked to the plane. Incongruously, he appeared to be carrying a furred golf umbrella.

“Welcome to Mexico,” he said to the two guards.

“Governor,” said one with a half salute.

At that moment, a small Oriental woman of a certain age, dressed in a traditional Japanese kimono, came to the door of the plane and began to descend. The man opened the umbrella to shade her.

“Reichsmarschall,” he said as she came down the stairs into his open arms. “All quiet on the Western front?”

“It was when I left Germany,” she said, “and I heard nothing on the plane. Thank you for the umbrella. The sun is so hot up here.”

“Tomiko, you look absolutely stunning in that kimono,” he said.

“I put it on in the plane, especially for you.”

“Muchas gracias,” he said. “Come and wait in the truck, in the air con

until we unload the luggage. I have some of my own guys, and your guys can help.”

It only took a few minutes to unload the baggage and place it in the vehicles. The pilots, who did not think refueling was necessary, pulled up the steps and closed the doors. The plane taxied up to the end of the runway, turned, and took off.

“They are going to pick up Teresa, who is in Dallas for a meeting,” said Tomiko. “I did not want to bring an official German military plane into Mexican airspace, even if La Contessa says it is OK. It might not look good diplomatically.”

After they helped load the luggage into the vehicles, Tomiko gestured to her two guards to board the second SUV with the young women, and the convoy set off. The young women introduced themselves. “We are Governor Munro’s guards. We are called Praetorians.”

“Yes,” said one of the young men. “I thought so. I am Fritz and this is Helmut. We have met some of the members of your organization in Germany. Some of the European leaders like Sheila MacDonald of France use the Praetorians as protection. We have seen when Herr Munro comes to Germany he always brings some of your group. But we understood he was a professional boxer himself, so why does he use women as his guards?”

“Very simple. If he has to hit someone, it does not look good. The law in America is so peculiar that he may be charged himself if some prosecutor does not like him,” said one. “But beautiful young women like us,” she said smiling. “If we kick a man’s ass, everyone thinks it is funny. And if we have to really hurt someone, nobody cares. Everyone knows that we Praetorians are competitive shooters and we shoot people, so no one comes close.”

“You are a competitive shooter? We knew the Reichsmarschall was an Olympic champion. But you also shoot.”

“Yes,” said one of the girls, “I am Tomoko, and I got the bronze in the 25m competition in the last Olympics.”

“Maybe you could coach us while we are here,” said the other young German. “We are the Reichsmarschall’s security and would all like to be better shots.”

“I think we can manage that,” said the other girl, with a smile. “My name is Mineko. If we can get Tomiko-san out of her husband’s bed for a few minutes this weekend, perhaps we can get her to coach us too.”

“That won’t be anytime soon,” said the other. “Munro, which is what

he likes us to call him, told us he had not seen her for months, so he had brought a large supply of Viagra with him.”

“He may need it,” said one of Tomiko’s guards. “The general likes men. Not that we know anything about this officially, of course.”

“Of course not,” said one of the girls. “I think they have what they call an open marriage. But Munro was telling us he has been in love with her for more than thirty years. Their child is less than ten years old. They will fly the child in, in a couple of days. But we think the lovebirds want to spend a little time on their own.”

As the lead SUV took them up the mountain road, Munro and Tomiko held each other and talked softly. At the top of one ridge, they took a winding side road.

“It’s been a long time since I was last here,” said Tomiko, looking around.

“Yes, about two or three years. It is such a gorgeous place I wish we could come more often.”

“Me too. But affairs of state. Now things are quieter in Europe, maybe.”

“Just to see you again, Tomiko,” he said, embracing and kissing her. “You look wonderful, and your scent is as wonderful as always.”

“I should. I took a shower on the plane a short time ago and dressed like this as I know you like me in traditional dress.”

“I do. I always have. ‘A neater, sweeter maiden in a cleaner, greener land.’”

“I know that one.” She laughed, kissing him. “‘On the road to Mandalay.’ She was Burmese.”

“Whatever, ‘somewhere East of Suez.’ God it’s good to see you again.”

The SUV approached the gates of the estate, where there were armed guards who identified them and waved them through.

“Are they always here?” she asked, indicating the uniformed guards.

“No, usually just a few retainers. But when La Contessa heard you were coming, she sent over some extra men of Hinchcliffe’s Legion. It would not look good if the Reichsmarschall of Germany was kidnapped by some drug gang in Mexico.”

“Really! Are they back? I thought Hinchcliffe had eliminated all of them years ago.”

“I’ll tell you later what has happened, but for now, we are here,” he said as the vehicle drew up in front of the hacienda.

“Last time I was here, you carried me up the steps,” she said, looking up at him.

“As Julius Caesar said, ‘a year older, and no wiser, and the crowds along the Appian Way remain the same.’ I think I could manage to carry you into the building, but it would not look good if I dropped the Reichsmarschall of Germany on her bottom.”

“Maybe you need more exercise. We should practice now.”

“I thought you would never ask,” he said, kissing her. “The bedroom is in the same place.”

“Come then, husband. I have missed you.”

“Gra mo chroi, love of my heart, I have been waiting for you most of my life.”

They held hands as they entered the building and climbed the steps to the first floor, entering a room with a glorious view down the valley. Neither had any interest in the view, only in each other. In spite of the passage of time, he was still the strong boy and she was the slim girl of their youth. He picked her up and stood her on the bed.

“Tomiko, l’amour de ma vie,” he said as she bent and kissed him. He began to strip off her clothes until she stood naked before him.

“Slim, strong, and ageless as ever,” he said, kissing and stroking her. “As beautiful as the first day I met you.”

“I remember a large gaijin, who killed men with his bare hands.”

“Only one, and I loved him. I remember a small, beautiful, determined woman who brought her children to me to foster. I wanted you the moment I saw you.”

“I knew you did, and I you, and I knew you knew. But it took us time.”

“I had no choice. I was still married to Elizabeth, who was still the US president. And there were other problems.”

“A long road, husband, but we made it and we have a child. Take me now, love of my life.”

He laid her down on the bed and began to stroke and kiss her. “Oh, husband,” she said. “I have missed your touch.”

Later, in dressing gowns, they lounged on the deck, under an awning, looking down the long sweep of the valley below them. Munro was drinking a bottle of Corona beer with a lemon slice stuck in it. Tomiko simply had a glass of sparkling mineral water. They were chatting quietly.

“So tell me about the drug gangs. I thought that Hinchcliffe and her legion had killed them all a long time ago.”

“She had. But the Democrats won the last election in the US. It was bound to happen. Any party too long in power becomes corrupt. And Archie Moore had two terms and so did Ash. No matter how hard you try to reduce government corruption, it creeps in.”

She nodded. “Yes, I know.”

“I was married to Elizabeth when she was president. She, a tough woman who never wept in her life, used to shed tears of rage and despair. These corrupt incompetent Houses would attempt to block anything she did. The deep state would misinterpret any order she gave or take it to an obviously absurd degree. The obfuscation and obstruction. But you know this yourself having been prime minister of Japan, and chancellor of Germany.”

“Yes. I know. No matter how hard you try, these slimy bureaucrats sneak in and corrupt everything. They are like cancer. The eternal question, do scum become bureaucrats or does becoming a bureaucrat turn them into scum?”

“Yes, Fermat’s last theorem. It is too difficult to clean them out of a federal government. At the state level, I think I have been able to manage, at least so far, by having unexpected audits run by graduate forensic accounting students and law clerks, and I get in the time-and-motion engineers at least annually. I pay the kids bonuses for money saved and criminals convicted. We charge the guilty with everything, including RICO. That frightens them, as if they lose, they lose everything and go to jail for years. So they plead guilty, which means they can be fired with cause, so no pensions and they never work in government again.”

“But you could not do that at the federal level, or I never could. Imagine in the US trying to audit the CIA or the FBI or the DOJ. In Germany I tried and Kurt, the current chancellor, tries to follow your example and audit departments, but we have to use military law to do it, and for how long we can keep doing that I don’t know. Even then, I use young men, no one above the level of captain as the seniors are usually too compromised.” She looked up at him, sighed, and shrugged. “Imagine me saying that, and I promoted most of these men. So what happened in the US?”

“Half of Congress and the Senate were in the pay of China. So whenever they could, they recriminalized drugs. You know that when they were presidents, Archie Moore and Ash tried to legalize, or at least decriminalize most recreational drugs. As soon as recreational drugs became criminalized again, China started to smuggle them in. The

Democrats also encouraged unlimited immigration of low-education-level immigrants, who will never be able to get a reasonable job, as America is essentially a largely automated society. So bringing the drugs in across the southern border became easy. So the drug gangs began again. The president of Mexico, La Contessa, has declared martial law in the two northern states and the drug gangs are being sought and eliminated, but the lure of drug money is very strong. And of course, drugs are also being smuggled in along the northern border with Canada.

“So they changed the legislation purely for money?”

“Hard to believe. Sounds awful, but so many of these people are in bed with China, or in bed with companies who are themselves in bed with China. I am surprised they have not come after the Prometheus Project.”

“You think they will?”

“I am very afraid. But with you today, I do not want to think these dark thoughts. I want to think of the future, ‘the years that never end and know no sorrow.’ Did I ever tell you I love you?”

“I think you did,” she said, rolling over to look down at him, “but tell me again.”

“Let me count the ways,” said Munro.

“I love thee with the love I thought I lost with my lost saints.

I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears of all my life.”

“I know the rest of that poem,” said Tomiko. “You don’t have to finish it.”

Later, she said, “I am getting a little hungry. What shall we have for dinner? I thought you might like me to dress. It gets pleasantly cool in the evenings in the mountains, so I can dress properly, in a European ball gown or a kimono?”

“A European gown, a kimono, I love you in both. Fortunately, I brought a black tie in case you wanted to go to Mexico City to see La Contessa. Dinner on the veranda?”

“Last time I remember the excellent ceviche and the roast goat. I would like the same again.”

“Sounds good. I’ll go tell the chef.”

Later that evening, they sat at a table, looking at the sunset. Linens were crisp the way Munro liked it, and the silverware and glasses elegant.

“For just the two of us?” asked Tomiko. “A little elaborate?”

“How often do I get the chance to dine with you, the woman of my dreams? I like it to be memorable, something I can treasure in my heart.