

Dances with Deception: By Reggie Cuyler, Jr.

Prologue

The roar from the semi automatic firearm pounded my ears with every shot. I stood strong with my hands clutched to the custom made grip. On the chamber the words 'I send them, He sorts them' were inscribed in cursive script. Bullets flew from the barrel in between bouts of taking cover behind the stone columns extending from the front porch to the roof of the house. If someone would've ever told me that I'd be warding off trained killers, I would've referred them to a psychiatrist. Fast forward a few years and now I'm packing more magazines than a dentist's office, and I'm not talking about the kind you find next to the latest Cosmo. The high-pitched noise of ricocheting bullets added to my adrenaline that was already pumping like a tanker of unleaded at a Chevron. The opposing fire briefly came to a close. Pouncing on the opportunity, I emerged from hiding and dumped out a dozen rounds from the extended magazine jutting from the bottom of the .45 caliber desert eagle. *One, two! One, two!* I clenched my teeth while the gun wailed at the car positioned out on the street about ten meters away.

My heart sunk when the weapon jammed from my untamed assault. The engine of the jet black Audi R8 revved up. Determined to make it the last encounter with my trespassers, I fumbled anxiously with the chamber. I dipped back into hiding and their heavy fire formed a typhoon of dust and debris around my asylum of tattered concrete. Finally giving up on freeing the congested handgun, I grabbed the P32 pocket pistol from my ankle, and returned the gesture. Bullets pelted the polished metal exterior of the sports car. The cronies sped off, the screeching tires left behind a zigzagged trail of steaming rubber.

At last the mayhem subsided. I slumped against one of the worn stone columns then slid to the ground. My long, curly black locks of hair hang carelessly over my face while I panted for air. The glow of the full moon gleamed on the shining metal of my zippo lighter before I flicked it open and singed the tip of a clove cigarette. Fortunately I was able to make it out unharmed. A couple of months back, luck wasn't on my side. I rubbed the scar from the wound I took to the right shoulder from their last visit. The embers of the short black cancer stick flickered in between short drags of smoke.

The humid air of mid-January in Argentina was thick and sticky. I flipped my hair from my face then sluggishly stood upright. After burying the butt of the clove into the ground, I tossed it into the street with the sea of metal slugs. Safety was scarce outside. It was time to turn in. Darkness loomed inside the contemporary colonial house. The air was still and the silence magnified the ringing in my ears from the gunfire. I turned on a few lights accompanied by spiraling ceiling fans. The temperature of the house was soothing compared to the moist heat outside.

That was the fifth shooting in the last six months, and I already relocated three times in unsuccessful attempts to dodge Terra-Corp's reparation agents. Their title was nothing more than a euphemism in lieu of calling them assassins. In the beginning they would call me on behalf of bewildered shareholders, but little did I know it was only an alibi to pinpoint my locale. Once the plot thickened, it turned out that these agents had a different boss, and it sure wasn't anyone that worked for my husband. But by the time I picked up on it they were already dusting their heels on the welcome mat.

Keeping old business and my new life separate was about as easy as paralleling a semi. Terra-Corp was Ray's brainchild before it tanked without warning. It was a landscaping corporation that created a strand of chlorophyll that could stunt the growth of grass while retaining all other green properties. Ultimately it was on brink of replacing the artificial feel of Astroturf and eliminating the need for traditional mowing. Growing up seeing the hardships of the landscaping profession first hand through his father, Ray used his doctorate in botany to engineer the Jamai-Grass to innovate the industry. Businesses and homeowners everywhere subscribed to the trend, and numbers were astronomical. At least until the only drawback associated with the product was uncovered.

Jamai didn't require much grooming outside of rain showers and in turn didn't store as much moisture as natural grass. So in the summer months Jamai gets unusually arid, and as a reaction to the dryness the chemical compound in the modified chlorophyll releases a fluid to revitalize the grass, however it's acidic. Needless to say pumps snapping at the heels, and tousled bottoms of tailor made slacks weren't particularly popular amongst buyers. Somehow Ray kept lost revenue from recalls under the table but he couldn't keep investors from taking their money off of it. Despite those that pulled out on the project, he was still able to clear a generous profit.

However a certain group of shareholders were given the heads up about the fortune that had crawled into my husband's lap via his clandestine business tactics. What I had mistaken for his wild success, was actually millions of dollars laundered from investors under promising impressions made by false bank statements and an overall faulty product. But bringing the issue to the authorities was the last idea in mind for the Hernan brothers. Putting their trust and money into Terra-Corp was a sound investment in the context of legitimizing their wealth that came from direct ties with the Scottish Raj. That was before an inside source leaked the real condition of the company.

It wasn't much you could hide from a group that connected. People everywhere answered to them, from politicians to two-bit street hawkers. A little bit of everybody either needed protection or had to return a favor. For that alone nobody crossed them, well at least until my husband came along, but that situation was corrected faster than it started. Ray went missing nearly two years ago but that wasn't the end of it. I was next by virtue of being his leading lady. Respect meant everything to the Hernan brothers and they demanded reparation. But they weren't just looking for a refund. Someone had to pay, in blood.