

*Grit*  
&  
*Lust*©

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Serial-

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### Chapter Three

## LUST and LOOT in SAN JUAN DE RIO

**"There it is," she said, circling the airport twice. The strip was short but amazingly**

**two-laned and paved. "Normally these aren't paved. There's only one reason for this to be paved," she said, ratcheting back the ailerons. "Drug smugglers."**

**The plane touched down and, as she braked, she pulled it up towards the five rather large hangers, stopping just short of a fuel truck that was parked nearby. Before exiting the plane she secured the instruments and pulled the key.**

**One man approached her, rattling off a sentence or two in Spanish. She said 'yes' or 'si', nodding her head.**

**She turned to me and said, "I need to get the plane refueled, and I need to watch them do it to make sure it's done right."**

**"I understand. Let me go get us a way into town." With that, I turned, heading to a small building just past the hangers that had a few antennas sticking out of it. I opened the door and went to a small counter where a young lady met me.**

**"Do you speak English?"**

**"Si, Señor, a little."**

**"I need a way into town."**

**"Si... a cab."**

**"Would you telephono them for me?"**

**She looked puzzled for a moment, "Oh, yes I will call them for you." I told her my Spanish never was any good and thanked her.**

**"You're welcome," she said flashing a cute smile. I headed back to Connie and the plane. The fuel truck was just pumping the last of the fuel into the tank. She gave the driver a few pesos for his trouble and headed to the small building I had just come**

from to pay the fuel bill. She met me back by the plane a few minutes later.

"What did you say to the girl inside?"

"Nothing," I said.

"Well she wanted me to give you this card and tell you she'd be off at about five, and would be happy to give you some Spanish lessons. What, do all the girls you meet give you their card?"

"Only the pretty ones," I said with a slight smile. She rolled her eyes.

"Help me move the plane, will you?" We pushed the plane to a tie down cable stretched across the storage area, locking it down securely with padlocks. The cab pulled up a few seconds later as we grabbed our bags out of the plane. Speaking Spanish, she asked the driver to take us to a good hotel, and told him he would get a good tip. Twenty minutes later we were checking into the Hacienda Galinda. It was a spacious hotel with a large bar and big pool. I couldn't wait to have a few drinks and get cleaned up. Connie got us two adjoining rooms in a quiet part of the Inn. We met an hour later at the restaurant. By the time she arrived I was on my second beer and beginning to feel better. She ordered a Tequila Sunrise and sat down, nibbling on the chips and salsa that were already at the table. I pulled the worn paper out of my pocket and set it down on the table.

"If you can read Spanish as well as you speak it, you'll have to help me interpret this. My Spanish is pretty bad." She pulled it over her way, turning it around so she could see. When the waiter approached she casually covered it with a napkin. After ordering she asked me for a pen. I gave her one, and a small pad of paper. By the time dinner arrived she shoved the whole thing back to me.

"That should help." She began on her meal, watching me read what she had written down.

"It's hidden in the church?"

"That's what it says," she answered as she sipped her drink. I folded up the original and put it back in my pocket. The translation said it was inside the newly constructed wall of the old bell tower of the town. It didn't name the church.

"Nothing about what's there?" I asked as I dipped a chip into the salsa.

**"No, there is just information about the location." We finished our drinks and retreated to the bar. By now, I was feeling great, and was torn between having fun with my beautiful companion or working. I could feel the heat she was giving off as she sat next to me swizzling her drink.**

**"One more, Señor?"**

**"Yeah, make it a bourbon and water this time."**

**"We only have Jim Beam, Senior. Is that OK?"**

**"Sure, fine. Say, could you tell me how many churches you have in town?"**

**"Only one, Santo Domingo, the other one burned down." That moment I was beginning to think of this trip as a trip for nothing if the icon and the painting had gone up in smoke. I took a big gulp from my beer and then watched the tiny bubbles rise in the golden liquid. Connie looked at me, blinking her eyes with a serious look on her face.**

**Trying to think of a way to find out more casually and yet act like I knew a little about the town I asked, "The new one or the old one?"**

**"The new one." The Bartender continued, "I think the people of the town didn't like the new church trying to take over, and as you know the old one had been here long before the revolution." I breathed a great sigh of relief, mentally reminding myself to give the bartender a good tip.**

**"That's a relief," Connie said. She yawned, covering her mouth with her hand. "Well, I think I'm gong to bed. Breakfast tomorrow about nine?" What I wanted to do was take her back to my room and make love to her and fall asleep holding her till the sun came up, but breakfast would have to do for now.**

**"I'll be joining you in a while, I'm kinda' bushed too." I let it hang for a moment to see her reaction. She smiled somewhat coyly and began to walk away.**

**"See you at breakfast," I added. She turned and looked at me with her smoky blue eyes under the blonde hair that had fallen across her face. God, she looked hot, I thought to myself. Before she could leave, I turned around and ordered another drink. I heard the clicking of her heels as she walked away behind me across the wooden floor. The bartender eyed me, then eyed Connie's swaying behind, I could see the look that**

**all men have when they watch a real looker as she strolls away, lust and desire. In this dusty oasis surrounded by sand and dessert, it was more like grit and lust.**

**I'd had my lust and desire many times before, and was always on the lookout for new conquests. But this one was different. She could fly, shoot, and keep up a running war of words with me. I actually liked her. I hoped nothing would happen to change that.**

**"Give me a final, final would you?" I asked the bartender. He poured mostly bourbon with a splash of water. He winked at me.**

**"Thanks," I said. "Can I buy you one?" He looked at his watch and nodded.**

**"So, how long have you lived here?" I began. That's one of the ways I start out the conversation with someone I'm trying to pry information out of without them knowing it. I was going to find out all about the Santo Domingo if I had to get the bartender and the whole staff drunk.**

**The knock was loud and repeated on my door, "I'm coming, give me a minute!" I put on the large white bathrobe the motel provided and picked up my forty five, holding it behind my back. Looking through the peephole, I saw it was Connie. I opened the door, yawning widely, signaling her to come in with a wave of my gun barrel.**

**"Come on in."**

**"Do you always greet people at the door with a gun?"**

**"Na, it just started recently. What time is it?"**

**"Eight forty five." I plunked the gun down on the table with a loud thunk.**

**"Thanks for waking me. I'll be a few minutes. Wanna' wait?" I eyed her, even in Levi's and a khaki shirt she looked great.**

**"How about I let you get ready and meet you downstairs?"**

**"OK, OK," I said. As she went out the door I locked it behind her. Within a few minutes I was sitting across from her, eating and sipping on a hot cup of joe. I cradled it with both hands. I wasn't cold but holding it was comforting.**

**"What time did you get in?"**

**"I don't know, one thirty or two thirty."**

**"I thought you were bushed?"**

**"I was, but I needed to work."**

**"Work?"**

**"Yeah, I needed information."**

**"Oh, did you get any?"**

**"Enough. We'll go look around town today and pay a visit to the church."**

**"Do you think we can get the..."** she looked around.

**"Not today, but tomorrow is the festival of the dead. There will be plenty of activity and the priest will be out of the church part of the day, so we can hopefully retrieve the merchandise." She nodded, her blonde hair bobbing a bit as she did.**

**"You don't mind staying an extra day, do you?"**

**"No, not really, it will be like a mini vacation,"** she smiled.

**"We also need to rent a car. I'm not going to trust a taxi cab to haul us and the merchandise to the plane." We made small talk as we finished breakfast. I learned that she was from Tennessee and originally from Texas. There was a slight hint of accent, just enough to make it very pleasant. I wish the festival was three days away instead of tomorrow, but it wasn't, and I'd have to make do with the time we had. We'd have other times, I'd make sure of that. God, I couldn't believe I just said that to myself. I shook my head.**

**"Are you all right, Rusty?"**

**"Yeah, just fine, coffee was a little bitter," I lied. I didn't want her to know she was affecting me that much. By mid morning we had rented a car and had driven out the airport to check on the plane, then driven back to stop at the church. It was a beautiful old mission style structure with a little of the French influence in the tall tower. I could see now it might be a little difficult to retrieve the painting and icon which had been deliberately stashed there. We went inside the open door. Putting a few peso's in the coffers near the unlit candles, Connie picked one up and, putting it in one of the holders, she lit it, I guess saying a silent prayer for someone. I was busy looking around. The high ceiling of the church was painted dark blue or purple with large faded stars on it. To the right of the church was an anteroom over which sat the bell**

tower. Connie and I looked around like two tourists gawking and pointing at various points in the chapel and the attached rooms. A small crowd was there coming and going, decorating the pews and the church and getting ready for the upcoming celebration. The stairs up to the bell tower were roped off and a sign in Spanish read *Entrada Prohibida* (entry prohibited). When no one was looking, I stepped over the rope and made my way as noiselessly as possible up the wooden stairs. Four stories up I finally reached the bell room. Three bells hung from large wooden beams, with the large one in the center the two smaller ones on the outside. I could faintly see newer plaster on the south and west side of the tower, just as the bartender had told me. I cautiously went back downstairs, stepped over the rope, and went about my business of touring with Connie.

A robed figure approached us and, through a heavily accented English, he asked if he could help us. Connie told him in Spanish we had heard that their Day of the Dead celebration was one of the best in the province. The Priest smiled at the compliment and introduced himself to us.

"My name is Father Gonzales." I shook his hand and asked him what time the celebration was. He said, "Well it's not here, it's at the cemetery. It starts at 11:00, there won't be anyone here, so you should come there."

"Thank you, Father."

"Gracias," my more fluent companion said.

"De nada," he replied. Smiling, he was pulled away by a small boy asking a question. As we exited I dropped a few pesos in the poor box, which I'm sure didn't go unnoticed by the Priest.

The town was no bigger than a small US town, except for the dirt roads and dirty conditions that tended to exist throughout all of Mexico. The ritzier tourist destinations run by American concerns are usually developed better. We were both glad to get back to the motel and our rooms. By two o'clock we were both lounging around the pool and, under the lush trees, being served cold beer and food. For the first time since I left the states I actually fell asleep under the warm afternoon sun, only to be awakened by Connie who was rubbing sunblock and oil onto my chest and shoulders.

**"I don't want you to be burned." I smiled and pulled her closer, inhaling her scent just before I touched her red lips with mine. She didn't resist and kissed me back hard.**

**"I'm hungry. Let's go in and eat," she said, with a beautiful smile. Offering my hand, she pulled me up onto my feet. A few minutes later we were sitting inside ordering some kind of food. She really had my interest. By the time we were done I was ready to take her on the floor of the restaurant right there. I could tell she felt the same way as she put her arm around my waist, letting her hand fall just down from my waist onto my butt. We started kissing again before we even got to our rooms, and almost didn't make it inside before we were out of our clothes, entwined on my bed. We both fell asleep under the dizzy spell of one another and the hot torrid love of the afternoon. Only the slight wind created by the fan overhead and the breeze through the window moved as we alternately loved and slept away the afternoon.**

**When I finally woke up, I found she had gone. I drifted back off for a few moments before getting up and showering. I was almost done when she knocked at my door. I opened it with only with a towel around my waist. She closed the door behind her, and wrapped her arms around me, kissing me until she pulled my towel off and pushed me back down on the bed again.**

**By the late afternoon we were both starving, but managed to make it out of the hotel and into town to one of the local restaurants that had a great bar and a good Mariachi Band. We sipped on tequila and beer, talking until about ten when we returned to the motel. I was up for a nightcap, but she wasn't. She kissed me lightly on the lips and said she would see me in the morning, and something about needing all the sleep we could get. By the next drink I was ready for the sack and, tipping the bartender well, I returned to my room and slept until the next morning.**

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**By eleven o'clock we were in front of the church. Waiting fifteen minutes to see if anyone came or went was the hardest part. When no one came in or out, we were**

inside within a few minutes, up the staircase, and into the bell tower. I pulled out a pry bar and a small hammer I carried with my gear. Tapping on the walls, I tried to be as quiet as I could, pulling down the plaster and lath. Behind the plaster on the south wall was nothing. I started prying on the west wall. Suddenly the whole new part from the 1900's gave way, crashing to the floor. Both of us froze, listening.

"Connie, go downstairs and see if anyone is around that could have heard that." She was reluctant at first, until I waved her down the stairs with my hand. Behind where the plaster fell were three objects wrapped in leather. The first was the small Icon. I covered it back up and put it down beside me. The second was long and tubular. It was a rolled painting by Miguel Cabrera. I could see there was a clear signature on the bottom. The third one was mystifying... it was another Icon. As I heard Connie coming back up the stairs I quickly rewrapped it and stashed it in my shirt.

"Anyone around?" I whispered.

"No, but that crash could be heard all the way down the street. We should go if you have the Icon and the painting." She looked nervously about. I hadn't told her anything about what we were here to find, and began to wonder how much she really knew. She had read the directions I recovered from the hole, but no where on them did it say what it was I was looking for. We stuffed the two items in a brown canvas sack we had brought with us and made our way downstairs. We were almost out the door when we passed the poor box again. I stopped, paused, and reached deep in my pockets and pulled out a large wad of bills. It was probably over ten thousand pesos. I folded it over and stuffed it down the slot. I didn't like desecrating churches; it was bad luck and I wanted to at least pay for the wall I had torn down. Connie, much to my surprise, was frowning. I just smiled and patted the top of the box with a slight smile.

We were back in the car and at the motel in fifteen minutes. Returning to our rooms, I packed up my valise, carefully wrapping the other Icon in some dirty jeans and stuffing it into my bag. We both snuck out the back way and put our luggage in the car, returning to our temporary abodes. I told her that I would meet her at the bar. She looked at me rather puzzled. I met her at the bar a few minutes later. The helpful bartender was working. He brought my usual, and a beer.

He winked at me, "Something to wash down the bourbon with, Rusty, a gift for the other night."

"How much did you tip him," Connie asked?

"It wasn't the tipping," I said, raising the glass in thanks to my new friend.

"Alrighty then, let's have a couple before we go." I rubbed my hands together in fun.

"Won't it look suspicious if we leave now?"

"Na, got it covered. Now, you can fly with a couple under your belt can't you?"

"Well, sure, but..."

"Then here's to you." We clanked glasses. Then after two drinks, I told her to go back to her room and I would be right there. We were out of the door and on the way to the airport within twenty minutes. We parked the car by the front of the office and I told the clerk inside that the rental agency would pick up the car tomorrow if we weren't back from the coast, but we should be back tonight.

Connie unlocked the plane moorings and I helped push the plane around down the Isle. The office clerk came running out as we were about to board. I felt for my forty five tucked behind my back. It was there.

"Señor, Señor, someone want to talk with you." Two dark burly men walked across the tarmac towards us.

"Start the plane, Connie," I told her without taking my eyes off the approaching men. Within a couple of revolutions, the prop began spinning as she revved up the engine. The clerk walked well around the two men. They approached within ten feet of me.

"Did you pay the runway tax, Gringo?" asked the fattest one, grinning at me with an enormous gold tooth in the front.

"Why do all you banditos have gold teeth?" I said aloud, in a bitterly sarcastic tone. "I suppose you want me to pay you a small fortune or you're not going to let us go, eh?" Before either of them could blink, I had my forty-five out. "Now I'll shoot the first son of a bitch that moves." I quickly disarmed them, tossing their guns some distance from the plane, no doubt causing severe damage to their mechanisms.

**"Now, you two jerks go that way." I pointed with my gun barrel in the opposite direction of where I had tossed the guns.**

**"Well, get going! Vaminos!" There was not a lot they could do, so both of them walked in the direction I indicated. Back in the plane, we were speeding down the runway before they even stopped and headed back to retrieve their guns.**

**"Is this country loaded with varmints, or what?" I said to Connie. She signaled for me to put on my head set and mike on again.**

**"How did you know?" she asked.**

**"'Cause this country is loaded with varmints all lookin' for something they didn't earn." She didn't know I had begun to perhaps consider her one of those as well, but would see how it played out. I at least had an ace in the hole she didn't know about.**

**"Won't the authorities suspect us after they find out?"**

**"Find out what, that they have a large hole in the bell tower wall and someone left them a large wad of cash in the poor box? It'll take a lot less than I left to repair the wall. I'll bet the priest doesn't even report it."**

**"What about the motel?"**

**"I took care of that too. I paid for another day. They'll be expecting us to stay until day after tomorrow. They'll just figure we went off on a romantic trip"**

**"...And the airport?"**

**"Told em' we'd be back tonight. Those hoods will have a long wait!" I laughed. What I didn't tell her was about the key to my room I slipped to the bartender so he could meet his girlfriend in style for the next two nights. He was more than helpful.**

**"We'll be back in the City in a few hours." I tried to make some small talk with her. After all, we had been intimate, but it fell short because of my suspicions.**

**to be concluded.....**