

NECESSARY FORCE PREVIEW

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GOLDEN SQUARE

THE WOMAN CAME INTO THE ROOM. SHE WAS CARRYING a big knife with a curved blade. Maj. John Randal, DSO, MC, was not as sound asleep as he appeared. His fingers tickled the ivory grip of his Colt .38 Super under the covers next to his leg.

A shadow appeared behind the woman. From the dock where the Nile houseboat was moored a lamp beamed through the porthole creating a yellow glow which materialized into the distinctive slim silhouette of a pistol barrel. The question in Major Randal's mind was which one did he shoot?

Quick as a cat the woman turned and stabbed the person behind her. Major Randal's Colt .38 Super spoke two times.

Flashlights came on. Armed policemen swarmed the boat. Someone blew a whistle. A sawed-off police captain with a toothbrush mustache wearing an ill-fitting off white linen suit shouted, "Are you OK, Major?"

"What took you so long, Sansom?" Major Randal said as he swung out of bed pulling on his pants and Blood's slip-on boots.

“Events did not go strictly according to plan,” Capt. A.W. Sansom said. “Not anticipating a second party to show up.”

“Well, neither was I.”

“Fatima is, or I should say was an operative for the Golden Circle – that much we know. The man she knifed is an unknown – Abwehr, Muslim Brotherhood or perchance a freelance... who is to say.”

“You’re supposed to know the players.”

“I spy spies, I don’t read crystal balls,” the policeman said. “If you had been a little quicker on the trigger and shot the miscreant before Fatima went for him maybe she wouldn’t have felt compelled to kill you too.”

“Right,” Major Randal said. “If I had, he’d have turned out to be one of your boys.”

“Had we wanted Fatima dead Major, we could have killed her ourselves. The plan was for you to pass out. Then, as the lady in question photographed the classified documents about the Abyssinian guerrilla operation contained in your briefcase, we break in and nab her red-handed. Couldn’t stick to the script, eh, lover boy.”

“One thing led to another,” Major Randal said.

“Have to give it to you Major, you make first-rate bait.”

“I’ve had practice.”

“So we hear,” the Chief of Cairo’s Counterintelligence Department said. “Remember, you were not here tonight. This never happened.”

“Tell that,” Major Randal said, “to the sporting set at the Kit-Kat Club.”

“Quite right,” Captain Sansom said. “You shot the best belly dancer in Egypt.”

MAJ. JOHN RANDAL WAS LAYING ON A LOUNGE AT THE pool of the Gezira Club soaking up sun next to the leggy brunette Lt. Penelope Honeycutt-Parker, RM. Her husband, Capt. Lionel Honeycutt-Parker was inside making reservations for dinner.

“Hot date last night?” Lieutenant Honeycutt-Parker asked. “You look tired, John.”

“No,” Major Randal said. Not that he would tell her if he had. She was

a long time friend of Capt. the Lady Jane Seaborn, OBE, RM – worked for her in the Raiding Forces Women’s Royal Marine detachment.

The truth was there had not been any dates. Last time he had been in Cairo women were literally throwing themselves at him. Naturally it had helped to have Special Operations Executive supplying female operatives to sleep with him to see if he would reveal military secrets.

This trip women would not come anywhere near him, that is except Fatima – and she had an agenda.

No books had been published about his latest military adventures this time around either. In fact, Major Randal never heard the Abyssinian campaign mentioned at all. It was as if it never happened. The talk was about the calamity in Greece, the threatened invasion of Crete and the German general named Rommel in Libya.

Except for the Honeycutt-Parkers he did not know hardly anyone in Cairo

Captain Lady Seaborn was away in England. Her dead husband, Lt. Cdr. Mallory Seaborn, had turned out not to be so dead when Major Randal rescued him on the first MI-9 mission to the Continent before coming out to Africa. Since he was engaged to the supposedly widowed Lady Jane at the time, to say that his love life was complicated would be a major understatement.

When Force N, meaning Major Randal and Lt. Butch “Headhunter” Hoolihan, went missing in Abyssinia Captain Lady Seaborn abandoned her returned-from-the-dead husband to come out to Africa to help organize a rescue operation. She stayed for the entire campaign, which did nothing to untangle their relationship.

Rita Hayworth and Lana Turner, the slaves he had liberated in Abyssinia, had gone to England with Captain Lady Seaborn. Now they were members of her Royal Marine detachment. The girls were scheduled for complete medicals and then who knew what other adventures Lady Jane had in store for them. Major Randal was surprised at how much he missed the girls. Rita and Lana had been his constant companions, shared every danger he had faced for the past six months. He wondered what the two Zar priestesses were up to.

Lieutenant Hoolihan was off on a course in England after getting

a clean bill of health from the medical authorities. The school he was attending was designed to initiate him into the mysteries of being a Royal Marine officer. Captain Lady Seaborn had mentioned a visit to Chatterley's Military Tailors. The young Royal Marine lieutenant was her pet project.

Major Randal had been Lady Jane's pet project once upon a time. It was good to be her pet project.

Maj. Sir Terry "Zorro" Stone, KBE, MC was home on leave too. His exact rank was in question (he had been an acting colonel). He was no longer commanding officer of the Lancelot Lancer Yeomanry Regiment aka Lounge Lizards. His brother had resumed command in Addis Ababa following the conclusion of the Abyssinian Campaign. Major Stone had led the longest, fastest, most successful armored cavalry advance in modern history – over 1,700 miles. Nothing the Germans had done on any of their blitzkriegs had even come close. Only his father, the Duke, had wanted his eldest son Reginald to command – and it was the family regiment.

Maj. Jack Merritt, MC, MM was staying in command of No. 9 Motor Machine Gun Company, Sudan Defense Force. Major Merritt had been nominated for an immediate Distinguished Service Order for his brilliant leadership during the run up to the Battle of Kern and then the race to the strategic Port of Massawa on the Red Sea. There was a rumor the Free French also had plans to award him the Legion of Honor. No. 9 MMG Co. was being detached from the Sudan Defense Force to be trained by the Long Range Desert Group in deep desert operations. The plan was that it then be assigned to Raiding Forces, Middle East.

Mule Raiding Battalion commanders Capt. Taylor Corrigan, MC, Capt. Jeb Pelham-Davies, MC and Capt. Pyro "Percy" Stirling, MC were on home leave.

Lt. Randy "Hornblower" Seaborn DSC, RN had returned to Seaborn House with the naval contingent that had traveled with Lounge Lizard Force to operate the 3-pound fast firers for the Lancelot Lancer Yeomanry. His boat, MGB 345, was back from its refit.

Capt. Mike "March or Die" Mikkalis, DSM, MM had gone on leave somewhere in Africa. He had informed Major Randal that his temporary

rank was only temporary. He did not intend to remain an officer. The job he wanted was Sergeant Major of Raiding Forces, Middle East.

Lt. Pamala Plum-Martin, OBE, RM was away going to flight school, Major Randal was not sure exactly where but it was in the Middle East somewhere. Because she had amassed so many hours flying combat missions for Psychological Warfare Executive (PWE) over Abyssinia in a Supermarine Walrus she was going to be able to place out of most of the training. There was a possibility the aviatrix might be awarded her wings and the Distinguished Flying Cross on the same day.

Sqn. Ldr. Paddy Wilcox, DSO, OBE, MC, DFC had gone along with Lieutenant Plum-Martin to be available to tutor her on the finer points of the written examinations. He had taught her to fly at Seaborn House. And, it had been his idea to allow her to fly combat missions for Political Warfare Executive over Abyssinia. The Canadian pilot wanted to make sure the Vargas Girl-looking Royal Marine received her wings.

Brandy Seaborn was with her husband, Cdre. Richard "Dickey the Pirate" Seaborn, VC, OBE. Commodore Seaborn was going to get his wish at long last, command of a capital ship – a cruiser. Brandy had originally come out to Egypt to serve with Col. Dudley Clarke in A-Force but now with Raiding Forces, Middle East being organized she was thinking about doing something with it instead. She and Major Randal had always been very close.

One thing was certain – she was not going to be a Royal Marine. Brandy marched to her own drum.

Missing were Capt. "Geronimo" Joe McKoy, Waldo Treywick and ex-U.S. Marine Frank Polanski. The three had stayed behind to carry out a private enterprise the day Force N flew out of Abyssinia. No word of their whereabouts had turned up yet.

Major Randal was growing bored in Cairo. He was ready to go to work reorganizing Raiding Forces. He had been in talks with Captain Honeycutt-Parker. The Royal Dragoons officer had proven to be a superb organizer. He was either going to take command of Raiding Forces, Europe located at Seaborn House or become deputy to Major Randal. There were a lot of possibilities for raiding to be had – he simply had to put the pieces of the puzzle together.

A blonde in a two-piece swimsuit that appeared to be made out of three Band-Aids and a couple of bootlaces strolled over to where Major Randal and Lieutenant Honeycutt-Parker lay sunning. The woman was tanned pure gold and had white platinum hair the color of ice (even paler than Lieutenant Plum-Martin's, if that could be possible). It was pulled straight back in a long ponytail. There were a dozen thin gold bangles on her left wrist.

She looked vaguely familiar.

"Are you Major Randal?" the woman asked with a slight accent. She could not avoid staring at the scars on his chest from being mauled by a lion.

"That would be me," Major Randal said. "Who might you be?"

Lieutenant Honeycutt-Parker had raised her sunglasses to check out the golden girl.

"Rikke Runborg. My friends call me Rocky."

"Nice to meet you, ah, Rocky."

Actually we have met, Major." Rocky had an impressive set of white teeth when she smiled... which it seemed like she did a lot. She was very supple.

"Really?"

"I was with Mallory," Rocky said, "the night you saved us. Never had the opportunity to thank you properly things happened so quickly after the gun battle and the mad dash to the boat."

"Didn't recognize you," Major Randal said, "with your clothes on."

"Mallory failed to mention he was married," Rocky said. "When I discovered the truth I came to Cairo to work with the Norwegian Legation. Call me."

"Fascinating," Lieutenant Honeycutt-Parker said as she watched Rocky ripple her way back to her lounge. "I would not make that telephone call if I were you, John."

"No?"

"Have you noticed women avoiding you?"

"As a matter of fact, Parker..." Major Randal said.

"Before she flew out, Jane passed the word over the 'old girl network' you had spent the last six months behind the lines in Abyssinia,"

Lieutenant Honeycutt-Parker said. “Every woman in Cairo knows the VD rate there is 80% or better. Get the picture, hero?”

“I hope you’re making that up.”

CAPT. LIONEL HONEYCUTT-PARKER RETURNED TO THE pool area. “Who was that?”

“Mallory’s ex-girlfriend,” Lt. Penelope Honeycutt-Parker said. “John rescued her from the Nazis.”

“Vichy French Police,” Maj. John Randal said.

“She wants him to phone her.”

“I would advise against that call,” Captain Honeycutt-Parker said. “Mallory has damned fine taste in women, credit him that.”

Jim “Baldie” Taylor walked out to the pool. “Who was that smasher you and John were chatting with, Parker?”

“Rikke Runborg, friends call her Rocky. She was with Mallory the night John brought the two of them out of France for Norman Crockett’s MI-9 – dropped by to ask him to call her so she can thank him properly.”

“I am going to do you a favor, Major,” Jim said. “We can take off this afternoon for the RAF base at Habbaniya. Pam is graduating from the flying school there in a couple of days. Let’s fly up to see her awarded her wings.

“Take along a couple of those long-range Springfield 7mm-06s you brought back from Abyssinia. Get in some White Oryx hunting. The place is a paradise in the desert.”

“Am I invited?” Lieutenant Honeycutt-Parker asked. “Lionel is leaving for England to check on Raiding Forces operations at Seaborn House. I am at loose ends.”

“Absolutely,” Jim said. “Habbaniya is the home of No. 4 RAF Training School. It’s a plush man-made oasis where they send pilots who need rest. Said to have the best swimming pool in the service, golf, polo, riding... you name it. Have ourselves a nice quiet holiday.

“Besides, Major, you do not want to place that phone call.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PHIL WARD IS A DECORATED COMBAT VETERAN COMMISSIONED at age nineteen. A former instructor at the Army Ranger School, he has had a lifelong interest in small unit tactics and special operations. He lives on a mountain overlooking Lake Austin with his beautiful wife, Lindy, whose father was the lieutenant governor to both Ann Richards and George W. Bush.

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