

Seven Continents Killer

BY

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The tap on my shoulder woke me from my hangover slumber. Pulling my hat up, I shaded my eyes from the blaring sun to see my traveling companion looking down at me.

"I'm going to get a drink. Want anything?" she asked.

I shook my head and blinked my eyes in the blaring sun. "Izzy, you've got to be kidding. I'm lucky I remember anything from the last couple of days. You get yourself one of those umbrella drinks. I'll keep sipping the fruit juice."

I could see her shadow was not moving.

"Mac Brent. The tough PI," said Izzy with a laugh. "A little too much at a Halloween party and he's down for the count."

I watched Izzy walk away in the skimpy bikini and placed my hat back over my face. I might still train like I did when I was a CIA agent jet-setting across the globe going after international drug rings and slave traders, but the fact that I'm fifty and Izzy is thirty-five, is the real reason I'm laying here and she's day drinking.

The cruise was on its last leg of a South American tour. Izzy was the office admin from the casting agency next to my office. I talked her into coming on this nice relaxing cruise. I told her I needed a vacation, but the real reason for the trip was to follow a hunch I had about "the Seven Continents Killer". Something the international news media called this serial

killer. It was a case I got involved in with some NYPD buddies of mine about five years ago and then got sucked in knee deep when I was hired to find the scumbag by a family of one of the victims.

The murderer would kill seven times each year. A body was found in each of the continents starting with North America, and then in a pattern of Europe, Asia, Australia, Antarctica, Africa and South America. At each murder scene the body of a woman was found with an incremental rose. One rose with the body in North America and the final being seven roses with the South American body. The roses would be in the right hand of the victim, which was then placed over her heart. The women were all in their thirties, rich and loved to party. The one odd thing they all had in common, was they all recently left their husbands after taking them for their money and leaving the guy to care for a kid. The whole think sucked all over.

The killer always stuck with his MO. Except last year. A body never turned up in Antarctica, but was found in an Antarctica Emperor Penguin exhibit in Europe. There were some severe storms last year, which tells me the killer is a traveler, and a regular one at that. I have my suspicions, but this time my contacts in South America reported no such murder. Perhaps I was wrong or the killer is already dead. This time it paid to not be correct. The trip was considered a business

expense and I was having an exciting time with a woman much younger than me. I guess I--

"Izzy, your blocking my sun again," I said.

Not hearing a reply I peeked from under my hat and there was more than one shadow on the ground. Removing my hat, I shaded my eyes again. The ship's captain, a security guard and steward stood there looking down at me.

"Mr. Brent, can we go to a quieter location to talk," said the Captain.

"I think we can do that."

Getting up, I shook my head and put my hat back on.

"Please lead the way," I said along with a wave of my hand.

I passed Izzy as I was walking by and gave her a pat on her ass and a smile. She rolled her eyes and lifted her drink in salute. With the way she looked, I would be lucky if she's not swept away by some other guy by the time I get back, which may be forever based on the trek they were taking me on.

When we finally got to the upper level rooms, two security guards were posted at the entrance of a roped off hallway. We walked past them and the captain stopped.

"Mr. Brent, there's been an incident and the Miami PD asked that we contact you for assistance until we get to port."

I smiled. I had mentioned to a Captain friend of mine in Miami that if anything happened on this cruise related to the

serial killer to reach out to me. Damn, I owe him a surf and turf dinner now.

"What type of incident?" I asked.

The guard and steward stared at the Captain and the Captain took the lead. "One of the high class guests was found dead in her cabin this morning. Apparently, she was beaten and strangled. When we called it in, they said to get you involved. Are you with the police?"

"In a way I am. Who was the victim?"

The Captain took a deep breath. "Mrs. Winifred O'Connell"

"Oh, her. The Hollywood bloodsucker. I need to see the scene."

The Captain nodded and led me down the hall with the other two following us. The room door was open and I examined the room from the hallway. Just as described, a body was laying on the floor by a sofa near the interior balcony doors. The room was nice. Bigger than some NY apartments...and it was...the flowers. When I saw the bouquet of 7 roses, I knew exactly who had murdered Mrs. O'Connell. It was the Seven Continents Killer and he was on the ship. Now to figure out exactly who that was. Mrs. O'Connell was holding the seven roses in her hand, but it was haphazardly done. The table was also knocked over and a bowl of fruit was spilled on the floor.

"Who found the body? Did anyone touch anything?" I asked.

"I--I found the body," said the Steward. "I didn't touch anything. I was her private concierge for the trip."

As I looked at the victim some memories before the tequila started to come back to me. The victim was wearing a skimpy Venetian Goddess Halloween outfit. Besides being able to tell she was cold the entire evening, I recall her complaining about something before leaving.

"I'm not saying you did anything wrong, but does anything stand out about her."

"I--I--cannot recall..."

"Come on. There has to be something," I said to the Steward grabbing his shoulders and making eye contact with him.

The Steward broke eye contact with me and looked at his feet. I'm thinking I might have to shake him harder, but his head shot up and he looked at me. "Bananas. She was allergic to them. I always had to make sure nothing she ate touched bananas."

"Really...that is all you can remember. I'm not sure--"

My thought processes froze as something yellow caught my attention from the corner of my left eye.

"Hold that thought," I said.

I entered the room a few steps and stopped by the overturned table. Looking over the spilled fruit, there it was.

"You said she was allergic to bananas. Who delivered the fruit?"

"I did," said the Steward. "I dropped them off the other morning."

"And you wouldn't have delivered any bananas with it?"

"That's correct. I made sure it was banana free."

I got up, turned around and smiled pointing at the floor.

"A banana," said the Captain.

"Yup," I said. "And I know who did it."

Everyone looked at me with anticipation, but I needed a second for the fog to clear.

"You'll want to send security to take your lounge singer into custody."

"Mel?" asked the Captain shocked.

The security guard backed away and I could hear the screeching of his radio as he called it in. I waited for the screech to stop echoing in my head before continuing.

"Yes, your lounge singer. I recall his costume. He was dressed as Carmen Miranda, with the banana headdress and all, and I remember our victim here mentioning that she hated his costume, but she never gave a reason. I figured Mel thought he was getting an easy kill, but she put up a fight. A banana fell from the headdress and mixed with the other fruit that spilled on the floor. Not knowing about her allergy, he probably

shrugged it off as he made his escape. I'm also guessing that when we investigate Mel, we'll find he has been taking on various cruise ship jobs worldwide, thus explaining how he found his victims in each of the continents."

"That is an amazing story," said the Captain. "But--"

I watched with a smile as the security guard stepped back and interrupted the captain.

"Captain, we found Mel in his cabin icing a leg. He also has scratches on him. He broke down after security busted the door in and admitted to the murder. He started mumbling things like "Mom, don't leave with the dance man" and "here are seven roses to make you want to come home."

I interrupted the Captain before he could say anything.

"I know what you're going to say. We're two hours out and drinks are on you. Now if you'll excuse me, I have an Izzy to find."

I walked away, never turning around to get a reply from the Captain. I found Izzy on deck waiting for me and as it turns out, she wants to join me on my next cruise to another continent. Yeah me...