



THIRTY-TWO

For a private plane, CBA's Electra was exceptionally roomy. Originally built by the American company Lockheed to accommodate forty or fifty passengers, it was now configured into a small hotel. The front salon did justice to any lobby. There were a galley and two private bedrooms, complete with double beds.

Vanessa, seated in the luxury of a leather sofa, could understand why the Air Force brass liked to party on it. Today it was the navy's turn. Across from her sat Admiral Jorge Isaac Anaya. To his right sat an aide, with an open briefcase on his lap, to his left a woman, dressed in a sweater that hugged her feminine figure. Sitting with tanned crossed legs, that even Vanessa admired, she seemed more concerned with the red polish on her nails than the Admiral's hand resting on her knee.

When the aide handed Jorge Anaya a single piece of paper, she lifted his hand off her knee, got up, and headed back in the cabin, disappearing in one of the bedrooms.

"Vanessa, por favour?" Luis Santiago Lopez, head of CBA and her ultimate boss, was holding an empty tumbler out to be refilled.

Vanessa smiled, forced, but not false. Luis had a bad habit of mixing up the signals she sent. She'd learned to present a neutral smile and avoid letting her hand touch his as she took the glass. "Certainly."

The noise of four turbine engines penetrated the insulated cabin walls with a low rumble, enough at times to muffle conversation, but, depending on where one stood or sat, average conversation was easily heard. All Vanessa caught while going to the galley was Anaya's aide saying, "Seville has control of South Georgia. We over ran the British."

When Vanessa reached the galley, she set the tumbler down and leaned against the counter, closing her eyes. Over ran the British. How many dead? John? Oh, God no. Please. Opening her eyes, she reached

for the refrigerator door and took out a tray of ice cubes. Breaking two loose, she dropped them in Lopez's glass with a shaking hand, one missed and tumbled to the floor.

Placing both hands on the counter to stop them from trembling, she waited for calm to return, trying to create an image of John in her mind: his black hair, curly behind the ears, brown puppy-dog eyes, a smile full of sunshine. All she saw was a body bag. "No." The word startled her, and she hammered the counter with one hand. He's probably still on the Falklands. Her heart told her otherwise. She drew a deep breath and poured scotch over the ice.

Vanessa returned to the main cabin in time to hear Anaya ask, "The *Bahá Buen Seceso*?"

"Left last night with the British soldiers."

She wanted to ask about casualties, but instead handed Lopez his drink.

"Gracias." He patted her bottom as she turned.

The first time Vanessa flew with Lopez he'd tried to get her into one of the bedrooms. She let him know she had no interest in a married man who had two mistresses. He'd never asked her again, but always kept the game of cat and mouse going.

She smiled at him and wrinkled her nose. "You're welcome," her voice as cold as the ice in his glass. Seating herself on the other end of the sofa, she sipped what was left of her wine and listened to Anaya's aide drone on.

"The *Rio Carcaraña* is unloading in Puerto Belgrano. The Air Force is asking about the Exocet shipment."

"How'd Lami Dozo find out about them?" Anaya asked.

His aide shrugged his shoulders.

"And the shipment of ammunition?" Lopez asked.

The aide looked at Anaya, who nodded yes. "Destination is South Africa. We're routing it through Puerto Rivero."