

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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TIGER TIGER



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CHAPTER ONE

HAD THEY NOT kept Hugh Llewellyn waiting he would almost certainly never have fallen for the Englishwoman's side glances. But fearful during those waiting hours of the effects of the tobacco smoke and the nervous tension on his tenor voice, he had been forced to down a good half dozen pints of draught Guinness, mindful of the similarity of depth and tone of the salubrious liquid to the wide pupils at the centre of her tartish eyes. Hadn't she moved that provocative bosom close enough for his lips to taste the delights of their white billowy satin, his eyes mentally caressing what he had to guess their two pastel rosettes.

For himself, Huw made no secret of his carnal desires.

In spite of the milling throng of revellers dressed in their low cut finery and monkey suits in the upstairs room, usually reserved for wakes and weddings, of the Tudor Mary, the languid looks poured in the direction of that mascaraed face, those black eyes, made twice as big with the shade of ultramarine known to women since the Pharaohs. But what tune to pick for his opening number would cause that English bosom to go pitter-patter?

A generation ago it would have been Mario Lanza. Mario, as in his film, *The Great Caruso*, sleazing his way through the Neapolitan numbers, *Torna a Sorrento*, slurring the words, with his lips hardly moving. God, the jelly hit Huw's legs at the sluttish thoughts of it, and all that he was capable of after half a dozen creamy Guinnesses. He toyed with Pavarotti. Old Brindisi! Brindisi my darling, which had been known to work under the right circumstances, aided by the benevolent effect of wine on a sinewy tongue. Brindisi, from *Traviata*, had a facility to reach the regions deep to the scarlet evening dress and a diamond necklace. But then when the time came, he sang the Nat King Cole number, *Mona Lisa*, in a moment of sheer inspiration.

She was melting.

He could feel it in a part of him that was more pertinent than his bones. In his imagination he was already feeling the swell of that

pinched waist in the fold of his arm, listening to her plaintive tale of boredom with the Anglesey hills, this poor Saesnes, who had taken refuge in Beaumaris, the only town on the island with a pronounceable name, which had sheltered these poor English hearts for centuries against the Welsh tongue and the Baptist church.

She was Turkish Delight on his tongue as he went into *Love Is the Sweetest Thing*, his moist pout of lips transcended space to touch those blackened eyelids, he kissed them closed, his mouth turning to those hard firm dry lips, her English pretence at refusal.

Ah, little chocolate-eyed Cleopatra, with dyed blonde hair, I shall nibble your armpits to make you laugh, and sing to your soul with my head at your feet and the sweet tones rising in adulation up the long interesting folds of your evening dress.

The double from Billy Rhys, the landlord and host, went down the hatch as Huw saw her man disappear through the throng in the direction of the loo. He was by her side, her head in a pretence of aversion, as he took her hand and made suggestions, unfortunately abbreviated and therefore to the point, given the short time he had for the purpose. A time and a place, my lovely! *God!* How he adored this pretence at deafness in those pink tart's *oreille*. He barely had time to savour this facet of the game before the unexpected fist landed on his right cheek and sent him flying through a neighbouring table amidst broken glass and the smell of port.

"You dirty little Welsh git!"

Huw was back on his feet and he wasn't standing for any English pretentiousness here, and his best shawl-collared suit already ruined. He let the Cockney bastard have it right on the button of his nose, before another of those fists came out of nowhere and he found himself back where he had started, in the broken wood and the glass and the smell of liquors - only this time he was more concerned with the fact that the room was spinning and he couldn't see anything clearly.

"Huwsie! Lord Jesus - Huwsie!"

The voice was that of Billy Rhys, only it seemed to float upon the air in an unearthly fashion, made all the more so since he could have sworn that this was out of doors and that was the starry firmament over him, and that Billy was pressing a bottle of malt into his hand.

"Pull yourself together, man. For the love of Pete! Don't you know Sandler and who the man is?"

"I don't give a shit who he is. I'm going to give it to him and that Jezebel."

"Oh, no you're not. Now you listen to me, Huw Llewellyn. Yours is too fine a singing voice to be ruined by fighting a London gangster over his wife."

"She's no more his wife than she is mine."

"Now listen to me, man. Take the bottle and be well out of it."

Huw turned to argue, but the door of the pub had been closed firmly by the departing landlord and at half past midnight, the street was in virtual darkness and he was alone.

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How could he just go home after that? Overpowering resentment only bridled the unrequited lust that ached in the heart of him. And Brindisi was in his soul.

He took the Land-Rover from the car-park and negotiated a lurching journey into the hills above the town. He wasn't thinking at all, just driving with the devil in him. The road swung and climbed. It was so steep in places he would have engaged low gear ratio if only he had been sober. Small trees and scrub whirled past in the headlights.

But then he recognised where he was and all of a sudden his spirits lightened. Fumbling in the shelf under the windscreen, he found the old blue plastic torch and he practically fell out of the vehicle to where he could smell water.

How was it possible, he asked himself, patting the bottle to see it was still there in his pocket, that his feet could be numb while his brain burned? Then he lifted his feet out of the stream and threw his sodden shoes and socks over his shoulder onto the bank, and, with trouser legs turned up to his knees, he tried tickling as he had so often when he had come up here as a lad. The torch was the bait and he kept his right hand under the water as the trap. There was no sense of time at all, only the patient waiting until he could see the speckled back in the light, sinewy in coyness, then slowly but surely closer and closer to where the fingers stroked the heavy sensuousness, until the first finger was in the gill ...

Up onto the bank with you! A good two or three pounder.

It was a glorious feeling, with victory in one hand and the opened bottle in the other, as he sang his *Libiamo* with all the gusto of his injured maleness.

Never better had his voice serenaded these Welsh hills. Mother Wales would listen to this heart-song from one of her gifted sons, even if an English gangster and his busty moll were incapable of such refined appreciation.

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He woke while it was still dark on the crest of a dream. The pleasant part was that a blonde, who might and then might not have been Marlene, was doing things to him in the bathroom of her architect designed house.

But then as if Providence felt it must take a negative hand, there was a loud noise, as if all of his joy were being rudely sucked away, followed by the sound of a shovel on clay.

Somebody was digging.

With his eyes closed, Huw Llewellyn was back in the Baptist cemetery, with his father's voice in his ears, only this was the younger Da, wearing grey woollen socks for the last time in living memory, saying the oration at the funeral of his mother and Huw, unable to understand such grief at the tender age of six years, watching the clay shovelled down on the coffin. But now, with his eyes open, discovering himself frozen to mother earth, with his trouser legs still above his knees and the half empty whisky bottle by his side, Huw watched the heavens whirl tumultuously about his head as he listened to that familiar sound in real time. There could be no doubt about it this time. This was no dream. Somebody, no more than fifty yards away from him, was digging.