

TWENTY EIGHT

The sailboat at night on the ocean was a place of sounds. Rigging clinked. Sails flapped. Water sloshed. Floorboards creaked. It had been a month at sea now and he was intimate with every one of those sounds. So much so that they had become like silence. Any alteration in their rhythms was a klaxon which rocked him from the deepest sleep.

He rolled from his hammock onto the floor of the cabin's modest living area. Someone was up on deck. He could hear whispers. It sounded like Spanish. Maybe Portuguese. There were at least three of them. Shit. One he could handle. Two would result in some damage. But three was going to hurt. The door opened and a flashlight poked down at him. "*Vem! Subir!*" It was Portuguese. They wanted him to come up. He must've crossed over into Brazil sometime in the middle of the night. He knew he'd been close. He allowed himself a moment of pride. He'd fucking made it. Thirty days on the water. No outside help or communication other than that time he bribed an official to get through the Panama canal; and he'd made it. After all he'd gone through. *All he'd given up*. No fucking way these punk wannabe pirates were going to ruin it now. It was almost funny that they'd try.

On that last frantic rush to the marina he'd stopped at a Long Beach book store to get some How To Speak Portuguese books and tapes. He'd used the past thirty days to study. He already spoke some Spanish, even if it wasn't a requirement with the LAPD it was a necessity. Portuguese came easy. His favorite of the books was filled with slang and popular swear words.

"*Vai tomar o cue! Filho da puta!*" Stick it in your ass you son of a bitch. He grinned as he tried out his first insult. It worked. The pirates yelled back in a flurry that he had no chance of understanding. Furious, they stormed down the narrow stairs into the tiny living area. They could only fit one at a time - which is exactly what he wanted. He'd once been a champion wrestler.

Then there was the stint in the Marines. And of course fifteen years with LAPD. If there was one thing that Frank Ronan did well, it's fight.

The first pirate was in his early twenties. No shirt. Rubber sandals. Skinny. His gun's handle was held together with duct tape. Frank winged a ceramic coffee mug at his face. The pirate fired a shot. It went high. The sound bounced off the fiberglass walls and made their ears ring. The pirate flinched. Frank tackled him around the waist and threw him in an easy hip toss against the wall. It was then a battle of strength for control of the gun. Frank bent the pirate's wrist. Bang. Bang. Bang. Three muffled shots and the pirate was dead.

The second pirate was already on Frank's back. Choking him. Frank reached up and pulled on his head, flipping Pirate Two over and onto the floor. Frank torqued on his neck until he heard a faint crack and the body went limp. Pirate Three was bigger than the others. He swung a metal bar at Frank's back. Somewhere inside him a bone broke. But he was able to turn and he caught the next swing on the arm. They were now wrestling up close. A quick feint and a duck and Frank had slipped beneath his arm and was now behind him. He drove the Big Pirate into the wall, pinning him there as his free hand searched the countertop for a weapon. He grabbed a fork from the sink and stabbed at the Big Pirate's neck. Over and over. The Big Pirate thrashed but Frank held him face first against the wall and kept stabbing. Finally the man slumped to the floor.

Frank was slick with blood. But victorious. He picked up the pirate's gun and went up onto the deck. As he expected there were no other pirates. Their small motor boat sat empty alongside his 40 foot craft. The glow of the impending dawn was just visible on the horizon. In the other direction, five miles off the starboard, was a shadowy mass that he now knew was the wild, tropical coast of Brazil.

“Yeaaaaarrrrrhhh!” He unleashed a primal scream into the yellowing sky. He’d done it. He was free. He was a king. A god. Immortal. Somehow it felt right that this last step had required a blood sacrifice.

His rib had definitely cracked in the struggle. He looked out over the ocean. There were no other vessels in sight but the sun was coming up fast. He wouldn’t be alone for long. He climbed back down below deck where he wrapped his ribs tight with a strip of bed sheet. He then dragged the three dead pirates up and threw them overboard. This far out the sharks would get them before they floated to shore. Their left over boat was an issue. As was the horror movie blood that now coated both the lower and upper deck. His main concern was that discovery of either of these two items would result in a deeper search and reveal a self fabricated steel container that was tucked behind a false wall in the hold. The container was air-tight and water proof. He’d welded it himself so that there would be no door or hatch. Sealed inside was \$49.5 million in plastic wrapped hundred dollar bills. The total weight of the money and the box was 1200 pounds. His treasure.

By the time he’d finished his coffee and a breakfast of banana and the last of the mahi-mahi that he’d caught yesterday; he had a plan. He was a man of plans. The plans didn’t always work as expected, but they bought him time. Time to make the next plan. And then the next. So on and so on. He’d lived his entire life like this, one plan to the next. This current plan however, it was a big one. It was the plan to end all plans.