

A MESSAGE IN POISON By BJ Magnani

EXCERPT

I've done some terrible things in my life. Big lies splash in my wake and follow me until the water creeps into my lungs. I've murdered many people who deserved to die. I take the phrase 'pick your poison' literally. My arsenal of natural toxins and poisons hidden deep within a freezer provide enough variety to mimic natural death. The cool salt air at my seaside cottage coaxes plants in my poisonous garden to yield the natural killers that I need. And I have collaborators around the world who can provide for me what my garden cannot.

Yes, it's true that I've spent much of my life taking care of patients as a physician and taught a generation of medical students. But it was this very expertise in toxicology that captured the attention of our government. They seduced me and then orchestrated a transformation from consultant to assassin. Some say it's my jewel-green eyes, raven-colored hair, and even my stiletto heels that tend to disarm my victims. They are blinded to the truth. With eyes closed to the Hippocratic Oath, I travel the world, eliminating terrorists and traitors with poison, stealth in a bottle, in the name of preventing mass destruction on a global scale. Our small covert counter-terrorism team weeds out threats at home and abroad—sanctioned killing, the price of doing business. I'm told that 'the good of the many outweighs the good of the one.' It's become my guiding mantra, allowing me to rationalize this dual existence.

I hide my secret life beneath the cloak of justice, and I've discovered that others do too. So I ask you if you're sure you know the truth about those around you. This last year of my life has been fraught with revelations that I didn't see coming. For more than twenty years, I thought my baby, my little girl, had died in the Colombian jungle. Not only did I learn that she's alive, but I discovered that she's attending the same medical school where I have my academic appointment—a life-changing disclosure. I tremble when I think that we may have brushed by each other not only at the university, but in my fleeting past. I look back and see momentary images of familiarity etched in my mind. Was my beautiful Rose right in front of me while I wore blinders of guilt and despair?

JP, my lover, and partner in our covert government band, grasps my turmoil. Desperate to soothe my soul, he promises that life's twists and turns can only make us more resilient and resolute. Facing the wind, my body stands tall and hard like a tree firmly rooted in the ground. Having no support on its own, a vine uses its tendrils to clutch to the broad trunk. My stories are like this vine, ever climbing, ever strangling—a complicated life that requires both brilliance and strength.