

THE 10TH ALEX CROSS NOVEL

WITH A SPECIAL
SECTION ON
ALEX CROSS

JAMES PATTERSON

LONDON



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For Larry Kirshbaum.

Here's to the tenth Alex Cross.

*None of this would have happened without your
commitment, your wise counsel, and your friendship.*

Prologue

THE WEASEL RETURNS, AND
WHAT A NICE SURPRISE

Chapter 1

COLONEL GEOFFREY SHAFER loved his new life in Salvador, Brazil's third-largest city and some would say its most intriguing. It was definitely the most fun.

He had rented a plush six-bedroom villa directly across from Guarajuba Beach, where he spent his days drinking sweet caipirinhas and ice-cold Brahma beers, or sometimes playing tennis at the club. At night, Colonel Shafer—the psychopathic killer better known as the Weasel—was up to his old tricks, hunting on the dark, narrow, winding streets of the Old City. He had lost count of his kills in Brazil, and nobody in Salvador seemed to care, or even keep count. There hadn't been a single newspaper story about the disappearance of young prostitutes. Not one. Maybe it was true what they said of the people here—when they weren't actually partying, they were already rehearsing for the next one.

At a few ticks past two in the morning, Shafer returned

to the villa with a young and beautiful streetwalker who called herself Maria. What a gorgeous face the girl had, and a stunning brown body, especially for someone so young. Maria said she was only thirteen.

The Weasel picked a fat banana from one of several plants in his yard. At this time of year he had his choice of coconut, guava, mango, and pinha, which was sugar apple. As he plucked the fresh fruit he had the thought that there was always something ripe for the taking in Salvador. It was paradise. *Or maybe it's hell and I'm the Devil*, Shafer thought, and chuckled to himself.

"For you, Maria," he said, handing her the banana. "We'll put it to good use."

The girl smiled knowingly, and the Weasel noticed her eyes—what perfect brown eyes. *And all mine now—eyes, lips, breasts.*

Just then, he spotted a small Brazilian monkey called a mico trying to work its way through a window screen and into his house. "Get out of here, you thieving little bastard!" he yelled. "G'wan! Beat it!"

There came a quick movement from out of the bushes, then three men jumped him. *The police*, he was certain, *probably Americans. Alex Cross?*

The cops were all over him, powerful arms and legs everywhere. He was struck down by a bat, or a lead pipe, yanked back up by his full head of hair, then beaten unconscious.

"We caught him. We caught the Weasel, first try. That wasn't very hard," said one of the men. "Bring him inside."

Then he looked at the beautiful young girl, who was

clearly afraid, rightly so. “You did a good job, Maria. You brought him to us.” He turned to one of his men. “Kill her.”

A single gunshot ruptured the silence in the front yard. No one seemed to notice or care in Salvador.

Chapter 2

THE WEASEL JUST WANTED to die now. He was hanging upside down from the ceiling of his own master bedroom. The room had mirrors everywhere, and he could see himself in several of the reflections.

He looked like death. He was naked, bruised and bleeding all over. His hands were tightly cuffed behind his back, his ankles bound together, cutting off the circulation. Blood was rushing to his head.

Hanging beside him was the young girl, Maria, but she had been dead for several hours, maybe as much as a day, judging by the terrible smell. Her brown eyes were turned his way, but they stared right through him.

The leader of his captors, bearded, always squeezing a black ball in one hand, squatted down so that he was only a foot or so from Shafer's face. He spoke softly, a whisper.

“What we did with some prisoners when I was active—we would sit them down, rather politely, peace-

fully, and then nail their fucking tongues to a table. That's absolutely true, my weaselly friend. You know what else? Simply plucking hairs . . . from the nostrils . . . the chest . . . stomach . . . genitals . . . it's more than a little bothersome, no? *Ouch*," he said as he plucked hairs from Shafer's naked body.

"But I'll tell you the worst torture, in my opinion, anyway. Worse than what you would have done to poor Maria. You grab the prisoner by both shoulders and shake violently until he convulses. You literally rattle his brain, the sensitive organ itself. He feels as if his head will fly off. His body is on fire. I'm not exaggerating.

"Here, let me show you what I mean."

The terrible, unimaginably violent shaking—while Geoffrey Shafer hung upside down—went on for nearly an hour.

Finally he was cut down. "Who are you? What do you want from me?" he screamed.

The head captor shrugged. "You're a tough bastard, but always remember, *I found you*. And I'll find you again if I need to. Do you understand?"

Geoffrey Shafer could barely focus his eyes, but he looked up to where he thought the captor's voice had come from. He whispered, "What . . . do you . . . want? Please?"

The bearded man's face bent close to his. He seemed almost to smile. "I have a job, a most incredible job for you. Believe me, you were born for this."

"Who are you?" the Weasel whispered again through badly chapped and bleeding lips. It was a question he'd asked a hundred times during the torture.

"I am the Wolf," said the bearded man. "Perhaps you've heard of me."

Part One

THE UNTHINKABLE