

# BETRAY



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**J.M. WINDLE**



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*Betrayed*

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## **PRAISE FOR *BETRAYED***

“Jeanette Windle authentically captures the sights, sounds, flora, fauna, and people of the cities, villages, and jungles of Central and South America. . . . She spins her tale as only one can who has herself lived and worked in this exciting and often contradictory subculture of the American Empire.”

### **WILLIAM K. SMITH**

Special Agent (Retired), U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration

“Jeanette’s style of writing takes you to the place she is writing about. You see the smoldering fires of the municipal dump of Guatemala City and the beauty of the Guatemalan cloud forest. . . . Once again, Jeanette has taken you there and made you part of her adventure.”

### **CW 3 LARRY TOMLINSON, SR.**

(USA, Retired), Miami, FL

“Windle’s amazing skill as a storyteller is equaled by her knowledge of the complexities of Latin America’s darker side. *Betrayed* is a sure-footed journey into suspense and fear illuminated by hope.”

### **PATRICIA SPRINKLE**

Author of the best-selling Thoroughly Southern and Family Tree mystery series

“Just under the surface of the vibrant beauty of Guatemala’s natural resources lies a seething cauldron of political turmoil. You can experience it all in *Betrayed*. Jeanette Windle is not only a great writer, she knows Latin America. I highly recommend this action-packed novel to any person who wants to better understand the Latin world or simply enjoys reading an intriguing mystery with a whisper of romance. This book is terrific!”

### **DR. RON BLUE**

Coordinator, Spanish Doctor of Ministry, Dallas Theological Seminary



## DEDICATION

To the real Auntie Evelyns of my childhood, who could ride a mule up the Andes, face down a rioting mob, and assure a homeless child of a heavenly Father's love, and whose iron-spined commitment taught this small daughter of American missionaries what courage, love, and sacrifice are all about.



*Sierra de las Minas, Guatemala*

“This is my Father’s world. . . .”

The crooning chimed with the screeching of macaws and the chitter of monkeys in the cloud forest canopy. Still, in the green hiding place made snug by wide, drooping fronds, curling ferns, and what had been a thick bed of moss, the singer checked herself, a raised finger hushing her companions. They’d never wandered this far or long without an adult hauling them back, and she was not ready to be dragged from this delightful new game.

There were three in all, two girls and a boy. The girls did not look like siblings. The singer was small with nut-brown hair and thin, sun-darkened features. Her younger sister, hardly more than a toddler, was flaxen blonde with skin pale enough to trace the blue of her veins. This oddity fascinated the boy, whose black hair and round, bronze features marked him as a native of these Central American highlands.

At the moment there was little distinction because all three were supremely dirty. Sharpened sticks had churned the firm springiness of the moss bed into a quagmire of loamy mud. The same mud caked woolen leggings and handwoven sweaters, plastering light heads and dark to an identical red-brown.

Their demolition was not without purpose. They were building a house, small hands industriously shoving bamboo canes into the mud, layering banana fronds and elephant ears across the top, patiently starting over again each time the structure overbalanced.

They were also extremely happy, as children will be with reasonable food and warmth, the security of adults in the background, and all of nature as their toy. At some point a crackling of thunder had presaged a storm, but when an exit from their hideaway confirmed blue sky between the thick branches of the forest canopy, they had returned to their labors.

They were blissfully unaware of the pit viper, green as the fern around which it coiled, just above their heads. Or the jaguar watching curiously from under a fern patch for a moment before it rose silently and wandered off.

Or the difference between rapid weapon fire and thunder.

The illusion of tranquility was so complete that the youngest ventured a low, contented humming as she patted and scooped. It was the same lullaby her sister had been singing.

Abandoning her caution, the older girl took up the words again. "This is my Father's world. . . ." Forgetting the rest of the line, she too dropped to a hum.

The Mayan boy had heard the tune often enough to add his own off-key whistle, while overhead the macaws set up a screeching counterpoint.

Yes, this was her father's world. And now he'd brought them along to this remote, secret paradise that was the most wonderful of any her short, varied life had yet known.

But even freedom palls in time.

After the corn tamales they'd provisioned for their adventure had been licked clean from their banana-leaf wrappings and the youngest child's hum subsided to a whimper, the older girl wondered why their escape had not yet been overtaken. Crawling out of their shelter, she was startled to see pink and orange through the breaks in the cloud forest canopy.

Back inside, she put her head close together with the Mayan boy, who was both playmate and guide. Even though they spoke no word of

the same language, they understood each other well enough. Taking her little sister's hand, the older girl coaxed her to follow the Mayan boy's lead.

Out on the trail, the humidity that dripped from every leaf and frond soaked through mud-caked wool. For the first time the older girl questioned if they should have wandered so long and far. Papa and Mama were the loving bedrock of her small universe, but their displeasure could be as shattering as that earlier thunder.

But her young mind was not capable of guilt or worry for long. If the trail seemed much longer than their outward wandering, there was still much to delight. White wisps of a mountain mist curled through the trees, laying cool fingers against flushed cheeks. A flash of red overhead was the tail feathers of a quetzal bird. Orchids coiling down over the trail looked so much like tiny, peering faces that the youngest child giggled. With a handful of foraged bananas to quiet rumbling stomachs, the children let their tired legs lag while the sky paled to green and the first stars sprang out.

Only when they smelled smoke ahead and heard the raised voices did the older girl tug impatiently at her little sister. Smoke meant cook fires, and if a search party had to interrupt the evening meal, there would be more than just a scolding waiting for them.

It wasn't until they stepped into the clearing that she realized the smoke was all wrong, the flames leaping high against a backdrop that was no longer the quiet hamlet from which the children had slipped away. She did not understand this noisy invasion of strange men and vehicles. What were they doing? Why were they stacking human beings like sacks of potatoes?

And why was her family's home now a blazing torch? Why were their treasured possessions piled carelessly on the dusty ground for the invaders to ransack?

Above all, why were the most important people in her life not here to banish her terror and bewilderment? "Papa! Mama!"

Tall figures were striding toward the children, and the shifting patterns of shadow and firelight could not hide that they were strangers. Behind these men, the flames blazed higher, their ugly, red glare falling across the growing mound.



The girl caught sight of lighter strands among the black in the pile. Pale, familiar features that looked still and asleep. Tossed, sprawling shapes filthy with stains that were not mud. “Papa! Mama!”

She hardly heard her playmate’s anguished screams as he hurled himself across the clearing. Her sister, still tight in her grip, was screaming too, but the older girl made no move or sound. Perhaps if she shut her eyes, this would all go away, like the bad dreams her father’s strong arms and her mother’s kisses so easily wiped away. “*This is my Father’s world. . .*”

*Papa! Mama!*

She did not immediately recognize the furious voices as a language she knew.

“No witnesses. Those are the orders.”

“Are you out of your mind? They’re children—babies! Haven’t your goons butchered enough for one day?”

“You think this madness is our doing?”

“No, just our enabling.”

Rough hands pushed aside the older girl’s matted curls, wiping at the mud on her face. “Hey, take a look at this. These kids aren’t locals.”

“You’re telling me they belong to—well, if this isn’t . . . Hey, get away from those cameras! No records. Do I have to spell it out? *¿Qué hacen? ¡Muévense!*

Heavy footsteps moved away, the harsh shouts no longer intelligible. Then she was being carried to one of the strange vehicles, her sister’s shivering small body settled into her arms.

“Don’t cry, sweethearts,” a deep voice whispered. “Everything’s going to be all right. You’re safe now.”

Young though she was, the girl knew it to be a lie.

She would never feel safe again.

### *Twenty Years Later*

So the rumors were true.

The stillness alerted the patrol even before their army Jeep jolted to a stop in the middle of the scuffed-dirt open space that was all this mountain hamlet boasted for a plaza.

There were no chickens or pigs rooting through the unpaved lanes. No women grinding maize or bent over the cooking pits. No shrill shouts of children's play. The patrol leader paused to dig at an ominously dark stain with his boot as his unit fanned out through the village, using automatic rifle butts to smash in rudely constructed bamboo doors.

"¡Capitán! Over here."

A box shape of cinder blocks roofed with galvanized tin across the village commons was the hamlet's only solid construction. The patrol leader strode over to where two of his squad had already battered in the door. A single blackboard and the wooden benches tumbled across the concrete floor identified the community schoolhouse/town hall/storm shelter.

And morgue.

The patrol leader snapped his fingers. "Tell the gringo we have found them."

His aide had no difficulty with the order. The army contingent was young, dark skinned, with the stunted growth and wiry leanness of the chronically underfed. Peasant conscripts too poor to buy their way out of military service.

The only exception stood under a nearby thatched cooking shelter, his height as conspicuous as the lightness of his hair and eyes. The recruit interpreted the thoughtful expression as the foreigner poked a stick into a pot of beans sitting on a burned-out cook fire. No villager would purposely abandon good food.

"Señor, *el capitán* requests your presence."

The gringo's long strides outpaced the recruit. As he reached the broken-down door, the patrol leader thrust out an arm. "It is not necessary to enter. There is nothing now to be done."

But the foreigner was already shouldering past. Crowding into the doorway behind him, the patrol leader and his recruits watched the

gringo stop abruptly as his boots met the puddled stickiness that was everywhere across the concrete floor.

No one had been spared. The men of the village showed no signs of resistance, had perhaps not even known what was coming. Splayed half-sitting against the far wall or sprawled like tossed dolls on the concrete floor, they lay in an oddly tidy row where the rapid fire of machine guns had mowed them down. The women had not been allowed to die so quickly.

And the children . . .

Stooping, the foreigner ran a swift hand to close an empty stare of a boy not yet school-age. When he swung around to face the soldiers, the cold implacability of his expression was surpassed only by the ice chips of his gaze. "So . . . it begins again."

“Señoras y señores, AeroMéxico Flight 621 is now beginning its final descent into Aeropuerto Aurora, international airport of Guatemala City.” The intercom announcement coincided with a flashing sign overhead: *Abroche Cinturón*.

Halfway down the crowded cabin of the 727, Vicki Andrews obediently fastened her seat belt, raised the shade of her window seat, and peered down. The landscape varied little from any one of a dozen developing nations into which she'd flown over the last few years. Admittedly spectacular scenery, followed inevitably by humanity's impact on that splendor. In this case Vicki couldn't tell if the white peaks of the hills and volcanic cones that ringed the highland basin in which Guatemala City squatted were snow or fog.

The plane banked to line up for approach to the airport. Beyond its control tower and terminals, Vicki could see the celebrated Zone 10 of Guatemala City. Sparkling glass towers that were luxury hotels and banks. The gracious, tree-lined Avenida de la Reforma with its nightclubs, American chain restaurants, high-priced boutiques, and foreign embassies. And terraced up hillsides, the mansions, bristling with security, where Guatemala's wealthy elite escaped the third world. An attractive scene and all that many international arrivals would ever see of the capital. Vicki was not one of them.

The plane tilted its wings as it dropped farther, offering beyond the glittering Zone 10 an excellent panorama of the other Guatemala City, where the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants lived and toiled. A warren of narrow streets. Crumbling adobe facades defaced by political graffiti. A sea of red tiles pockmarked with tin and Duralite roofing. Squeezed into every available opening and crawling up the steep sides of the mountain basin were the shanties of the poor, cobbled together from scrap lumber, tin, and even cardboard.

Far off to Vicki's right, one of Guatemala's less-advertised landmarks slashed through the shantytowns—a deep and wide ravine, originally a conduit for a major river tributary. Now a receptacle of a very different sort, its uneven and discolored surface reached within meters of the rim with what she knew to be thousands of tons of waste. Guatemala City's municipal dump. Vicki's destination.

If it was all depressingly familiar, it evoked no memories. So why had she been so reluctant to come here?

Giving up on the scenery, Vicki flipped back to the country info she'd printed out, picking up where she'd left off.

*The heart of the Mayan empire, Guatemala fell to Spanish conquest in the 1500s. Centuries of colonial rule led to a highly stratified society with the indigenous Mayan majority relegated to a feudal-style peonage; a rising urban Ladino, or Spanish/Mayan, class; and a largely European ruling elite. . . . By the 1950s, US-owned United Fruit Company was Guatemala's largest landowner, giving rise to the term banana republic. With coffee and banana plantations dependent on Mayan forced labor, the election of reform candidate Colonel Jacobo Arbenz was greeted with dismay by both the local aristocracy and international business interests. A CIA-sponsored coup ushered in a half century of military regimes, punctuated by populist uprisings and army reprisals. . . .*

*By the time the 1996 Peace Accords marked a cease-fire of the civil war, more than two hundred thousand civilians had disappeared or been massacred. Though a UN Truth Commission found the Guatemalan army responsible for more than 90 percent of atrocities, the United States has maintained strong business and political ties, lauding Guatemala as one of their strongest allies in the war on socialism. . . .*

*Lush rain forests, sandy beaches, and a colorful blend of Mayan and Spanish cultures make Guatemala a tropical paradise. However, with social inequities remaining unaddressed and a spiraling crime rate, the US Embassy Watch advises caution for any of its citizens. . . .*

*Tropical paradise!* Vicki began packing up her belongings as the plane landed and taxied to the terminal.

Vicki waited until the aisle was clear before sliding out of her seat and grabbing her purse and duffel bag—her only luggage. Experience had taught her the value of being able to sling all her belongings over her shoulder and walk away from a plane, a bus, a riot.

The immigration lines were still long by the time Vicki found the one marked *Extranjero*, “foreigner.” A stamp in her passport, and she moved on to customs, a row of wooden tables set up beyond the baggage claim. Unsmiling guards with automatic rifles hovered near as Vicki’s duffel bag was emptied out, the seams probed with the tip of a penknife. The same penknife dug into her deodorant, leaving white chunks like dandruff on her clothing.

Again, depressingly familiar.

It was also a routine part of her job, Vicki reminded herself sternly as she stuffed and zipped the duffel bag. So why was she being so sour?

*I’m just tired.* This last assignment had overrun her calculations by more than two weeks, and she’d barely had time to write up and fax the final report before boarding her plane for Guatemala City.

Shouldering her maltreated belongings, Vicki headed for the Plexiglas wall that separated the baggage claim and customs from a milling crowd waiting for arrivals outside.

A trick of lighting displayed her reflection, and Vicki took in the image she was about to accord her reception party. Rumpled jeans and a T-shirt. Shoulder-length dark brown hair pulled into a tight ponytail. The fine coating of perspiration and dust that was her only makeup. An amber glare blazing behind her lashes. No jewelry of any sort. Where Vicki spent her days, that was a red flag for a mugging.

Not a prepossessing first impression.

The image dissolved, and Vicki dismissed it with a shrug. Travel from one municipal dump to another hardly called for haute couture.

Vicki showed her passport along with her hard-earned customs clearance to a final armed guard and was out the door.

Outside, a metal railing held the crowd back from the Plexiglas, but with every emerging passenger, bodies surged against the barrier, calling out names, many holding up placards.

Vicki found herself instinctively searching the crowd for a familiar face before reeling herself in to read the placards. There would be no one she knew waiting in that welcoming throng.

She had traversed almost the entire gauntlet of reaching hands and pressing bodies when she spotted the one she wanted. A hand-lettered square of cardboard read *Casa de Esperanza*, "House of Hope."

Its bearer was as visibly expatriate as Vicki herself, an elderly woman not much shorter than Vicki but stooped and thinned with age to little more than a child's size. She looked so familiar that Vicki found herself stopping midstep until she realized the woman was a living embodiment of any number of black-and-white historical photos of American missionaries abroad that Vicki had come across in her research. The bun still showing a few threads of its original auburn in the white. The shapeless cotton smock reaching modestly to the tops of dark knee socks. Sturdy walking shoes.

Vicki swallowed a laugh. Was this already a total waste of her time?

Then she caught a shrewd, bright gaze, a smile that held so much understanding, warmth, and youth that Vicki decided to reserve her judgment. Walking forward, she set down her duffel bag, then held out her hand. "Hello, you must be Evelyn McKie, who founded Casa de Esperanza. I'm—"

But now it was the missionary whose aged features held startled recognition. "Victoria?"



As the child of missionary parents, award-winning author Jeanette Windle grew up in the rural villages, jungles, and mountains of Colombia, now guerrilla hot zones. Currently living in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Jeanette spent sixteen years as a missionary in Bolivia and travels as a missions journalist and mentor to Christian writers in a dozen countries. Her detailed research and writing is so realistic that it has prompted government agencies to question her to determine if she has received classified information. She has fourteen books in print, including the best seller *CrossFire* and the Parker Twins series.