

The tunnel was dark with only a small disc of light at the far end illuminating the way. He kept hitting his bare toes on rocks and other unseen obstacles on the cave floor. He felt like his feet were bleeding and he worried that he might not be able to walk because of the pain but still, he marched forward, drawn to the light like moth to flame. He was dizzy. It was exhaustion he knew but he also knew there was danger behind him in the deep recesses of the dark, a monster that would devour him whole, bones and all. So he kept marching forward. There was a scream, more like a roar echoing from behind. *Move it, damn it!*

But he couldn't. He felt like his legs were moving through drying cement. Then there was a trickling of water from behind. Then a whoosh! The tunnel was filling with water. Suddenly, he was swept away with the rushing water but he realized that was okay; it was bringing him closer to the ever-diminishing light. The tunnel then turned vertical and he was floating; above was a deep blue sky. He prayed the water kept filling the tunnel, floating him closer to the sky. But it was not to be. His heart pounded and his lungs began to fill and he was sucked beneath the surface, being drawn to the darkness below. As hope had escaped he felt something grab at his hair and now despair was replaced with optimism. But his hair was gone, replaced by stubble and there was nothing to grab hold of. Panic! He reached up with his hand and he felt the soft, delicate skin of a woman's hand. He tried with all his might but it was as if the hand was coated with grease. Finally,

the hand was gone and he sank effortlessly into the darkness.

Whitte awoke and sat upright, his head bounced off the bulkhead. He grabbed his forehead as if to keep his scrambled brain from pouring out. He saw stars. He lay there for a moment on a soft latex mattress, the sound of men shouting and machinery grinding poured through an open porthole. Acclimated, he turned on his stomach and edged himself off the high bunk and onto the floor.

He had spoken with the captain the evening before and he was reminded of the swashbucklers of two centuries before that prowled these very waters. The man was dark with a purple scar jagging down the left side of his face, disappearing into an unkempt beard. He smoked a cheroot that smelled of canned fish and coal-fired boilers. The captain had told Whitte he was free to move around the ship but had been content to keep a low profile. Now, he needed fresh air.

Seagulls called out their search for easy food and the mixed smell of diesel and salt momentarily made him nauseous. All the same, once acclimated, the air was welcome after the stale stench of manhood from the cabin he shared with a Portuguese officer that spoke no English. The sun was bright but still young. Below him was the open cargo hold being emptied of bales of tobacco destined to be rolled as “legal” Cuban cigars for consumption in America. A bale was held high above by a crane lowering it to the dock.

“Mr. Whitte, I hope the evening was pleasant.” The captain was smiling, knowing damned well that the evening had been anything but pleasant. He held out a card to Whitte. “Here is the name of the captain of the *Silver Slider*. It will be docked in this spot around four this afternoon. As I told you last night, it’s heading for Dominica and that’s where you

said you wanted to go?”

Whitte nodded, his head pounding. He took the card. “Thanks, I appreciate it.” He glanced at the card and put it into his pocket. “What time are you heading out?”

“We should be out by three. The *Slider* will leave around midnight so make sure you are on board well before then.”

“Am I going to have any trouble with immigration?”

He laughed. “What immigration?” He handed him an official looking form, filled out and signed. “Hand this to the man at the gate. It’s a shore pass and will readmit you to the docks when you are ready. Of course, you can stay on the docks until the *Slider* arrives.”

Whitte considered that—certainly less dangerous than going into town but he needed things and he needed to be reminded that there was a normal world out there beyond strange people who framed him for murder.

Two more bails were unloaded while they talked. The seagulls fluttered around and Whitte was ready to rejoin the real world. He bid the captain goodbye, thanking him again for his help and grabbed his knapsack from his cabin and walked down the gantry to the solid dock.

Whitte was on dry land again, his stomach’s contents empty, tired and battered from the storm but now it was sunny, a day full of promise. Whitte walked through the guarded gate with no problem. There were a couple of cabs parked at the end of the dock so he took one into St. John. His first order of business was to secure a cell phone but not before eating.

The cab dropped him off in the heart of downtown, where the cruise ships docked. Just outside of the duty-free shops, Whitte found a small restaurant called Hemingway's on the second story of a clapboard house. The tavern's management saw fit to claim—on the back of their menus—that the portly, bearded author had indeed eaten at this very restaurant: Tourist bullshit or a true, obscure little piece of history? Whitte didn't care. It was civilization and he wanted to bask in it as long as possible before boarding the next ship. He ordered a beer and a grilled catch of the day and finally began to feel somewhat normal.

The meal was edible. After a third beer, he paid the tab and ambled down the claustrophobic staircase to the bustling, narrow street below. He noticed a man standing next to a news rack with a paper in hand. He was staring directly at Whitte. Jack glanced down and saw his picture, the one from the Board of Directors on the Whitte Industries' website staring at him from behind the plastic cover. His dark wavy hair was combed neatly back across his scalp and was in such contrast to the shabby, bristly haircut he now sported. Looking at the picture he realized he'd never look like that again.

He scratched the growth on his face in an exaggerated manner. "Blimey," Whitte began. "What an asshole." It was the best British accent he could muster; it sounded like a Texan doing Phil Collins doing Sean Connery, if that were even possible. His first inclination was to do French or German but the man was very slender, wearing tight, white jeans and a tight, blue and white striped tee shirt. Across his chest was slung a man purse and, to complete the stereotypical urban European, a fanny pack around his waist.

"Me wife thinks I look just like that bloke," Whitte announced motioning toward

the newspaper.

“You do look like him,” the man purred in a French accent, “somewhat. Same nose,” he smiled as if appreciating Whitte’s looks. “You need not worry however,” he said pointing to the article. “They are no longer searching for him here. He was spotted in Switzerland.”

Whitte smiled and nodded, “Au revoir.” The only thought that entered his mind was fear. It was the Group. They had the only reason to misdirect, not wanting to risk him being picked up by local cops. He stumbled down the street, almost getting clipped by a local doing his best to be hip-hop.

He glanced down at his trousers. There was a large oil stain on his left thigh. He didn’t look touristy enough, too much like a vagabond. He went into a clothing shop and bought several shorts and sports shirts, river shoes, a baseball cap, and sunglasses and emerged a white, middleclass gas plant accountant from Sioux Falls, South Dakota—if anyone struck up a conversation he knew enough about the town because WO&G had a few natural gas fields they developed nearby. He packed the extra clothes in his knapsack and threw away the old. Now in his disguise he spotted a shop that sold prepaid cell phones. Ten minutes later he was good to go.

Whitte had read enough spy novels to be paranoid about bad guys being able to trace phone calls so he wouldn’t place the call until just before he boarded the ship bound for Dominica and afterwards would toss it into the sea.

He strolled within the Heritage Quay with tourists, bars, and shops closing in around him. Suddenly, a disturbance to the left caught his attention. A man was screaming

at a waitress who had apparently tripped and spilled strawberry daiquiris and piña coladas onto him at a small outdoor bar. It wasn't the spectacle of the ugly American tourist cursing out the young sobbing girl that kept his attention. Sitting to their side was Britannia Morgan flanked by the beefy security guy from Genesis Cay, Frank Wright. Brita was staring off into oblivion, oblivious to the ruckus behind her while Wright looked on with amusement. Whitte dove in behind a woman who was examining some tee shirts hanging outside of a shop.

His first instinct was to run. Run as fast and as far away as he could possibly go and then run some more. But the old adage, *keep your friends close and your enemies closer*, came to mind. Sitting across the way were both friend and foe. He casually strolled to an outdoor bar across the way from Brita and Wright, sat and ordered, "Something fruity." He pulled his hat down low and lit a cigarette.

After the commotion across the way died down, Wright tried to engage Brita in conversation but she ignored him. Finally, he gave up and began playing with what looked like a smart phone of some sort. At one point Wright looked directly to where Whitte was. He didn't panic; he took a sip from the tall glass with a pineapple slice on the side and slowly turned his head as if he were people watching. When he glanced back, Wright was speaking on a cell phone, a different one from which he had been playing with, looking away from Whitte. Had he been seen?

He continued to observe them. If Wright had seen him, he didn't seem to be in a hurry to come pick him up. But what if Wright had called for back up? Suddenly this little game he was playing had lost its appeal. He signaled the bartender for the check and

handed him one of the prepaid charge cards he possessed.

Just as Whitte was about to get up, Wright leaned across the table to Brita, spoke into her ear, tossed a couple of bills on the table, and stood. Whitte's heart began to pound even harder. But Wright didn't come his way. In fact, he walked out to Market Street and took a left, away from Brita and Whitte. Now, sitting all alone, Brita sat up and watched Wright walk away. After Wright had been gone for five minutes, Brita took a sip of water and then left and headed up High Street, the steep road heading into the heart of St. John. Whitte followed.

She kept her pace as an inquisitive tourist. Up several blocks to the left was St. Johns Cathedral. She moved in that direction.

As Whitte followed discreetly behind he became aware of impassive stares from the locals. At first he thought they might recognize him so he pulled his hat down lower. But that wasn't it. He was out of bounds. Tourists weren't welcome—or at least that was what his paranoid mind told him—and he'd better not fuck with them.

Brita crossed over to Long Street and paused. She glanced into a store window and then looked back down the street. Whitte stepped into an opened shop. Then she continued across the street in the same preoccupied manner with which most tourists approached a new experience. A small scooter passed in front of her and she stopped to let it pass and then made it to the sidewalk and up into the cemetery that sat beside the limestone cathedral. People lounged on the aboveground vaults, seemingly with no respect for the dead, as they snoozed or ate their lunch from brown paper bags. Tombstones were scattered in varying levels of decay with weeds and dying grass tugging downward on the stones. The grounds

had been majestic once but somewhere along the way it lost its calling to salvation and the subsequent deterioration was sad to behold. It was macabre and lent an air of danger.

It could very well be a trap but he couldn't help himself so he followed her through the graveyard and up the steps. He paused in front of a small plaque announcing that the cathedral, built in 1845, had been the third reincarnation with the first built in 1683 and the second in 1745. Earthquakes had destroyed the two previous attempts at deliverance and Whitte wondered whether the island was overdue for another. The towering wood door was battered and in advanced degrees of degradation. Sometimes, neglect approaches the phase of apathy and this cathedral was certainly now at that stage.

The elevated, once grand wood door was ajar, perhaps permanently stuck in that position. Whitte squeezed in and what he saw was awe-inspiring. The entire interior was built of wood—Whitte guessed mahogany, its retreating stain contributing to the sense of decay—with carvings of incredible detail, stretching up two stories. He tried to image what it would have looked like in its well-maintained glory. There were no visible light fixtures, compensated with candlestick candelabras scattered throughout the cathedral. Electric oscillating fans—the only clue of modern life—pushed the stifling air from the balcony to the aisle but had very little effect on comfort. The air was hot and stale with a hint of mold. He guessed services were conducted in the dark with only the light of candles, hurricane lanterns, and what little light the great stain glass above the Apse allowed.

It took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the darkness and he felt he was intruding into a world not meant for his kind however there was a custodian standing at the entrance that nodded and smiled. He cleared his throat and Whitte realized that he was expected to



pay for the privilege of entry so he pulled a twenty from his pocket and stuffed it into the collection box.

Whitte inched forward and he could hear someone mumbling incantations. There was an old woman kneeling in a pew to his left and a priest kneeling down before the giant cross near the altar. He couldn't see Brita. The priest stood, head bowed before the cross, crossed himself, and kissed his rosary. He turned to spy Whitte. It was odd; the priest was wearing sunglasses. He turned to his left and vanished behind a curtain. Faint hollow footsteps could be heard on wood. The priest was climbing stairs to the balcony. It was then that he saw a person kneeling in the first pew. It was so dark that it was impossible to discern the gender or race of the person but when she stood and the faint light from the stained glass illuminated her, it was quite obviously Brita. She never looked back; instead she followed the priest behind the curtain but he didn't hear the same hollow footsteps leading up the balcony.

Whitte considered his options. He could continue through the Crossing to the North Transept or to the left through the Nave. He could venture into the dark, uninviting aisle that led to the altar. He looked back to the custodian for a hint but he was gone. Then he heard a door whine open and then bang shut near the altar. Damn. He did not want to venture any further into the bowels of this eerie cathedral but it was obvious that Brita had left the building.

He began to lurk along the aisle toward the Chancel with trepidation and as he was a third of the way into the darkness, the railing of a pew in front of him exploded followed by what sounded like a hammer striking concrete. He stopped dead. What the hell? A

second small explosion erupted in the wood behind him and he quickly threw his knapsack into the pew and dived, head down. He positioned himself to face the aisle and raised his head slowly, his knapsack shielding his face, and examined the balcony above.

There, in the darkness was a man crouched behind a support beam with gun in hand. Was it the priest? He had shot at him and now stared down at him like a cat waiting for the mouse to scurry. The man was large but squat with close-cropped black hair but he couldn't see distinguishing features of his face behind the sunglasses. Obviously it was the priest defrocked. Whitte wondered how the hell the guy could see with the sunglasses in the diluted light. Then the man in priest clothing ducked behind a pew. Whitte glanced around the cathedral. The one woman reciting incantations didn't seem disturbed by the echoing shots. He slowly rose, watching for the priest the entire time. He began backing toward the exit thirty yards away when a hand grabbed his arm and he jumped, his breath pounded from his chest. It was the old woman.

"I's know I's a sinner. I's knows I's no good but I's can be redeemed," she spoke through a toothless mouth.

Whitte glanced at her as he pulled his arm away. "Please go away."

"Oh, I's knows I's a niggah in yours eyes. But I's can change. I's can be blessed."

Whitte pushed her away as he tried to make his escape.

"I's be good."

Whitte took a bill from his pocket and thrust it into her hand. "Now go away," he instructed. "And buy some self-esteem."

"I's thank ya. The lard be forgivin' ya your sins."

Whitte turned and walked forcibly toward the exit and as he cleared the door he turned and peeked back but saw no one but the woman who was now walking out a side door. He was unsure what to do next. The priest had wanted him to abandon his pursuit of Brita and that made it imperative for Whitte to find her. He ducked around the secluded north side of the church and crept among the weeds and vines until he reached the end of the wall. There was a small wooden door leading from the Chancel. He opened it slightly and he could hear strong footsteps echoing on the wooden floor. He quietly pulled the door shut and hid behind an oleander bush anchored by a stone covered flowerbed. Scuffling through the rock, he found two palm-size, smooth stones and put them in his pocket.

The man exited resolutely, no longer in priest garb, and took in his surroundings and proceeded east, away from the church. Whitte followed, dodging gravestones and keeping a concealed line of sight as the man turned and walked down a sidewalk to the street above. Whitte cleared the gate and emerged behind him. The man turned left, away from the center of town and walked among the clapboard houses with flaking pastels, glancing down alleys as he progressed. The man stopped and Whitte lunged behind a house. He waited ten seconds and then peered around the corner. The man was gone.

Whitte moved quickly to where the man had been and glanced around a corner into an alley. At the far end he could see Brita emerging from the darkness of the alley into the light of the far street. She turned right, toward the city. The man was between them, moving quickly.

Whitte entered the alley and threw down his knapsack. Lining up the man, Whitte let loose with a rock. It had been years since he had thrown a baseball but the projectile left

his hand with great force and accuracy and the stone struck the man, 15 yards away, at the base of his neck, throwing him forward into the ground. Whitte retrieved his knapsack and ran to the man.

He was not moving. Whitte felt for the carotid artery and there was a strong pulse and he was breathing. He examined the alley and there were no witnesses. Searching the man, he found a gun in a nylon holster in the back band of his trousers and a long cylinder, the silencer, in his right pocket. There was no wallet or other forms of identification. The man had a wad of cash in his pocket; Whitte relieved him of that. He turned the man over and staggered back.

He removed the sunglasses revealing a strong face with a scar creasing his chin; it was a face came crashing through the blanket of mist that had smothered Whitte's mind since the night of Abigail Spencer's murder. This man had been there, in the bathroom where Abby had led him from the dance floor. Whitte felt a sting on his neck and he covered it with his hand. It was an echo-prick from that night. The man had wielded a syringe. But why? Why had Abby led him into a trap? Or had she been surprised as well? He wanted to strangle this man. His mind leapt to a conclusion: *Why did you kill Abby!*

He screwed the suppressor into the gun pushed the muzzle of the silencer to the man's forehead. He glanced up and down the alley. There was no one. His finger tightened on the trigger and if he had sneezed, the finger would have constricted and the man's head would be irreparably destroyed. He eased back. He placed the gun next to his knapsack and pulled the man toward several trashcans overflowing with garbage. The man was shorter than Whitte by a good four inches but he was a pit bull: compact, powerful, solid, deadly. If

Whitte would ever have to fight this man, he would lose but right now, it didn't matter. He had a gun. An equalizer.

Whitte crunched the sunglasses beneath his foot.

The alley stunk enough to make Whitte feel it in his mouth. There was a pile of trash next to a rusted metal door. Whitte drug the man to the pile. Kicked him hard in the ribs, which elicited a grunt. Then he pulled several boxes of decaying food and other trash onto the still body. He stowed the gun and the man's other belongings in his knapsack, which was now becoming quite full. He examined the alley once more and set off to find Brita. By the time he reemerged in daylight she was long gone. It was pointless to search. He considered going back to the man he had subdued to wake him, to torture him, to make him talk and finally to kill him but he was already too exposed: Best to retreat.

With choppy black hair and over-sized sunglasses, no one would recognize Britannia Morgan so she mindlessly made her way back down High Street, her meeting a failure. Someone had entered the church and it had spooked her contact, the former CIA secret agent that she had had a fling with. When she had spoken to him on her cell phone the day before, he had promised he'd get her off the island. He had whispered to her to go back the tourist area and stay in the open. He would find her and so she had followed him out and while he went up the stairs, she had ducked out the back.

Now she was stumbling down the steep road, her purse hooped over her shoulder, both arms folded under her breasts as she walked with her head down. Someone had

offered to sell her some ganja when she first emerged from the alley. Now, she wished she had bought it and snuck off down an alley and smoked it. It would have relaxed her. But she had to keep her wits about her. It was then that she realized a white man had fallen in step with her to her right.

He was shorter than her, maybe by an inch, and wore his brown hair in a crew cut. He was neither handsome nor ugly and would be easily lost in a crowd or be the center of attention. The only distinguishing feature was a jagged scar cut across his chin, which of course signaled danger to her.

From the corner of her eye she could tell he kept stealing glances at her. She quickened her pace. He did as well. She slowed down, as did he. Finally she stopped and looked him in the eyes. They were hollow eyes with nothing behind them.

“I’m not who you think.”

“Who do I think you are?” he said with a faint American mid-western accent.

She shrugged her shoulder and began to walk away.

He smiled at her as he turned to match her stride. “I know who you are.” He reached out and grabbed her elbow. Before she could pull away, he pulled up his tee shirt just enough for her to see the handle of a handgun poke out from the top of his waistband.

A black Honda sedan pulled up next to them.

“Suppose we take a ride,” he said nudging her toward the car. “I’d like to know who you met with.” She pulled on him but he held tight. “Come now, Ms. Morgan. I’m your biggest fan.”

The day was now fading away. Whitte returned to the Heritage Quay, the tourists returning to their cruise ship, and hailed a taxi to take him back to the industrial port. He had given some thought to trying to find Brita but something nagged at the back of his mind to stay away. She had obviously led him into a trap and it was pure luck, and his own stupid risks that kept him free. Overall, however, the trip into town had been a success. He'd bought new clothes and more importantly, a disposable cell phone. He only needed to make one call and then he'd toss it into the sea.

As promised, the *Silver Slider* was berthed where the *Calpine Explorer* had been and he saw a man very similar to the captain he'd left behind directing people to various tasks. Whitte approached him and handed him the card the *Calpine's* captain had given him. The man smiled and began speaking some eastern European dialect that Whitte had no clue as to what he was being told but the man smiled and directed him up the gantry.

From the deck, Whitte stood looking back at Antigua. It was a beautiful island, as all were in the Caribbean, but something dangerous had happened and he wasn't sure what it was. He dug around in his knapsack, trying to keep the gun out of sight, and was able to get to his money in the secret flap. When he pulled it out—he was going to add the money he'd taken off the guy he'd wacked in the alley—a small device, about the size of a quarter fell to the deck. He picked it up. It was encased in clear plastic and inside he could see a watch battery and a small circuit board.

He was being tracked!

He was about to throw it into the water but held up. He placed it just inside of a life

ring attached to the bulkhead. He waited till dark and just before they pulled up the gantry he scurried down and made his way to the guarded gate. They let him through with no problems. He ordered a cabbie to take him to a hotel—something cheep—and as the cab rumbled down the potholed road back to St. John, he made his phone call.