

## 40 One in a Million

“I feel like I’ve got a thumb up my ass,” groaned Johnson into the Bluetooth that was hidden beneath the funky Rastafarian wig he had bought at a tourist dive near the cruise dock.

“It’s the bike seat,” Tiffany laughed.

“Yeah, that too,” he responded as he stood and moved forward off of the seat.

A white man approached the entrance to Banco de Mercantil Petróleo branch in Castries City, St. Lucia. Johnson reached down and squeezed the bulb of his bicycle horn. The man turned to face the annoying honk and Tiffany, peering through a telephoto lens, snapped his picture. She immediately downloaded it onto her laptop and initiated the search on her pirated CIA facial recognition software. Two minutes passed then she mumbled, “Nothing.”

“I’d rather be at a resort reading.”

“At least you’re outdoors.”

“Yeah, and I’m sweating. How much longer till it’s your turn?”

“Still another twenty minutes,” she lied. She should have relieved him ten minutes before.

Muller had flown them into Castries two nights before and cleared a very lax customs using the Reggie Upton and Ann Bolton identities provided by OIC. Muller had explained the two were doing a series of articles on travel in the Caribbean, with hopes of

selling the series to the *New York Times* travel section. Tourism contributes the greatest percent of GDP to most of the island nations so they were treated as VIPs. It had been laidback enough for them to smuggle their Berretta Storms stowed in the camera bag. At least they felt safe in this rugged part of town.

Horse shifted on his seat. “Here comes a woman.” He honked, the woman looked and Tiffany captured her digitally.

“Nope.” She was becoming dejected. They had been at this since yesterday morning and three hours invested this day. Tiffany initially suggested the search for whoever was using the BMP Whitte Industries account with the enthusiasm of a nerdy schoolgirl with a crush on the star quarterback but as the hours peeled away, it was becoming apparent that the QB favored the head cheerleader.

Still, it was the only course of action they could come up with. They assumed it was probably someone associated with Whitte Industries but that could be false. Humphries had provided a flash drive file that contained well over three thousand pictures of people associated with Whitte Industries. Most were current or former employees but it also included any contractor or professional service provider—such as lawyers and accountants—that had worked for the conglomerate. So, this operation consisted of trying to identify a man or woman who was associated with the Whitte family who might be using a Whitte Industries’ account for personal or even company business, who came into the bank to conduct business at an average of once a month—Tiffany had calculated this when she had discovered the account in WI books—and would, by chance, be using the account on this very day. It was like trying to hit a rat running on top of a tractor-trailer moving at ninety

miles an hour, from fifty yards away with a BB gun. However, Humphries' files had suggested that this was key to unlocking the mystery who Jack Whitte might try to contact —on the oft chance that Whitte were free to do so—to assist in his running from the law. They also suggested that the account would be accessed soon.

A tall, potbellied man with shaggy white beard approached the bank. Johnson honked. The man was oblivious as he continued into the bank. “Shit.”

“Catch him on the way out,” Tiffany instructed.

After twenty minutes, and two other people entering the bank, the potbellied man came out. Johnson honked. No reaction. Then he let loose on the bulb in a most annoying manner. Still nothing. “Hey, mother fucker!” he screamed. Everybody glared at Horse, including the man.

“Got it!” Tiffany cried out.

The man huffed at Horse and turned a corner and was out of sight.

She pulled the camera back and looked at the small LCD screen and toggled through the menu until she was staring at the old man. It had been twenty-five years. While she ran it anyway, she didn't need the facial recognition software to tell her whom it was.

“Why that be Willy White,” said the woman behind the counter of the Document Centre in downtown Castries. “He lives over near Soufrière.”

“Are you sure?” Johnson asked as he folded his Texas Ranger's badge back into his wallet.

“Oh, yes, dear,” she smiled at the tall Texan. “He comes in here ‘bout once a month,” she confirmed in her colorful Carib lilt, “To mail dings and such.” As her two customers turned to leave she asked, “You still want your pictures?”

Tiffany smiled. “Yes, ma’am. Thanks.”

The bell dinged as they let the door close back on itself.

“Give me five!” said Tiffany excitedly, holding up her hand. Horse slapped it.

“Down low,” mumbled Horse as he held his hand below his knee. She slapped it.

“Now back up high,” he said holding his hand a good three feet above her head. She shot him a dirty look. “Hee, hee you’re short,” he laughed, then added, “But smart.”

“Damn straight!”

“I still don’t believe it,” Johnson said.

Tiffany shrugged. “Nothing about this case surprises me anymore.”

They walked into a drug store that was next to the office center to buy a map of the island. As they stood in line, Tiffany gave way to impulse buying as she picked up some gum, a few candy bars, and a copy of the local newspaper, the St. Lucia Star. Walking back toward their parked car, Horse started thumbing through the thin paper.

“At least Whitte’s no longer gaining any local attention. Don’t see anything on him.”

“That’s good,” she responded, tossing the car key to Horse. “You drive.”

She took the paper from Horse and began looking through it as he started the jeep.

“Looks like they have the same problems we do. Here’s a story on gas taxes being too high. Another on shady politicians. Oh, here’s one on a wreck. A guy was heading down a

road and was hit, pushing his lorry down into a ravine.” She turned the paper back to the front page. “Ah, this one will keep Jack out of the headlines. Another self-centered Hollywood creep OD’ed on drugs.”

“Who?” Horse asked. He’d seen the story but hadn’t recognized the name.

“Britannia Morgan. You, know. She was in *Just Hit Me*.”

Horse shook his head. “I don’t really watch TV anymore.”

Tiffany shrugged.

The Learjet 40 XR seemed to hover above the water as it lined up with the peninsular runway at Charles Airport. A passenger aboard one the two cruise ships docked that day thought the jet was going to land in the trees. It’s an optical illusion of sorts; just a small spit of the runway can be seen from the bay. It appears to be narrow, much too so for a plane to land. A witness would swear the plane flew straight into the jungle and it was a miracle nothing was set ablaze but then, in a flash of an eye, some fifty yards down range, the witness would see the jet speed by a small opening in the trees and know all was well.

At the end of the runway, the jet slowed and turned and taxied back to a hanger furthest from the small terminal. A jeep followed the jet and once inside the hanger, George Crosswell, general counsel for Whitte Industries, was standing on the top stair of the jet awaiting the visit from customs. The two uniformed men checked Crosswell’s passport and then asked permission to search the jet, which he granted. After a few moments aboard, they thanked him for his cooperation. After they left, the pilot stepped out from the plane

and closed the hanger doors.

The customs officials were courteous and thorough though why they never opened the closed hatch set in the middle of the aisle in the jet was a mystery. Not that they would have seen anything. Still, there was something there, something that would not have made it through a more traditional security screening.

Johnson and Marks drove out of Castries with the top on the Suzuki Jimny down and as they passed the Hess Oil Company oil storage facility to their right and turned up into the mountains, they were both blown away. The paradise of Adam and Eve had nothing on this place. Sweet nectar of anonymous flowers and fruits floating on the cool but humid air overloaded their olfactory system. Horse was driving so Tiffany sat up and closed her eyes, letting the wind rake through her hair. Through the encroaching jungle they drove over wild, cascading rivers coming out of the mountains and passed clearings of banana, avocado, and mango groves. Horse quickly learned that to remain alive on the swerving and swinging one-lane road cut into the side of the mountain, he had to slow and honk as he reached a turn lest they ram head-on into a cargo truck or tour bus.

After nearly two hours, they crossed over a ridge and the fishing village of Soufrière appeared in the valley below, framed by the jungle and sea and painted by a brushstroke of God. It's a coastal fishing village with red and green roofs with soft white sand and turquoise water as its doormat. The slender lines of fishing boats beached along the town's only dock were just visible. Two caldera lava domes, Gros and Petit Titon, rise

to steep points, like shark's teeth, and dwarf the village below. Not seen through the vegetation was Qualibou, a smoldering sulfur-spewing crater that last erupted in 1766.

Tiffany awoke from the mesmerizing beauty that is St. Lucia and consulted the hand-drawn map that the clerk at the office service shop had provided and compared it to the one they bought at the drug store.

"We take a left up ahead," she instructed.

Horse turned off the main road that led to Soufrière onto a drive, loose rocks popping under the tires. Ahead, about twenty yards, they could see a turn in and a roof peeking over the jungle. Johnson stopped short. "Let's not announce our visit."

They walked up the drive and turned a bend. There was a small complex of smaller buildings built into the hill situated around a main house with a stone façade.

The old man was standing behind a beat up pickup truck, directing a young boy on unloading the truck. The man sensed the visitors and glanced back. He mistook Johnson for a local and barked, "Don't need no fish today." Then he spied Tiffany. *Damned missionaries*, he thought. "Don't need no religion neither."

Horse walked up to the man and flashed him his Ranger badge. "Ain't selling religion today, Mr. Whitte. Unless you've got something to confess."

The man looked confused, as if he suffered from Alzheimer's.

Tiffany stepped forward and handed him her old FBI identification card. He took it and studied it for a moment then he smiled at the woman in front of him and then he laughed.

He said, "I suppose this isn't totally unexpected," as he reached out and pulled

Amber Brown to his chest.