

At least that's how George Crosswell had explained it to Jack Whitte as they made their way from Antigua to Castries and then into the mountains surrounding Soufrière. He'd suspected as much; four years before, on that stormy night, when he received the call that his father was overdue and feared lost in a churning sea, he didn't feel the loss. He could have attributed his lack of sadness to the fact that his father was never really an open man, someone who he could rarely approach successfully but that wasn't it; something, a little voice maybe, told him to have faith.

And that same voice said the same thing when he was shown the pictures of the butchered woman alone on Cabbage Beach: it wasn't her. He should have listened.

But he hadn't listened.

It didn't matter that two of the three losses had been illusions. He should have been angry—beside himself with the intensity of a wildfire—but he wasn't. They had done what they felt needed to be done with premeditation. It was an easy leap for him from lost to found because they had acted for his benefit despite the pain they delivered. He wasn't necessarily thankful, either: just relieved. Still the anger burned.

George painted a picture in broad strokes that pitted his father in the center of a maelstrom of unethical and, if not criminal, certainly traitorous activities. Whitte Industries had served as a conduit to allow the barbarians at the gate a tunnel inside; the opportunity to suck wealth and power from those who had it to those who had it and wanted more.

Money buys influence and these people had bought enough to alter the course of a glacier: Just a nudge of the monetary policy here, just a little bit of the restructuring of the national debt here. If they sneezed, they could have General Motors under their control and the government would simply roll over and give it to them. They owned the United States of America. They probably owned most of the European governments as well.

No one would believe him, or George, or even his father's idiotic so-called doomsday device that George had told him about. The sheep wouldn't care. They couldn't comprehend it. And even if they did they couldn't stop it.

As George had spun his tale high above the Caribbean Sea, his mind kept returning to the last few days he'd spent with those disgusting people. Fascists. That's what came to his mind. His doctorate thesis had been on comparative economic theories of the Twentieth Century. He had examined the Marxian theories that led to the Progressive Era policies and how they had contributed to the Great Depression and the deliberate drift into the New Deal; all brought about by the belief that mankind was inherently evil and only the enlightened few could save man from himself. Fascists were nothing more than progressives that decided to use capitalism against itself. These modern day fascists he had spent time with where nothing but the same evil incarnate that infected the splinter group from the fascists, the Nazis. They weren't far right, as most assume. They weren't far left, as if that were the only other alternative. No, they were just evil, dedicated to sucking the very soul, the good and evil—that carefully calibrated balance that makes us who we are—from the face of the earth, to be replaced by sheep, as they called them. Everyone thought they had been defeated in the forties. Wrong.

His thinking was deliberate because he needed fuel for the fire. He had to justify the evil intent he had in his heart and what better fuel was needed than ridding the world of those vile creatures. He was Super Man. He would make the world safe for democracy. And he would go back to Cuba, he would find a way, and he would kill whomever he could find.

So when he walked forcefully into his father's house and found his father—alive and well if not looking quite himself—there was no relief. This was but a part of the journey for him.

He wanted to see the woman. His heart was in conflict. His father made him sit down with he and the Texas Ranger and he told him a story, a story about the girl who became a woman. About who she really was.

She was not Abigail Spencer, the woman that set his heart afire. She was not this secret agent that Croswell spoke of.

No. She was the angel that had sucked the sorrow from his heart and allowed him to heal. She was the little girl who visited him constantly while he was mending from the broken bones and the humiliation he had suffered from the Angel of Death. If there was an Angel of Death, she was the Angel of Life.

He was delirious.

He was hungry.

He hadn't slept or eaten much since he'd made the call to George Croswell after he left the cargo ship in Antigua. He had found an RFID chip in his bag. They had been tracking him. It wouldn't have mattered if he had continued on with his plan, the slow

tacking back and forth across the Caribbean from Antigua to Dominica, to Trinidad, and maybe finally on to St. Lucia where he now was. It was a stupid plan. He figured if anyone tried to follow him they would be led on a wild goose chase and by the time they found him, he would have made it to St. Lucia, discovered what he needed to, take the money out of the account, buy a new identity and fade into the sunset. But they didn't want him. They could have taken him anytime they wanted.

He had torn his bag inside out and confident there were no more chips he felt he could move about freely again. But then he shuddered. There was one more chip. It was inside of him, in his pelvis where they claimed he had had an accident and they had to stitch him back up. By just pushing on the painful swollen part of the wound, he could feel a small circular lump just under the curve in his pelvis. They wired him up.

He could go to a doctor, have it removed, risk being recognized and turned into the police. That might have been the best way to go. But the Group didn't want him caught. They wanted to follow him.

Why?

He had his suspicions but now it had become clear he needed outside help so he had called George Crosswell and this time he answered. He told him all he needed to know and when he picked him up in Antigua, he told him the rest. The Group wanted what he wanted; they wanted to know the truth and they wanted to know what threat it posed. They must have, somehow, known about his father's faked death. Hadn't Bolo said something about there being no body? So they must have figured he was out there lurking about, probably gathering evidence to expose them. Certainly they would know it didn't matter.

No one would believe any of it. It was just too pie-in-the-sky.

The benefit to being picked up by Croswell in the jet was that Wright and whoever else was trying to track him would see him on their little toy one moment and then in a whoosh, he'd be gone. They'd search the island. It might take them six hours or six days but they would eventually get to the airport to check the flight logs and they would find out about the flight he had just completed.

He thought about telling Croswell about the chip inside of him. They could fly somewhere, get it removed quietly, and fly on to St. Lucia. But then he realized he wanted them to find him. He wanted them to take him back to Cuba and he'd do whatever it was they wanted. He'd put on the song and dance, agree to stay a part of the Group and then, he'd kill them.

It was beyond what they had done to his father. Beyond the broken bones and violation of his own body. It was beyond their apparent designs of some sort of maniacal world domination LSD trip they seemed to be on.

They had killed Britannia. The island buzzed that next morning while he was waiting for George to fly into St. John. A movie star and been doused in the bay. A fisherman found her floating face down in the water next to where his boat was tied up. She still had a syringe stuck in the vein of her right arm. The theory was that she had pushed in the plunger; the drugs hit her harder than she thought they would and she passed out, fell into the water and drowned. Jack knew it was no accident.

He would kill any of them still left on their private island. The beauty of it was that it was private, under the territorial jurisdiction of Cuba. Cuban authorities wouldn't step

foot on that island. He could kill them all—so long as he left the staff alone, which he had no intention of hurting—and the Cubans wouldn't do a thing. No one would ever charge him for murder.

No, he wasn't suicidal. He wanted to live but if he had to open his mouth and let the water drown him as well, so be it. But he wanted to live. He wanted to see the little girl who'd saved him. He wanted to love her.