

45 Mountain Roads

There was a hole the size of a shoe rusted through in the back of the beat up red Ford pickup that Robert Whitte affectionately called Bessy. Jack's head was positioned just below it and when he looked up, he could see the weathered gray asphalt rolling beneath him. They had him lying down in the back, using the metal of the bed to provide more interference on the RFID chip painfully squishing around just below his abdomen.

When they had reached the end of the drive, they watched Croswell turn his rented Toyota Corolla toward the safety of Castries. They turned left, toward Soufrière. If those chasing Jack had made it to St. Lucia and were able to pick up the RFID chip signal before it had been neutralized, they would be driving in from Castries. Crossing the interior of the island through Soufrière would take three hours but it was safer than facing potential enemies at each turn.

The truck chugged up the hill and around a bend and as they did, Tiffany's cell phone tweeted. She answered and listened for a moment and then thanked the caller and disconnected. She shot Jack a terrified look. She pulled herself up and leaned in the open window between the cab and the bed.

"That was Croswell. He spotted three Jeep Wranglers heading this way. One had three men in it, the other two just the drivers."

Robert, sitting next to Johnson, the driver, glanced at his watch. "They're no more than ten minutes behind."

They were at a point of no return. They couldn't go back to the house to make a stand there. Even if they could, three guns against at least five men in the Jeeps plus who knew how many others close by were not odds with which he was willing to gamble. "Does this thing go more than thirty miles and hour?" Johnson was speaking somewhat facetiously.

"It can do hundred once you start down hill. Sixty on a flat road."

Johnson shook his head. "What about a turn off? Is there anything between here and the village?"

Robert shook his head.

"Well," Johnson said, "we got a couple of things going for us; it's dark and they don't know we're mobile."

As they crested the mountain around a bend, Horse honked to give signal to any approaching vehicle. They could see the sleepy lights of Soufrière below. The moon was just rising and it cast a sparkle over the bay. A Catalina PBV was bobbing close to the lone fishing pier.

"You ever see a plane in the bay before?" Johnson asked Robert who just shook his head.

Jack pulled himself up. "Goddamnit! That's theirs."

Johnson slowed.

"You don't have a choice but to go forward," Robert told him. He handed Horse his disguise: a faded baseball cap and a half-empty bottle of rum.

Horse put the ball cap on, turning it to the side. He also made sure the Berretta was

snug beneath his right thigh. Then he spoke through the opened cab window. “Get beneath the tarp,” he instructed Tiffany and Jack. He turned on the headlights as they made their descent into Soufrière.

After five minutes, just at the edge of town, Robert instructed Horse to turn left. “This’ll take us around back.”

From above they heard a car horn. Robert glanced back up the road. “That’s got to be them.” He crouched down onto the floorboard and Horse slowed the vehicle down to about twenty. Up ahead he saw a white man standing on the side of the road. He was flanked by what looked like locals. He was showing them pictures. Horse sat up and then tried to spread himself across the seat. He grabbed the bottle and held it close to his mouth as he drove by a tin shack—nothing but a local having a good time. Suddenly, a boy on a bike shot out from behind an alley and swerved to avoid the side of the pickup.

“Hey, mon,” he cried out as Horse drove by.

The commotion drew the attention of the locals. One man tugged on the side of the white man’s shirt and pointed toward the pickup.

“Fuck,” Horse whispered. “I think the gig is up.”

The white man tried to jump out in front of the pickup as Horse floored it. He swerved as the man banged on the sideboard. “Stay down,” Horse instructed. He glanced into the rearview mirror and saw the man hold a phone to his ear. “Where to?” he asked Robert.

Robert sat up, got his bearings and told Horse to take a right and then a left and it would rejoin the main road.

“Hit it!” Jack yelled from the back.

“I’ve got the damned pedal down as far as it’ll go!” He wished now that he’d taken the speed of the Corolla over the disguise of a local pickup.

Now the truck hit the long, winding road that led out of town and into the interior. Johnson turned off their headlights.

“Shit, you want me to get out and push,” Jack called out.

“Put it in low drive,” Robert told him, “It’ll have a bit more torque.”

He was right, they did increase their speed by ten miles an hour; still it wouldn’t be enough to put a distance between them and the pursuers. “There’s got to be a turn off somewhere.”

“There is in about five miles,” Robert said.

As they crested a hill overlooking the village, Horse asked, “You see anything back there?”

Jack saw the Jeeps’ headlights pulling into Soufrière. “They stopped.”

“Picking up the others from the plane,” Johnson said.

A pair of headlights began moving out of town. “One of them is coming after us.”

“There’s a dirt road up here to the left, maybe another five minutes,” Robert said. “It cuts over to the volcano. It’s slow going but I think we might lose them. If we stay on the main road they’ll catch us in about twenty minutes.”

“Is it a dead end?” Johnson asked

“Nope. It’s a cut through. It’ll rejoin this road about six miles up.”

“So if they don’t know about it we can gain some time,” Johnson observed.

“No. It’s a road from hell. We go more than thirty on it and it’ll knock the fillings from your teeth.”

“They’ve got Jeeps,” Jack said. “It won’t take them any time.”

“I’ve got a plan, idiot,” Robert spat out.

They hit the turn off to the left and Johnson killed the lights. For the first hundred feet the road was smooth so Johnson floored it.

“Slow down!” Robert ordered but Horse ignored him. Then they hit the first pothole; Jack and Tiffany were thrown up about three feet and then crashed violently down.

“I told you so.”

Horse slowed down.

They drove on for a couple more minutes and then Robert pulled a flashlight from the glove box. He handed it back through the window to Tiffany.

“Shine it to the left, out in front of us. I’m looking for something.”

Horse slowed the pickup to a crawl.

“There, turn in.” He turned back to Tiffany. “Lay flat or you’ll get bushwhacked.”

Branches screeched and clawed at the hood and cab of the truck.

“Veer left.”

They could hear the trickle of live water but as they drove further down the path, the trickle became a flow and then a rumble as water smashed against rocks. Robert directed Horse to the right and they parked beneath an island fig, its large tentacles forming a natural garage.

Before Tiffany would let Jack from the back of the pickup, she checked to make

sure his gadget was still taped snug to his lower abdomen. Then they all drifted to the waterfall beyond the truck. There was a slight smell of rotten eggs.

“That’s the sulfur from the volcano,” Robert explained.

Tiffany strolled toward the falls and reached out and felt a smooth rock wall beside the falling water. “Why does it look like glass?”

Robert flashed the light on the wall of the waterfall. It glowed a deep bronze color with flakes of green and yellow throughout the edges. “Minerals from deep down. There’s a hot spring that is forced up into the volcano’s crater, too hot to dip into, probably near boiling. It bubbles up mud and flows downhill from the crater—if we’d continued driving, we would have crossed it about a hundred yards up. It meets up with a cold-water spring about fifty yards down and makes the turn here and drops. The contrasting temperatures cause the minerals to fall out and so this is pretty much a copper, iron, and zinc wall.” He turned the flashlight off and the moon filtered through the surrounding jungle causing the waterfall to sparkle.

“You think they’ll find the turn in?” Johnson asked.

“Nah. Only locals know about this. It’s a service entrance to a park. If we continue to the left we’ll hit a parking lot. It’s locked up now but in the morning they’ll open the gate and we can slip through and take a mountain road to Vieux Fort.”

“Why do we want to go there?”

Robert Whitte rolled his eyes at the Texas Ranger. “Cause there’s an airport there. Get your CIA buddy to fly his Cessna in and we’re out of here.”

“Can’t we force open the lock?” asked Jack.

“Sure but I wouldn’t take the road at dark. Not safe. There are a couple of hundred foot drop-offs that you can’t even see in the daylight. It’s why no one drives it much.” He turned to walk back to the pickup. “We could go for a bit of shut-eye.”

They meandered back to the truck. “Why don’t you take a walk back up the road and keep an eye open,” he said to Johnson. “I’ll spell you in a couple of hours.”

Tiffany climbed into the back of the pickup and began to arrange the tarp to sleep on.

Robert turned to Jack. “Why don’t you let me tell you what I’ve been up to for the past four years.”